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The Initiation of Growth-Focused Relationships Involving Healthy Accountability at the Carbondale Church of Christ

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ABSTRACT

After several years of transition, the Carbondale Church of Christ is in the early

stages of becoming a spiritual growth-focused community. However, the emerging

growth community appears to reflect the prevailing cultural assumptions that growth is a

personal, private, and an individual task. To shape this emergent growth culture, this

project initiated a group of congregational opinion leaders, organized in pairs, into the

practice of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability. The initiation

involved a theological orientation followed by a four-week healthy accountability praxis.

The theological framework of the project involved three main aspects. First, the

project used the body image of Romans 12 to establish the Christian community, not the

individual, as the *telos* of the fully realized human ontology. Second, using Alasdair

MacIntyre's definition of a practice, I argued that the means of growth needed to be

reflective of the desired ends of spiritual growth. Thus as a practice, spiritual growth

activities must involve relationships since the ultimate *telos* is a relational community. It

is inconsistent with the goal of realizing an interdependent and interrelated body ontology

to pursue Christian spiritual growth via isolated individually focused means. Finally,

community virtues derived from Romans 12 provided practical guides for practicing

growth-focused relationships in a virtuous manner.

Data for the qualitative research came from three different sources: researcher,

insiders, and an outside expert. Abductive analysis of the three sources indicates that the

participants were initiated into a new community practice that resulted in personal growth, strengthening of relationships, and the practice of virtues. Additional discoveries included significant insights concerning the participants' motives and goals for growth, their interest in relationships, and the importance of training and structures associated with new practices in a congregational setting. In total, the project successfully initiated a group of influential members of the Carbondale Church of Christ into the practice of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability.

THE INITIATION OF GROWTH-FOCUSED RELATIONSHIPS INVOLVING

HEALTHY ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE CARBONDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dean of the Graduate School

Date

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Thesis Committee

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Chair

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To my wife, Becky, for her patience and
support on the journey

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Carbondale Church of Christ[1] has been declining in attendance and
organizational vision since 1983. Over the last twenty years, the leadership has attempted
to address these declines using managerial and program focused approaches with limited
success. Recently, the leadership adopted a new vision for the congregation focused on
spiritual formation and becoming a "growing community." For the past three years, the
leadership has labored to establish the new focus and change the culture of the
congregation. While there are signs that the transformation is advancing, there are also
signs that the strategy is beginning to stall. A thorough description of the congregation's
life stage will provide the necessary context for this project.

Title of Project

The title of this project is "The Initiation of Growth-Focused Relationships
Involving Healthy Accountability at the Carbondale Church of Christ." I hope that
introducing a healthy relational form of spiritual growth will advance the congregation's
realization of the "growing community" vision.

Ministry Context

The CCC is in the midst of transition and transformation. A Bullard life cycle
model provides a helpful framework for understanding the challenges of the current

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[1] Herein referred to as CCC.

context.[2] The Bullard life cycle model asserts that congregations, like people, have a natural, progressive life cycle. Bullard divides the life of a congregation into five phases: early growth, late growth, prime, early aging, and late aging. Furthermore, Bullard asserts that each stage of the life cycle corresponds to how the organization focuses its energies among four areas: vision, relationships, programs, and management. A brief examination of the CCC history using the Bullard model will illuminate the challenges facing the congregation.

<div align="center">Bullard Early and Late Growth Phases</div>

The CCC began in 1936 as a home gathering committed to the vision of establishing a non-instrumental restoration movement congregation. During its first decade, the congregation remained a small house church, at times consisting of only three faithful women who kept the vision alive. The chartering of Southern Illinois University in 1947 began an era of improved economic stability and demographic expansion in the region, allowing the church to build a building in 1949. For the next decade, the church's growth correlated with the growth of the surrounding community, fueled by coal mining and university expansion. The increased attendance, growing organizational structure, and excitement over the new building are indicative of Bullard's early and late growth phases. A fire in 1957 destroyed the first building, causing the congregation to remain focused upon early life cycle concerns of establishment and stability and delayed the transition from a late growth stage to a prime stage. The prolonged existence of the

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[2] George Bullard, "The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development," George Bullard's Journey, accessed June 29, 2011, http://bullardjournal.blogs.com/bullardjournal/2008/03/the-life-cycle.html.

congregation as a small house church combined with the building fire caused the life cycle growth phase to last twenty-five years.

Bullard Prime Phase

The growth of the congregation during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s correlated with the expansion of coal production and university growth during the same period. Numeric growth in the 1960s spawned several building expansion programs. At the same time, the congregation initiated substantial programs: planting an African American congregation, conducting a sizeable bus ministry, and hosting a campus ministry. The numeric growth combined with the expansion of ministry programs signal a congregation in the prime phase of the Bullard cycles.

Environmental concerns over high-sulfur coal shifted coal production away from Southern Illinois, triggering an economic decline. Ironically, 1983, the year of the congregation's peak attendance of 136, was also the year that all four elders resigned, leaving the congregation without leadership and without vision. Organizational momentum kept some of the programs operating until 1992 when the bus ministry ended. The lack of leadership, the decline in economics, the decreasing attendance, and the lack of vision are signs that the congregation was transitioning from a prime to an early aging life cycle phase.

Bullard Early Aging Phase

Conflict and the lack of elder leadership from 1983 until 1996 forced the congregation to focus more on management concerns and less on vision. This internal focus perpetuated the life cycle progression and prevented redevelopment. A new eldership in 1996 ushered in an era of stability that emphasized inclusion, management,

and organizational health. For the next eight years, the new leadership was successful at solidifying operations, fostering a friendly culture, and stabilizing the finances but struggled to establish a new vision. Without a new vision, the congregation inevitably advanced deeply into the early aging phase. By 2004, the congregation was desperately searching for a means of growth, unaware that they were on the brink of entering a late aging life cycle phase.

Late Aging or Rebirth

When I arrived in 2004, the congregation was anxious for growth, and on the surface, the congregation appeared well-positioned for progress. The leadership consisted of two elders and five deacons, and the atmosphere of the congregation was energetic without signs of division or conflict. As I began my new ministry, I followed the allure of organizational success and together with the leadership created a vision to restart the campus ministry and simultaneously make the congregation more accessible to visitors by organizing small groups. Within my first year, we hired a campus minister, launched small groups, and installed one new deacon and one new elder. Instead of fostering growth, the flurry of efforts stressed the stability culture of the organization and triggered several negative reactions.

By 2006 the campus minister had resigned after a brief nine-month tenure, the leadership had abandoned the small group ministry, three deacons had resigned, and the attendance had fallen by 30%. The early hopes for growth and organizational success were broken, and the congregation was in crisis. At this point, it was clear that the congregation had entered a late aging life cycle stage and the initial attempts at redevelopment and rebirth had failed. The revival of the congregation demanded a new

vision, but before that new vision could emerge, the old organizationally focused vision had to die. This symbolic death occurred when a long-term elder resigned and moved away from the congregation.

Rebirth and Revision

The Bullard life cycle model describes the natural progression of congregations over the course of time, unless there are intentional efforts or unforeseen circumstances that change the pattern. Like Newton's first law of motion, congregations will progress toward decline unless acted upon by an outside force. To avoid the eventuality of decline, congregational leaders must attempt to interrupt the aging process by intentionally updating the shared vision and restarting the life cycle sequence. Leaders can initiate rebirth and revision efforts at any stage of the congregational life cycle, but the prognosis for a successful rebirth decreases as the congregation nears old age. The change in CCC leadership provided the opportunity to revision the foundation of the congregation. In 2008 the leadership and I began to focus on spiritual formation. Teaching and preaching centered on growth topics: being intentional, grace, discipleship, and spiritual growth. The leadership adopted a shepherding model and restructured the leadership meetings. The new meetings involved regular prayer for each member, sharing personal growth goals, and regularly discussing the growth needs of the congregation. The topical focus of the teaching expanded to emphasize discipleship viewed through a narrative hermeneutic. In 2009 the leadership extended the emphasis on spiritual formation by challenging each member of the congregation to establish personal spiritual growth goals. Leadership reinforced the challenge by publicly sharing their own personal growth goals.

In 2010 the leadership continued to emphasize spiritual formation and personal growth introducing a congregational journal. The journal outlined daily Bible readings and a weekly spiritual discipline. These journals synchronized the congregation around a singular reading schedule, and the synchronization provided gentle group accountability. The congregation received the journals with great success, and many people reported a new enthusiasm for daily Bible reading, although there was less enthusiasm for the suggested spiritual disciplines. Overall, the journals quickly became a cultural centerpiece of the congregation as evidenced by the frequent references during classes and worship and the way members shared copies of the journals with friends. Despite their quick adoption and success, the daily reading structure of the journals introduced an additional layer of complication and stress on the congregation. The Sunday Bible classes continued to follow an annual schedule of eight six-week cycles that did not synchronize with the journal readings. People struggled to keep up with the journal readings, leaving little time to read the Sunday Bible class materials. The reading structure of the journals provided an excellent tool for synchronizing congregational thought, but inadvertently perpetuated guilt-motivated and task-oriented forms of spiritual formation.

In 2011 I convinced the leadership to restructure the teaching program. The new program combined the journal readings with the Sunday Bible class studies, focusing on depth over volume. In addition, the new journals reduced the assigned readings to one passage per week of approximately one chapter in length. Daily prompts in the journals encouraged participants to reread the same passage each day with different emphases similar to lectio divina or dwelling in the Word. The weekly reading also became the basis of the Sunday Bible class and sermon. The hope was that this reduction in the sheer

amount of information would result in increased participation and increased depth of reflection upon the selected texts.

Summary of Current Growth Culture

At the start of this investigation, the congregation appeared to be experiencing rebirth, and from a Bullard perspective, was in an early growth life cycle phase with a new vision of being a growth community. Several anecdotal indicators supported this view. First, after four years of consistent teaching on spiritual growth, the members of the congregation were aware of the desirability of spiritual growth and were maturing in their view of discipleship. Second, comments and questions in Bible classes indicated that members felt comfortable expressing variant beliefs. This was a sign that they had embraced the teachings on grace. Third, members frequently mentioned in casual conversations that they were attempting to follow the journal Bible readings and had experimented with spiritual disciplines. This behavior was a positive response to the recent leadership efforts to encourage growth and the use of corporate reading resources. Fourth, the congregation was beginning to retain new attenders. On any given Sunday, approximately thirty percent of those in attendance were people who had been part of the congregation for less than two years, and many of them were new Christians. These newcomers frequently mentioned that they found the congregation welcoming and felt it was a place where they could grow in their faith. Finally, the Wednesday night meals and Sunday night discussions evidenced a vibrant family atmosphere with wide age groups engaging in a variety of creative activities with little anxiety over doctrinal and practice concerns.

Statement of the Problem

The emphasis on growth resulted in a revitalized interest in personal reading and prayer, but not in increasing engagement or interaction between members on the topic of growth. As I listened to the conversations in and around the church setting, there was little talk of spiritual growth, no interaction around spiritual growth goals, and no corporate sense of support in the process of growth other than setting the expectation and providing the tools. In one-on-one conversations, I detected an increased interest in personal spiritual growth, but this did not result in the emergence of new leaders. In addition, I saw only limited evidence that people were increasing their participation in the life of the congregation. These observations indicated that the congregation, while beginning to grow spiritually, was pursuing growth as individuals rather than in community. While these individual efforts were laudable, they reflected the surrounding culture's emphasis on individuality and missed the quality and intensity afforded by healthy accountability.[3] This project sees the lack of growth-focused relationships that involve healthy accountability as a problem to address.

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[3] The emergence of new forms of intimate relationships and the decline of social capital are evidences of the individualizing trend of late modern culture. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note the trend toward contract-styled marriages designed to protect individual interests at the expense of togetherness and closeness. See Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, trans. Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1995), 97-8; Giddens identifies the emergence of a new form of relationship he labels as a "pure relationship," saying, "A pure relationship . . . exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver." This form of relationship prioritizes immediate individually defined self-interests. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6; Putnam explores the changes in various aspects of American culture concluding, that there is an overall decrease in social capital. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 25.

Statement of the Purpose

The private and individual approach to spiritual growth reflects the privacy and individuality lauded by the surrounding culture. People resist and avoid growth-focused relationships involving accountability because the dominant culture encourages individual efforts and believes faith is a private topic.[4] In addition, people are concerned about any form of accountability because they fear abusive forms of accountability.[5] Changing this culture within the subculture of the church will take time and healthy experiences. The purpose of this project was to initiate growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability.

Definitions

Growth-focused relationships. For the purposes of this project, a growth-focused relationship includes any intentional conversation or interaction between two or more individuals for initiating, sustaining, or enhancing spiritual growth. Spiritual growth, as used here, refers to any form of maturation as a disciple of Christ. Growth may involve the reduction of sinful habits, the increase in Spirit-led activities, increasing submission to the will of God, or fuller realization of a role or calling within the life of the church.

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[4] James V. Brownson et al., *Stormfront: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 9; Brad Kallenberg, *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 16; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 304-10.

[5] Some members of the Carbondale Church of Christ developed a negative impression of accountability relationships because of how discipling movements associated with the Churches of Christ abused these relationships. It was common for these discipling movements to assign individuals to a specific leader and force them to follow the instructions of that leader. These radicalized forms of discipleship were prominently critiqued by the media. See R. N. Ostling and S. S. Gregory, "Keepers of the Flock," *Time* 139, no. 20 (May 18, 1992): 62; Timothy R. Callahan, "'Boston Movement' Founder Quits," *Christianity Today* 47, no. 3 (March 2003): 26.

Growth-focused relationships resemble Christian practices because relationships naturally imply an on-going activity that Christians pursue as part of their life in God.[6] These growth-focused accountability relationships are personal, but not necessarily formalized as they would be in a mentoring, coaching, or spiritual direction application.

Accountability. For the purposes of this project, the term accountability refers to any interaction between two or more individuals for the purpose of reminding or reflecting upon a previously established personal commitment to a specific form of spiritual growth.

Basic Assumptions

This project addressed the growth culture of the CCC. In particular, the project sought to address specific factors within the CCC culture that limited the intensity and relational quality of the observed spiritual growth activities. The proposed intervention to initiate growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability built upon the leadership efforts detailed in the congregational context above, including establishing the biblical teachings concerning spiritual growth, creating a cultural expectation for growth, fostering a supportive atmosphere for growth, and providing tools for spiritual growth. Since these efforts appeared well established within the congregation, it was not necessary to address them within this project or to assume their existence; they were observed features of the existing CCC culture. This project, however, did assume that members of the CCC were not simply aware of the need for spiritual growth, but were also motivated to grow.

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[6] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

Delimitations and Limitations

The structure and nature of this study involved both limitations and delimitations. This study concerned the complex patterns of social behavior involved in spiritual growth within a congregation. The nature of this study demanded a detailed understanding of the congregational culture from the researcher's participation within the culture. To achieve this degree of depth, the study focused on a select group of people within the CCC. This narrow focus delimited the conclusions of the study because (1) I examined only the ministry context of the CCC, and (2) the project involved only those who participated in the workshop/praxis.

The study also involved limitations. The limitations stemmed from the inherent complexity involved in studying the human behavior of spiritual growth and the relatively short-term duration of the intervention. The conclusions reached within this study were limited by the following:

1. The length of the intervention limited the realizable depth of transformation and/or the magnitude of realized growth. The sustainability of the process and the sustainability of the individual transformations could not be assessed within the timeframe of the study.

2. The depth or superficiality of the growth goal selected by a participant self-limited the realized growth. Some participants did not realize growth because they self-limit their personal risk and exposure during the experiment.

Conclusion

The Carbondale Church of Christ is in an early stage of the congregational life cycle seeking to become a community focused on spiritual growth. The culture and

patterns established during this formative stage will define the congregation for many years into the future. While there are signs that the growth culture is beginning to take shape, there are also signs of the prevailing cultural assumption that faith and growth are private topics. It is an important time to shape the congregation's emerging growth culture by grounding its vision in a community understanding of the church and providing positive experiences with growth-focused relationships.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

My basic approach was to define spiritual growth as a community process involving relationships because the goal of spiritual growth involves an intensification of a communal form of life. The Christian community, not the individual, is the *telos* of the fully realized human potential. In an individually focused modern world, the challenge rests on understanding growth from this community perspective. The argument will proceed in three stages. First, I will establish that the *telos* of humanity is life as community by looking at Romans 12. Second, I will argue that Christian spiritual growth is a practice; thus, the process for realizing the *telos* of community must involve the community. The community plays an integral role as both the means and the ends of Christian growth. Having established the *telos* and the process, I will conclude this section with a series of virtues inherent in the pursuit of the *telos*.

