

Holy Shifts!

a reformation story

David W. Jones
with Macland Presbyterian

Holy Shifts

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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) or are paraphrased for clarity.

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If this book helps you, pass it on

Here I stand. I can do no other.
— Martin Luther

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Part I: Learning to Let Go

Every church reaches a moment when
the old answers stop working.

The building is still standing.
The programs still run.
The committees still meet.
The budget still gets printed.

Nothing dramatic happens at first.
Just a quiet question in the hallways:

“Is this it?”

Which really means:

Is this all the church is meant to be?

We always knew our church would close someday.
After all, every church Paul wrote to in the New Testament
eventually did. Why would we be different?

Still, when the fear arrived, it felt personal—
as if the angel of death had our congregation on speed dial.

But fear has a strange way of sharpening the soul.
The more uncertain things became, the more we realized
something surprising:

God was not abandoning us.
God was working on us.

We were changing.
Our questions were changing.

We stopped asking,
“How do we save the church?”

and started asking,
“What if God

**is inviting us
to become something new?”**

That question altered everything—
how we prayed,
how we imagined,
how we read Scripture.

We no longer read the Bible as distant history.
We stepped inside the story
and realized we were already in it.

Before we knew it, we became Abram and Sarai

Older than we wanted to admit.
Tired in ways we didn't know churches could get tired.
More comfortable with padded chairs
than open roads.

And yet, deep down, we felt the same flutter they felt—
that unsettling whisper of God:

**“Get up.
Leave what you know.
Walk toward what could be.”**

We weren't reading about them.
We were *feeling what they felt*.

The disbelief.
The hesitation.
The “Are you sure you've got the right people?” sensation.

And then the laughter.
Not nervous laughter—
holy laughter.
The kind that erupts when God promises something so
impossible
you can't help but snort.

It's the same laughter that eventually became a name:
Isaac.

Laughter.

The child whose very existence whispered,

“See?

God can create joy

out of the raw materials of the ridiculous.”

And if God could pull *that* off,
maybe God could do something with us too.

Then, before we could catch our breath,

We became Moses.

Not the polished Moses with stone tablets.

The other one.

The reluctant one.

The “please send somebody else” one.

We felt what he felt—
the bewilderment
of being interrupted by God
while minding your own sheep.

We weren't seeking a mission.
A mission found *us*.

Something in front of us caught fire—
not shrubbery, but need;
not flames, but possibility—
and we heard the unmistakable tug:

“Set my people free.”

Free from whatever poverty held them—
poverty of resources,

poverty of imagination,
poverty of hope.

We argued with God the way Moses did.
We offered our reasons,
our limitations,
our anxieties,
our age,
our size,
our dwindling options.

And God answered us
exactly as God answered Moses:

“I will be with you.”

So we went.
Reluctantly.
Barely breathing.
Still smelling faintly of sheep.

**And once we went,
we discovered we were Peter too.**

Not Pentecost Peter—
bold, articulate, miracle-working Peter.
No.
We became the earlier version:
storm-walking, heart-thumping,
“I’m doing it... wait—am I doing it?” Peter.

We stood where he stood—
in a storm we did not choose,
facing waves we could not control,
staring at a decision we could not avoid.

Stay in the boat,
or step out.

Only difference?

Our boat was already sinking.

Which makes stepping out feel less like heroism
and more like basic problem-solving.

So we stepped out—
shaky, wobbly,
eyes on Jesus,
water rising,
faith rising with it.

And in that moment,
we understood Peter completely.
Not theoretically.
Viscerally.

Because we were him.

And here is the thread tying our story together:

**God promised.
We believed.
And we laughed.**

We still do.
Every week.
Every meeting.
Every miraculous, ridiculous, impossible thing
God asks of us.

Because when a church realizes it is part of *God's* story—
not the other way around—
joy becomes the sign of life.

Not attendance.
Not budget.
Not how many committees survived the winter.

Joy.
Laughter.
Life.

If heaven keeps score,
that's the metric.

And this discovery leads us directly
to our first holy shift—
the shift that changes everything else in this book:

**We had to stop treating church as a *noun*
and start living as a *verb*.**

Chapter One

From Noun to Verb

*(How We Stopped Preserving a Thing
and Started Practicing a Life)*

For a long time, we treated “church” the way most churches do—

as something we **were**,
something we **owned**,
something we **managed**,
something we **maintained**.

It was a **noun**.

A place.

A campus.

A weekly event.

A set of ministries and meetings.

A schedule on a bulletin.

None of that was wrong.

It was simply **too small**.

Because **nouns** can be preserved without being alive.

Nouns can be maintained without being fruitful.

Nouns can be admired long after the movement inside them has stopped.

A church can function as a noun for years and years and years...

But **verbs**—

verbs cannot sit still.

Verbs move, breathe, grow, stretch, risk, lead and follow.

Verbs are **alive**.

And when a congregation begins shifting from **noun** to **verb**,

everything changes.

Identity changes.

Direction changes.

Imagination changes.

Even the **questions** change.

Not, “**What is our church?**”

but, “**What is our church called to do?**”

In today’s world, denominations often function more like **brands** than communities.

As culture wars intensify, we Protestants do what our name implies: we **protest**. We split, reorganize, rebrand, and launch yet another denomination. It happens so often it barely earns a headline. The world has stopped paying attention—understandably.

Twenty years ago, if you said, “I’m a Presbyterian,” someone might have asked,

“**Which kind?**”

Now, no one asks.

The brand names don’t carry the same meaning anymore.

People ask different questions now.

Externally, the question is no longer:

“**What are you?**”

but, “**What do you do?**”

Internally, the question is no longer:

“**Who are we?**”

but, “**Who are we becoming?**”

This was our **first holy shift**.

We had to move from thinking in **nouns** to living in **verbs**. And as every English teacher once reminded us—no passive verbs allowed.

Active, active, active.

The doorway through which every other shift must walk is this one. The shift that made all the other shifts possible: the moment we stopped treating “church” as **something**

we are and began treating “church” as **something we are called to do**.

And when a congregation begins shifting from noun to verb, everything changes.

Identity changes.

Direction changes.

Imagination changes.

Even the questions change.

Not “What is our church?” but

“What is our church called to do?”

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Church as a Noun

(What we were trying to preserve)

Before the shift, we too often...

- **focused on what we were**
instead of what we were called to do.
- **organized around programs**
instead of responding to callings.
- **counted attendance**
instead of cultivating transformation.
- **managed the building**
instead of mobilizing people.
- **hoped others would come to us**
instead of going to them.
- **protected spaces**
instead of sharing them.
- **preserved predictability**
instead of risking mission.

- **debated preferences**
instead of discerning purpose.
 - **memorized identity**
instead of imagining the future.
 - **maintained the noun**
instead of embodying the verb.
-

After the Shift — Church as a Verb

(What we learned to practice)

After the shift, we began to...

- **practice following**
instead of merely attending.
- **focus on formation**
instead of running programs.
- **build relationships**
instead of building rooms.
- **measure presence**
instead of managing pressure.
- **move toward neighbors**
instead of waiting for neighbors to move toward us.
- **share our resources**
instead of preserving our turf.
- **trust calling**
instead of clinging to comfort.
- **choose purpose**
instead of defending preferences.
- **imagine possibility**
instead of protecting identity.
- **become a movement**
instead of maintaining a museum.

This was our holy shift.

Pastoral Reflection

For us at Macland, this shift wasn't cosmetic.
It wasn't a strategy tweak or a clever new slogan.
It was **spiritual**.

We realized that Jesus never asked people to **attend** Him—
He asked them to **follow**.

Follow is a **verb**.

Love is a **verb**.

Serve is a **verb**.

Give, bless, welcome, forgive—
all verbs.

The entire Christian life is a verb.
Which means the church must be, too.

When we stopped trying to preserve what “church” was
and started practicing what church is **called to do**,
new life began to rise in places we assumed were dying.

The Spirit hadn't left.
The Spirit had been waiting
for us
to **move**.

And so we did.

Closing Prayer

God of holy motion,
turn our nouns into **verbs**.
Turn our maintenance into **mission**.
Turn our routine into **calling**.

Free us from clinging to what once defined us,
so we can embrace what You are inviting us to become.

Make us a people who **love**,
serve,
bless,
and **become**—
until our life together looks like the One we follow.
Amen.

Chapter Two

From Jesus the Noun to Jesus the Verb

*(How We Moved from Thinking About Jesus
to Participating with Jesus)*

Every church has a way of talking about Jesus. For years, we spoke of Him the way many congregations do:

as if He were an **object** to be preserved,
a set of **beliefs** to be defended,
a perfect **idea** encased in glass.

This is **Jesus as a noun**—fixed, defined, contained.

Orthodoxy matters.

Right belief protects us from distortion.

Right doctrine guards us from drifting.

But here is the danger we discovered:

You can believe everything **right** about Jesus...and have little to do **with** Jesus.

You can adore the noun and ignore the verb.

But the Jesus of the Gospels is never still.

He is feeding, healing, forgiving, restoring, crossing boundaries, lifting the shamed, welcoming the outsiders, breaking the rules that kept people out and creating a community that brought people in.

The earliest followers were not known as “orthodoxy experts.” They were called **people of the Way**—people whose lives moved in the direction of His life.

This was the shift we had to learn: **Jesus is a verb.**

Not simply Someone we think about, but Someone we participate with, together.

At Macland, when Jesus was mostly a noun, we tried to **preserve** the church—protect the doctrines, defend our identity, keep things tidy.

But when Jesus became a verb—when we saw Him moving toward the hungry, the lonely, the schools, the hurting—we realized:

We had to move too.

Before the Shift — Jesus as Noun

(What we believed was enough)

Before the shift, we too often...

- **focused on beliefs**
instead of actions.
 - **protected orthodoxy**
instead of practicing love.
 - **talked about what Jesus did**
instead of what Jesus does.
 - **treated Jesus like an object**
instead of a living presence.
 - **honored the creeds**
but ignored the needs.
 - **memorized statements**
instead of embodying compassion.
 - **debated theology**
instead of engaging ministry.
 - **saw faith as agreement**
instead of alignment with Jesus' mission.
 - thought discipleship was thinking correctly
instead of living courageously.
 - **kept Jesus in the past**
instead of meeting Him in the present.
-

After the Shift — Jesus as Verb

(What we learned to follow)

After the shift, we began to...

- **practice orthopraxy**
alongside orthodoxy.
- see faith as movement
not merely belief.
- **ask what Jesus is doing now**
not only what He did then.
- treat Jesus as a living Lord
not a theological object.
- **let His actions shape ours**
more than His adjectives.
- **follow His way**
not just admire His words.
- embody compassion, justice, and mercy
instead of only talking about them.
- align our lives with His mission
instead of our preferences.
- **live with courage**
not just correctness.
- **meet Jesus in the present moment**
and join Him where He is already at work.

This was our holy shift.

