

“In a turbulent and tumultuous world, change in the church can bring fear, insecurity, even pain. Navigating these rough waters requires leaders who have identified their own convictions and commitments around God’s unique purpose for them individually, and have summoned the courage to shift thinking and actions to experience deeper missional impact through the life of the local church. *Learning Change* shares the journey of a group of influential leaders who have grown through collaborative learning that is both personal and purposeful and catalyzes change internally and externally. Reading this book is your first courageous step toward personal and congregational transformation!”

—Tom De Vries, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America

“This is a biblical, hope-filled, and practical guide for Christian leaders who are ready to move past efforts to be heroic rescuers or organizational managers in order to experience life-giving transformation. *Learning Change* describes what authentic personal and congregational transformation looks like from the front-line experience of faithful Christian pastors. It’s a biblically and theologically sound approach to personal transformation and congregational leadership expressed in practical, realistic ways. The format blends foundational concepts, stories, and resources with reflective questions that guide personal and corporate response. Leaders who allow God to transform their mental models, values, and practices will discover a powerful guide for experiencing and catalyzing deep change.”

—Dr. James H. Furr, President and Professor, Houston Graduate School of Theology; Coauthor, *Leading Congregational Change*

“For the past decade, Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor, working with a cohort of pastors in the Ridder Church Renewal process, have sown seeds of change and cultivated transformational learning in the hearts and lives of church leaders. They have now gone into the field, gathered the fruit of their labors, and shared it with us. *Learning Change* is a beautiful and helpful resource, conserving of all that has been learned and of all that has been accomplished in the lives of pastors who have given themselves to the Holy Spirit, to one another, and to the process of transformation. This book invites readers to join in the feast and celebration, not simply by reading, but by engaging the process on their own. Each chapter offers compelling stories, inviting questions, and thoughtful exercises to help the truth about personal and congregational transformation become reality in the lives of pastors and those they serve. This inductive study of pastors’ lives and growth will inspire and instruct those willing to engage the demanding, but rewarding, journey of personal transformation.”

—R. Robert Creech, Hubert H. and Gladys S. Raborn Professor of Pastoral Leadership and Director of Pastoral Ministries, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

“A careful reading of the book of Acts, the Epistles, and especially the letters from John reveal that a key ingredient for the growth of the Christian community, both in number and in service, was the life of the community together. People in the first century witnessed something so powerful in the way that members of the church served God, loved each other, and cared for their neighbor that they were willing to risk their own life to join the Christian community. This is the power of discipleship. In an age when we falsely put too much hope in the power of leadership to drive the church forward, Jim Herrington, Trisha Taylor, and their team of pastors have rightly reached back to the origins of the church to discover the power of discipleship. They are hitting the center of the target when they examine the key problems of our post-Christian age and propose that the answer to problems of declining congregations, apathy, and spiritual despair will be found in radical obedience to Christ Mission through discipleship. Their book will help us get to the answers for our age and for ages to come.”

—The Rev. Tony Campbell,
Assistant General Secretary for the Reformed Church in America

“Jim, Trisha, and their team don’t just talk transformation. Anchored in the gospel of Jesus Christ, nurtured in relational community, and sharpened by good thinking, they walk individuals and congregations through change. I’m excited to see how this resource can bring further transformation to the church.”

Dr. Chuck DeGroat, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling,
Western Theological Seminary

“The authors of *Learning Change* understand that profound change must root in individuals before it transfuses systems. Having observed the cycle in themselves as well as in others, they shepherd us into the remissioning work of the Holy Spirit. Their penetrating wisdom confronts the hard places and speaks peace to the unsettled. Transformation becomes a verb as we journey with them toward the authentic hope of God’s church as the stunning bride of Christ.

I have witnessed the impact of the *Learning Change* principles on dozens of pastors from all over world. A team of professors and I stepped deeper into integrity and authenticity at one of Jim’s and Trisha’s Faithwalking retreats. If you will do the work, this poignant book will be God’s evocative grace gift for the next chapter of your ministry.”

—Thomas F. Tumblin,
Associate Provost for Global Initiatives & Academic Affairs,
Professor of Leadership, Asbury Theological Seminary

Jim Herrington & Trisha Taylor

LEARNING CHANGE

Congregational
Transformation Fueled
by Personal Renewal

Learning Change: Congregational Transformation Fueled by Personal Renewal
© 2017 by Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor

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*We dedicate this book to the courageous
community of leaders who helped create
the most challenging, loving, and life-giving
community that we have ever engaged.*

*Learning together with you has been one of the
greatest privileges of our lives.*

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Preface

I told God that I wanted to run. I said that I felt like I had gotten stuck again in a congregation that I didn't fit or that didn't fit me. I was bitter. I said to God, "I am done. I'm leaving. This is not working."