A central premise of this investigation is to establish that the Christian community, not the individual, is the *telos* of Christian growth. Because the prevailing cultural view of community shapes the church, it is necessary to establish the nature of the community on theological terms. This section argues that (1) the community is the essential ontology of life in Christ, (2) life in community is by nature interrelated and interdependent, and (3) growth from the community perspective is not the process of becoming a community but rather realizing the fullness of life as community with

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increasing interdependence and interrelatedness. Romans 12 discusses the body in the context of growth and provides a natural place to anchor this discussion.

The Body in Romans 12

In Romans, Paul uses a progression of images to depict the group aspect of the church. While the entire letter to the Christians in Rome addresses the interrelationship between Jews and Gentiles, the word "church" does not appear until chapter 16. Furthermore, while Paul's characteristic term for the collective life of the church is "body," the term body does not appear until chapter 12. To understand Paul's use of the term "body" in chapter 12, it is important to trace his progression of ideas concerning the shared life of Christians with a careful focus on the transition between chapters 11 and 12.[1]

The opening purpose statements of Romans declare Paul's intent to explicate his gospel "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom 1:16 NIV). As collective terms, Jew and Gentile are ethnic designations stressing the universality of the gospel message but saying very little about the nature of the interrelationships. Moving through the letter, Paul employs a variety of phrases for the collective people of God, including "Jew inwardly" (Rom 2:29 NIV), "Abraham's offspring" (Rom 4:16 NIV), "those baptized into Christ" (Rom 6:3 NIV), "those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1 NIV), "sons of God" (Rom 8:14 NIV), and "children of promise" (Rom 9:8 NIV). All of these collective designations focus on the relationship between God and the individual and only tangentially imply the nature of the interrelationship of the members. These primarily

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[1] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 548. Dunn notes the importance of the transition.

family images derive naturally from Paul's anchoring his argument in the promise to Abraham. While the family image implies a certain degree of interrelationship among the members, the nature of that interrelationship remains abstract. Finally, in chapter 12, Paul advances away from the family-focused "Israel by faith" collective designation to the body as the primary collective image.[2]

The opening verses of chapter 12 represent the hinge of the transition from the simple collectives of ethnic Israel and faith Israel to an interdependent body. This change in collective images is coincident with Paul's shift toward paranesis signaling that the living form of the church in Rome must reflect the new reality in Christ that Paul has been describing in the previous chapters. Paul opens chapter 12, saying, "I urge you to present your bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular)."[3] The collective people of God worship and honor God by offering up their plurality as a sacrifice of unity. It is one sacrifice, comprised of the voluntarily presented offerings of each individual's body.[4] Paul's use of body here signals the importance of a physically embodied gospel, one that involves personal actions, not just ideas. Nevertheless, when connected with the church-as-body image, it forms a trajectory of thought moving from individual lives through sacrifice to a collective existence as one body. For Paul, the essence of true worship involves both body and mind. The presented bodies (Rom 12:1 NIV) combine with a transformed mind (Rom 12:2 NIV), giving birth to a form of life that pleases God (Rom

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 36.

[4] Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans* (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 638; D. Edmond Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (July-September 1994): 309-24.

12:1 NIV).[5] The primary challenge, as signaled by Paul's eschatological "pattern of this world" (12:2 NIV) is for the people of God to recognize their existence in a new world as part of the new age.[6] Like baptism (Rom 6:1f NIV) and heart circumcision (Rom 2:29 NIV), the central cult of the new community consists in giving up the individuality of the bodies plural as a sacrifice through a transformed mind to give life to a new and singular body.

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul presents his new collective image for life "in Christ" that is the result of the voluntary sacrifice of individual bodies. Paul describes the new collective, saying, "Just as each of us has one body with many members . . . in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:5 NIV). By using the biological human body as an image, Paul asserts that life in Christ involves an essential unity. This essential unity is the result of reflecting upon our specific place, role, or function within the collective body of Christ with respect to our gifts. The shift in focus is important. Paul's urging the Romans to "think soberly" (Rom 12:3 NIV) upon how God is expressing his grace through them shifts their attention away from the ethnic comparisons evident in earlier chapters and anchors their identity in the activity of God. This is unity based upon the work of God rather than unity based upon a corporate objective or personal goal.

To say that the church is a body can mean several things, but Paul has a particular image for the body in mind. His image of a body is one where "each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:5 NIV). A human body is not a simple collective. It differs from

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[5] N. T. Wright, *NIB* 10:704.

[6] Ibid.

other collective images such as team, corporation, or family. In these collectives, the individual members have an existence apart from the team, corporation, or family. In a human body, there is no life for individual body parts outside the human body. Thus, by analogy, there also is no existence as a Christian outside the "body of Christ." The body existence is the essential, ontological form of life for members of the new humanity. Paul's presentation of this bodily existence involves several notable features.

First, the body life is both ontological and progressive. It is ontological because there is no alternative form of Christian life other than the collective body. That is the meaning of Paul's "in Christ" (Rom 12:5 NIV). At the same time, the body life of the Christian is progressive in that it involves a continuous presentation of self as a sacrifice involving the transformation of the mind.[7] While individual Christians exist as full "members" of the one body in Christ, they are also still moving towards a full realization via progressive transformation. This infers that spiritual growth does not lead to the creation of the body; rather spiritual growth brings about the fulfillment of what already exists in Christ. This progressive aspect is punctuated when Paul presses for the pursuit of excellence for each gift using phrases such as "If a person's gift is. . ." let them use them "generously" or "diligently" or "cheerfully." The transformation of mind results in an increasing quality or intensity of the participation of the individual member in the collective life of the body.

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[7] Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 286. Witherington notes the imperative, present continual tense of "conform" and "transform." Given the context of a progressive "renewing of the mind" (12:2), the aorist verb "present" should also be understood with a continual and ongoing sense.

Second, the language of the body involves both unity and diversity. The emphasis on "one body" stresses unity while the variety of gifts presents diversity. Romans emphasizes unity. Paul's choice of a body image was familiar to his audience, but the body image in chapter 12 modifies that popular notion of the body politic. There are frequent examples of ancient rhetoric employing the *topos* of a body to discuss matters of concern for the city or state. While the classical political theory appeals to the essential nature of the city as a body, the *topos* functions to urge unity through the proper attitude of the individual members.[8] Thus the classic image emphasizes the goal of functioning as well as a human body, asserting the body as the ideal form for what the community could become. While Paul also employs the body image to urge unity, his argument begins with the belief that the body describes the real and essential shared life of the members. This unity originates from the incorporation into the singular resurrected body of Christ and is the work of the Spirit, not the result of the activity of the members or their political association.[9] Accordingly, as Paul employs the image, he is not saying that the church should become a well-functioning organization but rather that the church is ontologically a body and challenges them to live as they essentially are.

Third, life in the body is both a personal pursuit under the control of the individual Christian and at the same time something that is assigned and distributed by God. Paul is clear. God determines the distribution of gifts within the body. Individuals,

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[8] Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 157-59.

[9] N. T. Wright, *NIB* 10:710; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 255.

however, must pursue the quality and intensity of their offering of that gift for the shared life within the body. God's distribution of gifts is the primary source of organic organization.

This brings my argument to its first milestone, which is to establish that the body is the ontological *telos* of human existence in Christ. There are no Christians outside the body, and as part of the body all members are interrelated, interdependent, and mutually essential. The singular body identity replaces the earlier ethno-centric and belief-centric collectives. It is worth emphasizing this point in light of the dominant cultural understanding of collectives. Paul's body image describes something very different from a modern social club, corporation, or even popular conceptions of congregations. Culturally, we focus first on the individual and then upon the collective. Individuals assemble to form the collective. Paul's argument moves in the opposite direction. If we project Paul's body image toward the eschatological horizon, the interrelated nature of body life would move toward the mutual interrelationship of the triune community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[10]

The Process of Christian Growth in Community

Having defined the ultimate form, or *telos,* of Christian growth in terms of the realization of the fullness of community, my attention now turns to the process involved in reaching that goal. If there is a goal, there is a process. The concept of a process involves two independent dimensions of time and quality.

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[10] Miroslav Volf, "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Velker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 4.

The first dimension of a process is time, the sequential and progressive aspect of pursuing the *telos*. Human development implies a natural, almost unavoidable, progress whereas a process implies the results of intentional work or effort. Narratives and journeys are common alternative analogies that capture much of the same quality.[11] The progressive aspect recognizes that Christian growth is a continual life of pursuing the ultimate realization of community. Hauerwas has said,

> Conversion is something never merely accomplished but remains also always in front of them. Thus growth in the Christian life is not required only because we are morally deficient, but also because the God who has called us is infinitely rich. Therefore, conversion denotes the necessity of a turning of the self that is so fundamental that the self is placed on a path of growth for which there is no end.[12]

The sequential and progressive nature of Christian growth also acknowledges our basic human existence as beings living within the confines of time. The continuity of the self from moment to moment inextricably links me-in-the-present with both me-in-the-past and me-in-the-future. Even when people change, growing to a degree that others describe them as "different people," they, nevertheless, remain the same essential self connected to their own history just as they pursue a future continuous with but different from their present. Our lives of growth are time-bound progressive processes.

The second aspect of a process concerns the quality and character of the activities involved in the pursuit of Christian growth toward the *telos* of community. For the Greeks, the virtues (arête) were the "qualities that cause a thing to perform its function

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[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 174.

[12] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 131.

well."[13] If the *telos* of Christian growth is to live as a perfect body community, then Christian communities will embody those qualities that cause them to be excellent communities. They will be communities of virtue where the practice of virtues enhances the essence of the *telos*. It would be inconsistent with the *telos* of living as an interdependent and interrelated body if the process of becoming increasingly interdependent relied upon independence and autonomy. It would be inconsistent with the *telos* of living as an interrelated body if the process of becoming increasingly interrelated employed only privatized personal growth efforts. This is a particular kind of process, one that embodies the qualities of the desired end within the activities that comprise the progressive appropriation of that end. This particular kind of process is called a practice. Alasdair MacIntyre has defined a practice as,

> A coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[14]

For our purposes the "complex form of socially established cooperative human activity" is descriptive of both the individual Christian practices of prayer, Bible reading, worship, evangelism, benevolence, and the grand collection of such activities seen as the coherent complex practice of the Christian community. Following MacIntyre's definition, the efforts involved in "trying to achieve" the goal of being an excellent form of Christian community will result in "goods internal" that are consistent with the "standards of

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[13] Ibid., 111.

[14] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

excellence" associated with the "form of activity." We have already said that our standards of excellence for a Christian community involve the interrelated and interdependent relationships among the members of a body. Thus the efforts employed in the pursuit of excellence as a community will involve life-as-community as the "goods internal" to those efforts. The pursuit of the *telos* of community must involve interrelated and interdependent community relationships for growth. It is important to clarify two possible misunderstandings of this point. First, as I have already said, one of the measures of excellence associated with the Christian community consists of their interdependent interrelationships. Consequently, it would be inconsistent with the *telos* of living as an interrelated body if the process of becoming increasingly interrelated employed only privatized personal growth efforts. Likewise, it would be inconsistent with the nature of a practice if the interrelated and interdependent relationships of the Christian body were merely means of achieving a *telos* of increased individualized autonomy.

MacIntyre's definition constrains the pursuit of becoming an excellent Christian community to reliance upon means consistent with the *telos*. However, there is something more in the definition. MacIntyre also asserts that if the means are consistent with the ends, then the concept of the ends will also be "systematically extended." Thus the conception of what it means to be an excellent Christian community will continually deepen and expand if the community is involved in those efforts necessary for achieving the goal. Thus our Christian growth efforts employed to realize the goal of being an increasingly interrelated and interdependent community would also extend our understanding of what it means to live as an interrelated and interdependent community.

Perhaps this recursive dimension to the growth practice may explain how our culture has reached the current anemic understanding of community. If we substitute modernity's goal of realizing individual potential into the definition of the practice, then the goods internal to this practice would involve personal, private, and independent efforts, and the "systematic extension" of the cultural understanding of what it means to be a community would continually reflect the importance of independence and the individual. The *telos* of the practice defines the means of the practice.

From the practice perspective, however, the correction to this anemic understanding of community involves both a redefinition and a retooling of the efforts used to reach the goal. It will be impossible to reach the goal of an interdependent and interrelated community by simply addressing the definition of community. In order to understand what it means to live as community, we must engage in interrelated and interdependent practices. Simply talking about community or explaining the meaning of community will not achieve the desired end. It is only by actually being community that we can become community. There are many practices commonly associated with Christianity such as prayer, Bible reading, singing, sharing the Eucharist, and helping others. These activities are practices insofar as they embody the desired ends of Christian community. Activities pursued privately and individually will systematically extend privacy and individuality. The only way to cultivate a communal *telos* is to engage Christian practices as a community. As I have already argued, there is an important difference between a collection of people engaged in individual Christian activity and an interrelated, interdependent community of Christians. Simply praying, singing, and eating the Lord's Supper in the same place at the same time cannot achieve the desired

interrelated, interdependent *telos* of Christian community. In order to become an

interdependent and interrelated community, we must engage in the process of becoming

as a community effort. We must both conceive and practice the activities of Christianity

in ways that involve interrelating and promote interdependence. Our means of growth

and transformation must involve each other in order for the growth and transformation to

promote a communal *telos*.

The Need for Living Stories

Heroic stories and epic tales that emerge from the community help shape the

imagination of what it means to live as community. The narrative depiction of the life of

Jesus, the early church, and the heroic stories of ancient civilizations all serve to

concretize the abstract virtues in real lives contingent in real histories.[15] These stories are

imaginative because they project the familiar toward the ultimate, but they are also

practical in that they concretize the abstract. The stories of Jesus' relationship with the

disciples, Jesus' prayer of unity with the Father and among the followers, the accounts of

the church in Acts 2, even the creedal depictions of the mutual life of God all create an

imagination of what is possible and desirable. In our culture, we have a need for stories

that capture the imagination for the mutually interrelated life. Stories that foster a

collective imagination around life in relationship.

Both the theology of interdependent community and the praxis of the community

are required to realize the body *telos*. If we imagined a group of newly converted

disciples striving to be transformed into the body image of Christ, they would face three

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[15] Ibid., 121ff; Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 107.

significant challenges. First, according to the definition of a practice, their ability to

conceive of the *telos* nature and praxis of such a community will be limited by their

neophyte status. Second, as a community they will lack intra-community stories capable

of forming the imagination of their new life. Third, Christian communities are relational

systems, and the premise of systems theory is that systems always seek homeostasis.[16]

Thus these newly formed communities will naturally tend to reinforce the status-quo

form of life and resist change. These three challenges are easy to identify for a newly

formed church but are equally applicable to any church that chooses to adopt a new *telos*.

Achieving the change will be difficult; sustaining the change will demand constant effort.

Hauerwas echoes this concern, wondering if the church can "provide a polity sufficient to

sustain the differences [of the rival narratives] necessary for discussion."[17] The power of

the surrounding culture's individualism, cynicism, and the "desperation of fanaticism"

must be countered by powerful stories that arise from real-life experiences within

communities that result from community-based efforts for Christian growth.[18] On the one

hand, countering the natural tendencies of anonymous individuality demands bold

communal practices of openness and transparency. On the other hand, the means of

change must be consistent with the character of the desired *telos*. Forcing and coercing a

desirable behavior cannot achieve the desired end. I once heard a technology futurist say,

"don't mistake a clear view for a short distance."[19] While the *telos* of an interrelated and

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[16] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 23-4.

[17] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 96.

[18] Ibid., 127.

[19] Paul Saffo collaborated on a project I worked on while at Kodak.

interdependent community is clear, traveling the distance from where we are to that *telos* will not be short or easy.