Pastoral Reflection

Jesus never said, "Think about Me."
He said, "Follow Me."

He never said, "Preserve My ideas."
He said, "Do what I do."

He never said, "Agree with every doctrine."
He said, "Love your neighbor."

Orthodoxy tells the world what we believe about Jesus.
Orthopraxy tells the world what Jesus believes about us.

Our problem wasn't that we believed the wrong things about Jesus. Our problem was that we believed the right things...without moving.

Once we saw Jesus moving—into schools, into food insecurity, into partnership, into the community—we realized: **We had to follow.**

The shift wasn't from right beliefs to wrong beliefs. It was from only believing to believing enough to act.

Jesus as noun can be admired.
Jesus as verb must be followed.

And following changes everything.

Closing Prayer

Living Lord,
shake loose our settled beliefs
until they become living practices.

Move us where You move—
toward the hungry, the hurting, the forgotten,
toward the ones waiting for good news.

Let our thoughts honor You,
but let our actions embody You.

Make us people of *the Way*—
not guardians of ideas,
but participants in Your living ministry.

Turn our belief into courage,
our faith into movement,
our theology into love. Amen.

Chapter Three

From Tradition to Transformation

(A better way.)

Every church has a moment when tradition stops feeling like inheritance and starts feeling like inertia.

Tradition is beautiful—until it becomes heavy.
It carries wisdom—until it starts carrying us.
It preserves the past—until it prevents the future.

And here's the hard truth we had to face:
most churches don't get stuck because they lack passion.
They get stuck because their passion is welded to something
that no longer moves.

We kept polishing things that no longer shined.
We kept protecting things that no longer needed protecting.
We kept tending rituals long after the meaning leaked out.

But we didn't notice it at the time.
Because tradition has a way of walking beside you so closely
you don't feel the weight until you stop to breathe.

And then comes the grief.

Not anger.
Grief.

The quiet heartbreak of realizing how much time,
how much money,
how much energy,
how many meetings,
how many arguments,
how many late-night anxieties
were poured into things that were never meant to bear the
weight of our hope.

Not wasted, exactly.
But misplaced.

We weren't wrong.
We were faithful—to the wrong questions.

We were asking:
“How do we keep this going?”
when God was whispering:
“Why do you think this must stay the same?”

Tradition tries to steady us.
Trend tries to excite us.
Neither one transforms us.

Tradition looks backward for security.
Trend looks sideways for relevance.
Transformation looks forward for calling.

And here's the paradox:
You cannot transform without tradition.
But you cannot keep tradition without transformation.

The past is not the enemy.
The past is the teacher.
But every teacher must eventually point you out the door.

We had to learn that honoring the past
is different from recreating it.
That memory is a gift
but nostalgia is a cage.
That what God *did* is not the same as what God is *doing*.

Transformation didn't begin when we changed structures.
It began when we changed questions.

Not “How do we preserve what we love?”
but “How do we love what God is bringing next?”

Not “How do we keep the church we had?”
but “How do we become the church God needs now?”

Tradition gave us our roots.
Transformation gave us our wings.

And sometimes you don't know you can fly
until you stop gripping the branch.

Observation

Tradition is not the enemy.

Trend is not the enemy.

They become burdens only when we let either one define the future.

Tradition without breath becomes a museum.

Trend without depth becomes a performance.

Transformation with the Spirit becomes a **movement**.

And transformation is always sustainable.

It is always rooted.

It is always built on the freedom that comes from margin, clarity, and Spirit-led stewardship.

If your church has been drifting between nostalgia and novelty—between guarding the old and chasing the new—hear this blessing:

You are not behind.

You are not failing.

You are not stuck.

You are being invited into transformation.

Deeper roots.

Clearer vision.

Wiser stewardship.

Freer movement.

You do not have to choose between the past and the present.

You only have to choose the **Spirit**,

and let the Spirit reshape everything—even the budget—toward freedom and possibility.

Budgeting through the shift.

Budgeting changes as a church grows from **tradition** to **trend** to **transformation**.

But one truth stays the same:

Don't spend more than you make.

Margin is not a sin. It's a spiritual practice.

Tradition often treated every dollar like it needed a job immediately.

Trend tries to predict the future and budget for what might happen.

Transformation learns to hold money with open hands and open eyes — not as a fear-based restraint, and not as a fantasy-based accelerator, but as a tool for mission.

Church budgets get healthier the moment we stop treating “breaking even” as the goal.

Margin isn't greed.

Margin is space.

Margin is breath.

Margin is what gives the church room to respond when God surprises us.

There are, of course, a few timeless wisdom rules:

- **If you're going to build something, keep the total cost under 3.5 times your annual revenue.**

Go beyond that, and the building starts owning you.

- **Don't take out a loan you can't realistically pay off within five years.**

The longer the loan, the more it shapes the ministry instead of supporting it.

- **And if someone tells you a building project will “make money”... breathe. Slow down.**

That's not faith — and it's not necessarily foolishness either — it's usually **wishful thinking dressed in religious**

language.

Stewardship doesn't shame desire, but it does ask for clarity.

Facilities don't create revenue.

Mission does.

Buildings are tools, not engines.

The holy shift comes when we stop expecting buildings to save us and start expecting ministry to lead us.

Budgets become transformational when they stop being a scoreboard and start becoming a compass — a way of listening, a way of noticing where God is already creating possibility.

Because in the end, a faithful budget isn't about making the numbers work.

It's about making room for God to work.

Prayer — From Tradition to Transformation

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,
we thank you for the traditions that carried us
when we did not yet know the way.
For the hymns that held our grief.
For the prayers that named our hope.
For the faithful hands that built what we inherited.

But we confess—
sometimes we mistake preservation for faithfulness.
We cling to what *was* because we are afraid of what *might be*.
We baptize habit and call it holiness.
We follow trends not because they are true,
but because they are loud.

Slow us down.

Free us from the fear that if we let go,
you will disappear.
Remind us that you are not trapped in our past
and not anxious about our future.

Give us the courage to release what no longer gives life,
and the wisdom to recognize what still does.
Help us resist imitation without imagination,
motion without mission,
activity without attention.

Breathe on us again.

Not so we become something impressive,
but something alive.
Not something bigger,
but something truer.

Align our hearts, our structures, our budgets,
and our lives
with what you are already doing in the world.

Lead us—not backward in nostalgia,
not sideways in trend,
but forward into transformation.

And when we are afraid,
when the future feels unclear,
teach us to trust that the same Spirit
who met us once
is meeting us now.

Amen.

Chapter Four

From Funnel to Flashlight

(Our experience of transformation.)

For a long time, we lived inside what we now recognize as a **funnel**.

The funnel shaped how we thought about money, budgets, and faithfulness.

Every year brought the same quiet anxiety. Expenses and revenue needed to sit politely next to each other— close enough to look responsible, but not so far apart that anyone started to sweat.

If expenses crept too high, people worried. “**Are we being reckless?**”

But if revenue crept too high, people worried just as much. “**Are we making a profit?**”

It didn’t matter which side moved. The funnel always produced fear.

This was not because anyone was greedy or unfaithful. It was because money in a **noun-based church** has nowhere else to go.

When church is primarily a *place*, then every dollar eventually flows toward the place— buildings, maintenance, staffing, repairs, upgrades, insurance, utilities.

And here is the hidden truth of the funnel:



When revenue grows, expenses chase it.

Not because people want more. But because the system requires it.

Donations in a funnel do not create life. They create **more funnel**.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Living in the Funnel

Before the shift, we...

- **tied money to the noun of church**—buildings, programs, staff.
- **feared surplus** as much as shortage.
- **assumed every dollar needed a container.**
- **measured faithfulness by balance** instead of impact.
- **believed raising more money would solve the problem.**

But without a mission, more money only produced a **more expensive version of the same problem**.

The funnel could maintain. It could not transform.

The Awakening — When the Funnel Was Named

At some point, we realized something uncomfortable:

If all we know is the funnel, and we do not have a **clear, measurable mission**, then revenue growth becomes a threat instead of a gift.

People worry the church is “making a profit.” And when revenue declines, we panic— trying the same strategies that worked before:

- add programs,
- hire staff,
- spend more to grow.

The sower never hoped the crop wouldn't grow. The sower knew what wheat was *for*.

Our problem wasn't growth. It was purpose.

After the Shift — Living with a Flashlight

A flashlight changes everything.

A funnel collects. A flashlight **directs**.

A funnel pulls resources inward. A flashlight sends resources **outward**.

When we clarified our mission— who we were called to bless, where we were called to serve, why we existed at all— money stopped being a problem to manage and became a **tool to aim**.

After the shift, we began to...

- **aim resources at mission**, not maintenance.
- **invest instead of absorb**.
- **let purpose determine spending**.
- **treat money as energy**, not anxiety.
- **measure faithfulness by fruit**, not fear.

Donations no longer created expenses. They created **impact**.



A Pastoral Confession — What the Funnel Did to a Pastor

Living in the funnel taught me to be cautious. It also taught me to be anxious.

Every budget season felt like walking a tightrope. Too much spending felt dangerous. Too much revenue felt suspicious.

The funnel trained us to believe a lie:

“If we just raise more money, we’ll be okay.”

But without a verb, without a calling, without a flashlight illuminating who we were called to bless— more money only deepened the funnel.

Nouns consume. **Verbs create.**

The Structural Shift — From Mortgage to Movement

Before we sold our property, we carried debt that was going to live longer than the church.

We were going to close long before we finished paying what we borrowed.

That was not sustainability. That was scarcity wearing a tie.

Now we owe nothing. And what we have produces more.

What was once a **hole in the ground** into which resources disappeared has become a **geyser**— creating equity that produces equity, which we now invest in mission partners who relieve suffering every day.

The effect is the exact opposite of the funnel.

The Spiritual Shift — From Fear to Faithful Direction

Money itself never changed. We did.

When we stopped asking, “**How do we keep this running?**” and started asking, “**Why do we exist?**”

clarity replaced anxiety.

The flashlight didn’t eliminate risk. It eliminated confusion.

Pastoral Reflection

The funnel trained us to survive. The flashlight taught us to **serve**.

The funnel asked us to protect. The flashlight invited us to **participate**.

Once we knew who we were for, we stopped being afraid of growth.

Mission gave money meaning. Purpose gave generosity joy.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God of provision and purpose, free us from systems that consume us and form us into a people who give with direction.

Aim our resources where You are already at work. Turn our fear into focus, our anxiety into alignment, our giving into grace that multiplies.

May every dollar tell the truth about who You have called us to be.

Amen.

Chapter Five

From Committees to Teams

(How Our Work Changed When Responsibility Became Shared)

For a long time, the work of the church happened through **committees**.

That wasn't a flaw.
It was the model we inherited.
It worked—until it didn't.

Committees gathered faithful people around tables.
They ensured representation.
They created fairness.
They slowed things down just enough to feel careful.

