

Faith by Design:

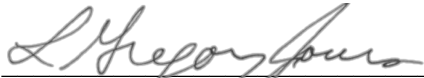
Exploiting intersections between Acts and design thinking to cultivate the conditions for innovation in the local church as an expression of traditioned innovation

by

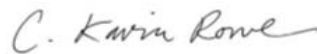
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2021

ABSTRACT

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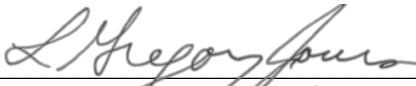
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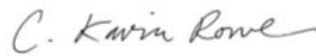
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Abstract

In 2021, congregational life in America feels troubled. The residue of vitality in vacant Sunday school classrooms, dated worship bulletins, antiquated committee structures, and worn pew cushions reminds churchgoers of the ways congregations once successfully capitalized on the intersection of industrialization and an evangelical spirit. However, today, the world has changed. Traditional churches that mirror a now-shuttered factory across town struggle under the weight of dated, worker-dependent, industrial expressions of congregational life. These congregations feel trapped, which inhibits innovation and steers churches toward the same fate as those factories across town.

Some believe that what local churches need is a way to cultivate innovation. To do this, congregations need the tools and a pathway that leads to innovative breakthroughs. Design thinking is a process built on an accessible set of tools that can provide teams in any field the steps necessary to cultivate innovation.

For the church, and specifically local congregations, innovation cannot happen in a vacuum. Churches have histories and traditions, most of which root themselves in a tradition connected to the book of Acts. As churches cling to specific traditions, they often maintain practices as traditionalism, which begets a shallow expression of tradition. In these instances, faithful innovation is necessary. However, to innovate for the sake of innovation alone represents a shallow expression of innovation. The church needs to hold together tradition and innovation in ways that give life to a shared life rooted through embodied traditions.

Faith by Design explores and exploits intersections between the embodied traditions outlined in Acts and the modern pathway to innovation described in design

thinking. By adapting the approaches, tools, and practices of design thinkers and then exploiting these processes' intersections with the stories of the early church in Acts, the congregations can discover and design a renewed sense of life and vitality. *Faith by Design* invites congregations to explore the design thinking process and practices within the rich Christian tradition in ways that will help cultivate the conditions necessary for the emergence of renewed practices and behaviors which beget life, vitality, and hope.

*This thesis is dedicated to Natalie, Cam, and Finn.
From side trips on vacation to another podcast episode on
design, I could not have done it without you. I am ready to
get out of the office and off of the computer so I can share
more of this amazing life with you. You're the best, and I
love you more than I can possibly express.*

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I wanted to fulfill this goal and get this degree long before I was willing to speak it out loud. I guess that as a mom, you just knew. Thank you. Saying I love you is not enough, but it's all I've got.

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Introduction

A Lesson from a Swamp

Seattle is an amazing city, but it has not always been this way. In its early days, life in Seattle was so difficult that officials considered moving the city. Ultimately, instead of moving the city center 130 years ago, they made an innovative decision so that the city could flourish.¹

In the 1800s, the center of Seattle was at Pioneer Square, on Eliot Bay at Yesler Way near Henry Yesler's Sawmill. Loggers brought timber in from the Pacific Northwest forests and sent it down Yesler Way to the sawmill. The sawmill processed the wood and loaded it on boats bound for the rest of the West Coast. The location of the sawmill was ideal for exporting timber. However, it was a swamp, which is far from ideal for a young city. Ocean tides caused the most significant problems because living at sea level meant toilets and plumbing could not function during high tide. City leaders debated the problem until the Great Seattle Fire of 1889.

On June 6, 1889, Seattle burned down. City-wide fires happened in many cities including Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco, and Tokyo during that era. In October of 1871, approximately 300 people died in the Great Chicago Fire. Thankfully, Seattle's fire had no deaths, and city leaders wisely used the rebuilding period to make significant changes.