The Implementation of a Community Growth Process

I have argued that the goal of Christian growth is to realize an increasingly interrelated, interdependent form of community that reflects the mutual membership of the body. I have also argued that the process, the specific activities used to pursue the growth goal, should be consistent with the goal itself and involve interrelated and interdependent relationships within the community. The next two sections will address practical considerations involved in reaching *telos* of community. The first section will propose growth-focused relationships as a practical means of moving toward the goal. The second section will examine several guiding virtues that arise from Paul's presentation of Romans that will further refine the nature and character of the *telos* and the process.

Growth-focused Relationships

This project seeks to increase the use of growth-focused relationships, involving healthy accountability as one realization of how the interrelated community reflects the *telos* of the community. The central question we must address is "How can the community become more involved in the growth process of individuals?" We must not overlook the current ways the community is already involved in the growth process of individuals within the community. The collective and shared activities of worship, the Lord's Supper, preaching, and Bible classes all involve the community. The assembled presence of each member provides a powerful form of shared identity and encouragement. Consistent with Paul's argument to the Corinthians, the sharing of "one

loaf" (1 Cor 10:17 NIV) is a participation in the body of Christ. The mutual participation of the community in singing, hearing the word, and communion powerfully shape the affections of individual members.[20] However, while these activities of the assembly are important for the life of community and provide a certain degree of character shaping, as large-group activities, they cannot provide a sufficient focus on individual growth agendas. The encounter with the Word, the table, and presence of God prepare the individual heart with an understanding of the specific needs for growth within the context of a community, but in most congregations, the assembly simply raises awareness of general needs for growth, while the actual efforts for growth are pursued as private individuals. The praxis of growth in the average congregation displays an underlying belief that isolated private individual efforts for Christian growth are all that is necessary to build the body of Christ. This assumption fails in two significant ways. First, as we have already argued, the goal of Christian growth is the realization of interdependent and interrelated community, not simply strong individuals. Individuals who have relied upon individual and private efforts for growth are not likely to become suddenly interdependent and interrelated. This common approach imagines the wrong goal for Christian growth. Second, even if the goal is corrected, individual efforts are inconsistent with the process nature of realizing the goal. Employing individual efforts for the realization of community places the "goods" of the process external to the "means."

The goal was to pursue a form of growth-focused relationship that involved a high degree of interrelationship and interdependence. While it is theoretically possible to maintain mutually interrelated and interdependent relationships with a multitude of

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[20] Kendra G. Hotz and Matthew T. Matthews, *Shaping the Christian Life: Worship and the Religious Affections* (Louisville: John Knox, 2006), 3-32.

people, from a practical perspective most people struggle to maintain such intimate

relationships with a very small number of people. Since, in the present context, most

people consider growth a very private topic, the involvement of even one or two people

in the process would reflect a significant advancement toward our goal. As people make

this move to involve others in the growth process, it is important that these relationship

are guided by and reflective of the "standards of excellence," or virtues associated with

the *telos*. How we interrelate and interdepend in the process of growth must be consistent

with the goal.

<p style="text-align:center">Keeping Christian Growth in Relationship a Virtuous Process</p>

My goal in this section is to highlight several process virtues affecting growth

relationships, anchoring these virtues in Romans 12 and the theological framework

already proposed. The following virtues and vices should guide the growth-focused

relationships.

In Freedom

From Romans 12:1, I noted that individuals present their bodies. This presentation

reflects the free and voluntary submission that God seeks. God allows humanity to live in

freedom, but calls them to submit to his will in order to realize their full potential. Even

Jesus was free to choose his actions, and he left an example of one who freely chose to

submit to the will of the Father.[21] While I have argued that the *telos* of human existence is

the interrelated community, the realization of this *telos* must involve the free, voluntary,

and mutual submission in a growth-focused relationship. Another expression of freedom

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[21] Volf, "Being as God Is," 7-8.

within growth-focused relationships is to allow each individual to freely choose how they will submit to the will of God in a particular aspect of life by allowing them to chose their growth goals. The corresponding vice would be for others to presume to know or impose a particular growth goal on the other

As Unique Creations

As discussed earlier, Paul's primary analogy for the community is the body. He specifically uses this analogy to emphasize both the unity and diversity of grace-enabled gifts within the community. While each member of the body is also a member of each other, the goal of living as a body should be that each member realizes a unique participation within the body. The uniqueness is the expression of God's choice to manifest grace in different forms for the sake of the body as a whole. Growth-focused relationships must honor the uniqueness of form, function, and nature of individuals and avoid imposing their own ideas or designs upon the other.

In Love

Growth-focused relationships are enacted in love. Paul often uses God's love of humanity as the paradigm for our love for one another. Coercive behavior modification techniques may be effective at shaping behaviors, but they are counterproductive in realizing the *telos* described because they do not conform to the nature of the goal. Conditional love says to the other, "I will love you when you change," while unconditional love says, "I will love you so that you are free to change." Paul reflects on God's approach to change in Romans 5, saying, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God

demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
(Rom 5:6-8 TNIV). God's love toward us is not conditioned upon our progress in the
process of transformation. Instead, God displays his love towards us so that we can be
empowered to change. Growth relationships modeled upon this pattern will be
relationships based upon mutual, loving commitment that does not depend upon the pace
or progress in growth.

In Romans 12:9-13 Paul describes life in the body, offering a series of participles
that read like a bulleted list of virtues or a Jewish code. The bulleted list comes under the
opening heading of sincere love.[22] Witherington notes, "Paul is deconstructing or
redirecting some of the major values of the culture."[23] These injunctions equally
challenge the North American culture of individualism and autonomy. Several of these
imperatives will be important in the practical application of growth-focused relationships.

Be Devoted to One Another

Devotion characterizes the type of relationship expected within the body.
Devotion is an intense form of commitment that goes far beyond being merely friendly,
cordial, and even helpful or supportive. Devotion in the process of growth implies that
my investment in another persons growth will remain solid despite diversions, lack of
progress, reversals, or even that persons limited commitment to change.

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[22] N. T. Wright, *NIB* 10:707, 711; Wright considers Rom 12:1-13 a section where
the imperatives of Rom 12:9-13 are focused on life within the community. See also
Witherington, *Romans*, 292.

[23] Witherington, *Romans*, 293.

Honor One Another

To honor one another in a growth-focused relationship would be expressed in the willingness to respect the other's growth goals, specific plans for change, and opinions about priorities. Conversationally, over-expressing opinions and giving unwanted advice dishonor the other and represent a form of epistemic injustice. When people discount, deny, dismiss, or rebuff an opinion from a credible source, they enact epistemic injustice. Within growth relationships, the process of change involves successes and failures, wisdom and folly, reasons and excuses. Within all of these, the person pursuing growth must be considered the primary knower. Despite what one person thinks they "know" about another, the person with the goal, the desire to change, and the definition of success must be honored with epistemic justice.[24]

Keep Your Spiritual Fervor

Spiritual fervor expresses the Spirit's desire to move ahead. There is little room for complacency, inactivity, or ambiguity regarding the life that God created. In the context of spiritual growth, intentionality and intensity express spiritual fervor. Healthy accountability is one means for helping each other maintain focus on self-declared growth goals.

Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer

Hope is essential for spiritual growth. Without the hope of progress, growth, or change, there is little motive to invest the energy necessary for change. We live in a

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[24] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.

culture that expresses their hopelessness in constant cynicism or fanaticism.[25] Hope is the firm grasp of God's powerfully open future, confident that God can and will bring his promises to fruition. There is always a path forward.[26] Within growth-focused relationships, it is important that each partner seek to believe in hope and trust in God's power for the future. Perhaps that explains why Paul directly links hope with affliction and prayer. Growth and change are difficult endeavors. At times, we arrive at a lacuna or wander aimlessly unsure of what to change. As partners in growth, we must remain patient and invest our energies in prayer for each other's growth.

As an End and Not As a Means

Finally, there is one additional virtue that does not come directly from Romans 12:9-13. Utilitarian ethics emphasizes the ends and is indifferent to the means. All that matters is accomplishing the desired end. By contrast, virtue ethics argues that the means must, at a minimum, be reflective of and consistent with the ends. Simply using others to achieve one's own personal growth goals would be a utilitarian separation of the means from the ends of the growth process. Growth relationships must not conceive of others as tools for growth but as necessary members and participants in the process. As an individual seeking growth toward the *telos* of community, I must struggle against the prevailing cultural narrative that emphasizes the priority of realizing personal agendas.[27] The other, the growth partner, is integral to the process. Growth-focused relationships

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[25] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 127.

[26] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 37-68.

[27] Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 163.

should be enacted in such a way that strengthens the relationship while pursuing the desired growth.

Perspectives on Implementation

Thus far in this section, I have proposed growth-focused relationships as a practical means of transforming personal spiritual growth into a relational practice consistent with the *telos* of an interrelated and interdependent body ontology. In addition, I examined Paul's community virtues as they applied to the relational spiritual growth process. Before jumping directly into an implementation of growth-focused relationships in a congregational setting, it is useful to stand back and consider some implications of what we have examined in this section. Congregations are heterogeneous groups of people at various stages of spiritual growth. We have seen that MacIntyrian practices not only align the means and ends but also systematically extend the understanding of the *telos*. Therefore, at every point in time in the life of a congregation, there will be some who conceptualize the interdependent and interrelated community in ways that are closer to the *telos* than others. For the purposes of this thought exercise, we can simplistically conceive of two subgroups within a congregation: one with a more mature conceptualization of the *telos,* which I will refer to as farsighted, and one with a less mature conceptualization of the *telos,* which I will refer to as nearsighted. It would be natural for the farsighted group to want the nearsighted group to see what they see so that the congregation as a whole would continue to grow. Our review of the nature of a practice indicated that progression toward the *telos* required both cognitive conceptualization and experiential means. In addition, the types of means employed for progress must be consistent with the virtues associated with the *telos*.

When the gap between the farsighted and nearsighted members is large, it would not be surprising for the farsighted members to become impatient and even frustrated with the progress of the nearsighted. In this situation, the farsighted members may lose sight of the relationship between the means and ends of virtuous practices and advocate means that violate the virtues of the *telos*. Even if these accelerating means are effective for catalyzing change, they will be catalyzing change that is inconsistent with the *telos,* and the effect will be the creation of a community different from the one imagined.

Hauerwas has at times suggested various tactics designed to close the gap between his farsighted vision of Christian community and the nearsighted concepts common to American Christian culture. In one lecture, Hauerwas used the topic of business ethics to suggest that the real issue lay with the "independence of spirit that democracies putatively want to encourage." When asked for his solution to this gap, he proposed that "[the church] should start by requiring all those currently in the church, as well as anyone who wished to join the church, to declare what they earn in public."[28] Requiring members of the community to make these public statements violates the fundamental means-must-reflect-the-desired-ends premise of virtuous communities. It may be true that the *telos* of Christian community would include such public statements as a way for the community to sustain its shared values of interdependence and interrelationship, but if those declarations are not voluntary, then law, not virtue, is sustaining the community. The ends of such coercive means will be a different community than the imagined *telos*. Hauerwas is right to emphasize the role of imitation in the formation of community, but voluntary imitation is something different from

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[28] Stanley Hauerwas, "Discipleship as a Craft, Church as a Disciplined Community," *Christian Century* 108, no. 27 (October 2, 1991): 883.

required proclamation. A virtuous alternative would be for the farsighted members to proclaim their income voluntarily and invite others to do the same. A truly disciplined community must focus on the means, not the imagined ends.

As we have already seen, there are no pragmatic shortcuts to the steady, intentional efforts of farsighted leaders' voluntarily offering their transforming lives as a public sacrifice of independence inviting others to do the same. As the community grows and matures, the understanding of what it means to live as a body will continue to extend toward the ultimate *telos*. However, the gap between farsighted and nearsighted members will never disappear. New members to the community will always be nearsighted, and farsighted members must remember that the journey of transformation involves the continuous sacrifice of autonomy for the sake of the body. Furthermore, the entire process of realizing the *telos* perfection of the body is the work of God, who empowers transformation and distributes spiritual gifts to individuals for the good of the whole. For this project, growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability are merely one means of a disciplined pursuit of the body *telos*. The virtues of the *telos* community must guide all aspects of these growth-focused relationships.

Conclusion

The Christian community, not the individual, is the *telos* of the fully realized human potential. Christian spiritual growth is a communal practice that promotes individual spiritual formation and the intensification of body life that is interrelated and mutually interdependent. According to Romans 12, this *telos* results from the voluntary sacrifice of individuality for the sake of mutual interdependence. As a practice, spiritual growth must involve relationships in the process of pursing the *telos* of community. It is

inconsistent with the goal of realizing mutual interdependence and interrelatedness to pursue Christian spiritual growth via isolated individually focused means. It is also inconsistent with the *telos* of community to use the community simply as a means to realize an independent individual identity. Finally, the community virtues of freedom, uniqueness, love, devotion, honor, and hope must shape the communal practice of Christian spiritual growth, keeping the means of growth consistent with the desired *telos* of a virtuous Christian community.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Within a culture that treats faith and personal growth as private topics, people

naturally lack the experience of inviting others to participate in their growth initiatives.

This project prepared a small group of people to engage in growth as a community

practice by initiating growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability. The

group preparation involved both a theological reorientation and an experiential praxis

with the hope that the combination provided a positive foundation for ongoing expansion

of the communal practice of healthy accountability and growth-focused relationships.

The nature of the project intervention suggested a qualitative research approach.

Qualitative research is "grounded in the social world of experience"[1] and focuses

on the meanings associated with human experiences.[2] Rather than the detached non-

involvement preferred by quantitative approaches, qualitative research involves the

researcher as the instrument of inquiry and leverages his or her direct involvement as a

means to obtain greater detail about the phenomena under investigation.[3] This study

originated from my observations of the individually focused and privatized approaches to

spiritual growth within the CCC and sought to improve those patterns by reframing the

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[1] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 57.

[2] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 33.

[3] Ibid., 12-14.

theological foundation and providing an alternative relationship experience. This section

will detail the intervention, data sources, data-gathering protocols, and data analysis

approaches.

Format of Project Intervention

Overview of Intervention

The intervention proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, I trained participant

pairs using a four-hour workshop on involving others in healthy growth-focused

relationships thus changing Christian growth into a community practice. In the second

phase, the trained participant pairs practiced healthy accountability on a selected growth

topic for four weeks in a supervised praxis.

Participants

The intervention involved eight participants, grouped as participant pairs. The

recruiting of these participant pairs involved criterion-based purposive sampling to recruit

the first member of each pair and snowball sampling to recruit the second.[4] Criterion-

based purposive sampling begins by determining a description of an optimum member.

For this project, an optimum member was a person who was motivated to grow and who

had the potential for influencing the rest of the congregation according to the purpose of

this project. I recruited four initial participants, three female and one male, to serve as

primary members of the intervention group using the following criteria: over age 18,

regular participants of the CCC, and interested in spiritual growth. To enhance the

potential that this project would expand the practice of growth relationships within the

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[4] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 83-84.

CCC, I gave priority to participants who had already been identified as opinion leaders in an earlier congregational study.[5]

The initial criterion-recruited participants then recruited a partner using a snowball sampling approach. Snowball sampling utilizes the natural social network of one set of participants to access another group.[6] Often these natural social networks allow researchers to access hard-to-reach populations because they are invisible members of a social subculture.[7] The application of snowball sampling in this project allowed the first set of participants to work within their own social network to link to a participant partner whom they trusted. The relational comfort of the participant pairs was critical because the project expected each pair to practice healthy accountability, an expectation that was unfamiliar or uncomfortable at the start. Beginning the praxis with participant pairs in which relational trust already existed increased the likelihood for a positive experience capable of catalyzing the congregation as a whole. To maintain the quality of the participant group, the initial participants were required to recruit partners with the following criteria: over age 18, the same gender as their recruiter, interested in growth, and a regular participant of the CCC. A sample of the recruiting correspondence is provided in appendix A.

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[5] Stephen Shaffer, "Congregational Study of the Carbondale Church of Christ" (class project, Abilene Christian University, May 2009).

[6] Chaim Noy, "Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11 (2008): 327–44.

[7] Wim van den Brink, et al., "How to Find Future Ecstasy-users: Targeted and Snowball Sampling in an Ethically Sensitive Context," *Addictive Behaviors* 32, no. 8 (August 2007): 1705-13.