—Michael DeRuyter, Pastor

This is the story of a community of pastors who came together to learn whether real change was possible in their personal lives and in the lives of their congregations. This is the story of real people who were willing to engage in transformational learning with no quick fixes. These are our stories of hope that we want to share with you. Real change is possible. We know it. We've seen it. We're living it!

Key Players

Trisha Taylor and Jim Herrington

Jim and Trisha live and work in Houston. From 1989 to 1998, Jim served as the Executive Director of Union Baptist Association in Houston, and from 1997 to 2009, Trisha served as a therapist in the UBA Center for Counseling. Early in Jim's tenure, his leadership team conducted a study that confirmed what we all know today: Congregations are in rapid decline numerically, and they have increasingly lost their capacity to impact their communities and the culture. In 1990, eighty percent of Houston-area Southern Baptist congregations were plateaued or declining despite the rapid and long-term growth of the city. Even growing congregations were not growing at a pace that kept up with the city's growth.

Seeking solutions to these challenges, Jim and Trisha and many others partnered for over a decade, serving pastors and congregations in an effort to help them reconnect to their intended calling. They conducted a series of pilot projects, did a lot of pastoral coaching, and participated in ongoing reflection on their own experience with personal and congregational transformation. In addition, Jim coauthored with Mike Bonem and James H. Furr *Lead-*



Jim Herrington



Trisha Taylor

ing Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey; and along with R. Robert Creech, Jim and Trisha co-authored *The Leaders' Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*.

The Ridder Planning Team

Jim and Trisha's story intersected with a pastoral leadership initiative in the Reformed Church of America (RCA), generously underwritten by former Western Theological Seminary President Hermann J. (Bud) Ridder and his wife Lenora. The Ridder Leadership Initiative (now known as Ridder Church Renewal) began as a series of invitation-only annual events, with Lyle Schaller (1997), Max DePree (1998) and Bill Hybels (1999) as keynote speakers.

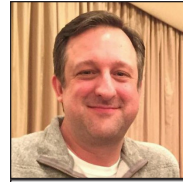
Jim was invited to speak in 2002, and he reframed the conference's format to allow participants to reflect on and interact with the content in real time. Jim's experiential model led the Ridder planning team (Keith Derick, George Brown, Vicki Menning, Ken Eriks, Dan Gillette, and Lenora Ridder) to begin asking questions about the value of the one-time event model. While the annual conferences were attracting a great response, these leaders were wondering, "Was real change in congregations actually taking place?" In 2007, recognizing that transformational learning takes time, the planning team decided to move from an episodic format to a more intensive long-term process that engaged pastors of "reasonably healthy" congregations along with key leaders. Directed by a partnership that included Western Seminary, the RCA and regional synod, as well as Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) congregations, Jim and Trisha were invited to provide the leadership for this newly imagined process.

The Pastors and Their Leadership Teams

Seventeen churches accepted the invitation to participate in the first round of the Ridder Church Renewal process, and 128 leaders (pastors plus six to eight key lay leaders from each congregation) began to engage in a two-year process of learning. The format included five multi-day retreats, and guidance and support for practicing and reflecting upon their learning in their congregational contexts. Of the 128 people who began the process, 126 completed it—an astounding completion rate. Something different was happening in this process. The original seventeen teams were invited to participate in a second two-year module of learning, and twelve teams said yes. The typical cynicism and resignation experienced after church leadership events had given way to stories of hope and possibility.

The following pastors agreed to join a team that would take responsibility for working with Jim and Trisha to continue developing the Ridder content and resources:

Michael DeRuyter
 Pastor, Midland Reformed Church
 in Midland, Michigan



Drew Poppleton
 Former Pastor, Heartland Community Church
 in Lafayette, Indiana; currently, PhD student
 at Fuller Theological Seminary



Nate Pyle
 Pastor, Christ Community Church,
 Indianapolis, Indiana and author of
Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood



Chip Sauer
 Pastor, Community Reformed Church
 of Charlevoix, Michigan



Jessica Shults
 Pastor, Standale Reformed Church,
 Grand Rapids, Michigan



John Sparks
 Formerly Co-Pastor, Haven Church,
 Kalamazoo, Michigan



Brian Stone
 Formerly Co-Pastor, Haven Church,
 Kalamazoo, Michigan



Hopeful Stories

These pastors also became the coauthors of this book, and it is their stories of real change in their personal lives and in the lives of their congregations that inspired its creation. We see *Learning Change: Congregational*

Transformation Fueled by Personal Renewal as the third in a trilogy, complementing *Leading Congregational Change* and *The Leader's Journey*, by taking the content of the first two texts and showing it lived out in practice, in community, and over time, in a wide variety of congregational contexts.