The most significant change came when planners and engineers finally decided to elevate the city streets and sidewalks eleven feet above sea level. However, such a

¹ Avery Trufelman, "The Seattle Underground," 99percentinvisible.org, 1/9/2018, accessed 9/5/2018, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/mini-stories-volume-4/4/>.

massive public works project takes time that businesses and residents could not afford to wait on. The public needed to rebuild and reopen immediately, which led to an innovative design solution: build new doors.

During the rebuild, every home and business added a second-floor entrance. These upstairs doors allowed businesses to rebuild immediately and then shift things upstairs after the sidewalks and roads were raised. The most remarkable aspect of the plan is that it worked! Today, no one would think that some of Seattle's streets are eleven feet above a swamp, but Bill Speidel's Underground Tour of Seattle in Pioneer Square allows guests to visit a few of the original first-floor entrances from the rebuild after the 1889 fire.²

This lesson from a swamp is a hopeful image for a thesis considering innovation for the church. It is not the perfect analog for a congregation seeking innovation; however, it is a reminder that the future demands new doors. Furthermore, it shows the promise of building new doors within the traditions, patterns, and systems that make a gathering of believers a church. The Seattle image provides promise for a both/and approach to designing a future within congregations. This approach is a lot like what Greg Jones calls 'traditioned innovation.'

Innovation for the church

People need innovation. In *Christian Social Innovation*, L. Gregory Jones writes that people are hungry for innovation in all areas of life, including "education, health, business, journalism, and even civil society itself."³ Innovation and inspiration come to individuals, groups, leaders, businesses, and organizations in many ways. Sometimes

² Bill Speidel's Underground Tour <http://www.undergroundtour.com/> Accessed 9/5/2020.

³ L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016. 1.

innovation comes from the embrace of an intensely analytical, data-driven process. One might think, "moneyball for ...," referencing the 2003 Michael Lewis book and film of the same name.⁴ Other times, innovation emerges from a spark of inspiration. Inspired epiphanies are wonderful, yet they are also elusive and difficult to replicate. This search for innovation raises a question: What if there is a way to cultivate the conditions that lead to innovation? What if individuals and organizations can learn how to be innovative? Moreover, what if such innovation can come in ways that are informed by the past, generated from within an organization, and in service to hope reflected in the past, present, future, and the ultimate telos?

This thesis is about cultivating the conditions for innovation in the church. Across time, the church has embodied traditions enumerated in Acts. Some of these traditions are specifically mentioned in Acts 2:42-27, 4:32-35, and 5:12-16.⁵ Though the shape and mechanics of the church's worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service has changed across 2,000 years, these essential practices are embodied by the church across time. These practices serve as containers of the church's intangible tradition. The scriptures practically assume these practices are a part of the church. Beyond Acts and being the church means holding to these traditions, even as they change shape across time. This change in shape is what it means to build new doors in the church.

The traditional church in the United States today needs the new doors of innovation. For decades, the mechanics of the patterns, practices, and ways embodying faith have resisted change. Traditions have become rote and many have confused a past generation's specific expressions of gathering, worshipping, sharing, studying,

⁴ Michael Lewis, *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc. 2003.

⁵ William H. Willimon, *Acts. Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for teaching and preaching*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. 42.

evangelizing, and serving as essential for salvation. While these expressions of traditional practices did lead to salvation for many, the specific shape of these traditions is not essential for salvation in any way. How a congregation “did church,” 70, 100, or 200 years ago is not essential for salvation. Instead, it is essential that the church gathers, worships, learns, shares, serves, and grows in a given time as a gateway to faithfulness and salvation. And through these traditions, today’s church tethers itself to the church across the last 2,000 years.

However, far too many people in congregations today resist innovation and the reimagining of traditions. They have clung to a way of doing things that subverts a spiritual need and inhibits the movement of the Spirit. Yet, the stories of Acts reflect growth and innovation in the church. Acts virtually instructs faithful congregations to look to change, grow, and renew the expressions of faith by learning how to cultivate innovation through contemporary methods while maintaining a connection to the Spirit of God through faithful traditions like those named above.