Workshop Phase

All participants attended a four-hour workshop consisting of three sixty-minute sessions with intermittent breaks. The workshop provided a theological foundation framing Christian growth as a relationship practice and prepared participants for the praxis of healthy accountability. Each of the workshop sessions began with a presentation followed by a reflection exercise and concluded with a group exercise. The workshop took place in the Family Room of the Carbondale Church of Christ building on Sunday September 25, 2011, from 12:30 to 4:30 PM. Lunch was provided, and childcare was made available as needed. The following paragraphs summarize the content of the three sessions, and detailed outlines are provided in appendix B.

Session 1—Growing as a Body

Presentation—"Growing as a Body"—The presentation explained the theological contours of Romans 12, contrasting the essential ontology of a body with that of an individual to establish the community as the *telos* of Christian spiritual growth.

Reflection—Connecting to the idea of a *telos*, each participant identified a list of possible growth goals they were willing to pursue in the praxis based upon the presentation. To help them identify potential goals, I provided a growth goal worksheet shown in appendix C.

Exercise—I helped the group to select the growth goal they used in the praxis phase using the following questions:

1. Which of the goals listed deepens your life within the body?
2. Which of the goals are you most motivated to work on?
3. Which of the goals can realize noticeable progress within 4 weeks?

After narrowing the list of goals, the participants selected a single goal and further specified that goal using a SMART goal worksheet provided in appendix D.[8]

Session 2—Spiritual Growth Is a Community Practice

Presentation—"The Nature of a Practice"—The presentation highlighted the nature of a practice where the ends are reflective of the means and specifically emphasized the importance of the Romans 12 virtues associated with body life.

Reflection—Participants practiced identifying body life virtues and vices as they relate to the practice of accountability by reviewing a list of conversational excerpts and identifying the virtue or vice involved in the example. The virtue and vice summary along with the conversation snippet exercise is detailed in appendix E.

Exercise—The virtue/vice worksheet was discussed as a group. Following this interaction, the participant pairs shared their identified growth goals while their partner listened without comment.

Session 3—Healthy Accountability

Presentation—"Healthy Accountability"—The presentation examined latent anxieties connected to the practice of accountability and introduced a procedure for the practice of healthy specific accountability.[9]

Reflection—Participants then completed a handout that specifies in detail how they wanted to practice healthy accountability for their selected growth goal during the

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[8] Tony Stolzfus, *Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills, and Heart of a Christian Coach* (Virginia Beach: Stolzfus, 2005), 135-36.

[9] Stolzfus, *Leadership Coaching*, 261-67.

praxis phase. The summary of healthy accountability and agreement worksheet is provided in appendix F.

Exercise—The participants shared their healthy accountability plans with their partners, refining and agreeing to the details as a team.

Supervised Praxis Phase

The praxis experience lasted four weeks during which the participant pairs conducted their agreed upon healthy accountability conversations at least once per week. The accountability conversations were simple and not expected to take more than ten minutes each week. During the praxis phase, I contacted each of the participants weekly by phone to ask them several open questions about the ongoing accountability praxis. The purpose of these weekly supervision calls was to ensure that the process of accountability remained healthy and to address misunderstandings of process, procedure, and purpose.[10]

Evaluation Methodology

This section describes the particular methods used to gather data and the subsequent analysis of those data to determine how the intervention has affected the CCC. Specifically, my goal was to determine the extent of initiation that the participants had toward the practice of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability.

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[10] The use of phone conversations has become commonplace within coaching and many spiritual direction settings. The use of phone instead of face-to-face meetings, while introducing some limitations for the interpretation of body language and gesture, will enhance the rate of successfully completed conversations.

Data Triangulation

The evaluation methodology used data triangulation combining three different perspectives: an insider, an outsider, and the researcher.[11] This multi-angle approach reduced the risk of relying upon single sources and their inherent biases and limitations. The three different sources of data allowed opportunities to identify both convergence and divergence between the sources. Convergence increases the credibility and reinforces the findings. Divergence provides important insights about the observed phenomena and often leads to understandings that were invisible within a single source. Thus the multi-angle data approach improves the validity of the findings.[12] The data collection methods used varied from source to source, optimizing the collection method to the situation.

Insider's Perspective

The participant pairs involved in the intervention provided the insider's perspective via an individual interview with the investigator at the end of the praxis. By the end of the praxis phase, the participants had completed the workshop and four weeks of healthy accountability with their partners, providing an information-rich data source. As the sole source of insider data, it was vital to capture their perspectives in a timely manner so that the details of their recollections remained clear. These interviews were conducted between October 24 and October 26 immediately following the fourth week of praxis and used a predetermined interview structure to minimize data collection variations.

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[11] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 73. Data triangulation employs three different data sources to increase the understanding of the underlying phenomena.

[12] Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 556.

The interview methodology employed an interview guide specifying the topics to cover along with suggested questions. The form used in the interviews is provided in appendix G. This approach allowed me to maintain consistency while providing the flexibility to explore the topical areas using appropriate follow-up questions.[13] The insider interviews addressed the following topics:

1.   Participant's understanding of the goal of Christian growth

2.   Participant's understanding of growth-focused relationships as an example of the role the community plays in the growth process

3.   Participant's understanding of the virtues and vices associated with growth-focused relationships

4.   Participant's perceived benefits of healthy accountability

5.   Participant's attitudes toward healthy accountability

6.   Participant's experience with the accountability process

7.   The likelihood that the participant will continue using healthy accountability to sustain their spiritual growth efforts

Outsider's Perspective

Dr. Earl Lavender served as the outside expert and provided his interpretation of the groups' degree of initiation into the use of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability. Lavender is the executive director of the Institute for Christian Spirituality, the director of Missional Studies, and a professor in the College of Bible at Lipscomb University. Lavender provided a unique blend of academic expertise in the field of Christian spirituality with years of active involvement in church ministry.

Lavender's assessment employed a group interview of the participants. He followed an interview guide that specified the topics of interest but did not specify the

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[13] Ibid., 343-44.

specific questions used. This approach insured that important topics were included in the

interview while providing Lavender flexibility to explore the topical areas using

appropriate follow-up questions.[14] The group interview examined the following topics:

1. Participant's understanding of the body nature of Christian community
    and practice

2. Participant's understanding of growth-focused relationships as an example
    of the role the community plays in the growth process

3. Participant's experience and attitude with the accountability process used
    in the praxis

4. The likelihood that the participant will continue using healthy
    accountability to sustain the spiritual growth efforts

Researcher's Perspective

During the intervention, I captured field notes based upon my observations during

the workshop, the weekly one-on-one praxis supervision calls, and observations made

throughout the intervention. The data collection method used for each of these sources

follows.

Workshop Observation

The workshop provided the first opportunity to gather data for this project. Since I

was the presenter of the workshop, a non-participant observer captured observations of

the action during the workshop.

The selection of the non-participant observer considered the effects of the

observer upon the participants.[15] I was concerned that the relationship of the observer to

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 326.

the participants in the workshop would introduce distractions and affect how closely

participants paid attention to the presentations. I did not want the participants to be

uncomfortable with maintaining privacy and become concerned about the observer's note

taking or that the observer's prior relationship with one or more of the participants would

cause them to be concerned about the approval or disapproval of the observer. For these

reasons, I took the following precautions. First, I introduced the non-participant observer

to the workshop participants at the start of the workshop with an explanation of their role.

Second, I provided a short description of the kinds of notes the observer was going to

capture. Third, I asked the workshop participants to express any concerns or ask any

questions they had about the observation before the workshop sessions began.

The qualifications of the non-participant observer were a crucial aspect of

gathering quality notes. The individual's considered for this role had the following

qualifications: (1) trustworthy based upon their reputation or professional qualifications

to avoid undue concerns about privacy and non-biased capturing of notes, (2) unrelated to

the researcher to avoid biasing the observations, (3) attentive to details, and (4) adept at

quick note writing.

Not everything that occurred in the workshop was of interest to the project, and

attending to unimportant activities had the potential to prevent capturing important data.

To prevent this, an observation protocol was developed to aid the non-participant

observer and is provided in appendix H, along with note taking worksheets provided in

appendix I.[16]

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[16] Scott L. Thumma, "Methods for Congregational Study," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy Ammerman et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 199-203.

Supervision Sessions Interview Protocol

The supervision interviews consisted of a weekly phone call with each participant to gather data for the evaluation and monitor the ongoing intervention. This dual purposed structure suggested an interview method that combined an interview guide approach with an informal conversational interview.[17] As the interviewer, I asked each participant four specific prewritten questions. These four questions provided an important consistency between the interviews. I used additional probes and follow-up questions as necessary in a conversational style. As necessary, I provided clarification and addressed any concerns expressed by the participants. These supervision interviews were typically brief, lasting less than ten minutes. I recorded responses to the interview questions using a call note worksheet provided in appendix J and added detailed observations in my field notes. The insider interview questions were as follows:

1. What occurred in your peer conversations this week?

2. What modifications did you and/or your peer make to your goals or accountability agreement?

3. What issues or concerns do you have?

4. What reflections or observations do you have about spiritual growth and healthy accountability?

Additional Field Note Protocol

In addition to the specific field notes during the workshop and supervision sessions, I captured observations from other settings involving the intervention participants. Specifically, I was interested in ad-hoc conversations involving intervention concepts between participants or between participants and non-participants.

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[17] Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 342-44.

Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis techniques guided the interpretation of the data collected from the three sources. The goal of the interpretation was not to compare before and after but rather to form a thick description of the participant community's ongoing life as seen through the lens of the project purpose. Patton suggests an inductive approach that moves from data to learning, following the steps of "coding, classifying, categorizing, and labeling."[18] This open approach allows the broadest discoveries based solely upon the collected data. This approach seems most appropriate to studying completely unknown phenomena. Bogdan and Taylor recommend a more deductive process that begins with developing a preliminary story line derived from the project purpose. In their approach, this preliminary story line seeds the spiral analysis process with an initial thread directly tied to the study structure.[19] The deductive approach assumes some preliminary knowledge of the phenomena under investigation. While this initial story line helps focus attention on the salient information in the interpretation process, there is also some danger that the predetermined focus will result in the researcher's seeing only what they expected to see in the data. This project originated with the researcher's a priori personal experiences as a member of the community under investigation. As a result, the interpretation could not advance in a purely inductive fashion because it was impossible to isolate my prior experiences with the congregation from those associated with this investigation. This led to the natural conclusion that the interpretation approach for this

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[18] Ibid., 463.

[19] Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource,* 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 150-55.

project would follow an abductive structure combining both inductive and deductive features in a three-phased process.[20]

Phase 1 was a deductive component that occurred prior to data collection and involved identifying a preliminary story line for the interpretation and a tentative coding scheme. Phase 2 proceeded inductively, moving from data to meaning by carefully reviewing the collected data, refining the phase 1 coding scheme, and identifying patterns and themes. In this phase, the data collected from each of the three perspectives (insider, outsider, and researcher) were analyzed as independent data sources. In phase 3, the analysis compared the data from the three perspectives. The following sections describe each of these phases in more detail.

Phase 1—Preliminary Storyline and Coding Scheme

Phase 1 of the interpretation involved the identification of an interpretive storyline and preliminary coding scheme. These preliminary activities served as the initial analysis framework for the data review in phase 2. Identifying an interpretive storyline and initial coding scheme helped anchor the analysis to the stated project purpose. Unlike some more general ethnographic studies, this project began with an identified problem and aimed at a predetermined purpose. While the study had the potential to produce insights unrelated to the intended purpose, the data interpretation focused solely upon improving the researcher's understanding of the stated purpose. This deductive step explicitly acknowledges that the project had a stated goal and that the researcher had *a-priori*

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[20] Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 171.

experience with the community. As the analysis proceeded in phase 2, the preliminary

coding scheme was modified to ensure that the codes fit the data and not vise-versa.[21]

Initial storyline

The initial storyline derived from the project purpose and explicitly stated the

desired results. The storyline of this project suggested that, by reframing the theological

importance of the body away from a simple collective and toward an interrelated,

interdependent body and providing a positive experience with healthy accountability, the

participants would be more motivated and open to involving others in their personal

spiritual growth efforts.

Initial coding scheme

The project purpose and theological framework determined the initial coding

scheme. The primary focus of this project involved attitudes and theological

understandings about involving others in personal growth efforts. The project assumed

that the default privatization of growth originated from the surrounding cultural emphasis

on individuality and independence. In addition, the project presumed that there were

latent anxieties associated with accountability that combined with those cultural

influences to limit or prevent its practice. Thus the project sought to introduce a change in

the theological understanding of the body that challenged the cultural presupposition and

provided a positive and healthy experience of accountability, challenging the latent

anxieties. These project interests and purpose were reflected in the initial coding scheme

provided in appendix K.

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[21] Taylor, *Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 152.

Phase 2—Reviewing Data Sources Independently

In phase 2 of the interpretation, the data from each of the triangulated sources were analyzed independently. The data collected from each source were entered into a word processor file organized by source, by collection type, and by participant where appropriate. Multiple statements and/or sentences were separated into separate lines, and the data were tabularized to form one row per statement. The analysis of each source began with the preliminary coding scheme identified in phase 1 and proceeded through repeated reviews until the resulting coding scheme stabilized. I examined all the data from one triangulation source at a time and applied a structured sequence of readings:

1. I read and reread all the data collected associated with the triangulation source to gain a sense of the whole.[22]

2. For each document in the group, I read each one all the way through, making simple notes in the margin of my impressions and thoughts.

3. I reread the same document applying Moschella's literal lens and modified the coding scheme from phase 1. Each statement was assigned one or more codes, and these codes were entered into the table in the literal column. If new codes were needed, the preliminary coding scheme was extended by adding the new code and writing its definition into a new table similar to the one provided in appendix L. Steps 2 and 3 were repeated for all documents within the triangulation group.

4. I reread each document, applying Moschella's interpretive lens, assigning codes to each statement, and entering those codes into the table in the interpretive column. If new codes were needed, the preliminary coding scheme was extended by adding the new code and writing its definition into a new table.

5. I reread each document, applying Moschella's reflexive lens, assigning codes to each statement, and entering those codes into the table in the reflexive column. If new codes were needed, the preliminary coding

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[22] Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 168. I am applying Moschella's idea of immersion to one data source at a time.

scheme was extended by adding the new code and writing its definition into a new table.[23]

6. Once all the data from a particular source were coded, the data were loaded into a database. Statements that were assigned more than one code were duplicated so that each database entry consisted of one statement along with one literal, one interpretive, and one reflexive code as determined by the previous steps. The database system was used to generate reports organized by code, and these reports were reviewed for coding consistency, and adjustments were made as needed. Once all of the coding was rechecked, final reports were generated and used to identify themes.

I repeated this sequence for each of the triangulation source document collections allowing each source to develop its voice before placing those voices in conversation with the other sources. At the conclusion of phase 2, each data source had a source specific coding scheme, a list of themes, and a collection of observations and notes.

Phase 3—Comparisons of Data Sources

Phase 3 of the interpretation analyzed the data sources in conjunction with one another. By comparing both the raw documentary evidence and the resulting coding indices, convergences, silences, and slippages became evident.[24] Convergences appeared when two or more sources indicated significant similarities in coded content or the resulting coding index. Slippages appeared when one source of data offered insights that did not appear among the others or when sources contradicted one another. The differences in the resultant coding schemes among the data sources provided three unique perspectives, and the variations enhanced the findings of the project.[25] The analysis

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[23] Ibid., 172.

[24] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 197.

[25] Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods,* 248.

looked for silences as well. Silences were missing elements of the picture or initial codes that were not assigned during the analysis.

Conclusion

The combined praxis, and theological intervention initiated an influential group of CCC members in the practice of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability. Capturing the participants' perspectives via interviews, my perspective as field notes and supervision calls, and incorporating an outside expert via a group interview provided multiple data sources for interpretation. The findings and results appear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The data analysis began with independent analysis of the data sets from the insider, outsider, and researcher perspectives. The source specific analysis always began inductively using the initial coding scheme and resulted in deductive source-specific coding schemes and themes. Subsequently, these source specific findings were cross-compared to find convergences, slippages, and silences. This section presents the results of both stages of the analysis, beginning with the source specific findings and progressing to the combined results.