And in a season of maintenance, committees make sense.

But when mission becomes clear,
when purpose sharpens,
when movement replaces maintenance,
committees begin to strain.

Because committees are designed to **manage agreement**,
not to **advance mission**.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Life in Committees

Before the shift, we...

- **organized work around meetings** instead of outcomes.
- **spread responsibility thin** so no one felt fully responsible.

- **measured success by consensus** instead of progress.
- **absorbed emotions** rather than clarifying roles.
- **confused participation with ownership.**
- **spent more time talking about doing** than actually doing.

Committees are often less about action
and more about **managing feelings.**

Someone was anxious—so the committee slowed down.
Someone was upset—so the committee adjusted.
Someone disagreed—so the committee hesitated.

Ironically, committees often carried everyone else's emotions
while neglecting responsibility for their own.

Energy drained.
Momentum stalled.
Good people grew tired.

The Turning Point — When Mission Clarified the Work

When our mission became clear, something else became clear too:

We didn't need agreement.
We needed alignment.

Mission doesn't ask,
"Is everyone comfortable?"
Mission asks,
"Who is called to this work?"

And once that question changed,
the structure had to change with it.

After the Shift — Becoming Teams

Teams function differently.

Teams don't ask who is responsible for how everyone feels.

Teams ask,

“What is my role?”

After the shift, we began to...

- **organize around roles**, not reactions.
- **name responsibility clearly**, instead of diffusing it.
- **trust people to carry their part** of the work.
- **move without waiting for unanimity**.
- **measure health by fruit**, not mood.
- **depend on one another**, not on endless discussion.

Teams don't need everyone chasing the same thing.

They need people playing their position well.

A Helpful Image — Four-Year-Old Soccer vs. a Real Team

Committees often resemble four-year-old soccer.

Everyone runs toward the ball.

Everyone wants to help.

Everyone is exhausted.

Very little actually happens.

Teams look different.

Players move **without the ball**.

They trust their teammates.

They stay in their lane.

They conserve energy for what matters.

The work flows.
The field opens.
The goal becomes visible.

This was the shift we felt.

The Spiritual Shift — From “Somebody Ought To” to “I Am Somebody”

Committees tend to produce a familiar sentence:

“Somebody ought to...”

Somebody ought to fix this.
Somebody ought to lead that.
Somebody ought to take responsibility.

Teams produce a different sentence:

“I can do that.”

When people know their role,
they stop waiting for permission
and start offering their gifts.

This is how participation becomes ownership.

Pastoral Reflection

When we moved from committees to teams,
we didn't lose voices.

We gained **movement**.

We didn't silence disagreement.
We clarified direction.

We didn't abandon care.
We stopped letting emotion replace mission.

Teams didn't make the church colder.
They made it **healthier**.

Because when people know what they are responsible for,
they can stop carrying what they are not.

Then, one unexpected change surfaced as we moved from
committees to teams.

It wasn't planned.
It wasn't argued.
It wasn't even named at first.

It simply... happened.

Committees, by their nature, tend to look to the pastor as a
kind of **professor**—
the one with the right answers,
the one who clarifies theology,
the one who keeps everyone "in bounds,"
the one who explains and interprets and ensures we stay
decent and in order.

And in the Presbyterian world, this makes sense.
We literally call pastors **Teaching Elders**.
We were taught by professors, so we naturally continue the
pattern.
Classroom models produce classroom expectations.

But when a church begins to move from **committees to
teams**, something very quiet and very beautiful emerges.

Teams don't need a professor.
Teams need a **coach**.

Teams don't gather to be informed.
Teams gather to be **equipped**.

Teams don't wait for answers from the top.
Teams bring wisdom from the room.

No one announced this shift at Macland.
No one voted on it.
No one changed any titles.

It just became true.

As people stepped into clearer roles,
as ownership increased,
as agency awakened,
as mission clarified...

...the pastor was no longer the one doing the work **for** the people,
but the one drawing the work **out** of the people.

Not **explaining** everything,
but **releasing** everyone.

Not guarding the playbook,
but helping the team run the play.

Not the expert at the center,
but the coach at the edge of the huddle.

And this wasn't a rejection of the "Teaching Elder" identity.
It was the natural extension of it.

Teaching became less about transferring information
and more about cultivating transformation.

Elder became less about standing in front
and more about standing among.

Teaching Elder quietly, gracefully became
something closer to **Equipping Elder**.

No controversy.
No fanfare.
Just the seed of a reformation—
small enough to miss,

quiet enough to overlook,
real enough to change everything.

Because when a church shifts from committees to teams,
the pastor doesn't need to push the change.
The system itself invites a new kind of leadership—
one rooted not in professorship,
but in presence,
partnership,
and purpose.

A leadership that doesn't say,
"Here is the answer,"
but instead asks,
"What do you see? What do you bring? What can you do?"

A leadership that trusts the Spirit to move through the room,
not just the pulpit.

A leadership that sounds an awful lot like the New Testament,
but feels startlingly contemporary.

We didn't set out to change the role of the pastor.
We simply set out to become a team.

The rest happened on its own as our shifts that fostered new
life and a new culture.

Closing Prayer

God who calls each by name,
teach us to trust the gifts You have placed among us.

Free us from structures that drain life
and lead us into patterns that multiply it.

Give us clarity of role,
joy in responsibility,

and grace for one another
as we work side by side.

Make us teammates in Your mission—
moving together,
serving faithfully,
and trusting You with the outcome.

Amen.

Part II

Learning to See Differently

Most change doesn't begin with doing something new.
It begins with seeing something old... differently.

The world didn't change overnight.
We just finally noticed it had already changed—
and we were still asking yesterday's questions.

This section is about vision.
Not plans.
Not strategies.
Not blueprints.

Vision as in sight.
As in perspective.
As in learning how to look again.

Because this is not the first time God has had to adjust
someone's vision.

We were the Magi—
following a star with just enough light to begin,
trusting what God placed before us,
until the city lights grew brighter
and we mistook common knowledge for wisdom.
Kings belong in palaces.
Power lives at the center.
So we followed the lights—
until the star quietly waited for us to notice it again.

We were Levi at the tax booth—
seeing only numbers,
until Jesus showed him people.

We were James and John—
staring at empty nets,
until Jesus reframed the sea beneath them.

We were Paul on the Damascus road—
so sure of our direction,
until a sudden light revealed a world we had never seen.

And we were Bartimaeus by the roadside—
crying out from the margins,
refusing to be silenced,
until Jesus stopped, called our name,
and took the scales from our eyes.

Change didn't begin with their actions.
It began with their eyes.

When fear runs the show, everything feels urgent.
But when wisdom enters, urgency gives way to meaning.

We slow down.
We question what "everyone knows."
We notice the assumptions shaping our reactions.

Because the way we see the world
determines the way we move through it.

And sometimes the holiest shift
is simply learning to look again.

Chapter Six

From Opinions to Perspectives

(How We Learned to See More Than We Assumed)

Every church has opinions.
Lots of them.

Opinions about music.
Opinions about budgets.
Opinions about change.
Opinions about what “people” think.
Opinions about what “they” will say.

For years, we treated opinions as if they were truth.
As if they carried the weight of wisdom.
As if they reflected reality.

But eventually we learned something that changed us:

Opinions are not perspective.

An opinion is a reaction.
A perspective is a vantage point.
An opinion is a feeling.
A perspective is an angle.
An opinion assumes.
A perspective *sees*.

Perspective widened our world.
Perspective softened our hearts.
Perspective freed us from battles we didn’t actually need to fight.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Living in Opinions

(What kept us stuck)

Before the shift, we...

- treated assumptions like facts instead of testing them.
- **believed our view was the whole view** instead of part of a larger picture.
- **reacted emotionally** instead of responding thoughtfully.
- filled in blanks with fear instead of curiosity.
- projected our anxieties on the congregation instead of listening to real voices.
- **used the word “they” too easily** instead of naming actual people.
- **mistook noise for insight** instead of seeking clarity.

Opinions are quick.
Perspective takes time.

After the Shift — Living with Perspective

(What opened us up)

After the shift, we began to...

- **ask questions** before assuming answers.
- **listen longer** than we spoke.
- **seek the whole picture** instead of the convenient one.
- **name actual people** instead of imaginary groups.
- **test our feelings** instead of trusting their first draft.
- **replace fear** with curiosity.
- **look for purpose** beneath the problem.

Perspective changed our conversations.
Perspective changed our decisions.
Perspective changed *us*.

This was our holy shift.

A Shift Within the Shift — From “They” to Real People

One of the most transformative things we ever did was stop using the word **they**.

Anytime someone said:

- “They are upset...”
- “People at Macland think...”
- “They won’t like this...”

We paused and gently asked:

“Who is ‘they’?”

Most of the time the answer was:

“Well... they won’t come to session.”

And the truth became clear:

Imaginary crowds were shaping real decisions.

When we eliminated “they,” something holy happened:

- fear decreased,
- clarity increased,
- conversations became kinder,
- and decisions became healthier.

Perspective requires real people.

Opinions rely on imaginary ones.

The Spiritual Shift — Seeing Like Jesus

Jesus never reacted to a moment based on rumor.

He *saw* people:

the woman at the well,
Zacchaeus in a tree,
the children others dismissed,
the crowds who were “like sheep without a shepherd.”

Where others saw categories, Jesus saw **faces**.
Where others felt opinions, Jesus carried **perspective**.

Perspective is not just emotional maturity—
it is spiritual sight.

Pastoral Reflection

Opinions kept us small.
Perspective made us spacious.

Opinions narrowed our imagination.
Perspective widened our compassion.

Opinions made the room tense.
Perspective made the room calm.

We learned that most of the battles we feared...
were shadows cast by opinions, not reality.

Perspective didn't make everything easy.
It made everything **truer**.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God who sees clearly,
teach us to see as You see.

Free us from the grip of assumptions,
from the fog of fear,
from the smallness of opinion.

Give us perspective—
wide enough to hold others with grace,
deep enough to discern truth,
and humble enough to keep learning.

Make our sight clear and our hearts open.

Amen.

Chapter Seven

From Us and Them → Just Us

(Why Jesus Breaks the Spell of “They” — Matthew 25)

Every church has a word it uses without realizing what it’s doing.

At Macland, that word was **they**.

“They believe...”

“They think...”

“They feel...”

“They are like that...”

It sounds harmless.

It isn’t.

Because once we say *they*, we stop seeing persons.

We see categories.

Crowds.

Caricatures.

And the moment people become categories, compassion becomes optional.

So we made a quiet rule in our church:

“They” is a bad word.

Not because we’re picky about language,
but because language trains vision.

We don’t say, “Macland believes...”

or “Macland thinks...”

or “Macland feels...”

Because Macland isn’t a single mind.

Macland is a **conglomeration of persons**.

Three children in one family will teach you that quickly.
Same house.
Same parents.
Same rules.
Completely different people.