And there are more hopeful stories on the way. In February 2012, Western Seminary, through the diligent work of Keith Derrick, Ken Eriks, and Lee Ann Sotok, applied for and received a generous grant from the Lilly Foundation. These funds allow us to continue to share our learning with RCA and CRC communities across North America.

It is our great desire that every pastor and congregational leader who reads *Learning Change* will experience hope that real change is possible. Hope that, over time, congregations can be revitalized and restored to become centers of reconciliation and *shalom*, where fruitful and faithful missional living is central to their identity. Hope like Pastor Mike DeRuyter discovered as he engaged in this new way of learning:

As I began to connect the dots, I could see that often my running was about my sense that things were not working and would never change. I felt stuck. As I began to see myself as part of a system, I was able to see that staying didn't mean that I was helpless or stuck. I could change. There was something I could do to get a different outcome.

In January 2009 we (Jim and Trisha) sat waiting for the first group of pastors to arrive from “up north” to begin the Ridder process. With some nervous laughter, I (Trisha) said to Jim. “I must be crazy to be taking this on. I mean, my life really works right now, you know? The kids are doing well and they'll be leaving home soon; we'll have an empty nest. Our marriage is as good as it's ever been. Professionally, I'm having a lot of success and I love my work. We live in the most comfortable house we've ever had. Really, why would I want to do this?”

I glanced over at Jim and saw that he had tears in his eyes. Quietly but intensely, he said, “Because, Trisha . . . you could have an epic life.”

The silence gave me the space to consider the impact of Jim's words. I knew what he meant by an epic life. He didn't mean fame and fortune. Jim meant that I could have the life God created uniquely for me, so that I could live the dreams God has for me. In that moment, I knew that I didn't want to settle for anything else.

We invite you enter into these stories of hope, into these stories that demonstrate that you don't need to settle for anything less than the epic life God is dreaming for you and your congregations. There are no quick fixes, but when we are willing to commit to a different way of learning, real change is possible.

Introduction

The enthusiasm was palpable when we decided to write *Learning Change: Congregational Transformation Fueled by Personal Renewal*. We were eager to share our stories of personal and congregational transformation in our own voices. We wanted to share (1) the core content of the Ridder Church Renewal process—the information we have learned about deepening our core values, recognizing and shifting our mental models, and the end game of faithful and fruitful missional living; (2) the new tools we have developed to become more effective leaders; and (3) our experiences of learning to learn in community. And most of all, we wanted to share with you, pastors and congregational leaders, our stories of real change that have taken place over time, as we committed to a new way of learning.

Our deepest hope is that you will say “yes, this is possible for me too”; that you will become inspired to form your own learning community inside your congregation; and that you will journey towards the “end game” we all desire—faithful and fruitful missional living expressed personally and corporately.

How This Book Is Organized

Learning Change is divided into four parts. The chapters in *Part One: The Keys to Real Change* are foundational to understanding the rest of the text. Chapter 1 invites us to dream big again and casts the vision for missional living. In Chapter 2, we define key concepts used throughout the book, and in Chapter 3, we convey our deep conviction that personal transformation must precede congregational transformation.

In *Part Two: Core Values: Reconnecting to Our Intended Design*, we dig deep into the values of integrity, authenticity, courage and love. These core values are central to our identity as children of God, yet without focused efforts at renewing our commitment to these values, we drift away from this identity. Each chapter shares stories about reconnecting to our intended design, the way we were created to be by God.

In *Part Three: Mental Models: Shifting the Way We Think*, we explore how the way we think affects how we manage ourselves and others in our personal and congregational contexts. Chapters 8–12 contain information and stories of hope about discipleship, creative tension, appropriate emotional boundaries, congregations as systems, and high performance teams.

In *Part Four: Additional Tools for the Journey: Equipping Ourselves for More Effective Leadership*, we include information and stories about prac-

tices we believe are critical to effective leadership: recognizing the vows that block us from responding thoughtfully; finding the courage to have crucial conversations; and committing to processes that help us become more accountable. We conclude with the vision of where we started: faithful and fruitful missional living expressed personally and corporately. It is our deep conviction that this “end game” is possible when a church becomes a learning community, engaged in practical and reflective learning over time, in and out of its congregational context.