Researcher Data Findings

The researcher data consisted of notes from a non-participant observer during the workshop, weekly supervision call notes, and general field note observations. My analysis began with a series of immersive readings to familiarize myself with the material. Following this immersion, I read the data three more times, examining each entry and assigning codes to the data as appropriate. Each of the three readings employed a particular analytic focus: literal, interpretive, and reflexive. During each reading, I added new tags to the coding scheme to capture the unique voice of the data source. Each statement of the source material received as many codes as were warranted. The resultant coding scheme for the researcher perspective appears in appendix L.

Comparison of Initial to Resultant Coding Schemes

The comparison of the initial coding scheme with the resultant coding scheme illuminates important observations. Four of the initial codes do not appear in the resultant coding scheme, two of which warrant comments.

<u>Statements about the presumption of privacy or independence</u> (Spp)—The study presupposed that people conceive of Christian growth as a private topic; as a result they are hesitant to involve others in their growth efforts, preferring to be independent. There was no evidence of these concerns in the researcher data. Either the assumption is incorrect, the training workshop allayed the underlying concerns, or the specific concerns were not captured in the data set.

<u>Statements about accountability as a practice</u> (Sap)—The praxis workshop described a practice as a form of activity in which the desired ends are incorporated within the means. The researcher's notes do not contain evidence that this concept was subsequently reflected by the participants. The participants commented on the relational and pragmatic benefits of healthy accountability, but they did not express that increasing the interdependence of the Christian body is central to the idea of Christian transformation.

The resultant researcher coding scheme added thirteen codes, including the following:

Mp	My reaction to participant's behavior/statements
Shap	Statements about features of the specific healthy accountability process adopted for the intervention
Slc	Statements about limited conversation involved in applied practice of healthy accountability

Spig   Statements about the performance/progress made toward their growth goal

Sea   Statements about the effectiveness of accountability

Sia   Statements about the importance of accountability

S+R   Statements about the positive desire/need for relationships

Sar   Statements that connect relationships and accountability

Scg   Statements about the challenges of growth and reaching goals

Sng   Statements about the nature of the goals selected/pursued

El-   Negative emotional language associated with growth/progress/goals

El+   Positive emotional language associated with growth/progress/goals

Rs   Participants' reactions to themselves

Two of the new codes capture statements about my reactions to the participants (Mp) and the participants' reactions to themselves (Rs) respectively. The remaining additions organize into three clusters. The first cluster includes codes that reflect observations about structural and procedural aspects of the praxis.[1] A second cluster reflects observations about personal aspects of pursuing a growth goal using healthy accountability.[2] These codes capture my perceptions of the participants' view of their progress, challenges, reflections, and emotions associated with growth. A third cluster represents data that connect the praxis activities with the relationships of the participants.[3]

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[1] Codes Shap and Slc.

[2] Codes Spig, Sea, Sia, Scg, Sng, El+, and El-.

[3] Codes S+R and Sar.

Observations

The most frequent observation during the supervision calls concerned the specific procedures involved in the structured form of healthy accountability applied in the praxis.[4] The frequency of these comments was consistent with the structured nature of the praxis and reflects the participants' desire to follow these procedures properly.

Before the intervention, I had not anticipated that the structured nature of the specific accountability conversations employed in the praxis might inhibit the formation of relationships.[5] The conversational procedures employed in the praxis were designed to ensure that the specific accountability interactions were simple to train, easy to apply on a sustained basis, and remained virtuous. While these participants indicated that their conversations positively affected their relationships[6] and the structures were effective for keeping the process virtuous, these same structures also had the negative effect of stilting natural interactions.[7] The fact that the participants perceived these conversational structures as limits reveals that they had a desire for improved relationships with others in the body and viewed the opportunity to improve their relationships in a positive light.

The data reflect the inherent challenges associated with growth as well as the effectiveness of the accountability practice. Several coded comments capture both positive and negative impressions of the success participants experienced in the pursuit of their goal. The strength of the impressions, both positive and negative, indicates an

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[4] As captured in the code Shap.

[5] Captured in codes Sar and Slc.

[6] As represented by codes El+, S+R, and Sar.

[7] As represented by Slc.

underlying desire to make progress toward their growth goals.[8] This latent desire to grow was countered by the practical challenges of growth and internal negative emotions associated with the struggle forward.[9] Overall, the dominant expression captured in the researchers' data supports the conclusion that healthy accountability is both important and effective.[10]

<div align="center">Themes</div>

Several themes emerged from my data, including the motives for growth, the desire for relationship, expectations about progress, the effectiveness of accountability, and the impact of the particular form of accountability employed in the praxis. Discussion of these themes follows.

<u>Motives for growth</u>[11] Participants expressed their motives for growth with the vocabulary of want, need, and should. Those who expressed growth in the language of a need often expressed concerns of "not doing enough" or "not living up to God's will." Some expressed growth simply as the need to "work harder" and "do better." Others appeared motivated by a desire to avoid embarrassment. The remainder expressed their desire for growth as simply a desire for personal progress without resorting to guilt-laden language of "should "and "ought." My impression was that most participants were expressing an unspoken expectation of personal growth and progress. "Do what I am

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[8] Code Spig.

[9] Code Scg reflects the challenge of growth while code EL- captures the internal negative emotions.

[10] Codes Sia and Sea.

[11] Code SmG.

supposed to do" summarizes the basic motive for growth observed in the data. This basic

expression of the motive for Christian growth lacks any explicit recognition of the body

nature of the church.

Desire for relationship[12] The participants viewed the inclusion of others in their

process of growth positively. The positive view of including others captured two

expectations. First, the participants expected that reaching their goals would be easier if

someone was helping them. Second, many of the participants saw the opportunity to

build intimacy and strengthen relationships as a positive benefit of including others in the

growth process. Although the participants held a positive view about including others in

their growth efforts, none of the participants expressed interrelatedness as the goal, but

rather it was a serendipitous benefit.

Expectations about progress[13] The participants expected to make progress and

were often dismayed that they failed to be successful reaching their goal. When they did

not reach their goal, they often internalized this as personal failure and expressed this

perceived failure using the language of guilt and shame. Their internalized perception of

personal failure often failed to account for unexpected circumstances, their own

unrealistic expectations, or they discounted the progress they had already achieved.

Effectiveness of accountability[14] The participants all expressed that the healthy

accountability applied in the praxis phase was effective and important in helping them

make progress toward their growth goals. Although some did not make the progress they

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[12] Codes S+O, Slc, S+R, and Sar.

[13] Codes Spig and EL-.

[14] Codes Sea, Spig, and Sia.

had expected, they felt they made more progress with accountability than they would have on their own.

The impact of the particular form of accountability[15] The healthy accountability employed in the praxis limited the accountability conversations to allowing their partner to ask them one or two questions that they designed themselves during the workshop. Participants acknowledged that this process insured that the conversations remained positive and healthy, but the procedure also limited and hampered free flow relational exchanges.

Insider Data Findings

The insider data consisted of participants' responses to a phone interview conducted at the conclusion of the praxis. Repeating the process applied to my data, my analysis began with a series of immersive readings to familiarize myself with the material. Following this immersion, I read the data three more times, examining each entry and assigning codes to the data as appropriate. Each of the three readings applied a different lens: literal, interpretive, and reflexive. During each reading, I added new tags to the coding scheme to capture the unique voice of the data source. Each statement of the source material received as many codes as were warranted. The resultant coding scheme for the insider's perspective is provided in appendix M.

Comparison of Initial to Resultant Coding Schemes

The resultant insider coding scheme differs from both the initial coding scheme and the resultant researcher coding scheme. The differences are primarily due to the

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[15] Codes Shap and Slc.

particular data collection methods and the specific questions used to gather the insider

data. The insider coding scheme includes eleven codes that were not anticipated in the

initial coding scheme.[16] Five of these eleven additions were also additions to the

researcher coding scheme while six are unique to the insider scheme, including the

following:[17]

Sgg	Statements describing the goals of Christian growth
Sna	Statements about negative applications of accountability
Spn	Statements about the progressive nature of relationships/accountability
Sim	Statements about the desire/importance of mutual accountability
Sba	Statements about the benefits of healthy accountability other than reaching goals
Sdi	Statements about the degree of initiation or likelihood to continue using healthy accountability

These six unique codes all exhibit a reflective tone consistent with the post-praxis

context. Five codes that appear in the researcher data do not appear in this data set.[18]

Observations

Before discussing the major themes from the insider data, it is important to

explore several general observations. The explicit expression of a presumption of privacy

or independence appears as a single statement in this data set. Although limited in

frequency, its appearance directly verifies the presupposition of a cultural resistance to

involving others in personal growth topics. The participants' repeated emphasis on the

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[16] Codes Shap, Sar, Spig, Sea, Scg, Sgg, Sna, Spn, Sim, Sba, and Sdi.

[17] Codes Shap, Sar, Spig, Sea, and Scg also emerged in the resultant researcher coding scheme.

[18] Codes El+, S+R, Sia, Sng, and El-.

need to keep accountability positive and nonjudgmental provides additional indirect

support of the latent resistance to involving others in growth efforts.[19] Participants'

positive expressions about involving others in personal growth efforts indicates that the

presumption of privacy is not an expression of a lack of interest in relationships but rather

a protective stance against the potential threats and risks associated with such

relationships.[20]

Statements about accountability as a practice are absent from this data set. This

silence indicates that the participants continue to view involving others in their spiritual

growth as optional. While motivated to grow and interested in relationships, these

participants view accountability primarily as a pragmatic tool for advancing their spiritual

growth goals. In a similar vein, the theological distinction advanced in the workshop

between a body seeking to become a more excellent body and a collection of people

becoming better people is barely noticeable in the data.

Two participants expressed concerns about the potential to misuse accountability

referencing past abuses. The theological foundations of this project presupposed the

presence of these references. The impact of these historical abuses, although distant,

lingers but does not appear to overpower the positive impact and benefits of healthy

accountability as experienced in the praxis.

In two statements, participants reflected on the progressive nature of relationships,

indicating their expectation that healthy relationships would deepen with time and

practice. This, I believe, relates to the systematic extension aspect of MacIntyre's

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[19] Captured with code Svv.

[20] Captured with code S+O.

definition of a practice when he says "that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."[21] The repeated relationship centered growth efforts will not only yield results, but will also systematically extend the conception of the goal of growth and the nature of relationships within the body. Simply talking about community or explaining the meaning of community will not achieve the desired end. It is only by actually being community that we can become a more excellent community and expand our conception of the body. The benefits of employing a virtuous form of interrelated involvement for the purposes of growth also had an impact on the participants' relationships outside the praxis pairings. This bleed-through effect further supports the effectiveness and importance of healthy accountability and demonstrates the systematic extension in action.

<div align="center">Themes</div>

The insider data exhibited notable themes, including the goal to become Christ-like, interest in relationships, the importance of virtue, the importance of mutuality, the effectiveness of healthy accountability, and the importance of training and structures. A discussion of these seven themes follows.

The goal to become Christ-like When asked for their view of the goal of Christian growth, most participants expressed that goal using the phrases "to become like Christ" or "become what God wants me to be." Sometimes their expression was mixed with a sense of the Christian mission to represent God and Christ to the world. It is notable that this expression of the goal contains little or no mention of the interrelated body aspect of Christian formation. Despite the emphasis this idea received in the workshop, that

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[21] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

singular presentation was insufficient for shaping the prevailing conception that individual morality and character-focused issues dominate Christian growth goals.

Interest in relationships The participants frequently mentioned both the importance and desirability of involving others in relationships focused on growth. Most expressed that these growth-focused relationships quell loneliness, providing encouragement, strength, and support for the journey of growth. Contrary to the idea that people prefer to grow independently, this theme indicates that these participants prefer relationship so long as those relationships are virtuous.

Importance of virtue Repeatedly the participants express the importance of virtue within accountability relationships. Their expressions took the form of vices they wanted to avoid rather than virtues to be included in growth relationships. They consistently identify criticism, blame, guilt, shame, advising, and instructing as conversational vices to avoid. This emphasis on virtue indicates that the virtue portion of the workshop and the careful procedural controls employed in the praxis were justified and effective.

Importance of a mutual relationship Participants spontaneously expressed that healthy accountability relationships needed to be mutual relationships where partners were accountable to one another. Mutual accountability was the form employed in the praxis, but the workshop training never mentioned or called attention to this aspect of the structure. The spontaneous expression of the importance of mutuality stresses its importance.

Effectiveness of accountability Participants expressed that healthy accountability was effective for helping them focus on their chosen growth goals. This sense of focus manifested itself as a desire to give a good report to their partners. The anticipated

accountability conversation infected their daily activities and gave them the energy

needed to avoid distractions and to take action on their goals. The effectiveness described

was universally pragmatic in nature. Their primary sense of success related to their

achieving or making progress toward a specific growth goal. Deepening the relationships

with their partners was a by-product of the pursuit of their growth goal.

Importance of training Comments stressed the importance of the initial training

workshop for keeping accountability healthy and positive. In that workshop the

participants learned specific conversation virtues and a procedure for healthy

accountability designing the specific questions they wanted their partners to ask them

during the accountability meetings. The structured conversation process provided a

helpful formality that kept the conversations from devolving into guilt- or shame-based

patterns.

Importance of structure The participants indicated that they found it easier to

practice the weekly discipline because their practice was part of a formal study, or group

structure. My weekly supervision calls introduced a double accountability layer that aided

their practice. The importance of structure was further evident in the participants'

hesitation to commit to continuing the process beyond the study without the support of a

group structure.

Outsider Data Findings

The outsider data consisted of a transcribed oral report provided by Earl

Lavender, who interviewed the group at the conclusion of the study. Multiple readings of

the data preceded coding the data from the three perspectives: literal, interpretive, and

reflexive. The initial coding scheme categories were applied as appropriate, and new

codes where introduced as they emerged from the data. Each statement of the source material received as many codes as were warranted. The resultant coding scheme for the outsider's perspective appears in appendix N.

Comparison of Initial to Resultant Coding Schemes

Because the final interview focused on global assessments of the project, several codes from the initial coding scheme did not appear in the outsider data.[22] These silences are not significant. Thirteen new codes extended the initial coding scheme to capture Lavender's impressions derived from the final interview. Of the thirteen additions, three appear in all three data sets,[23] five appeared previously in the insider data,[24] one appeared in the researcher data,[25] and four are unique to the outsider data. The unique codes include the following:

S+ha	Positive opinions about praxis, healthy accountability
SiT	Statements emphasizing importance of training session in praxis
SiS	Statements about the study structure and the impact of being a study on their experience
Fut	Suggestions for future applications, changes

The outsider data appropriately reflect an overarching perspective and an evaluative tone looking at the project as a whole.

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[22] Missing codes include Rp, Spp, Sap, SmG, Sep, SpO, and Sut.

[23] Codes Sar, Shap, and Sea.

[24] Codes Sdi, Sgg, Sim, Sna, and Spn.

[25] Code Sng.

Observations

The outsider's perspective indicated that healthy accountability helped the participants progress toward their growth goals by providing focus and encouragement. The positive experience of the praxis phase left each of the participants with a positive opinion about healthy accountability and significantly increased the likelihood that they would use it in the future.

Although many of the initial codes were silent in the outsider data, three of the initial codes along with the one code that also occurred in the researcher data warrant comment.

Statements/understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12)[26] The outside observer confirmed that the participants understood that their interrelationship was an important aspect of their life in the body. This affirms the theological presentation of the workshop and the connection of spiritual growth with a relational component.

Statements about the virtues/vices[27] Likewise, the outsider repeatedly mentions the importance that accountability relationships exhibit the virtue of honesty and avoid the vices of criticism, judgment, and guilt. The initial workshop highlighted these virtues, and they were a central feature of the praxis phase. The emphasis upon virtue clearly resonated with the participants.

Participants' reactions to me[28] The outside observer noted that while all of the participants had a very positive opinion of me, some of them also felt intimidated by the

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[26] Code Sr12.

[27] Code Svv.

[28] Code Rm.

questions I employed in the praxis supervision calls. Participants described the intimidation as a form of discomfort stemming from not knowing how to respond to my open questions rather than their feeling coerced or bullied. The weekly supervision calls were simple and routine check-in calls to ensure that they were properly executing the specific practice of healthy accountability initiated in the workshop. To ensure freedom and safety, I did not ask the participants about the specifics of their goals or about their progress toward those goals. Instead, the interviews focused on general process and procedural concerns. According to the outside expert, these calls had both a positive and a negative impact. On the positive side, the weekly supervision calls functioned as an additional layer of accountability, motivating the participants to carry out their peer-partner accountability agreements. On the negative side, my neutral and open-ended questions left some participants unsure of how to respond, wanting to maintain privacy while providing me with sufficient responses for the study.