Community isn't sameness.
Community is the ongoing work of loving **actual persons**.

And that names the holy shift in this chapter:

Not left versus right.
Not insiders versus outsiders.

But the deeper, more disruptive shift:
from **us and them**
to
just us.

The Problem

Alfred Adler once observed that what we call contradictions are usually just **variations**—degrees on a scale, not enemies on a battlefield.

But we don't live like that.

We live as if difference requires distance.
As if disagreement demands division.
As if identity must be protected by comparison.

So we do what humans have always done.

We group people.
Label them.
Compress them.
And then we say the word that makes it all feel manageable:

They.

And when we do, we feel safer.
Clearer.
More certain.

Also smaller.

The Text

Jesus tells a story in Matthew 25 that is simple enough to remember
and dangerous enough to change the way you see the world.

The sheep and the goats.

Both groups are surprised.

That matters.

Because surprise reveals perspective.

The sheep are surprised because they helped without keeping score.

The goats are surprised because they didn't know the hungry person *counted*.

The king says to the sheep:

"I was hungry and you gave me food...
I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

And they respond, confused:

"Lord, when did we see you hungry?"

Which is another way of saying:

"We didn't see **You**.

We saw **someone**.

We saw a person.

We saw *one of us*."

Then the king turns to the goats:

“I was hungry and you gave me no food...”

And they protest:

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and not help?”

Which translates to:

“If we had known it was *you*, we would have helped.”

That is the confession.

They didn’t see a person.

They saw a category.

They didn’t see a neighbor.

They saw a **they**.

And you know how **they** are!

Why would we expect any more from **them**?

The attitude was toxic in us, among us.

So, we shifted.

The Shift

The sheep and the goats don’t differ in beliefs.

They differ in **vision**.

The goats live in **us and them**.

The sheep live in **just us**.

For the goats, the hungry are outsiders.

For the sheep, they are family.

Jesus even hints at this in his language.

To the sheep, the least of these are called
“**members of my family.**”

To the goats, they are simply “the least of these.”

Same people.
Different lens.

The sheep are not doing charity.
They are practicing kinship.

They aren’t helping *them*.
They’re helping *us*.

A Self-Survey for Churches (Including Ours)

Where “They” Took Over... and Where Personhood Returned

Before the shift, we...

- spoke in **categories** instead of names
- blamed **groups** instead of engaging persons
- used “they” to create **distance**
- confused disagreement with **disconnection**
- treated need as a **problem** instead of a call

After the shift, we began to...

- see **persons before positions**
 - ask “who is this?” before “what are they?”
 - practice compassion without needing credit
 - speak in “we” more than “they”
 - remember: the church is not a coalition of the like-minded but a family learning to see one another
-

Prayer

Father of All,
deliver us from the lazy comfort of “they.”

Interrupt us when we reduce people to labels.
Soften us when fear tempts us to divide.
Teach us to recognize You
in the hungry,
the stranger,
the neighbor
who worships at a different hour
or with a different hymnal.

Make us a church where no one is “them.”
Where partnership reshapes perception.
Where family is larger than agreement.

And teach us—again and again—
to say with our lives what You already said with Yours:

There is only
us.

Amen.

Chapter Eight

From *Faith or Finance* to *Faith and Finance*

(How Pragmatists and Idealists Learned to Lead Together)

Every church has two ways of thinking, that, if we aren't careful, can facilitate division in the church.

The **idealists**.
And the **pragmatists**.

The idealists ask:

- *What is God calling us to become?*
- *What would faith look like if we weren't afraid?*
- *What if we trusted God more than the numbers?*

The pragmatists ask:

- *Can we afford this?*
- *How will this be sustained?*
- *What happens if this doesn't work?*

For a long time, we treated this difference like a problem.

Idealists were accused of being naïve.
Pragmatists were accused of lacking faith.

But neither was true.

This was our holy shift:
we learned that **faith and finance are not enemies**.

They are partners.

Before the Shift — When Faith and Finance Talked Past Each Other

Before the shift, we...

- **pitted vision against viability.**
- **treated budgets like spiritual tests.**
- **felt tension in meetings** without naming it.
- **assumed one side needed to win.**
- **confused caution with fear** and imagination with recklessness.
- **forced decisions into false binaries.**

Faith people worried finance people were shrinking the gospel.
Finance people worried faith people were risking the church.

Both were trying to be faithful.
Neither felt fully heard.

The Realization — These Are Not Two Sides, They Are Two Gifts

At some point, we realized something essential:

God had not placed idealists and pragmatists in the same church by accident.

Idealists guard the **why**.
Pragmatists guard the **how**.

Idealists keep the church from becoming cautious and small.
Pragmatists keep the church from becoming unsustainable and chaotic.

Faith without finance can drift into fantasy.
Finance without faith can drift into fear.

We didn't need one side to convert the other.

We needed them to **trust each other**.

After the Shift — Learning to Lead *Together*

After the shift, something changed in our conversations.

Idealists learned to say, “Help us understand what this will require.”

Pragmatists learned to say, “Help us understand why this matters.”

Budgets stopped being battlegrounds. They became **maps**.

Finance stopped asking, “Can we afford to do this?”
And started asking, “How do we fund what we are called to do?”

Faith stopped saying, “God will figure it out.”
And started saying, “Let’s be honest about what we have.”

This was not compromise.
This was **collaboration**.

And when the time came, when we were crushed under the debt and programs we could not afford financially, and when Finance said, “This is a life or death decision.” Faith replied calmly, “This will be a life after death decision.” In our shift, our understanding of church died. That was okay, because God rolled the stone away and faith and finance moved together, as one out into the world.

The Spiritual Shift — From Either/Or to Both/And

Faith is not pretending the numbers don’t exist.
Faith is telling the truth about the numbers **without letting them have the final word**.

Finance is not doubting God.
Finance is honoring the future God has entrusted to us.

The question stopped being:
“Do we choose faith or finance?”

And became:
“How do we practice faithful finance?”

That question changed everything.

The Macland Learning — When Trust Replaced Suspicion

As trust grew, something else happened.

Meetings slowed down — in a good way.
Listening deepened.
Defensiveness softened.

Finance leaders felt permission to speak honestly
without being labeled unspiritual.

Vision leaders felt permission to dream boldly
without being labeled reckless.

We stopped trying to win arguments
and started trying to **tell the truth together.**

That is how alignment is built.

Pastoral Reflection

The most faithful decisions we ever made
were not made by idealists alone
or pragmatists alone.

They were made in rooms where both gifts were honored.

Faith gave us courage.
Finance gave us wisdom.

Together, they gave us **peace**.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God of vision and wisdom,
thank You for giving Your church different gifts.

Protect us from false choices.
Save us from dividing what You have joined.

Teach us to dream boldly
and steward wisely.

Let faith stretch us
and let wisdom steady us
as we follow You together.

Amen.

Chapter Nine

From Church as Place to Church as Practice

(How We Moved from Maintaining a Location to Teaching a Way of Life)

For generations, we spoke about church the way most people do:

“I’m **going** to church.”

“I’m **at** the church.”

“Meet me **at** the church.”

Church was a destination.

A building.

An address.

A campus.

A place.

And there is nothing wrong with holy places.

God has met His people in:

- temples,
- tents,
- upper rooms,
- catacombs,
- sanctuaries.

Places matter.

But places can also **trick** us.

They can convince us that God is most present where we gather—

instead of where we live.

Something shifted for us when we noticed a quiet, humble movement that has changed millions of lives without ever owning a single building:

A.A. and every 12-step group on earth.

No property.

No campus.

No turf.

No stained glass.

No maintenance budget.

They don't drain their energy maintaining facilities—
they invest their energy teaching **practices**.

They form community, not campuses.

They shape lives, not landscapes.

They measure transformation, not attendance.

And in seeing them clearly, we began to see ourselves
clearly.

Church is not where you go.

Church is what you practice.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Church as Place

(What we assumed was the point)

Before the shift, we...

- **defined church by location**
instead of by lived faith.
- **focused energy on maintaining property**
instead of forming disciples.
- **measured ministry by attendance**
instead of transformation.
- **treated the building as the sanctuary**
instead of the world.
- **taught information**
instead of teaching practices.
- **depended on Sunday morning**
instead of daily rhythms.

- **encouraged ‘come and see’**
instead of ‘go and do.’
- **limited imagination to on-site possibilities**
instead of what God could do anywhere.

Church-as-place felt familiar.
But it wasn’t the fullness of the gospel.

After the Shift — Church as Practice

(What we learned to live)

After the shift, we began to...

- **define church by discipleship**
not geography.
- **focus on daily formation**
not weekly attendance.
- **measure ministry by stories**
not headcounts.
- **see the world as the sanctuary**
not the building.
- **teach practices** like prayer, confession, forgiveness,
gratitude, service, calling.
- **equip people to live faith everywhere**
not only at church.
- **encourage ‘go and live’**
rather than ‘come and watch.’
- **treat discipleship as portable**
because practices travel.

Practices multiply.
Places depreciate.

This was our holy shift.

The 12-Step Parallel — Rooms Without Ownership, Lives With Recovery

Twelve-step communities taught us something profound:

You don't need to **own** the room to change a life.

You need a **practice**.

They don't curate perfect services.

They curate **honest space**.

They don't protect buildings.

They protect **process**.

They don't depend on performance.

They depend on **participation**.

They don't ask people to believe first.

They ask them to **practice** first.

And practice—done together, over time—changes everything.

Church-as-practice does the same.

The Spiritual Shift — From Holy Spaces to Holy Rhythms

Jesus preached in synagogues sometimes.

But most of His ministry happened:

- on roads,
- on hillsides,
- in boats,
- in homes,
- across tables,
- among crowds,
- beside the sick,
- in the open air.

Jesus didn't build a place.
He built a **practice**.

"Follow Me."

"Love your neighbor."

"Forgive seventy times seven."

"Do this in remembrance."

"Go and make disciples."

He did not assemble spectators.

He formed **participants**.

The early church grew not because they had better places,
but because they had deeper practices.

The Practical Shift — From Maintenance to Movement

When church is defined by **place**, we...

- tilt budgets toward buildings,
- consume staff energy on facilities,
- wait for people to come.

When church is defined by **practice**, we...

- tilt budgets toward discipleship,
- empower people in daily life,
- send ministry outward.

Place-based church asks:

"How do we keep this going?"

Practice-based church asks:

"How do we form people for Christlikeness?"

Practices can go anywhere.

Buildings cannot.

From Place to Practice: A Recovery Story

Everyone is addicted to something.

Addiction is not just about substances.

It's about attachment.

It's about what we cling to when the world feels unstable and we want something solid to hold.

Churches are no different.

Like people, churches discover early what gives them comfort, identity, and a sense of control. Over time, those good and necessary things can quietly shift from tools we use into lifelines we protect.