Within each chapter, we’ve included:

- *Information:* Content, both biblical and theoretical, learned in the Ridder retreats and then practiced and reflected on in the congregational context
- *Stories:* Stories about our experiences with the content—what we learned and how we’ve been changed by our learning
- *Practice and Reflect:* Questions and suggestions for taking this information into your own congregational context, and then practicing and reflecting upon what you’ve learned
- *Going Deeper:* Each chapter includes resources to encourage further exploration of the subject matter

How to Use This Book Effectively

Learning Change is best read:

- In community, with a small group
- With an active stance, committed to working through the exercises and reflecting upon what you’ve learned
- With a journal in hand for personal reflection
- Over time—this is not a book to be raced through or read on a strict schedule
- With an open mind—see where the Spirit leads you
- In conjunction with the online resources available at <http://www.westernsem.edu/journey/ridder>

Let’s begin the journey together!

Acknowledgments

Ridder Church Renewal was born when a small group of people began to wonder, “What kind of system could support and equip congregations and pastors as they grapple with the kinds of challenges that face the church today?” Those early conversations included George Brown, Keith Derrick, Ken Eriks, Dan Gillette, and Vicki Menning. Later, Ben Becksvoort, George Hunsberger, Rodger Price, Steve VanderMolen, Wayne Van Regenmorter, Angie Mabry-Nauta, Rick Veenstra, and Art Wiers joined the conversation.

Over the years, others have joined the Ridder Sustaining Team, including Tim Rotman, Michael Kooy, Sherri Meyer-Veen, Lee Ann Vandyke, Jill Ver Steeg and Tim Brown.

About half-way through our journey, Kyle Small and Megan Mullen conducted a massive research project among participants in Ridder Church Renewal that catapulted our learning.

This book exists because of the hard work, commitment to excellence and spirit of adventure of the contributing authors. They embody the learning with integrity. They have captured that learning in their writing and share it here with authenticity and vulnerability. Their example inspires us daily.

The contributing authors are part of a larger community of pastors that also include Ridder Church Renewal faculty Scott Lokers, Andy Bossardet, Edie Lenz, Chad Schuitema, Scott Stephan and Marijke Strong. Others in the Ridder learning community are Heidi DeJonge, Kevin DeRaaf, Vance Elzinga, Bill Flavin, Tom Grabill, Taylor Holbrook, Dave Kingma, Mike Meyer-Veen, Sherri Meyer-Veen, Greg Town, Jeff Vandermeer, and Andrew Vis. These pastors have made learning an adventure of friendship.

As Ridder Church Renewal has expanded into 6 regions in two countries, we have been joined by strong advocate Martin Contant, Rick Droog, Chris Godfredson, John Kapteyn Abby Norton-Levering, Amy Nyland, Tom Smith, and Lyle Zumdahl.

This book is also dedicated to the memory of Adrian Van Giessen and Ben Becksvoort who helped to make Ridder a reality before they could even know what it would be. They left us too soon and their supportive presence is deeply missed.

Suzette Mullen Harrell read the first draft of this book and offered invaluable feedback that made it a much better resource.

Shawn Vander Lugt and the team at Kregel Publications were generous, thorough, and deeply encouraging. They made everything about the book better.

Lee Ann Sotok has consistently made Ridder a place of welcome and hospitality, while also making all the details work. We're forever grateful for her.

Chris DeVos started as a participant and eventually joined the staff at Western Seminary where he gave faithful, effective oversight that helped this function as a true collaborative partnership between denominations, seminary, synods and local congregations.

Before Ridder Church Renewal even existed, Herman "Bud" and Lenora Ridder were working to equip pastors for the work of the Church, sharing their resources and dreaming dreams that in large measure gave birth to this community of practice that now exists across the United States and in Canada.

Finally, the work that we do is supported and deeply encouraged by our spouses, Betty Herrington and Craig Taylor. They are our most avid fans and our first and most important learning community.

To all of these and many more, we are deeply grateful!

Part 1

The Keys to Real Change

When we began this journey together, we had no idea where our learning would take us. We knew that our congregations needed to change, but we didn't realize how much we would change along the way. We knew that we needed to learn some new things, but we didn't know that first we would have to learn *how* to learn.

In Part One, we share what we learned and how we learned it, and what we still have left to learn. We invite you to learn along with us.

Chapter 1

Fully Alive: God's Dream For Us

Brian Stone

I dream of a community that will not settle for good enough, or for the kingdoms of our hands, but will tirelessly fight for the kingdom of God in our neighborhoods, our city, our country and to the ends of the world.