Statements about the nature of the goals selected/pursued[29] Part of the report from the outsider revolved around the nature of the growth goals selected by some of the participants and their degree of spirituality. Although for the sake of privacy the participants were not required to disclose their growth goals as part of the study, they did voluntarily talk about them to the outside observer. Some of the goals involved the desire for more consistent Bible study, some focused on prayer, others focused on works of service or changing attitudes, and some focused on completing practical tasks. It was the opinion of the outside observer that the task-focused goals were decidedly non-spiritual in nature.

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[29] Code Sng.

Themes

The dominant themes of the outside expert's report includes the positive experience of the praxis, the importance of the training and practice structures, and the impact on relationships. Each of these themes are discussed below.

Positive experience of the praxis The outsider's view was that the participants had positive opinions of accountability as conducted in the praxis and taught in the workshop. This positive experience resulted from their comfort that the process was positive and virtuous and avoided the negative aspects of accountability combined with their experience of progress toward their desired goals.

Impact on relationships The outside observer noted that the participants strengthened their relationships with one another and they viewed this deepening of relationship as an important part of the practice.

Importance of training and structures Repeatedly, the outside observer referenced the importance that the participants placed on the initial training and the conversational structures used in the praxis phase. These structures were critical for the positive result, and participants deemed them necessary for future continuation of the practice with the congregation. The degree of importance placed on this is also evident in the hesitancy these participants expressed to engaging in healthy accountability with untrained partners. While they enthusiastically embraced the practice and the possible expansion to include others, they insisted that all future participants be trained in the workshop material.

Inter-Source Findings

The previous sections examined the three data sources independently, beginning with the initial coding scheme and culminating in source-specific resultant coding schemes, observations, and themes. In this section, my attention shifts to looking at the patterns among the source specific results. The comparison of the different sources highlights convergences, slippages, and silences. Before I attempted an inter-source comparison, the source-specific results required normalization to remove semantically overlapping codes variations. During the source specific analysis phase, each data source added source-specific codes to the initial coding scheme. This deductive methodology allowed each data source to determine unique resultant codes. This process, however, opens the possibility that some source-specific codes represent semantically overlapping underlying concepts. Thus when comparing the source-specific coding schemes, some of the differences are significant while others only appear significant. What functions as precision in the source-by-source analysis results in obfuscation when comparing the sources. To correct this problem, it was necessary to normalize the source-specific coding schemes before examining the data for convergence, slippages, and silences.

The normalization process began with creating a master coding scheme from the union of the source-specific schemes. This master scheme was subsequently organized into six master categories, and each of the codes from all the sources was grouped under one of the six mast categories: (1) personal reactions among participants, (2) theological/ideological perspectives, (3) specific practice of accountability used in study, (4) accountability as a healthy part of Christian life, (5) relationships, and (6) initiation.

This grouping preserves the source-specific distinctions while localizing similarities and highlighting the overlaps. The categorized master coding scheme appears in appendix O.

<div align="center">Convergences</div>

Five convergences emerged from analyzing the categorized master coding scheme. The first two convergences emerged within the theological/ideological perspectives category that contained codes associated with the interconnectedness and interrelated nature of the body of Christ. The master coding scheme indicates that all three data sources contain findings in this category, but in uneven degrees. The researcher data indicate that five different participants questioned or commented during the Romans 12 workshop presentation. According to the data, my impression at the time was that the participants understood the material and agreed with the concepts presented. However, only one participant mentioned the Romans 12 body theology during the insider interviews, while the outsider interview shows strong support for the concepts. This variation called for closer inspection. Delving deeper into the specifics, the underlying data indicated acceptance of the idea that the church is a place of relationships, thus that relationships should naturally play a role in the growth efforts of individual members. This correlated well with Lavender's summarizing statement, "It seems like to me that everything you wanted to accomplish in terms of building community and the idea of spiritual formation by community, all of that they embraced, they thought that was right."[30] What is missing from this conceptualization is the ontological primacy of the body.

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[30] From transcript of Earl Lavender's oral report following his interview with the study participants, collected on 2 November 2011.

The second and the most significant convergence in the category occurred around the topic of virtues and vices in growth-focused relationships. All three data sources emphasized the need for growth-focused relationships to involve honesty, trust, listening, and encouragement while avoiding guilt, judgment, criticism, advising, and lording over one another. The consistency of these sentiments reinforces the importance of these virtues, hints at what people want in relationships, and potentially explains why people hesitate to involve others in their growth efforts. The fear that these virtues will not be present is enough to inhibit the natural formation of growth-focused relationships. Several participants mentioned that the virtues presentation of the workshop challenged them to rethink their conversations and be more careful about advising and judging, saying, "This is not easy" and "Definitely have to watch your tongue." The strength of the virtue convergence masks notable slippage around particular virtues. The Romans 12 virtues of being unique creations, keeping spiritual fervor, and not being simply the means of growth are missing in the data.

The third convergence concerned the specific form of accountability employed in the praxis. From the workshop straight through to the final interview, the shape and structure of the accountability interactions garnered attention. The participants were motivated to conduct their conversations virtuously and were diligent to perform their role in the study as instructed. The workshop trained the participants to use a structured form of specific accountability where each partner designed one or two accountability questions that their peer-partner would ask them during weekly check-ups. Their instructions were to refrain from free-form conversations about their growth goals and ask only the specific accountability questions. They could celebrate the accomplishments

and ask how their partners wanted to adjust the goal or strategy, but nothing else. Engaging in normal social exchange was allowed before or after the specific accountability conversation so long as these additions were consistent with the virtues discussed in the workshop and avoided problem-solving, making suggestions, and giving advice. This structured conversational form was employed to keep the process simple and virtuous. The structured accountability conversations had positive and negative convergences. The positive convergence affirmed that the process was relationship building, effective, efficient, and vice-free. The negative convergence was that participants felt constrained in their ability to converse freely and thereby strengthen the relationship still further.

The fourth convergence highlights the effectiveness of accountability as an accelerant for growth. Universally, the participants mentioned that the simple weekly accountability conversations with their peer-partners helped them focus on their growth goal and energized their pre-call efforts. Many reported significant progress toward their goals even during the short four-week praxis. The strength of this convergence confirms one of the foundational study premises. At the same time, while accountability was effective, the importance, or theological soundness, of the practice does not appear as a convergence.

Finally, the fifth convergence appeared within the relationship category of the master code scheme. Two codes converge across all three data sources, strengthening the conclusion that accountability conversations fostered participants' relationships with their peers.[31] Involving others in the spiritual growth process in healthy ways enhanced their

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[31] Codes Sar and S+O.

growth efforts while strengthening their degree of interdependence and interrelatedness. In addition, these two codes demonstrate that the participants desired stronger relationships within the body of Christ and welcomed the structural formalities that helped them forge such relationships. Contrary to a premise of this study of a cultural bias against relational involvement in spiritual formation, these results indicate that what people resist is unwanted and unhealthy involvement of others in personal efforts, not the relationship itself.

Slippages

Slippages are concepts that appear in conflicting ways within the data. Slippages are more than simply the absence of an idea in a particular source. Simple absences will occur naturally from the divergent data collection methods employed among the triangulated sources. Slippages play an important role for their ability to highlight divergent views, interpretations, or understandings of the underlying reality. The analyzed data exhibit five slippages worthy of comment.

The first slippage concerns the participants' reactions to me. Coded content on this topic appears in the researcher and outsider sources, but the nature of the content from each source differs. Field notes from the workshop contain my reflections on the general lack of questions and discussion that took place in the presentation sessions. The participants exhibited energy during their peer-partner interactions and sustained attention to the presentations, but there were surprisingly few challenges, clarifications, questions, or comments. The outsider interview revealed that the participants felt intimidated during the weekly supervision phone calls of the praxis. It is possible that the lack of comments in the workshop reflects the same underlying dynamic. As already

mentioned in the outsider data discussion, the form of intimidation was not a fearful, uncomfortable intimidation but rather insecurity about their responses to my questions. A personal result of this finding is that I need to take this to heart and intentionally seek ways to keep my style light, accessible, and relational. The presence of this intimidation factor probably enhanced the effects of the double accountability structure of the praxis and potentially overestimates the extensibility of the results.

The second slippage appears as a tension between the participants' strong desire for virtuous peer relationship and their avirtuous treatment of themselves.[32] The expression of personal guilt, shame, and self-flagellating comments appeared in my notes from the weekly supervision calls. In several of these one-on-one conversations, there existed a high degree of negative inner psychology functioning as the participant's primary motives for growth. It appeared that what participants demand from their peer-partners they failed to discipline in themselves. The presence of these negatively charged internal growth motives confounds the ability of this study to understand whether the stated resistance to involving others stems primarily from their apprehension of guilt-from-others or their apprehension of self-guilt.

The third slippage noted in the study was an observation by the outside expert concerning the nature of some of the participants' growth goals that did not appear in the other two sources. The outside expert felt that task oriented growth goals were less important and transformative than goals that involved more classic spirituality topics. In my opinion, the nature of the goal is immaterial to the focus of the study. Goal topics,

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[32] Compare codes Svv, R+R, and S+O with codes Rs and El-.

like relationships, will change over time in keeping with the strength of the growth-focused relationship. Any growth goal can result in transformative spiritual formation.

The fourth, and final, slippage was the apparent tension between the strong emphasis on the need for training as captured by the outside expert's group interview and the negative comments about how the structured process taught in that training limited relationship development. This appears to be a natural and unavoidable tension. It is natural that new social patterns associated with growth-focused relationships will necessarily rely upon procedures and structures as a means of initiating the communal pattern. I would anticipate that as this style of interaction permeates the body it will progressively shed the procedural safeguards and come to rely upon social initiation into the communal pattern without the need for specialized training.

<center>Silences</center>

The only complete silence within these results was the absence of coded statements reflecting the idea of accountability as a practice. The workshop presentation described the idea of a practice using two key statements: "The means of becoming must equal the ends of becoming" and "To become a more excellent body we must pursue growth not as individuals, but as a body." The heavier emphasis expressed on the effectiveness of the accountability process rather than its importance combined with the absence of body concepts in the motives for growth indicate that these participants are operating with a nascent understanding of the body of Christ as a body rather than a collective. This observation correlates with MacIntyre's suggestion that practices "systematically extend"; thus it would be impossible for a group of people who have not

practiced communal forms of spiritual formation to conceptualize the body of Christ ontologically.

Summary and Conclusion

This section reviewed the findings and results beginning with the source specific results and then progressing to the inter-source findings. Twenty-six codes were added to the initial scheme, with additions coming from all three data sources. This pattern reflects a robust triangulation of data that strengthens confidence in the stated findings. The researcher resultant scheme added thirteen codes. The researcher additions focus on procedural concerns of the accountability praxis along with the weekly struggles associated with growth. The insider scheme grew by eleven codes, six of which were unique to the insider perspective and emphasize the participants' reflections on growth and accountability. The outsider results added thirteen codes to the initial scheme, with four being unique to the outsider perspective. These additions captured the retrospective and reflective contents consistent with the timing and purpose of the outsider's interview. The unique additions from each data source are all consistent with the uniqueness of the perspectives, and all offer helpful insights for the study.

The three data sources generated thirteen themes, the majority of these arising from the insider's perspective. These themes show that the participants have been initiated into a new practice that resulted in personal growth, strengthening of relationships, and the practice of virtues. In addition, the data triangulation contributed to significant insights related to the participants' motives and goals for growth, their interest in relationships, and the importance of training and structures associated with new

practices. In total, the findings offer substantial contributions to the life of the

congregation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Having reviewed the findings in detail, I now return to the original assertions and assumptions of the project to ferret out meaningful conclusions. Following these conclusions, I will examine additional ministry and personal lessons that have resulted from the project and explore the implications of these lessons on the CCC and their potential applicability to other settings.

Conclusions

The theological foundation of this study used Paul's image of a body in Romans 12 as an essential depiction of the ontological reality of the body of Christ. The inherently interrelated and interdependent qualities of a body were contrasted with the culturally prevailing collectives of groups, teams, and corporations. These cultural collectives prioritize individual existence above interdependence and imagine the collective experience as an enhancement to the individual pursuits rather than vice-versa. Combining the Romans 12 understanding of the interrelated and interdependent body with the idea of a practice led me to conclude that the correction to the present anemic understanding of community would involve both teaching and experience. Thus it would be impossible to reach the goal of an interdependent and interrelated community by simply focusing on the cognitive understandings of community. In order to understand what it means to live as community, the community must experience interrelated and interdependent practices. This project demonstrated the validity of this premise. As the

discussion of the findings revealed, the praxis participants increased their level of interdependence and interrelationship by involving others in the growth process. Their positive comments about the relationships, coupled with their experience of progress toward their growth goals, confirmed the positive conclusion. While they could not articulate their experience using the language of a practice, they, nevertheless, incrementally extended their understanding of living in a body through their mutual involvement with each other in growth-focused efforts.

The earlier theological discussion argued that the praxis of growth in the average congregation revealed an underlying belief in the sufficiency of isolated private efforts for Christian growth. This assumption, I argued, fails in two significant ways. First, the assumption fails by selecting the wrong goal for growth. The common error is imagining the goal of Christian growth to be strong individual Christians rather than an interrelated and interdependent community. Second, even if the errant goal is corrected, individual efforts are inconsistent with the practice nature of realizing the body goal. Employing individual efforts for the realization of community places the "goods" of the process external to the "means." The findings of this project indicate that most of the participants continue to express the goal of Christian growth in individual terms using common phrases such as "become Christ-like." The teaching presented in the workshop phases was insufficient to change this deeply embedded belief. This negative finding is consistent with a group that is only beginning to conceptualize Christian growth in relational terms. MacIntyre's definition of a practice asserted that true practices systematically extend the understanding of the practice. Applying this definition, I would expect that the continued application of growth-focused relationships involving healthy

accountability would, over time, shift the understanding of the goals for Christian growth. Negative experiences with growth-focused relationships threaten this systematic extension and elevate the importance of procedural structures that limit negative occurrences during the formative stages.

The initial story line of this project was to reframe the theological importance of the body away from a simple collective and toward an interrelated, interdependent body through a combination of teaching and praxis. I hoped that this combined intervention would result in the participants' becoming increasingly motivated to involve others in their personal spiritual growth efforts. The findings confirm that the workshop's teaching and the positive praxis experience have indeed increased the likelihood that these initiants will continue to involve others in their Christian growth efforts.

One final assumption made within the project needs examination. The project assumed that the prevailing emphasis on privatized growth originated from the surrounding cultural emphasis on individuality and independence. I asserted that this cultural disposition, combined with latent anxieties associated with unhealthy accountability, inhibited communal forms of Christian growth. The findings confirm the presence of significant anxieties associated with negative experiences of relational growth contexts such as guilt, shame, and control. The participants expressed these anxieties in indirect ways, stressing the need for training and process structures. Thus I conclude that there is a prevailing predisposition for individualized growth efforts and that this predisposition is related to latent anxieties that involving others in growth efforts would increase feelings of shame, guilt, or inadequacy. Some of the findings indicate that the anxieties may originate from dissatisfaction with self and only expressed as a fear of

others. However, there are insufficient findings from the study to isolate the source of this

predisposition.

Summary of Ministry and Personal Lessons

Four particular lessons emerge from this project. Three of these lessons shape the

ongoing ministry at the CCC while one of them is more personal in nature. First, I did not

expect to discover a latent desire for relationship, including a positive disposition for

involving others in growth initiatives. Prior to this study, I had presumed that people

would hesitate and resist the relational form of spiritual formation. On the contrary, they

embraced it and hoped for significant relational outcomes. The hesitancy associated with

growth-focused relationships had more to do with the risk of guilt, shame,

embarrassment, and rejection that would reinforce their individual inner dissatisfactions

with their own Christian growth. The shift in assumptions opens the door to a more rapid

expansion of the communal form of growth at the CCC than was anticipated before the

study. This accelerated expansion will depend primarily upon the ministry structures to

train new participants and develop effective on-going support methods to insure that the

practice remains healthy and virtuous.