For churches, one of our most persistent addictions is to **nouns**.

Buildings.

Programs.

Committees.

Budgets.

Traditions.

None of these are evil.

Most of them began as gifts.

But addiction rarely begins with bad things.

It begins when good things are asked to carry more weight than they were designed to hold.

Addiction narrows vision.

It reduces imagination.

It replaces awareness with habit.

It trades responsiveness for control.

And the deeper the addiction, the harder it becomes to imagine life any other way.

Why Recovery Language Fits

Recovery language fits the church because recovery is about truth-telling.

It names the reality that willpower alone is not enough.
That good intentions don't break deep patterns.
That transformation requires surrender, not just strategy.

Wisdom, in this sense, is a kind of sobriety.

Sobriety is not moral superiority.
It is clarity.

It is the ability to see what we are attached to.
To notice what we are using to manage fear.
To recognize when protection has replaced participation.

To be sober is to become *response-able*—
able to respond to what is real,
rather than react from what we fear losing.

Practice Is How Recovery Takes Root

Recovery does not happen in ideas.
It happens in practice.

Practice is how we tell the truth repeatedly until it sticks.
Practice is how old reflexes loosen their grip.
Practice is how we learn to live without reaching automatically
for what once numbed our anxiety.

Practice assumes we will stumble.
Practice expects return.
Practice trusts time.

This is why church as practice matters so deeply.

Not because practice helps us *see better*,
but because practice slowly, faithfully, reshapes who we are
becoming.

Practice forms new instincts.
New reflexes.
New ways of responding to uncertainty without panic.

Recovery is not about abandoning nouns.
It is about no longer being ruled by them.

A Community in Recovery

When a church begins to recover, it doesn't announce it.

There is no ribbon-cutting ceremony for sobriety.
No plaque on the wall.

Recovery shows up quietly—in how decisions are made, in how
fear is handled, in how control loosens its grip.

It shows up when a church can pause instead of panic.
When it can listen instead of defend.
When it can risk movement instead of clinging to preservation.

This kind of transformation is not fast.
It is not efficient.
It is real.

And like all real recovery, it needs a shared language, a shared
honesty, and shared practices that can be returned to again
and again.

Which brings us to the steps.

The Twelve Steps for Churches Addicted to Nouns

Step 1

We admitted we were powerless over nouns—that our buildings, programs, committees, and structures had begun to shape us more than we were shaping them.

Step 2

We came to believe that a God bigger than our institutions could restore us to movement, meaning, and mission.

Step 3

We made a decision to turn our will and our future over to God's activity in the world, not just God's approval of our plans.

Step 4

We took a searching and honest inventory of the nouns we were protecting and the verbs we had stopped practicing.

Step 5

We admitted—to God, to ourselves, and to one another—where fear had replaced faith and control had replaced trust.

Step 6

We became ready to let God loosen our grip on what once served us but now holds us still.

Step 7

We humbly asked God to remove not our history, but our need to preserve it at all costs.

Step 8

We made a list of all the people and partners we had overlooked while maintaining our systems, and became willing to rejoin them in real life.

Step 9

We sought to make amends—not with explanations, but with presence, partnership, and shared work—wherever possible.

Step 10

We continued to practice awareness, and when we slipped back into nouns, we noticed quickly and adjusted gently.

Step 11

We sought through prayer, listening, and discernment to deepen our awareness of where God was already moving, asking not only for clarity, but for courage.

Step 12

Having experienced a spiritual awakening as the result of these practices, we tried to live the faith out loud—carrying verbs into the world and practicing them together.

Recovery doesn't mean we stop using nouns.

It means nouns stop using us.

And that is how a church moves
not just from place to practice,
but from addiction
to wisdom,
from fear
to response-ability,
from survival
to resurrection.

A Prayer for Churches in Recovery

God of truth and grace,
we come without pretense.

We confess how easily we cling to what feels solid
when faith asks us to trust what is alive.
We confess the ways we have protected structures
when You were inviting us into movement.

Teach us the honesty that makes recovery possible.
The humility that tells the truth about our attachments.
The courage to loosen our grip without losing our love.

Make us sober.
Clear-eyed.
Response-able.

When fear rises, slow us down.
When control tempts us, help us let go.
When old habits whisper that preservation is faithfulness,
remind us that love is always still moving.

Give us the grace to practice again tomorrow
what we could not master today.
The patience to return.
The wisdom to notice when we are drifting back toward what
numbs us.

Form us into a community of recovery—
not perfect, not finished,
but honest, awake, and willing.

And now, together, we pray the words
that have steadied so many on this same path:

**God, grant us the serenity
to accept the things we cannot change,
the courage to change the things we can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Amen.**

Chapter Ten

From Orthodoxy to Orthopraxis

From Right Belief to Right Becoming

(Or: How to Take a Noun and Turn It Into a Verb)

Blaise Pascal said it in a line that still stings in the best way:

“The knowledge of God is very far from the love of God.”

That sentence is the whole chapter.
Because it’s possible to *know* all kinds of things about love
and still not be loving.

It’s possible to speak fluently about compassion
and remain cruel.

It’s possible to defend the faith
and never actually practice it.

Which is why, if love were only a noun, learning to see love as a
verb would be worth a lifetime.
Not because nouns are bad—nouns are necessary.
But because verbs change people.

Love as a noun can be admired.
Love as a verb rearranges your calendar.

And the same is true of church.

If church is only a noun—
a place, a service, a property, a brand, a “thing we have”—
then it can be discussed, defended, debated, and preserved.

But if church becomes a verb—*churching*—
then it starts influencing behavior the way loving does.

And just imagine the world if churching shaped us
as much as loving does.

Not the word “church.”
The practice of it.

Not what we claim.
What we become.

The Two Words That Tell the Whole Story

The universal church has spent millennia trying to lock down one word: **Orthodoxy.**
Right belief. Right doctrine. Right thinking.

It’s not a bad word. It’s a necessary word.
Beliefs matter. Ideas matter. What we say about God matters.

But orthodoxy has often operated like this:
If we can just get the thinking right, the living will follow.
Believe in Christ, and you’ll act like Christ.

It sounds reasonable.
It’s also... frequently untrue.

Because human beings don’t always live from their beliefs.
We often live from our habits.

Which brings us to the other word—the one that doesn’t get nearly the same attention:

Orthopraxis.
Right practice. Right living. Right doing.

Orthopraxis makes a different claim:

If we practice the way, the heart will catch up.
If we do the right actions, we begin to think differently.
And not only think differently—become differently.

Act like Christ, and you will not only believe—
you will become Christ-like.

And here's the irony:
We all know orthodoxy.
Orthopraxis barely sounds like a word.

Which tells you something about what we've spent our time perfecting.

A Visualization: The Two Doors

Picture two doors.

On the first door, a sign reads: **RIGHT BELIEF**.
Inside is a classroom. Charts. Creeds. Diagrams. Definitions.
People taking notes. People nodding. People arguing in the hallway about who explained it best.

On the second door, a sign reads: **RIGHT PRACTICE**.
Inside is a gym. A training field. A kitchen. A recovery circle.
People learning by doing. People failing and trying again.
People getting stronger in ways that don't photograph well.

Both rooms matter.
But only one of them reliably changes the body.

Orthodoxy can create spectators who know the rules.
Orthopraxis creates participants who learn the game.

And the church, if we're honest, has often been very good at filling sanctuaries with educated spectators.

Which brings us to the parable we can't shake.

The Ducks With Beautiful Feathers

Kierkegaard imagined a church full of ducks on Easter morning.
The preacher preached with fire about feathers and flight.
The congregation shouted "Amen!" like it was a sport.
They sang hymns about soaring.

And then the service ended.

And every duck waddled home.

That's orthodoxy without orthopraxis:
a room full of people who believe in flying
but never leave the ground.

The tragedy isn't that they didn't mean it.
The tragedy is that they thought meaning it was the same as
becoming it.

Why We Keep Choosing Orthodoxy

Because orthodoxy feels safer.

Belief can be defined.
Practice has to be lived.

Belief can be enforced.
Practice has to be trained.

Belief can be settled.
Practice keeps unfolding, especially when love is the law.

Orthodoxy offers the comfort of closure:
"We know what we think."

Orthopraxis demands the discomfort of movement:
"Now we have to live it."

And living it is messy.

Because the living law of love is not a code you consult.
It's a way you walk.
Love does not come with a flow chart.
Love is discovered in real time—
in conflict, in inconvenience, in interruption, in repair.

Which is why orthopraxis is so threatening to institutions.
It can't be fully controlled.
You have to keep practicing it.
You have to keep becoming.

The Becoming Way

William James called it the “as if” principle.

Shakespeare said it in one line: “Assume a virtue if you have it not.”

Richard Rohr put it plainly: **“We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”**

That’s orthopraxis.

If you want to become patient, you practice patience.

If you want to become kind, you practice kindness.

If you want to become forgiving, you practice forgiveness.

Not as performance.

Not as pretending.

But as training.

Because practice is not hypocrisy when becoming is the goal.

Practice is hypocrisy when appearance is the goal.

There’s a difference between *acting* and *training*.

One hides. The other heals.

The Noun-to-Verb Miracle

This is the broad shift underneath all the others:

We take what we’ve treated as a noun

and we turn it into a verb.

Love → loving.

Faith → trusting.

Hope → hoping.

Church → churching.

And churching—real churching—should affect the world the way loving does.

Not by winning arguments.
By forming people.

Not by polishing statements.
By practicing mercy.

Not by guarding boundaries.
By building tables.

Not by perfecting belief.
By learning, week by week, to live in the way of Jesus.

Why Orthopraxis Matters Right Now

Because the world is not primarily asking if we're correct.
It's asking if we're credible.
And credibility isn't proven by what we say we believe.
It's proven by what our lives repeatedly do.

Orthodoxy, at its best, names the north star.
Orthopraxis teaches us how to walk by it.

And this is where the church's addiction shows itself.

It's easier to protect church as a noun
than to practice church as a verb.

It's easier to host worship
than to become a people who live worshipfully.

It's easier to defend "love"
than to be changed by loving.

But the gospel has always been a verb.

"Follow."
"Forgive."
"Feed."
"Go."
"Love."

Not admire.
Not memorize.
Not applaud.

Practice.

Become.

A Closing Picture

Orthodoxy is the map on the wall.
Orthopraxis is walking outside.

Orthodoxy is the recipe card.
Orthopraxis is cooking the meal.

Orthodoxy is the gym membership.
Orthopraxis is showing up to train.

And if the church is going to matter in the next season,
it won't be because we finally achieved perfect definitions.

It will be because we became a community that practices love—
so consistently, so imperfectly, so faithfully—
that people start to taste it.

Prayer

God, save us from the illusion that right belief automatically
becomes right living.
Give us the courage to practice what we confess.
Train our habits toward mercy.
Train our reflexes toward compassion.
Train our lives toward love—
until churching becomes as natural as breathing,
and as consequential as loving.
Amen.