The good news is when the church looks to innovate, it will find that gaining the skills necessary for innovating for a time and place can be learned. The church can learn practices and patterns that, when informed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, can cultivate innovation within the church’s traditions. In the emerging field of design thinking, today’s most innovative design thinkers believe it is possible to learn practices that reliably lead to innovation, no matter the industry. Their message to the church could be that by learning and engaging in design practices and process, and then infusing the design practices with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a church can bring about the

conditions necessary for congregational thriving as it cultivates innovation in a rapidly changing world.

Today the world is VUCA: volatile, uncertain, chaotic, and ambiguous.⁶ Things that once were reliable and predictable often are not any longer. These conditions are a problem for church leaders looking to improve by merely refining practices and honing procedures. In generations past, factories and industry so heavily influenced everyday life that things felt mechanical and predictable. In such settings, refining details and optimizing for marginal gains can allow one's preferred production method to find improvement and success.

In decades past, a congregation's prominent lay leaders adapted the skills they learned at work for their church life. This approach to organizing life and then refining the church's processes and practices worked well. When a congregation was overwhelmed, struggling, or just a little complacent, a "back-to-the-basics" approach, supplemented by strategic planning, beget great success as everyone worked a little harder, a little smarter, and with more attention to detail. Congregations embraced these processes but did not realize how much of their success was due to the predictability of their systems. In predictable systems, the profits and production increase with a refined operation. However, that does not necessarily work anymore. Life is not predictable. And the shape of congregations and communities no longer mirrors the industrial systems of 20th-century businesses.

⁶ L. Gregory Jones. "Learning Intuition." on *Faith and Leadership*. 2/7/2017. <https://www.faihandleadership.com/l-gregory-jones-learning-intuition> and Nathan Bennett and G. James Lemoine. "What VUCA Really Means for You." *Harvard Business Review*. January-February, 2014. <https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you>.

Today, churches exist in a VUCA world which demands a different skill set than they had in the past. Such an approach is an invitation to discovery rather than reorganization. When something no longer works, a new set of practices and pathways must be found. This thesis posits that a viable pathway toward innovation for congregations is to embrace design thinking, inspired by God's work through the church in Acts, as an expression of traditioned innovation.

What is Traditioned Innovation

The church has a history. Every local congregation has a history. And these histories connect to the church Luke describes in the Acts of the Apostles. For 2,000 years, local churches have sought to fulfill Jesus' command in chapter 1, verse 8, as he declares, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."⁷ They have done this, in part, by maintaining the embodied traditions of the church that Luke lays out in chapter 2, verse 42-47, as cited above. Since Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, the church has worked to connect people with the Spirit of God in pursuit of this mission. For many who came to the faith in the late-20th century, the church's culture and practice took on an industrial feel. The church was a little spiritual factory that made Christians. And the system worked well, until it didn't.

Today, regular attendance and congregational engagement wane, and the weight of outdated methods of arranging congregational life and maintaining faithful traditions has left the church a victim of its own success.⁸ With the shifts in society and culture away from the stability that made the traditional church successful, congregations are

⁷ Robert W. Wall. "Acts of the Apostles" in vol. 10, *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. 40, 42.

⁸ Aaron Earls. "20 Vital Stats for Ministry in 2020." 1/7/2020 *LifeWayResearch.com*. Accessed 2/10/2021.

overdue for a change. The historical stability of the church in the U.S. leaves a remnant that is often averse to change. However, beyond this remnant, most see the need for innovation.

Greg Jones explores how innovation inspires God's people and the church in his book, *Christian Social Innovation*. Jones describes how the traditional church in the United States feels deeply troubled because, among other things, it has ceased to innovate. In the wake of the post-World War 2 expansion, churches were wildly successful. Today though, communities that birthed once-successful congregations are now changing. The factories and industry that fueled much of the economic stability and growth across recent decades have streamlined, downsized, or closed. The folks who worked in those same factories remain and fail to understand why things are no longer as life-giving and viable as they once were. Furthermore, many also lack the skills and practices to imagine what could be next, so they remain entrenched and dissatisfied with all they know.