Secondly, it was surprising to see the degree to which the participants responded

to the training and welcomed the structured forms of healthy accountability employed in

the praxis. Apparently, the reward of avoiding undesirable consequences of

accountability was an easy trade for the risk that the structures would limit relationship

building. This learning suggests to me the importance of providing structure to the

corporate process of growth. Appropriate programmatic structures may unlock additional

latent energy that would accelerate the formation of communal aspects in other dimensions of the life of the congregation.

The third discovery is a reflection upon the participants' positive response to the praxis combined with their somewhat tentative commitment to continuing the growth-focused relationships on their own without the study structure. This reinforces the prior learning around the need for structures but also suggests that true initiation into a communal form of spiritual formation will require a more extended praxis. It is unclear how long it would take until the communal form of spiritual formation becomes socially self-sustaining within the congregation.

Finally, the project has made me more aware of how portions of the congregation perceive me. On the one hand, it is gratifying to learn how they value my contribution to the life of CCC, but on the other hand, they indicate a sense of intimidation as well. This intimidation factor is certainly not intentional and has caused me to reflect on ways that I can soften my style to minimize the negative effects of this.

Implications for Ministry

The positive results from this study suggest that continuing growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability would benefit the congregation's development of a healthier communal identity. The progressive nature of practices suggests that the scope of healthy accountability conversations will expand as practitioners become more and more comfortable with one another and their understanding of the goal of Christian growth matures. At another level, the types of goals pursued should also systematically extend to deeper spiritual concerns over time. Although this appears to be a natural progression and is consistent with the underlying

theory that practices systematically extend, I hesitate to assume this progression will occur without facilitating structures. The praxis phase of this project involved a double accountability structure, which was a factor of its success. Some form of double accountability may be necessary until the practice is firmly established. Leadership can provide elements of double accountability without the formalism used in the praxis by providing training, congregational challenges, facilitation of the formation of growth-focused relationships, and incorporation of the relational dynamic into the worship. With these thoughts in mind, I want to outline a preliminary path forward for CCC.

The first priority for the continuation of this effort will be to leverage the experience of the study participants so that they serve as yeast within the broader congregation. This will take two facets. The first facet is for the praxis group to share their positive experience with the congregation via testimony or a video presentation. The offering of positive testimony will reinforce the participants' interpretation of the praxis and lay the foundation for broadening congregational involvement. A second facet of propagation must involve encouraging the study participants to continue in the practice of involving others in their growth efforts using healthy accountability. The enthusiasm expressed in the final interview for this practice indicates that the continuation has a good chance of occurring. Building upon the positive testimony of the praxis group will expand interest in healthy accountability training. Then by repeating the snowball recruiting structure, these new participants could recruit partners, extending the practice further into the congregation.

The periodic pattern of promoting, recruiting, training, and launching clusters of people will help spread the practice through the congregation. As the practice deepens

within the community, it will undoubtedly evolve. Continually managing the evolving process to ensure that it remains healthy and virtuous will demand leadership attention.

Generalizability

The initiation of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability in the CCC was a project that grew out of the life of the congregation and was a natural extension of a long-term initiative focused on spiritual formation. This section explores the potential that such growth-focused relationships would be successful in other contexts. The leadership of the CCC has been focused on establishing spiritual formation as a central focus of the congregation for the past four years. Within that time, three topics have dominated our congregational life: the need to be intentional, the need for every Christian to grow, and the need for a theological understanding of grace. I believe that all three of these topics are prerequisites for the successful launch of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability in other contexts. While these subjects are prerequisites, there is no reason to believe that it requires four years of preparation in other contexts. These three core topics could be promoted via more directed and intensive training sessions or even incorporated into an extended version of the healthy accountability training workshop.

Future Actions and Study

The findings and conclusions of this study suggest the potential for several ongoing study topics. First, the results of this study seem to indicate that teaching alone will not change the understanding of the goal of Christian growth without an ongoing praxis of relational formation. This assumption warrants a longitudinal study. It would be helpful to trace how the theological perceptions of a group of people who engage in the

ongoing practice change over the course of several years. Second, the importance of double accountability in the congregational setting was discovered by this study. There is a need to explore several different forms of double accountability to understand the practical implications of these congregational patterns. Third, the study also suggests that certain people who are predisposed to heavily judgment-focused theologies would benefit from alternative forms of accountability to prevent reinforcing their negative motives for growth. A study to examine this specific population would further refine the ministerial application of healthy accountability based upon personality variations.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

This project sought to encourage the burgeoning congregational interest in spiritual growth and steer the emerging efforts away from the default individualism using growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability. The results confirm that the study participants had previously been inhibited from involving others in their growth efforts because they feared that these relationships would increase guilt, shame, and embarrassment. The form of accountability introduced in the praxis overcame their hesitations, enhanced their peer-partner relationships, and intensified their growth efforts. The combined theological and experiential approach used in the praxis has increased their inclination to involve others in their ongoing growth efforts. Their initiation, with the help of ongoing congregational support structures, provides a foundation for growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability to permeate the congregation over time.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

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August 22, 2011

Mr. Stephen Shaffer
288 Pump House Rd.
Murphysboro, IL 62966

Mr. Shaffer,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board I have approved your project titled *Initiation of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability at the Carbondale Church of Christ*. You are now approved for data collection and analyses. Please notify this office when you have completed your study. Should any problems develop with the study, please inform the Office of Research promptly.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Scott Perkins, Ph.D.
Director of Research
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
perkinss@acu.edu
325-674-4920

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Initiation of growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability at the Carbondale Church of Christ

Principle Investigator: Stephen L. Shaffer Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors: Tim Sensing Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

Victor McCracken College of Biblical Studies, Abilene Christian University

Introduction: I understand that I have been asked to participate as part of a study group in a project to initiate growth-focused relationships involving healthy accountability at the Carbondale Church of Christ

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to teach an influential group of participant-pairs from the congregation about the nature, role and process of spiritual growth as it relates to life in the body of Christ.

Procedures: The project will begin with a four-hour workshop on September 25, 2011 from 1-5 PM. Beginning on September 26, 2011, the participant pairs will practice healthy accountability with each other following an agreed upon procedure and plan that they will determine for themselves in the workshop. The accountability interactions will occur weekly and will continue for four weeks, ending on October 23, 2011. During the four weeks of healthy accountability practice, I will contact each participant each week to monitor the practice and address concerns. On October 29-30, 2011, an outside expert will conduct a group interview with the participants to evaluate the projects effectiveness. Upon signing this document, you acknowledge your understanding that your input will be solicited and incorporated into this thesis.

Potential Risks: There are no identifiable risks to participants in this research study. All published participant quotations will remain anonymous.

Potential Benefits: Your participation may benefit you by: (1) Providing a new understanding of the nature, purpose, and role of the body of Christ in the process of spiritual growth, and (2) introduce you to the safety and effectiveness of healthy accountability.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

Rights of Research Participants: I have read the above. Mr. Shaffer has explained the nature of the group and has answered my questions. He has informed me of the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research. I understand that I do not have to participate in this research and can withdraw from this research project at any time. I understand that all information I provide will remain confidential. If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Shaffer by telephone at (618) 319-3420 or by email, steve@carbondalecoc.com.

Signature of Participant_____. Date _____

Signature of Principle Investigator _____

PARTICIPANT INVITATION SAMPLE

I want to invite you to participate in my DMin thesis project. My project trains people to practice *healthy* accountability as one way to fulfill our calling to be an interrelated body of Christ and to intensify our ability to grow spiritually. I am looking for 4-5 people to join the project initially and I hope you will consider being part of this initial group.

If you decide to participate:

You will recruit a peer-partner; someone you are comfortable sharing growth goals with

You and your peer-partner will participate in a 4-hour workshop on **Sunday Sept 25th** where you will: (1) Examine God's desire that we be become a body of interrelated and interdependent people, (2) Select a personal growth goal to work on during the duration of the project, (3) learn how to practice *healthy* accountability using relationship virtues derived from Romans 12, and (4) craft a healthy accountability plan for you and your partner.

For 4 weeks after the workshop, you and your peer-partner will contact each other once per week implement your healthy accountability plan. These peer meetings occur either in person or via phone and are expected to last no more than ten minutes each.

At the conclusion of the study, you and your peer-partner will participate in a group interview conducted on **Sunday October 30th** by an outside expert, Dr. Earl Lavender, Executive Director of the Institute for Christian Spirituality, the Director of Missional Studies and a Professor in the College of Bible at Lipscomb University.

In case you are uncomfortable with the idea of "accountability" let me clarify what I mean by "*healthy* accountability." First, let me say what it is NOT. Healthy accountability does not involve guilt, shame, embarrassment, disappointment, or rebuke. You will always be in control of the process. You will select your own growth goal, you will decide the specific question(s) your partner can ask you when you meet, and you decide when and how you and your partner will make contact each week. As a peer-partner you will be expected to faithfully meet once each week to practice your plan, ask the question(s) your partner has designed, and be a good listener. It will be a very simple process, but one that you will find really helps you stay on track.

I hope you will consider being part of this project. Please indicate your decision and return this to me.

☐ I am interested in participating

☐ I am not interested in participating

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING

Thank you for agreeing to participate. The study will examine the Biblical concept of the body of Christ and how to involve others in our personal spiritual growth via healthy accountability. Since personal spiritual growth and accountability are sensitive topic areas, I want you to recruit your own partner for the study so that your peer-partner is someone you already trust. The person you recruit must meet the following qualifications:

- Someone who is already part of the Carbondale Church of Christ family
- Someone over 18 and of the same gender as you
- Someone willing to participate in the study
- Someone who can commit to attending the key events of the study:
  - Workshop-Sun Sept. 25th, 12:30-5:00 PM
  - Brief weekly peer-appointments
  - Final group interview with an outside expert on Sun Oct. 30th 12:30-3:00 PM (final times still to be determined)

I will be checking in with you between now and the first workshop on Sept. 25th to answer questions and address issues or concerns.

Again, thank you for your participation and I look forward to your contributions to this work.

Steve

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION OUTLINES

Session 1-Growing as a Body
I.   Introduction-Study Overview
    A. Workshop Structure
    B. Research components & informed consent
    C. Schedule of Events & Important dates
II. Presentation-"Growing as a Body"
    A. Collective Images of Romans
        i.   Jew and Gentile (1:16; 2:29)
        ii. Abraham's offspring (4:16)
        iii. Baptized into Christ (6:3), in Christ (8:1)
        iv. Sons and Daughters of God (8:14), Children of promise (9:8)
    B. Romans 12:1-2-"I urge you to present your bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular)."
        i.   Present = Voluntary
        ii. Plural Individuals ➔ Sacrifice➔ Singular Body
        iii. God's pleasure with the new "body" (12:2)
    C. Romans 12:3-8-A New Form of Collective, the Body
        i.   Biological image implies essential unity
        ii. Identity anchored in God, not comparisons
        iii. Unity is not the result of organization or personal goals
        iv. No life outside the body
        v.   Interdependent, Interrelated body
        vi. Not a collective such as a team, corporation, or family
    D. Key Features
        i.   Ontological and Progressive
        ii. Unity and Diversity
        iii. Assigned but involves a Personal Pursuit
        iv. Reflects the Trinity (interrelated, interdependent)
III. Reflection
    A. Ask Participants to identify a list of potential growth goals that they could pursue for this study
IV. Exercise
    A. Select and refine goals
        i.   Which of the goals listed deepens your life within the body?
        ii. Choose three or fewer goals from your list that you are most motivated to work on?
        iii. Which of the goals on your list do you feel you can make progress in 4 weeks?

B. SMART Goal worksheet
    i. Explain the SMART goal worksheet and instruct participants to complete it for their selected goal.

Session 2-Spiritual Growth is a Community Practice

I. Presentation
    A. The Idea of a Practice
        i. The Body as *telos*
        ii. Progressive Nature of Christian life
    B. The Means and the Ends
        i. The Greeks and Virtue Ethics
        ii. Individual efforts inconsistent with Body ontology
        iii. The Need for Living Stories
    C. The Virtues of the Christian Body
        i. Review and discuss, "Virtue and Vice".
        ii. Define specific virtues from Romans 12.
II. Reflection
    A. Handout conversation snippet exercise and instruct participants to complete the worksheet on their own.
III. Exercise
    A. Participants share answers to conversation snippet exercise
    B. Participants share their SMART growth goals with each other

Session 3-Healthy Accountability

I. Presentation-"Healthy Accountability."
    A. Discussion of accountability experiences
        i. What images do you associate with accountability?
        ii. What fears, concerns, resistance do you sense?
    B. A Healthy Accountability Practice
        i. Discuss Keys to Healthy Accountability.
        ii. Specific, not general
        iii. Invited, not imposed
        iv. Intentional and Structured
    C. Designing Good Accountability Questions
        v. Specific
        vi. Open
        vii. Celebrates partial success
II. Reflection
    A. Explain the Healthy Accountability agreement.
    B. Participants complete the agreement by themselves first
III. Exercise
    A. Partners share, discuss, negotiate, and agree to the specifics of their accountability plan.

APPENDIX C

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GOAL IDEA WORKSHEET

I. Life Categories-*"**How could my life in Christ be better expressed through my…**"*
Work
Recreation
Finances
Family
Ministry / Church
Health / Body
Marriage
Devotional Life
Use of Gifts / Skills / Calling

II. Goal Prompts
Start / Stop a new habit
Relationship with God-Memorize Scripture, Prayer, Study, Worship, Body Life
Change your attitude / actions in a relationship
Body Life / Life Purpose
Make an important Decision
Listen to God's priorities for your growth
Form a relationship for Christ
Community Involvement

III. Life Purpose Goals
- What are the things (gifts/skills/personality traits/passions) that you believe are God placed / God given?
- What situations, groups of people, causes are you most motivated to work on? (Where are your soapboxes, things you are willing to spend time and money to try to make a difference?)
- What would you like to say to God about how you used your gifts/skills/talents he loaned you?
- What is something you want to do, know it is within your calling to do, and keep thinking about?
- What keeps you from pursuing any of these ideas / topics

IV. Transformation-God does the transformation…our job is to remember who we already are…to remain in God's presence in the middle of the hour to hour activities.
- What one discipline or practice do you believe would help you stay aware of being "alive in Christ" and live out your Spirit driven purpose?

APPENDIX D

SMART GOAL WORKSHEET

S – Specific	Strive for clearly defined goals. Instead of "lose weight"; use "lose 5 lbs." Instead of "pray more often" use "create the habit of getting up at 6AM to pray"
M – Measurable	Measurable simply helps to make the goal specific. You can measure new habits and new attitudes by how often you practice them. Most specific goals can be improved by adding a measurable dimension. For instance, if you goal is to use my gift of compassion at church (which is not very specific) you can change it to say, "help at least 2 people in need each week."
A – Achievable	Check your goal to insure you are being realistic. Habits take six weeks to establish. Strive for goals that are challenging, but realistic so that you do not feel defeated or discouraged when things take longer than expected.
R – Relevant	Relevance of your goal requires that you have a big picture in mind. For this project, relevant means that your goal is a spiritual growth goal that increases the intensity of your participation in the church as a relational body.
T – Time Specific	What is the duration of your goal? Instead of "lose 5lbs"; a time specific goal would say, "lose 5 lbs by Dec 1st." The "5 lbs" portion makes it specific and measurable, the "Dec 1st" portion makes the goal time specific

Source: Adapted from Kenneth Blanchard et al., Leadership and the One Minute Manager: Increasing Effectiveness through Situational Leadership (New York: William Morrow, 1985)

Write out your goal in the space below and refine it using each of the SMART descriptions.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

HEALTHY ACCOUNTABILITY CONVERSATIONS

Virtues and Vices

As Discussed in Chapter 2, Theological Framework

In Freedom (F)-God allows humanity to live in freedom of will, but calls them to submit to his will in order to realize their full potential. Romans 12:1 urges, but does not force, individuals to voluntarily present their bodies as a sacrifice.

As Unique Creations (U)-The goal of living as a body should be that each member realizes a unique participation within the body as determined by God's choice to manifest grace in different forms. Growth-focused relationships must honor the uniqueness of each person and avoid imposing personal ideas, agendas, or designs upon the other.

In Love (L)-Coercive behavior modification techniques may be effective at shaping behaviors but they are counter productive in realizing the body telos because they do not reflect the nature of the goal within the means. Conditional love says to the other, "I will love you when you change" while unconditional love says, "I will love you so that you are free to change." Guilt, shame, belittling, comparisons to others or myself, minimizing the challenges involved in change, and the like are coercive behaviors.