Part III

Time to GO!

There comes a moment in every story of faith
when seeing differently is no longer enough.
You have to move.

We had listened.
We had learned.
We had let God adjust our vision.
But now the question was no longer,
“What do we see?”
The question had become,
“What will we do with what we see?”

Because this is where God’s people always find themselves—
standing at the edge of a calling they never feel ready for.

We were Mary when the angel appeared—
young, unprepared, overwhelmed by grace,
caught between fear and favor,
hearing a calling that would reshape her life and the world.
She didn’t feel ready.
She simply said yes.

We were the little boy with the five loaves and two fish—
holding so little it felt almost embarrassing,
yet willing to offer it just to see what God might do.
He didn’t bring enough.
He brought himself.

We were the disciples on the mountaintop—
still carrying doubts,
still unsure of their future,
yet hearing Jesus speak the words that launched the church into
the world:
“Go.”

Not because they were strong,
but because he was with them.

And we were Esther—
placed in a position she didn't choose,
in a moment she didn't expect,
until Mordecai helped her see what God had already seen:
that she was exactly where she needed to be
“for such a time as this.”

We too were gathered, shaped, and positioned—
not accidentally,
but providentially.

These are not four different stories.
They are four movements of the same calling.

A moment of holy invitation.
A moment of honest offering.
A moment of courageous obedience.
A moment of realizing we were made for this moment.

And now this is our moment.

We are called not just to believe,
not just to understand,
but to step into the work God is already blessing.

To risk.
To offer.
To trust.
To go.

This is where faith becomes movement
and movement becomes mission.
Where what we have seen
becomes what we now must do.

Welcome to the call.
Welcome to the going.

Chapter Eleven

From the God of Our Comfort to the God of Our Calling

(How We Learned That Peace Is a Beginning, Not a Destination)

Most of us come to faith seeking God as **God of comfort**.
The God who meets us in hospital rooms and sleepless nights.

The God who steadies our breathing when anxiety rises.

The God who carries us through grief, disappointment, and loss.

The God who whispers, **“You are not alone.”**

Comfort is holy.

Comfort is needed.

Comfort is a gift.

But comfort is not the whole story.

Somewhere along the way—quietly, gently, unmistakably—
God begins shifting us.

Not away from peace, but **into purpose**.

Not out of rest, but **into responsibility**.

Not toward fear, but **into calling**.

At Macland, we prayed for comfort for a long time.

“Lord, help us survive this.”

“Lord, help us make it another year.”

And God did.

But eventually our prayers began to stretch.

They sounded less like **“Help us survive,”** and more like
“Help us serve.”

Less like **“Protect us,”** and more like **“Guide us.”**

Less like **“Make this easier,”** and more like **“Make us
braver.”**

This shift—from comfort to calling—was one of the clearest signs that God was forming us into a congregation ready to bless the world.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — The God of Comfort

(What we assumed faith was for)

Before the shift, we...

- **asked God to soothe anxiety**
more than shape direction.
- **sought safety**
more than purpose.
- **tried to preserve what we had**
instead of exploring what God wanted next.
- **treated prayer as relief**
rather than discernment.
- **expected God to calm storms**
more than call us through them.
- **clung to the familiar**
rather than trusting the unknown.
- **healed wounds**
but rarely used scars to serve others.
- **received comfort**
but didn't always grow from it.

Comfort is holy.

But comfort alone cannot carry a mission.

After the Shift — The God of Calling

(What we learned to trust)

After the shift, we began to...

- **ask God to shape direction**
not just soothe emotion.
- **seek courage**
more than comfort.
- **move toward what feels faithful**
not merely familiar.
- **treat prayer as discernment**—“God, what are You asking next?”
- **assume God is forming us for mission**
not maintenance.
- **expect responsibility**
not just reassurance.
- **use our scars as ministry**
not just memories.
- **live faith as participation**
not just reception.

Calling doesn't erase comfort.
It **fulfills** it.

This was our holy shift.

The Spiritual Shift — From “Help Me” to “Send Me”

Most of our earliest prayers sound the same:

“Lord, help me.”

“Lord, heal me.”

“Lord, fix this.”

“Lord, calm my fear.”

God hears every one.

But eventually the Spirit whispers a deeper prayer—
a prayer that is ancient, frightening, freeing, and true:

“Here I am.

Send me.”

Comfort says, “**Lord, stay close to me.**”

Calling says, “**Lord, lead me.**”

Comfort says, “**Hold me together.**”

Calling says, “**Make me useful.**”

Comfort says, “**Make this easier.**”

Calling says, “**Make me braver.**”

Jesus comforts His disciples in the boat—
but then calls Peter onto the water.

He comforts Mary in the garden—
but then sends her to tell the others.

He comforts Peter after denial—
but then entrusts him to feed His sheep.

Comfort is Christ.

Calling is also Christ.

They are not two gods—just two movements of grace.

The Practical Shift — From Preservation to Purpose

When churches live in **comfort-mode**, they...

- protect old structures,
- avoid risky mission,
- cling to the familiar,
- pray for stability,
- confuse peace with passivity.

When churches live in **calling-mode**, they...

- step into new mission,
- risk change for the sake of the Kingdom,
- see discomfort as fertile soil for growth,
- pray for courage,
- recognize peace as a byproduct, not a destination.

Comfort says, “**Let’s keep things calm.**”
Calling says, “**Let’s follow the Spirit.**”

Pastoral Reflection

For years, we thought God’s primary work in us was to keep us steady—
to calm fears, soothe wounds, lighten burdens.

But gradually we noticed something:
God was making us **stronger**, not just safer.
Braver, not just calmer.
Wider, not just deeper.

Comfort prepared us. Calling **sent** us.

We were not only being held together—
we were being **shaped** for something.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

Holy God,
You comfort the broken,
steady the anxious,
and strengthen the weary.

But You also call us.
Beyond safety. Beyond certainty.
Beyond what we have known.

Move us from comfort into courage.
From being held to being **sent**.
From surviving to serving.

Make us a people who say with open hands,
“**Here am I; send me.**” Amen.

Chapter Twelve

From Scarcity to Adventure

(How We Learned That Faith Begins Where Certainty Ends)

Scarcity is not just about **money**. It is a way of **seeing**.

Scarcity asks familiar questions:

- **Do we have enough?**
- **What if this fails?**
- **What if we move too soon?**
- **What if we lose what we have?**

Scarcity waits for **certainty**. Scarcity confuses **faith** with **safety**.

For a long time, scarcity shaped our imagination. Not because we lacked resources, but because we lacked **confidence**.

We waited to know before we went. We waited to be sure before we moved. We waited for the math to work.

And then we learned something freeing:

Faith does not begin with abundance. Faith begins with adventure.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Living from Scarcity

Before the shift, we...

- **waited until we felt ready** before acting.
- **asked permission from fear** instead of listening for calling.
- **confused caution with wisdom.**
- **delayed obedience** until conditions improved.

- **treated certainty as a prerequisite** for faith.

Scarcity always asks: **“Is it safe?”**

The Middle Shift — From Scarcity to Abundance

Scripture often invites us to imagine abundance. The possibility that there *might* be enough. The hope that sharing could change the outcome.

Sometimes abundance is revealed only **after** we act.
Sometimes it is discovered **along the way**.

But abundance alone can still keep us cautious. Because abundance asks us to calculate.

We learned something deeper:

You do not need to know there is enough. You need to be willing to go anyway.

After the Shift — Choosing Adventure

Adventure is not recklessness. It is **honest assessment** paired with **trust**.

After the shift, we began to...

- **offer what we actually had**, not what we wished we had.
- **stop borrowing courage from the future**.
- **move without guarantees**.
- **trust God with outcomes**, not just intentions.
- **choose faith over fear**, even when the math was unclear.

Adventure does not promise success. It promises **presence**.

A Necessary Clarification — Faith Is Not Debt

Choosing adventure did not mean borrowing money. It did not mean taking out loans to manufacture faith.

Faith involves **honest assessment**. Not pretending. Not posturing. Not selling the future to feel brave today.

Before we sold our property, we carried a loan that was going to live longer than the church. We were going to close long before we finished paying what we borrowed.

That was not faith. That was **scarcity disguised as stewardship**.

Now we owe nothing. And what we have produces more. Not anxiety. Not debt. But **mission**.

What was once a **hole** where resources disappeared has become a **geyser**— creating life beyond us.

The Spiritual Shift — From Security to Trust

Scarcity clings. Adventure releases.

Scarcity asks God to protect what we have. Adventure trusts God with what we offer.

All God needs is **enough**. And enough is almost always less than we think.

If you have anything at all to offer, then you do not lack enough.

You have **more than enough**.

Which means you can leave it behind.

Pastoral Reflection

I know this shift is hard. Fear feels responsible. Waiting feels wise.

But adventure is where discipleship lives. Not in certainty. Not in control. But in the **step**.

Jesus never said, “Follow Me once you’re sure.”

He simply said, “**Follow Me.**”

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God of the unknown, free us from the fear that keeps us still.

Teach us to trust You not only when we can see the path, but especially when we cannot.

Give us courage to offer what we have, faith to release what we cannot control, and joy in the adventure of following You.

Lead us beyond scarcity, beyond safety, and into the wide and living way.

Amen.

Chapter Thirteen

From Charity to Mission

(How We Moved from Helping People to Joining God's Why)

For a long time, we thought we knew what churches were supposed to do when they saw a need.

Offer charity.

Someone is hurting? Bring a meal.

A crisis hits? Take up a collection.

A disaster strikes? Send bottled water and gift cards.

None of that was wrong.

It was compassionate. It was generous. It was faithful.

But charity is reactive.

It begins with a problem, not a purpose.

It responds to the moment but rarely reshapes the mission.

And here's the hidden truth we discovered:

**Charity is what you give when something goes wrong.
Mission is what you give when something is going right.**

Charity reacts to tragedy.

Mission invests in transformation.

Charity asks, *"How can we help?"*

Mission asks, *"Why are we here?"*

And once we saw the difference, we could never unsee it.

Because when all we practiced was charity, we waited for someone else's crisis to activate our compassion. But when we shifted to mission, we realized God had already been at work long before any disaster arrived—we just had to join what God was blessing.

That was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Charity as Our Default

Looking back, we weren't doing anything wrong.
We were doing what churches have always done: responding.

We measured compassion by moments.
We gave when something broke.
We felt generous after a crisis.
And we assumed that was the work of the church.

But charity couldn't carry the weight of our calling.
It comforted people in the short term,
but it didn't help anything change in the long term.

Charity kept us busy.
Mission would require us to be brave.

After the Shift — Mission as Our Why

Once we asked deeper questions, new possibilities opened.

Instead of reacting, we began investing.
Instead of waiting for emergencies, we looked for partners
already transforming lives.
Instead of measuring success by how much we gave,
we measured it by the stories that came back to us—
stories of children fed, families stabilized, hope restored.