Though many see the need for something to change, without the inspiration or skills to successfully design and innovate in ways that serve a congregation's embodied traditions and mission, they too are stuck. For some, the prospect of learning something new is so daunting that they simply fade into the background. Others entrench themselves against change. However, such polarized reactions are not necessary when a congregation remembers its call to embody a set of traditions in service to being Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. "How we always did it" and "how might we do it" need not be at odds. There is a better way to meet a need for stability and a need to change. Greg Jones describes a mindset the church can embrace called 'traditioned innovation.'

Jones defines traditioned innovation as:

a way of thinking and living that holds the past and future together in creative tension, a habit of being that depends on wise judgment, requiring both a deep fidelity to the patterns of the past that have borne us to the present and a radical openness to the changes that will carry us forward. Our feet are firmly on the ground with our hands open to the future.⁹

Jones continues,

Traditioned innovation is an important mindset to have in any circumstance. It is even more crucial in times of instability, in wilderness circumstance, in contexts where we often feel overwhelmed by all the new things that surround us already – in times like the present.¹⁰

The church in the United States is in a wilderness. Local congregations struggle under the weight of dated structures, programs, processes, and frameworks for expressing faith.

The good news, though, is a mindset shaped by traditioned innovation can design a path forward. Traditioned innovation assures the church that the path is not entirely new. The traditions of gathering, worship, praying, sharing, and reaching out always remain. These traditions find new expression in every age as a faithful connection to the first church in Acts. And in that way, the church has moved for 2,000 years by remembering its beginning while looking to its end simultaneously.¹¹

The church has always faced difficult circumstances and unusual problems. It has always taken inspiration from history and tradition to craft unique solutions through the Holy Spirit's animating presence. In a way, traditioned innovation is both what the church needs to do and what it has done before. Traditioned innovation points the church to who

⁹ Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 51.

¹¹ James William McClendon, Jr. *Doctrine: Systematic Theology* vol. II. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. Both Jones and McClendon write about holding together what is now with what was and what will be. McClendon writes about it for Christian worship, “Over long periods of time Christian worship missed its mark by seeking a nostalgic return to a real or mythical past time period, but true biblical worship is never nostalgic and never mythical; its feet are firmly planted in the here and now of today, and its movement forward, onto the beckoning end. The church remembers only in order to remember, and it's re-membering its reconstitution of Christ body in the gathering, is focused on the future coming that is already in part realized.” p 408-9.

it was, who it is, and who it will be. And as the church looks to build new doors within a framework of traditioned innovation, it finds inspiration from its past and identifies tools for implementing that inspiration from today to build its future.

Design Thinking, Inspired Implementation, and Traditioned Innovation

Though a more thorough definition and description of design thinking will follow, it is enough to say right now that design thinking is an empathetic, constraints-recognizing, action-driven, iterative process that assists in solving problems by generating previously unimagined possibilities. The design thinking process began to codify about fifty years ago at the nexus of design, engineering, and innovation at Stanford University. Today's design thinking processes rise from the belief that everyone can think and work in ways that lead to innovation. Engaging in a distinct sequence of steps helps unlock imagination and creativity from inside individuals.¹² As it emerges from its post-industrial period, the church needs to reimagine ways to embody its tradition and fulfill its mission. Design thinking is the process that can guide the church through this process of discovery.

Design thinking's promise for the church, as it has already been hinted at, is tied to the beginning of the church in Acts. Scripture provides both a guide to the traditions of the church and the stories that serve as inspiration for the design thinking process. The sermons of Acts involve reaching back to tradition and building upon it in freshly inspired ways. The gathering of the church in Acts 2 embodies several essential traditions that shape congregational life. The gift of the Holy Spirit generates hope for the new believers in ways that drive the newly formed communities to share and collaborate in

¹² Bernie Roth. "Design Process and Creativity." Summer, 1973. <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/bernie-roth-treatise-on-design-thinking>. Accessed 11/6/2019.

radical, if not idealized, ways. The expansion of the community comes through embracing diversity and finding a place for all who have needs. And finally, the ministry of Acts grows, changes, and progresses throughout the narrative in ways that inspire today's church to experiment rather than remain entrenched in the industrial expressions of yesterday's success. These aspects of Acts inspire practices for the church willing to explore and experiment with the design thinking process.