Devoted to One Another (D)-Devotion characterizes the type of relationship expected within the body. Devotion transcends friendly, cordial, and even helpful or supportive. Devotion in the process of growth implies that my investment in your growth will remain solid despite diversions, lack of progress, reversals, or even limited commitment.

Honor One Another (H)-Willingness to respect the other's growth goals, specific plans for change, and opinions about priorities. Conversationally, over expressing opinions and giving unwanted advice dishonor the other and represents a form of epistemic injustice. Despite what I think I "know," the person with the goal, the desire to change, and the definition of success must be honored with epistemic justice.

Keep Your Spiritual Fervor (SF)-Spiritual fervor expresses the Spirit's desire to move ahead. In the context of spiritual growth, intentionality and intensity express spiritual fervor. Healthy accountability is one means for helping each other to maintain our focus on our self-declared growth goals.

Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer (HPP)-Hope is essential for spiritual growth. Without the hope of progress, growth or change there is little motive to invest the energy necessary for change. As partners in growth, we must remain patient and invest our energies in prayer for each other's growth.

As an End and Not as a Means (E)-Growth relationships must conceive of the other not as tools for growth but as necessary members and participants in the process. Growth-focused relationships should be enacted in such a way that strengthens the relationship while pursuing the desired growth.

Conversation Snippet Exercise (with answers)

Conversation Snippet	Identify which virtue or vice each statement is an example of and why
"Did you do better this week than last week on your goal?"	L, HPP
"Don't you think it would be better if you…."	F, H, U
"Why didn't you work on your goal this week?"	F, L
"I think you should add another goal to your efforts"	F, L, H
"You are really good at _____, why don't you do something in that area?"	H, F
"Sorry I forgot to call you last week."	D, SF, HPP
"Did you do your best?"	L, F, H
"Why did you pick that goal?"	F, UC
"Are you sure you want to work on that?"	H, F, L
"We really need more _____ in this church. Would you be willing to take on that responsibility?"	F, H, UC
"I'm having trouble getting started on this goal. If you could push me a little, I'm sure I can do the rest on my own."	E
"You have been working on the same goal for a very long time."	HPP, SF
"It seems to me that you would be better off working on _____ before you work on _____. What about switching your goals?"	F, H
"That is a very hard thing to change. Do you think it is even possible?"	HPP, H
"I'll stick with you as long as you do the work."	HPP, SF, D
"I know that you can do better than that."	L, HPP

APPENDIX F

HEALTHY ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICE

Accountability, when enacted in healthy ways, is a powerful Christian practice that reflects the interrelated and interdependent nature of life in the body. The virtues mentioned above help to keep accountability conversations healthy. In addition, the following practical guidelines should be followed.

Be Specific-The accountability conversation is targeted on a specific goal not on life in general. Don't ask someone to hold you accountable in general, specify how you want them to hold you accountable.

Give Permission-The person seeking accountability specifically gives the person holding them accountable permission to ask a specific accountability question.

Design the Accountability Question-The person seeking accountability designs the question they want the person holding them accountable to ask.

Make Specific Appointments-The partners make a clear, definite and specific plan for when, where, and how the accountability conversation will take place. (i.e. 6pm, Fridays, by phone, I call you on your cell phone)

Source: Adapted from Stolzfus, *Leadership Coaching* (Virginia Beach: Stolzfus, 2005), 261-268.

Designing Accountability Questions

Designing the accountability question requires careful attention to details. The question should be specific, open, and allow celebration of partial success.

Specific-The question reflects the specific and measurable aspects of the growth goal.

Open-The question should avoid limiting the responses to simple dichotomous alternatives such as yes/no, good/bad, ok/not ok.

Celebrates Partial Success-Since change and growth are difficult one way we enact the virtue of "keeping our spiritual fervor" is by celebrating progress rather than waiting for complete success.

Healthy Accountability Agreement Worksheet

Fill in the following healthy accountability agreement with your partner.

I am striving to grow spiritually. I am asking you to help me make progress reaching my SMART goal stated here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

I am inviting you to hold me accountable to this goal by committing to contact me:

When _____

Where _____

How _____

How often _____

Each time you contact me, please ask me the following question:

_____

_____

_____

_____

In addition, I ask that you pray daily that I will rely upon the power of God's Spirit for progress and growth.

By signing this agreement, you are committing, in love to enact the virtues of body life by holding me accountable to my growth goal as specified above.

_____   _____

Person inviting accountability   Person holding them accountable

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW FORM

Participant's understanding of the goal of Christian growth.

Question-What are the goal/goals of Christian growth?

Participant's understanding of growth-focused relationships as an example of the role the community plays in the growth process.

Question-What is your understanding of the motives for growth-focused relationships?

Participant's understanding of the virtues and vices associated with growth-focused

relationships.

Question-What makes/keeps growth-focused relationships healthy?

Participant's perceived benefits of healthy accountability.

Question-What do you see as the benefits of healthy accountability?

Participant's attitudes toward healthy accountability.

Question-What ideas do you associate with healthy accountability?
Question-What is your perspective on healthy accountability?

Participant's experience with the accountability process.

Question-What was your experience with the accountability process?

The likelihood that the participant will continue using healthy accountability to

sustain their spiritual growth efforts.

Question-On a scale from 1 to 5 (1-not likely, 5-definitely), how likely are you to use healthy accountability to sustain your spiritual growth?

APPENDIX H

WORKSHOP OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

As you take notes during the workshop, please keep the following in mind:

- Keep your observation notes separated from your own interpretations or comments. Place your comments and interpretations in a separate column adjacent to the observation.

- Use neutral language in your observations to avoid introducing interpretations. Instead of saying, "Mark was angry" say, "Mark's face was red and there was sweat on his forehead." Then add a comment in the separate column, Mark appears angry.

- Make note of Interactions-Who is engaged? Who is not engaged? Who is talking with whom? What are they talking about? What is the spatial arrangement of people? Make a simple diagram of the room and seating chart. When it changes make note of the change.

- Make note of the atmosphere-level of energy, mood of the room, tension, joking, who appears to have concerns outside the workshop, looking at time, attending to cell-phones/texts, etc.

- During presentations / exercises– note facial expressions, engagement with material, surprise, concern, confusion, rejection, etc.

- Questions / Comments from participants-capture verbatim. Who else appears interested in the question/comment?

- Key language usage (please make note of participant's use of any of the following by using the initials of person each time the words are expressed)

Theological Language	Accountability Language
Body	Personal
Gifts	Private
Process	Fear
Practice	Guilt
Virtues	Time
Vices	Commitment
Growth	Tool

APPENDIX I

WORKSHOP OBSERVATION NOTES WORKSHEET

Before the workshop begins:

Observations	Comments Ideas / notes

(Draw a diagram of where people are sitting or standing before the start)

Session ___ Time:_____

(note seating / grouping arrangement at the start of session)

Observations	Comments Ideas / notes

APPENDIX J

SUPERVISION CALL NOTES WORKSHEET

Name:
Study Week- 1 2 3 4   Date:
1. What occurred in your peer conversations this week?
2. What modifications did you and your peer make to your goals or accountability agreement?
3. What issues or concerns do you have?
4. What reflections or observations do you have about spiritual growth and healthy accountability?

APPENDIX K

INITIAL CODING SCHEME

Code	Description
Rp	Participant's reactions to other participants.
Rm	Participant's reactions to me.
Spp	Statements about a presumption of privacy or independence.
Sap	Statements about accountability as a practice.
SmG	Statements about personal motives for growth.
Sr12	Statements / understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12).
Svv	Statements about the virtues / vices.
Sep	Statements about participants experience within the praxis phase.
Sgi	Statements about Christian growth as an idea.
SpO	Statements about practical aspects of involving others (time, schedule, forgetfulness, etc).
S-O	Statements about resistance to involving others in personal growth (guilt, shame, regret, failure, success, anxious, fear).
Sut	Statements implying underlying theologies (atonement, body life, growth).
S+O	Statements about positive motivations for involving others in personal growth efforts.

RESULTANT CODING SCHEME—RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Code	Description
Rp	Participant's reactions to other participants.
Rm	Participant's reactions to me.
[Spp]	Statements about a presumption of privacy or independence.
[Sap]	Statements about accountability as a practice.
SmG	Statements about personal motives for growth.
Sr12	Statements / understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12).
Svv	Statements about the virtues / vices.
[Sep]	Statements about participants experience within the praxis phase.
[Sgi]	Statements about Christian growth as an idea.
SpO	Statements about practical aspects of involving others (time, schedule, etc).
S-O	Statements about resistance to involving others in personal growth (guilt, shame, regret, failure, success, anxious, fear).
Sut	Statements implying underlying theologies (atonement, body life, growth).
S+O	Statements about positive motivations for involving others in personal growth.
Mp	My reaction to participant's behavior / statements
Shap	Statements about features of the specific healthy accountability process adopted for the intervention
Slc	Statements about limited conversation involved in applied practice of healthy accountability
Spig	Statements about the performance/progress made toward their growth goal
Sea	Statements about the effectiveness of accountability
Sia	Statements about the importance of accountability
S+R	Statements about the positive desire/need for relationships
Sar	Statements that connect relationships and accountability
Scg	Statements about the challenges of growth and reaching goals
Sng	Statements about the nature of the goals selected/pursued
El-	Negative Emotional language associated with growth/ progress/goals
El+	Positive Emotional language associated with growth/progress/goals
Rs	Participants reactions to themselves

Note- Initial coding scheme highlighted in bold, square brackets indicates the code is empty in the resultant coding scheme.

APPENDIX M

RESULTANT CODING SCHEME—INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Code	Description
Rp	Participant's reactions to other participants.
[Rm]	Participant's reactions to researcher.
Spp	Statements about a presumption of privacy or independence.
[Sap]	Statements about accountability as a practice.
SmG	Statements about personal motives for growth.
Sr12	Statements / understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12).
Svv	Statements about the virtues / vices.
Sep	Statements about participants experience within the praxis phase.
Sgi	Statements about Christian growth as an idea.
SpO	Statements about practical aspects of involving others (time, schedule, forgetfulness, etc).
S-O	Statements about resistance to involving others in personal growth (guilt, shame, regret, failure, success, anxious, fear).
Sut	Statements implying underlying theologies (atonement, body life, growth).
S+O	Statements about positive motivations for involving others in personal growth efforts.
Shap	Statements about features of the specific healthy accountability process adopted for the intervention
Sar	Statements that connect accountability and relationships in general
Spig	Statements about progress / performance of reaching their growth goal
Sea	Statements about the effectiveness of healthy accountability
Scg	Statements about the struggles and challenges of reaching growth goals
Sgg	Statements describing the goals of Christian growth
Sna	Statements about negative applications of accountability
Spn	Statements about the progressive nature of relationships / accountability
Sim	Statements about the desire / importance of mutual accountability
Sba	Statements about the benefits of healthy accountability other than reaching goals
Sdi	Statements about the degree of initiation or likelihood to continue using healthy accountability

Note- Initial coding scheme highlighted in bold, square brackets indicates the code is empty in the resultant coding scheme.

RESULTANT CODING SCHEME—OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Code	Description
[Rp]	Participant's reactions to other participants.
Rm	Participant's reactions to me.
[Spp]	Statements about a presumption of privacy or independence.
[Sap]	Statements about accountability as a practice.
[SmG]	Statements about personal motives for growth.
Sr12	Statements / understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12).
Svv	Statements about the virtues / vices.
[Sep]	Statements about participants experience within the praxis phase.
Sgi	Statements about Christian growth as an idea.
[SpO]	Statements about practical aspects of involving others (time, schedule, forgetfulness, etc).
[S-O]	Statements about resistance to involving others in personal growth (guilt, shame, regret, failure, success, anxious, fear).
[Sut]	Statements implying underlying theologies (atonement, body life, growth).
S+O	Statements about positive motivations for involving others in personal growth efforts.
Sgg	Statements describing the goals of Christian growth
Sna	Statements about negative applications of accountability
Spn	Statements about the progressive nature of relationships / accountability
Sar	Statements that connect accountability and relationships in general
Sim	Statements about the desire / importance of mutual accountability
Sea	Statements about the effectiveness of healthy accountability
Sdi	Statements about the degree of initiation or likelihood to continue using healthy accountability
Shap	Statements about features of the specific healthy accountability process adopted for the intervention
S+ha	Positive opinions about praxis, healthy accountability
SiT	Statements emphasizing importance of training session in praxis
SiS	Statements about the study structure and the impact of being a study on their experience
Sng	Statements about the nature of the goals selected/ pursued
Fut	Suggestions for future applications, changes, etc.

Note- Initial coding scheme highlighted in bold, square brackets indicates the code is empty in the resultant coding scheme.

CATEGORIZED MASTER CODING SCHEME

Personal Reactions among participants (PRAM)		
	Rp	Participant's reactions to other participants.
	Rm	Participant's reactions to me.
	Rs	Participant's reactions to self
	Mp	My reaction to participant's behavior / statements
Theological / Ideological Perspectives (TIP)		
	Spp	Statements about a presumption of privacy or independence.
	Sap	Statements about accountability as a practice.
	SmG	Statements about personal motives for growth.
	Sr12	Statements / understanding of the theological presentation (Rom 12).
	Svv	Statements about the virtues / vices.
	Sut	Statements implying underlying theologies (atonement, etc).
	Sgg	Statements describing the goals of Christian growth
	Sim	Statements about the desire / importance of mutual accountability
	Sgi	Statements about Christian growth as an idea.
Specific practice of accountability used in study (SPAS)		
	Slc	Statements about limited conversation in the praxis
	Shap	Statements about the specific healthy accountability process used in the praxis
	Sng	Statements about the nature of the goals selected / pursued
	Stg	Statements about the type of goals chosen
	SiT	Statements emphasizing importance of training session in praxis
	Sep	Statements about participants experience within the praxis phase.
	SiS	Statements about the impact of being a study on their experience
Accountability as a healthy part of Christian life (AHPC)		
	Sia	Statements about the importance of accountability
	Sna	Statements about negative applications of accountability
	El-	Negative emotional language associated with growth/progress/relationships
	El+	Positive emotional language associated with accountability
	Spig	Statements about progress / performance of reaching their growth goal
	Sba	Statements about the benefits of healthy accountability other than reaching
	Sea	Statements about the effectiveness of healthy accountability
	Scg	Statements about the struggles and challenges of reaching growth goals
	SpO	Statements about practical aspects of involving others (time, schedule, etc).
	S+ha	Positive opinions about praxis, healthy accountability
Relationships (REL)		
	S+R	Statements about the positive desire/need for relationships in general
	Spn	Statements about the progressive nature of relationships / accountability
	Sar	Statements that connect accountability and relationships in general
	S-O	Statements about resistance to involving others in personal growth (guilt,
	S+O	Statements about positive motivations for involving others in personal growth
Initiation (INIT)		
	Sdi	Statements about the degree of initiation into healthy accountability
	S+ha	Positive opinions about praxis, healthy accountability
	SiT	Statements emphasizing importance of training session in praxis
	Fut	Suggestions for future applications, changes, etc.

BRIEF VITA

Stephen L. Shaffer was born in Queens, New York, on April 1, 1961. He and his family moved to Bridgewater, New Jersey, in 1968 where he attended Bridgewater-Raritan High School East, graduating in 1979. While attending Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, Stephen met and later married his wife, Rebecca (Parker) Shaffer. He graduated from ACU in 1984 with a bachelor of science in physics. Following graduation, Stephen and Becky moved to Rochester New York where he completed a master of science in optical engineering at the University of Rochester in 1984. That same year, Stephen began a seventeen-year career with the Eastman Kodak Company, working on government contracts, developing new consumer products, and researching medical imaging systems. He holds thirteen U.S. patents. In 2001, Stephen, Becky, and their five children, Melanie, Joanna, Madeline, Jacob, and Caroline, moved to Abilene, Texas. In 2003, he completed a master of science in marriage and family therapy from Amridge University in Montgomery, Alabama and a master of divinity from Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. Since 2004, Stephen has served as the senior minister at the Carbondale Church of Christ in Carbondale, Illinois. Stephen is also a professional life coach and life coach trainer.