Mission wasn't a program on the side.
It became the center of who we were.

We began aligning our resources with our purpose.
We stopped spreading ourselves thin.
And we finally understood that giving wasn't relief—
it was participation.

Mission didn't just change our budget.
It changed our identity.

Why “Charity First” Always Falls Short

Charity begins with “Oh no.”
Mission begins with “Here’s why.”

Charity is emotional; mission is transformational.
Charity waits for trouble; mission looks for calling.

When charity leads the way, crises set the agenda.
When mission leads the way, purpose sets the energy.

We didn't want to become experts in emergencies.
We wanted to become partners in God's renewal.

The Macland Question — Our Holy Mirror

The question that finally confronted us was simple:

**If our church closed,
how long before anyone outside noticed—
and who would cry?**

That question revealed our truth.

If our absence would go unmourned,
we had not yet discovered our mission.

Mission is what ensures your absence would hurt.
Mission is what ensures your presence brings life.

It became a compass for us—not to measure attendance or
revenue,
but to measure impact by the people who depended on our
love.

The Partners Who Revealed Our Purpose

Once we named our calling—to feed people, relieve suffering, and invest in hope—we didn’t have to search for partners.

They were already there.

My Neighbors’ Children—working toward a world where no child is hungry.

Reflections of Trinity—working toward a world where no family goes hungry.

These weren’t charity projects.

These were aligned missions.

We didn’t support them out of pity.

We joined them out of purpose.

Mission has a way of introducing you to your people.

The Spiritual Shift — From “Somebody Ought To” to “I Am Somebody”

Every church knows the old phrase:

Somebody ought to...

Somebody ought to help.

Somebody ought to fix this.

Somebody ought to do something.

But mission makes a different sound:

“I am somebody.”

The minute one person steps forward, the flock moves.

The moment one voice says, “I’ll go first,”

faith becomes contagious.

Movements don't start with committees.
They start with callings.

God stirs individuals.
Mission forms communities.

Pastoral Reflection

Charity comforted us.
Mission changed us.

Charity helped us survive the hard days.
Mission helped us discover why God placed us here.

Charity was something we did.
Mission became something we were becoming.

We learned the Spirit wasn't asking us to respond to every crisis.
The Spirit was shaping us to take responsibility for our calling.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God of purpose and provision,
turn our charity into calling
and our sympathy into service.
Give us a mission that outlives us,
a purpose that guides us,
and partners who reveal Your heart.

Make us a people who do not wait for a crisis to love well,
but who invest deeply in the work You are already
blessing. Send us not just to help...
but to join You.
Amen.

Chapter Fourteen

From One Flashlight to a Constellation of Light

(How Our Mission Became Brighter Than Our Congregation)



When we first shifted from the **funnel to the flashlight**,
the church finally understood its purpose.

We weren't trying to keep the lights on.
We were trying to shine them.

One flashlight brought clarity—
a single beam revealing where God was calling Macland to go.

But clarity invites responsibility.
And responsibility invites expansion.
And expansion invites something unexpected:

The light began to multiply.

At first, it was individuals—
people picking up their own small flashlights,
shining into the places only they could reach.

But soon we realized something deeper:

**Our partners weren't carrying flashlights.
They were carrying floodlights.**

And when your partners shine brighter than you...
the church begins to disappear in the best possible way.

Before the Shift — One Flashlight, One Center

For years, the pastor held the beam.
The session aligned the beam.
The committees discussed the beam.
The congregation followed the beam.

One light.
One center.
One identity.

It made the church easy to locate.

“Where is the church?”
“Right there — in the beam.”

But one beam limits reach.
One beam limits capacity.
One beam limits imagination.

It keeps the church visible...
but small.

After the Shift — A Constellation of Light

As soon as Macland embraced a missional identity—
relieving suffering, feeding people, investing in hope—
we realized something holy:

We weren't the biggest light in the story.

Our partners—
the very ministries we supported—
shone farther, stronger, and more brilliantly than we ever
could alone.

Reflections of Trinity doesn't hold a flashlight.
It runs a **searchlight** into the heart of hunger and poverty.

My Neighbors' Children doesn't hold a flashlight.
It floods entire communities with nourishment, dignity, and
hope.

The Extension doesn't hold a flashlight.
It beams restoration into addiction, homelessness, and
despair.

What we carried was a flashlight.
What they carried were floodlights.

And something beautiful happened:

**The more faithfully their lights shined,
the less the church needed to be seen.**

Not because the church disappeared...
but because it finally became what Jesus intended:

A servant, not a spotlight.
A connection, not the center.
A catalyst, not the glory.

The Disappearing Church — The Zen of the Kingdom

There's a teaching—popularized by Bruce Lee—that says:

“If you stare at the finger pointing to the moon, you will miss the heavenly glory.”

The finger is not the point.
The moon is.

Likewise:

- The church is not the point.
- The Kingdom is the point.
- The light is the point.

In the funnel model, the church is the finger.
In the flashlight model, the church still holds the finger.
But in the many-flashlights model?

**The finger disappears into the night sky.
Only the light remains.**

You cannot point to the church.
You can only see what the church illuminates.

When our partners shine brighter,
we become nearly invisible.

And that invisibility is not loss.
It is fulfillment.

It means we have finally stopped drawing attention to ourselves
and started drawing attention to the work.

The church becomes like the moon in daylight—
still present, still real,

but overwhelmed by a brighter light
shining in the places we could never reach alone.

That is not decline.
That is discipleship.

Identity by Illumination, Not Presence

In the old model, you measured the church by:

- attendance,
- buildings,
- programs,
- branding.

In the new model, the church is measured by:

- the hunger it relieves,
- the suffering it reduces,
- the transformation it empowers,
- the partnerships it strengthens,
- the hope it multiplies.

The more faithful we became,
the less visible we became.

Because the church is no longer the beacon.
It is the **grid** supplying power to the beacons.

We do not shine instead of our partners.
We shine *into* our partners,
and they illuminate the world.

A single flashlight church asks:
“How do we shine?”

A constellation church asks:
“Whose shine can we amplify?”

One puts the church in the center.
The other puts the Kingdom in the center.

The Practical Shift — Visibility Down, Impact Up

When the mission becomes bigger than the congregation, several things happen:

- People talk more about the mission and less about the church.
- Stories highlight the partners more than the home base.
- The community knows the work without necessarily knowing the origin.
- The church becomes harder to find—unless you follow the light.

This is the paradox of Kingdom work:

The more we serve, the less we shine.
The less we shine, the farther the light reaches.

Pastoral Reflection — The Blessed Disappearance

There was a time when I worried
that Macland would vanish.

That we would shrink, fade, disappear.
That our name would become small.

But then I saw something truer:

We weren't disappearing.
We were **dissolving** into the light.

We were losing visibility
because we were gaining purpose.

We were shrinking
so the Kingdom could grow.

We were stepping aside
so the floodlights could do their work.

And when I looked for the church,
I found it—

not in one place,
but in all the places
where the light was shining.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

God of the great and quiet light,

Make us a people who no longer need to be the center,
as long as Your mission is seen.

Let our identity disappear
into the work You are doing.

Let our presence dissolve
into the compassion we extend.

Let our name fade
into the names of those we partner with
who shine farther than we ever could.

Because the goal was never to be visible.
The goal was always to be faithful.

Turn our flashlight into a constellation,
and our constellation into a sky
no one can miss. Amen.

Chapter Fifteen

From Consensus to Alignment

(How We Stopped Trying to Please Everyone and Started Following the Spirit Together)

For a long time, we believed progress required **consensus**.
Everyone needed to agree.

Everyone needed to feel comfortable.

Everyone needed to nod at the same time.

Consensus felt holy.

Consensus felt unifying.

Consensus felt safe.

But here is what we learned:

Consensus can kill calling.

Consensus shrinks vision until no one is threatened.

Consensus reorganizes mission around the most anxious voice in the room.

Consensus demands unanimity—and unanimity often produces **anonymity**.

Decisions grow smaller.

Dreams grow safer.

Energy grows thinner.

This is why we were stuck.

Then something shifted—something spiritual, something freeing:

We stopped seeking **consensus**
and started pursuing **alignment**.

Alignment is not about everyone agreeing.

It is about finding the people who are called in the same direction.

And once we made that shift, we discovered something stunning:

There is always a community of the called.

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Living for Consensus

(What exhausted us)

Before the shift, we...

- **waited for everyone to be ready**
before taking a step.
- **softened vision**
to avoid conflict.
- **protected feelings**
instead of pursuing mission.
- **held endless meetings**
instead of creating movement.
- **mistook politeness for unity**
and stalled as a result.
- **let fear steer decisions**
rather than calling.
- **designed plans around the most anxious voices.**

Consensus preserves peace.

But peace without movement is not the gospel.

After the Shift — Living with Alignment

(What energized us)

After the shift, we began to...

- **seek people of shared calling**, not shared preference.
- **trust conviction**, not caution, to set the pace.
- **let dissent be honored**, but not controlling.
- **build teams of like-hearted, like-called people.**
- **clarify purpose**, rather than dilute it.
- **measure unity by movement**, not unanimity.
- **trust that the Spirit gathers the ones who are ready.**

Alignment preserves mission.

Mission creates movement.

This was our holy shift.

The Spiritual Shift — From Pleasing People to Following the Spirit

There is a question that can paralyze any church:

“Is everybody okay?”

If “okayness” becomes the goal, then we slowly become concierges—attending to everyone but Jesus.

Jesus never sought consensus.

He sought disciples.

“Follow Me,” He said—

not “Do you all want to do this together?”

Some followed.

Some walked away.

Some opposed Him.

But the movement grew through **alignment**—

through people whose hearts burned in the same direction.

Consensus never started a revival or a reformation.
Alignment always does.

The Practical Shift — From Convincing Everyone to Finding the Right Ones

Consensus exhausts leaders.
Alignment **energizes** them.

Consensus asks: “**How do we bring everyone along?**”

Alignment asks: “**Who is the Spirit already stirring?**”

Consensus builds broad but shallow groups.

Alignment builds focused, deep, multiplying communities.

When we embraced alignment, we found:

- more clarity,
- more passion,
- more movement,
- more freedom,
- more fruit.

Alignment doesn't shrink the church.
Alignment **reveals** the church.

Pastoral Reflection

What we discovered was simple but freeing:

We do not need **everyone** to move.

We need the **called** to move.

Consensus kept us polite.

Alignment made us courageous.

Consensus made us anxious.

Alignment made us faithful.

Consensus built agreement.

Alignment built mission.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

Spirit of truth and calling,
gather us around Your purpose,
not our preferences.

Release us from the illusion of unanimity.
Set us free from the fear of disappointing imaginary crowds.

Give us eyes to see the ones You have called,
ears to hear the direction You are leading,
and courage to follow wherever You go.