—Nate Pyle

I dream of missional life—a life where fear, doubts, masks, and surface relationships are no longer necessary—a life where I live what I believe, that my child, my family, and others who meet me might learn not by preaching but by example.

—Edie Pekich Lenz

I was born with a dream inside me. So were you. We were designed to dream of the epic life God created us for—the abundant life, the fully human, fully alive life that Jesus lived.

Along the way, we exchanged that dream for a seriously compromised version, characterized by the pursuit of comfort and convenience—the pursuit of the American Dream. We wanted to learn to dream again, to hear the call to join God in bringing *shalom* to our broken world.

Every person is born with a God-sized dream inside them. We were designed to dream of the epic life God created us for—the abundant, fully human, and fully alive life that Jesus lived. This is the life we were created to live, and when we are living in this way, our congregations and communities are being transformed into places of mission, and fruitful and faithful living.

As church leaders, it’s easy to forget our dreams and move away from our true calling. Do you remember your dreams? When I was little, I pinned a towel around my neck like a cape and dreamed of being Superman. As a teenager, I dreamed of being a rock star. As a college student, I dreamed of being the kind of English teacher with whom students would clamor to study. Reconnecting with our childhood dreams helps us ignite our imaginations and allow ourselves to go to the “what ifs” and “could it bes” we all possess. Connecting to our childhood dreams helps us set aside the tyranny of congregational maintenance and opens up a spiritual space where we allow God to show us once again the full life he is calling us to. God created you full of potential and to dream big dreams for the Kingdom!

Practice and Reflect

So, I invite you to stop and set aside some time (an hour would be ideal) to get away and remember with God the dreams you had as a child and adolescent. It might feel hard to find the time. You might need to cancel a meeting. You’ll definitely need to turn off your computer and your smartphone. Take your journal, your Bible, and go someplace where you won’t be disturbed or distracted. You can pray this prayer, or one like it, and then quietly sit with God and remember. Journal whatever God brings to you.

Holy Spirit, I invite you into this space with me. It has been ____ years since I have allowed myself to remember the dreams you planted in my heart long ago. Would you remind me of those dreams? Give me the courage to imagine them again.

When I did this exercise and remembered my dreams to be a superhero, a rock star, and the world’s best teacher. I was struck that I had a deep desire to have an impact in the world and to influence others—even when I was young! In that moment, God again stirred up in me a dream to make a significant impact for the Kingdom.

Dreaming Differently

Somewhere along the way, we stopped dreaming. We went from having big dreams about how we would have influence and change the world to settling and buying into the lie that we couldn’t make a difference.

Some of us got hurt along the way. We were told, taught, or otherwise bought into the lie that we weren’t good enough, smart enough, bold enough, or creative enough. We believed these lies and began to form a life around this diminished view of ourselves. And we settled.

We gave up on our dreams of making a difference and settled for dreams that were small and safe. We decided to find a job, make a living, and play it safe. We began to seek our significance in the accumulation of things. We learned to dream what the world around us supported and encouraged. In Romans, Paul tells us that we “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

Many of us settled or accepted someone else’s dream for us. In either case we got something less than God’s intention for our lives. What makes a lie so powerful is that it seems so right. Making more money to buy a better car, a bigger TV, a nicer house, and a smart phone with unlimited texting—we dreamed of these things hoping that they would satisfy us.

This lie permeates every area of our lives in ways we are not even aware. It even impacts the church. In the church tribe I am part of, it was often said in jest that some of the best reasons for being in ministry were the tax breaks, pastoral perks, a great health plan, and one of the best denominational pension plans in the United States. Really?

But the lie doesn’t impact pastoral leaders alone; it impacts entire congregations as well. The church I serve is fifty-eight years old as I write this. It was started out of a dream to bring the gospel to a community in desperate need for transformation. Along the way, however, the dream lost to the power of the lie that success for the local church was found in the world’s definition of success—increasing membership and financial stability along with the comfortable consumption of religious goods and services. As a church we learned to make great church members, but had no plan to make disciples who would impact their homes, neighborhoods, or workplaces with the gospel. We exchanged the dream of God for the American Dream of increasing ease and comfort.

Practice and Reflect

I invite you to stop reading again. A significant part of the learning journey is developing the capacity to tell yourself the truth. Please open your journal and spend a few moments in quiet. What does this last section stir up in you? Have you given up on your dreams? When did that happen? What hurt caused you to settle? Is there evidence that you have substituted God’s dream for your life for the American Dream? Be courageous and write down what you hear.

I’m inviting you to relearn that the fully human, abundant life that Jesus calls us to is a life driven by a God-given dream. I’m inviting you to dream dreams that move you toward the calling that was yours from your creation. Are you ready to dream the kinds of dreams for which you are designed? Are you ready for dreams that propel you into aligning your life with God’s mission in the world?