By utilizing design thinking to create frameworks and approach problem-solving, culture shaping, and embodying the Christian faith within a congregation, churches meld their traditions with the inspiration from the early church's stories and a promising modern strategy. Design thinking is an implementation strategy that can draw energy from God's inspiration through the book of Acts in ways that fulfill the church's mission to be Jesus's witness to the ends of the earth.

Conclusion and Thesis Declaration

In 1889, Seattle was at a crossroads. Rebuilding after the fire forced the city to innovate as it moved forward. The solution of upstairs entrances was simple and effective. It was a design solution, and, in a way, it was design thinking ahead of its time. Similar innovation is now needed across society today, and especially in the church.

The church needs viable ways to move forward and innovate. For some, the need to innovate meant altogether leaving historic congregations and starting over.¹³ However, that is not for everyone. Many believe that God could still bring life to the traditional church's dry bones, if only they knew how. Traditioned innovation, "a way of thinking and living that holds the past and future together in creative tension," is a framework

¹³ For example, church planters who do not want to deal with traditional congregations and denominations.

through which the traditional church can find hope.¹⁴ By holding together the essential traditions and practices of the church found in Acts, with the inspirational presence of the Holy Spirit across time, and creating intersections with the steps of an innovative design thinking process, the church can design a path forward through inspired practices.

The world today is VUCA, and the once-familiar streets feel like they have moved at least 11 feet! However, the Holy Spirit still guides and inspires Christian people and congregations through the stories of Acts. Just as the Spirit led the church through the strange lands of its post-ascension beginnings, it will do so again. Acts was, has been, and always will be both an authoritative template to draw from, and a source of inspiration for the church. Acts reveals how God continues to work through the church. It shows that no matter what odd, unique, or seemingly impossible circumstances it might face, the mission of the church continues to include gathered congregations at work as Jesus' witnesses "to the ends of the earth." How congregations and the church live out being witnesses to the ends of the earth will look different in different times and cultures but Acts always inspires. The question becomes, how will the church embody the inspiration of the Spirit this time?

For a congregation seeking to innovate through the tradition and practices of the Christian faith, but beyond the structures built upon post-World War II industrial success, a design thinking approach shows great promise. In *Creating Great Choices*, Jennifer Reil and Roger Martin write that "Design Thinking is ... an approach to solving mysteries about the world, creating new ways to meet the needs of users, and producing new value for organizations."¹⁵ By embracing and adopting the approaches, tools, and

¹⁴ Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, 51.

¹⁵ Roger Martin and Jennifer Reil, *Creating Great Choices*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017. xvi.

practices of design thinkers from business, education, and the social sector, and then exploiting the intersections of these innovative processes with the stories of innovation from the early church in the book of Acts, the church can discover and design toward thriving. This thesis proposes that by exploring and exploiting intersections between a design thinking approach to problem-solving and the early church's stories in the Acts of the Apostles, Christians and congregations can discover innovations in practice that move beyond yesterday's industrial expressions of church. Working with a framework of traditioned innovation, *Faith by Design* invites congregations to explore and experiment within the rich Christian tradition in ways that allow for the emergence of renewed practices and behaviors which cultivate the conditions for life, vitality, and hope in ways the intersection of industrial models and an evangelical impulse no longer can.

Chapter 1 - Everything is Designed

Design thinking is an intentional process anyone can use to spark innovation, but what does that really mean? It is promising, but how does it work, and how might it bring life and hope to the traditional church in the United States? This chapter begins with helpful definitions of design thinking. It then addresses the way churches were typically designed. Next, it introduces how churches can move toward becoming design thinkers. And finally, the chapter closes by highlighting some of the stories from Acts that inspire this process.

What is Design Thinking?