Make us a community of the called—
aligned with Your heart,
alive with Your mission,
and free to move in Your Name.

Amen.

Chapter Sixteen

From Audience of People to Audience of One

*(How We Stopped Performing for Approval and Started
Living from Presence)*

Every church has an audience.

At least, we think we do.

We imagine people are watching, evaluating, critiquing:

- What will **they** think?
- Will **they** be upset?
- What if **they** don't like it?
- What will **they** say afterward?

But eventually we learned something both liberating and slightly humorous:

People are not thinking about us as much as we think they are.

Most of the time, people are not our audience—they are busy managing their own.

We began to see that the anxiety we carried wasn't about others at all.

It was about the **audience in our heads**.

And that audience was loud.

But then we discovered a quieter truth—a truth that settled our breathing and steadied our steps:

God is our audience.

Not the crowd.

Not the critics.

Not the imaginary “they.”

This was our holy shift.

Before the Shift — Living for an Audience of People

(What drained our courage)

Before the shift, we...

- **feared disappointing others**
instead of discerning God.
- **worried about reactions**
instead of listening for calling.
- **softened vision**
to avoid conflict.
- **imagined critics everywhere**
even when no one had spoken.
- **measured decisions by comfort**
instead of conviction.
- **believed people were thinking about us**
as much as we were thinking about them.

Anxiety grows when the room becomes your judge.

After the Shift — Living for an Audience of One

(What steadied our courage)

After the shift, we began to...

- **seek God's approval first,**
not public applause.
- **listen for calling,**
not commentary.
- **pursue faithfulness,**
not popularity.
- **discern direction,**
not avoid discomfort.
- **move with clarity,**
not react to imagined resistance.

- **trust that God's pleasure**
is enough to sustain us.

When the room stops being your judge,
God becomes your **center**.

This was our holy shift.

The Inner Crowd — The Audience in Our Minds

We often fear what *people* will think...
but the deeper truth is this:

We fear what **we think people think**.

That imagined audience is powerful:

- They whisper caution.
- They amplify fear.
- They distort reality.
- They paralyze courage.

Once we learned to meet that inner audience with grace—
to bless it, quiet it, release it—
something holy emerged:

**We stopped managing imaginations
and started listening to God.**

The Spiritual Shift — Practicing the Presence of God

When we live for an audience of One, our posture changes:

- We breathe deeper.
- We move slower.
- We decide clearer.
- We trust sooner.

Brother Lawrence called it “the practice of the presence of God.” We began calling it **peace**.

Because when God is your audience...
fear has no place to sit.

Pastoral Reflection

There is a moment every church faces—
a moment when you decide whether you will follow your
calling or your **crowd**.

We realized we could not carry both.
One would silence the other.

The audience of people kept us anxious.
The audience of One made us brave.

Fear shrank.
Courage grew.
Decisions aligned.
Mission clarified.

This was our holy shift.

Closing Prayer

Holy One,
quiet the false audience within us.
Silence the voices that do not belong.
Clear the room of our fears.

Fill our minds with Your presence,
our hearts with Your courage,
our steps with Your call.

Make us people who live, move, and love
for Your eyes alone. Amen.

Chapter Seventeen

From God in Our Story to Us in God's Story

(How We Became the Kind of Characters God Could Use)

For a long time, we thought faith worked like this:

We had a story.
And God showed up inside it.

God helped when things went wrong.
God comforted us when things hurt.
God blessed what we were already doing.

God was important.
But God was often a **supporting character**.

Then something shifted.

We began to realize that the Bible does not tell the story of
people who invited God into *their* plans.
It tells the story of God inviting people into *God's* purposes.

And that changes everything.

The Discovery — Character Shapes Plot

Every good story knows this truth:

Character shapes plot.

Plots don't move because circumstances change.
Plots move because characters make decisions.

They choose courage or fear.
They choose trust or control.
They choose movement or safety.

And somewhere along the way, we realized something
humbling and holy:

God was not asking us to save the church.
God was forming us into the kind of people through whom a
different future could emerge.

Before the Shift — God as a Character in *Our* Story

Before the shift, we...

- asked God to **ble**ss our plans.
- prayed for God to **fix** problems.
- treated faith as **divine support**.
- saw God as **the responder**, not the initiator.
- **measured success by survival**.
- **imagined closure as failure**.

God was present.
But God was often seen only as **reactive**.

We didn't realize it then, but we were asking God to help us
preserve a story that had already run its course.

After the Shift — Us as Characters in *God's* Story

After the shift, we began to see differently.

We stopped asking:
"How do we keep this going?"

And started asking:

“What is God doing, and how do we join it?”

We realized that God wasn't trying to keep Macland alive as an institution.

God was shaping Macland as a people.

And here is the part that still takes our breath away:

Once we became the kind of characters who could live God's mission,

God would not let the story end.

Not because buildings mattered.

Not because traditions had to be preserved.

But because the story was still needed.

The Turning Point — When Closure Was No Longer the Ending

There was a season when closure felt inevitable.

The numbers said it.

The trends said it.

The logic said it.

But something deeper was happening beneath the data.

God was writing a different ending.

Not by changing circumstances overnight,
but by changing **us**.

We were learning to move.

To trust.

To partner.

To release control.

To follow mission instead of maintenance.

And in becoming those characters, the plot shifted.

Not dramatically.
Not magically.
But faithfully.

God didn't rescue us *from* the story.
God rewrote the story *through* us.

The Spiritual Truth — God Writes with People

God does not write stories with buildings.
God writes stories with people.

God does not advance the Kingdom through property.
God advances it through character.

God does not preserve institutions.
God forms disciples.

When we stopped asking God to preserve our chapter
and started offering ourselves to God's larger story,
the future opened.

We didn't save the church.
We became the church.

Pastoral Reflection

Looking back, we can say this with humility and gratitude:

We did not keep Macland from "closing".
God did.

But God did it the way God always does.

By shaping people who were willing to trust, move, release,
and follow.

We became characters God could use.
And because of that, the story continued.

Not because it had to.
But because it mattered.

Closing Prayer

Author of life and love,
thank You for writing with us.

Forgive us for the times we asked You to serve our story
instead of surrendering ourselves to Yours.

Keep shaping our character—
toward courage, trust, generosity, and grace,
into characters you can use
in Your story, not ours,
in Your kingdom, not ours.

And wherever this story goes next,
may we always remember:

The plot belongs to You.
The calling belongs to You.
And our joy is simply to play our part faithfully.

Amen.

Epilogue

When the Service Ends

We said it every week.
Almost casually.
Almost without thinking.

Now the worship service is over.
And church truly begins.

We thought it was a benediction.
A closing line.
A liturgical period at the end of a sentence.

We were wrong.

It was a **compass**.
It was a **map**.
It was an **invitation into the wild**.

For years, we imagined church as something that happened *in here*—
inside walls,
inside hours,
inside routines we could predict.

But the Spirit has never been interested in containment.
The Spirit is always interested in **movement**.

Worship does not end.
It **spills**.

Church does not stay put.
It **scatters**.

The songs quiet.
The prayers fade.
The lights dim.
The doors open.

And that is when the adventure begins.

Because everything we practice together—
attention, compassion, courage, generosity, trust—
was never meant to be a weekly performance.

It was training.
Conditioning.
Rehearsal for a story that unfolds **everywhere else**.

Into classrooms and kitchens.
Into meetings and neighborhoods.
Into the awkward hallway conversations.
Into the places where courage is required,
and hope is scarce,
and kindness is rare,
and light is needed.

We didn't always know where God was leading us.
We still don't.
But we learned one of the holiest truths of all:

Adventure belongs to the willing.

Character shapes plot.
And when a community becomes brave,
God doesn't reward them with safety—
God rewards them with **a bigger story**.

When a community becomes generous,
God entrusts them with abundance.

When a community becomes faithful,
God refuses to let the story end early.

We thought we were trying to save a church.
We were not.

God was forming a people
He could keep **sending**.

A people not shaped by fear,
but by imagination.
Not defined by a building,

but by a calling.
Not limited by what they once were,
but awakened to what they could become.

Here is the quiet miracle of it all:

God did not need us to preserve the church.
God needed us to **become** the church—
leaning forward,
looking outward,
moving always toward the next good thing.

Not perfect.
Not unanimous.
Not finished.

Just willing.

So if this story finds its way into another congregation's hands,
let it not be read as a set of instructions,
or a formula,
or a clever restructuring strategy.

Let it be read as a dare.

A call to step out of the boat.
A whisper that says,
“Try something. Risk something. Follow something.”

A reminder that the church is not a noun to protect.
It is a verb to practice.
A movement to join.
A story to walk into.

The service is not the destination.
It is the trailhead.

And the Spirit—
wild, untamed, uncontained—
is already out there ahead of us,
waiting at the next bend,
calling us toward whatever comes now.

God of the open door,

We are standing at the threshold again.

Not at the end, really—
but at the place where endings become beginnings,
where a book closes and a life opens,
where the last page is not a period
but a breath.

We thank you for what brought us here.
For the saints who carried the church when we did not know
how.
For the prayers that held us when our plans failed.
For the songs that kept singing even when our hearts were
tired.
For the traditions that gave us roots—
and for the holy disruption that gave us wings.

Forgive us for the times we confused the church with what we
owned.
Forgive us for the times we protected nouns
while the world begged for verbs.
Forgive us for the ways fear disguised itself as wisdom,
and control pretended to be faithfulness.

And now, Lord, give us the grace of sobriety—
clear eyes, open hands, and steady hearts.

Make us response-able.
Able to respond instead of react.
Able to listen instead of assume.
Able to bless instead of blame.
Able to love without needing to be right first.

Send us out the door.

Send us out of our old certainties
and into your living world.

Send us out as people who practice what we pray.
People who don't just talk about compassion but embody it.
People who don't just believe in peace but make it.
People who don't just admire Jesus but follow him.

Let worship be our starting block.
Let prayer become our posture.
Let love become our reflex.

When we are tempted to retreat into what is safe,
pull us forward into what is faithful.

When we are tempted to chase applause,
lead us toward quiet goodness.

When we are tempted to measure success,
teach us to measure faithfulness.

And when we forget—because we will—
bring us back.
One day at a time.
One step at a time.
One verb at a time.

Now take this church that is no longer simply a place
and let it become a people.

A people who cross thresholds.
A people who tell the truth.
A people who feed the hungry.
A people who welcome the stranger.
A people who repair what is broken.
A people who shine light without blinding anyone.

Hear us O' God, as we pray seeking Your Kingdom, and not
our own, praying as our Lord taught, saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our (debts),

as we forgive our (debtors).

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom,

and the power,

and the glory,

forever.

Amen.

**Now the book is over.
And church truly begins.**

Go, and on your way,
may the Lord bless you and keep you,
make His face to shine upon you,
be gracious to you,
and give you peace,
now and forevermore.

Amen.