Dreaming Is Rooted in God’s Creation

In the beginning of Genesis we read about God creating, out of nothing, all there is. Why? Why did God create? Why did God create You?

I have a deep conviction that God created the world because God is love and because God is on mission. In the beginning, God created the perfect environment for all to live and thrive. The restoration of this perfect environment is what we call the *shalom* of God, a Hebrew term for deep peace and wholeness.

With all the brokenness in the world, we can still experience this deep peace, this shalom, when we are fully alive, living into our intended design, and functioning as God intended. When a community—a family, a school, a business, or a congregation—lives into its God-given design, shalom is experienced. Wherever God’s love is fully expressed and experienced, God’s shalom is at work.

Created in the image of God, we were entrusted with responsibility for the land (Genesis 1:28–30), and we are called to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1–3). Though sin marred God’s shalom, God chose us to partner with him in recreating and restoring shalom in our own families, our communities, and ultimately in the world. How can we reconnect to this central purpose, this central calling to be God’s partners in restoring *shalom*?

Practice and Reflect

Stop here and spend some time journaling. Where is your world marred by sin and brokenness? What part of the brokenness stirs your heart, your passion? What wrong do you feel passionate about righting? What brokenness calls to something deep in you? What would your family or community or workplace look like if there were movement toward the full shalom of God being expressed?

Challenges in This Book

As you read through *Learning Change*, you will be asked to take an honest look at yourself. The journey of living into your dreams is fueled by a growing capacity to tell the truth about what is actually happening in your life, what we call “saying what is so.” We will challenge you to be courageously authentic about your life, your work, your family, and your community.

When I get challenged like that, all my defenses go on high alert, and I find myself stiff arming the Holy Spirit and others. I stop listening to understand, and I begin to disagree, argue, or feel shameful with a desire to hide who I really am.

We will challenge you to find time in solitude to reflect on what you are reading. This work will have more impact if you are aware of experiences that you have of shame, of not being right, of not being enough. With awareness and persistence, you can quiet those voices more effectively.

God does not reveal our brokenness or integrity gaps to shame us. Remember, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

Integrity gaps are those places in our lives where we don’t do what we said we would do, or where we don’t live into the design for which we were created. God reveals those gaps to help us grow. It’s as if God is saying, “I love you and I have a calling that I want to entrust to you, and if you are going to own that calling, this wound needs to be healed. Or, that integrity gap needs to be closed.”

Finally, it is in the practice and reflection—the places in this book where we ask you to stop and write a journal entry or have a conversation or say a more authentic prayer than you’ve ever said—where your dreams increasingly come true. So in order to get the most benefit from this book, please make the time to do this important work.

Dreams Rooted in Who We Are in Christ

St. Irenaeus, who lived in the second century, made this observation: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” In Jesus Christ, God has given us an example of such a fully alive person. I am operating with a classical, orthodox understanding of the person of Jesus Christ—that he was both fully human and fully divine. Jesus, as a human being, lived fully into the design of what it meant for him to be human. He is our example and model for who we are to be.

As a human being, Jesus had to do the work of hearing God’s calling, just like we do. In the baptism experience, God speaks and Jesus’s calling as the Messiah is fully imparted. Jesus immediately goes to the wilderness for forty days to hear from God and to clarify his calling. And as disciples, we follow the example of Jesus. He heard the Father’s plan for his life and he followed it. We are called to do the same. When you realize that God has an intention for your life and you begin to live into it, you will experience God’s shalom.

Central to every person’s call is a sense of mission. You don’t just have a job. You are not just pursuing a career. You have a calling to be on mission in the places where you spend most of your day. There you pray for and work for the coming of God’s Kingdom—the full shalom of God. God’s call for you will be expressed in your work in the world.

When you find that calling, you will know the full, abundant life that Jesus promises in John 10:10 where Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Jesus intends for you to have a big life, an epic life. Jesus didn’t come so that he could be the means to a life of greater ease and comfort or to help us get the next promotion or bigger church. He came to give us a full life. A full life is a missional life. Don’t substitute his calling by taking on the American Dream.

The full life Jesus came to give us is expressed powerfully in John 15. We cannot live this abundant life unless like a vine, we are deeply con-

nected to Jesus, the branch. When we are connected to Jesus, we bear fruit. We have the life for which he designed us. We become truly like him, fully human and fully alive.

Jesus says that those who follow him and become like him, will do “greater works than these” (John 14:12). Wait! Did Jesus really mean that? I believe he did. When you look around at your life you might say, “I don’t know anyone who is doing all the things Jesus did, let alone greater things?” That’s true for most of us. In unprecedented numbers, followers of Jesus have substituted his call to a fully human, fully alive missional life for a very small life driven by consumerism. What would happen if we began to recapture Jesus’s vision for what it means to be human and began to live into that?

I’m challenging you to take on the possibility that by learning to dream again—learning to hear God’s calling for your life—the promise of John 14:12 could begin to be realized in you.

The full life we were created for is found in Jesus. It is found in our becoming so much like Jesus that we begin to do the kinds of things that Jesus did. Your calling and my calling is not to be the Messiah. But like the Messiah, if I am connected to God, God will show me what my calling is. God will fill my heart with the dream of a missional life that contributes to God’s shalom coming into the world where I live.

So what kind of dreams are you dreaming? Are your dreams guided by consumerism? Are they thwarted and made small by some experience of wounding from your childhood? Or are they dreams about living the abundant life that Jesus models for you; the abundant life to which Jesus calls us all?

Heal Our Land

When we settle and live small lives that pursue greater ease and comfort, and when our dreams become about making ourselves feel good, we stop becoming like Jesus, and the world suffers. So, in this opening chapter we have called you back to dream again. We’ve rooted that call to dream in the biblical narrative of God’s mission to establish shalom over all the earth. We’ve rooted it in the biblical narrative regarding God’s design of human beings.

In 2 Chronicles 7 we have a picture of what happens when God’s people stop pursuing the things of God. It is a picture of famine. Look at our world today: high unemployment, skyrocketing divorce, unprecedented numbers of children living in poverty, a pervasive sex culture, failing schools, declining cities, homelessness and despair. There is famine in the land. In 2 Chronicles 14, God promises that if we, God’s people, will repent and turn from our wicked ways, God will come and heal our land.

We have a deep conviction that when we live into the design and purpose for which we are created, God brings healing to the land. When we begin to live into the full life to which Christ calls us, God brings healing

to the land. When we abide in Christ in such a way as to produce fruit, God brings healing to the land.

Created in the image of God, we are called to be a blessing. We are given authority to declare the shalom of God and demonstrate it through love. We are invited to abide in Christ so we might do even greater things. We are commissioned with a ministry of reconciliation and reminded that God's people will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned and care for the single mother and her family.

That is the full life Jesus offers us. It is this epic life that we are created to live as we step into the good works that God has already prepared for us.

Dream Big

How we see our future determines how we live today. If you know you will be going on vacation in a week, you begin to live toward that vacation. You begin laying out clothes to pack. You arrange for your mail to be held. You get your yard ready for when you will be gone. You get things lined up at work. You buy tickets for flights or program your GPS.

Begin to dream again. Begin to dream with God, through God's Word, and through prayer. Begin to invite God to shape your dreams. Begin to dream about your life of mission in the world. Not about what you will do, but who you can become. Not about the things you will accomplish, but about becoming so much like Jesus that those things happen naturally.

Begin to dream about your church on mission in the world. It's not about the buildings, your budget, the number of small groups, or a new sound system and lights. Dream with God about the people in your congregation and who they can be as they abandon themselves to the work of the Kingdom.

Begin to dream about your neighborhood, community and cities. Dream about what it would be like if everything worked according to God's design. Dream about the shalom of God taking over the broken places, the parts of your community that aren't working as they should. Dream about children learning to read, about caring for single mothers, families staying together, or eradicating homelessness. And dream about your part in bringing that larger dream to pass.

Dream big. It will shape the way you live now. Big dreams will increase your capacity for more of the best that God has for you.

Practice and Reflect

It's not enough to have big dreams. We must share our dreams so they can grow. Are there encouraging people in your life with whom you can share your dreams?

Don't rush. This isn't a test. It is about learning and growing and becoming fully human and fully alive in the pattern of Jesus Christ. In solitude, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about God's dreams for you in your context today. Some questions you might find helpful:

- God, what is your dream for the kind of person you want me to be?
- What gifts or passions have you given me, that when expressed, cause me to experience being fully alive?
- What wrong exists in the world that angers or disturbs me so much that I want to do something about it?
- What have I always wanted to do to make a difference but have been too afraid to try?

Questions like these can help you begin to reconnect to God’s dreams for you.

I Have a Dream

As part of the Ridder Church Renewal process, we spent time reflecting and reconnecting to God’s dreams, and then we shared our dreams with each other.

My dream is deeply personal and is birthed out of the redemptive work God has consistently worked out in my life. I remember the flood of feelings I experienced when I put my dream on paper for the first time—when I completed the assignment to write my “I have a dream” speech. I remember the anxiety I felt as I began to share it with others and eventually made it public to my congregation. Here are the three parts to my dream for my family, congregation, and the larger community:

I have a dream that with authenticity I will be able to lead my family into full-out radical obedience, that I will love, honor, and cherish my wife so deeply that she has the safety necessary to be the woman God calls her to be. Although I meant it when I described that dream, I didn’t love, honor, and cherish my wife in the way I had hoped and promised and brought deep hurt and brokenness into my family. Today, however, Cathy is an amazing story of God’s ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness. Not only have I been blessed to be by her side as she courageously brings reconciliation into the lives of others and ministers tirelessly to disadvantaged children, but I have experienced God’s grace through her first hand, as God restores our marriage. Because many in our congregation embraced the concepts in this book, Cathy and I are part of a small community that walks with us and continues to encourage us to dream and live missionally.

I believe God is calling us to become the kind of missional disciples that make disciples; that we are being shaped to no longer be able to look at our community and context while ignoring the reality of what is taking place; that we are becoming the kind of faithful community that looks at the needs of this place to which we are called

and says, “We can’t live with that!” and actively partners with God in the re-creation of our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. Since sharing this dream with the congregation, we have launched three missional communities! One in a local elementary school, one serves children at a local mobile home community, and one serves adults, and their families, with developmental disabilities.

I have a deepening conviction for, and dream of, catalyzing a movement where the Church of Kalamazoo will become unified and mobilized around seeking the transformation of our city; that this is part of God’s call on my life. Keeping this dream in front of me has allowed me to experience a ministry called “Jesus Loves Kzoo” grow from a handful of churches one year, to more than a dozen the next, to more than fifty ministries uniting together to transform the city of Kalamazoo! Can you imagine? Churches who normally compete against one another are coming together for one purpose—to love our community in Jesus’s name.

Be willing to dream! It’s what you were designed to do!

Going Deeper

We were designed to dream God-sized dreams and when we settle for anything less, we live small lives and abdicate our responsibility to be God’s partners in restoring shalom to the world. To hear more of our personal and corporate dreams, go to <http://www.westernsem.edu/journey/ridder>.

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Daring to Dream: Another Story

The Ridder process has challenged and empowered me to dream a bigger dream for my life by crystallizing a picture of missional living as the church functioning and alive in all the places that people gather.

In one of the early retreats, we were asked to spend some time in solitude. We had heard a presentation that envisioned the possibility of all the

churches in our city working collaboratively to impact the city for good. It was in that time of solitude that I really began to consider what it might look like for me to participate in leading that kind of a movement in Midland.

From that time of solitude, fast-forward several months when we were sent home to work on describing God’s emerging future for our congregation. We were encouraged to change the question from, “How will our church be different in five years?” to “How will our city be different in five years if we are effective at our work as a church?”

The vision from that time of solitude and the work we did to envision our changes in our city changed the trajectory of my life.

Now, fast-forward five years—at a recent board meeting, we had a conversation that indicates the lasting impact of this work. Our elders were asking if I was focusing my time and energy on the most important things. It wasn’t a punitive question. It was one that emerged from a vision of impacting the city. In that meeting we formulated a clear sentence about my role: “The elders of Midland Reformed Church want me to be a pastor to the city through the church.” There is this growing vision within the life of board members and leadership that they can have an impact on their city, and that accelerates my vision because it’s a shared vision.

So, the clear and direct challenge to live the life Jesus calls us to live inspired me deeply. I was also impacted by the amazing gift of the authentic community that has emerged with the Ridder pastors and team leaders in my learning community. I remember the night that Jim [Herrington] said to me, “You are designed for so much more.” I was able to hear those words as words of love rather than words of judgment because we had shared so much together. I understood his heart, and my heart was moved by his love for and belief in me.

Then there was this magical moment with the group. As my cohort was concluding our time with Ridder Church Renewal, we had a time of solitude where each of us was assigned to write an “I Have a Dream” speech. Then we came to those gathered on the sixth floor of the library at Western Theological Seminary, and we read these speeches out loud. It was one of life’s most memorable moments. None of us were famous. No megachurch or celebrity pastors in the room. Just me and my friends willing to take the real, personal, and public risk of dreaming about a big life that would influence our family, our communities, and our cities for and with the love of God.

That story is powerful to me as an inspiring stand-alone moment. It has even more power because I am—and I also see my friends—living into those dreams in very real and tangible ways.

—Mike DeRuyter, Pastor, Midland Reformed Church