In her book, *Design the Life You Love*, industrial designer Ayse Birsel writes, "Everything we use in everyday life is designed by a designer."¹ Though Birsel's portfolio includes pots, pans, office supplies, and toilet seats, her statement refers to every aspect of human life. Everything, not just the products we use every day, is designed. Some things are designed explicitly and intentionally, while other things result from absent-minded patterns and habits and are thus, unintentionally designed. But everything, from the font, binding, or digital format of this document, to a church's shared life, is designed.

As one considers the church and the design decisions that have shaped the church, Andy Crouch's definition of an institution is helpful. Institutions are shaped by "articles, arenas, rules, and roles."² These articles, arenas, rules, and roles combine to form a distinct ethos for every institution. It is important to name that since an institution's

¹ Ayse Birsel. *Design the Life You Love*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2015. 27.

² Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013. 172.

articles, arenas, rules, and roles are designed, they can also be redesigned. This is where design thinking becomes essential. Design thinking helps those interested in solving problems and generating changes to make those changes. However, that begs the question, what exactly is design thinking?

The introduction's working definition is that design thinking "is an empathetic, constraints-recognizing, action-driven, iterative process that assists in solving problems while generating possibilities toward a defined telos." This definition builds on research and wisdom from many other definitions. One of the most approachable definitions of design thinking comes from Peter Sims' book, *Little Bets*, when he writes, "Design thinking provides a set of creative methodologies for solving problems and generating ideas based on the building up of solutions rather than starting with the answer."³ ⁴

These two definitions provide a great start; however, it is worth noting that one could fill pages with definitions of design thinking and never entirely pin down a complete definition of design thinking.⁵ Design thinking can feel messy. Since design thinking happens through iterative cycles, it can feel like the process is collapsing on itself. And, as one engages in a design thinking process, it may well feel like the best hope for figuring things out is what Justice Potter Stewart noted in *Jacobellis vs. Ohio*, "I know it when I see it."⁶ Most will know what they are feeling and seeing as they immerse

³ Peter Sims. *Little Bets*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011. 12.

⁴ Other helpful definitions include:

Design thinking is "thinking like a designer would" by Tim Brown, *Change By Design*. New York: Harper Business, 2009. 62; It is "a way of solving problems that encourages positive risk-taking and creativity," John Spencer and A.J. Juliani. *Launch: Using Design Thinking to Boot Creativity and Bring Out the Maker in Every Student*. San Diego, CA: Dave Burgess Consulting, 2016. p52; "a problem-solving approach with a unique set of qualities: it is human-centered, possibility driven, opinion focused, and iterative." Jeanne Liedtka, Randy Salzman, Daisy Azer. *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 6

⁵ Sohrab Vossoughi notes that "The core of design thinking's problem could be that it is so difficult to pin down. While its effects are fairly clear - a combination of deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning that leads to an unusually-pragmatic strain of creativity - thinking of any sort is a human activity and humans are hard to figure out. Discussions about design thinking tend to focus on companies that employ it and the successes they achieve, rather than the people who actually do it." Sohrab Vossoughi. .

"Deconstructing the Design Thinker" *Rotman on Design*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 197.

⁶ "Jacobellis v. Ohio" Wikipedia, Wikipedia Foundation. Accessed 8/28.2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobellis_v._Ohio.

themselves in the process. This means that, ultimately, the design thinking process is best understood through action.

What is the Design Thinking Process?

The definition of design thinking refers to a process. Beyond "thinking like a designer," the design thinking process is a series of steps and cycles of iteration that bring the needs of a particular person, organization, or situation to the forefront in order to name a problem, and then explore possible solutions to the named problems. Among those who use and teach design thinking, there are countless variations in the process. From organization to organization, and firm to firm, each design thinker takes steps and makes leaps in different increments. Each group and each expression of the process will emphasize different aspects of the process. However, overall, all design thinking follows a similar path toward solution generation.

Many consider Stanford University to be the home of design thinking. The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design or the d.school, founded in 2003, is a place for practitioners of all kinds to apply design thinking to make real-world impacts in every field.^{7 8} And though their process has changed over time, currently the d.school describes a five-step design thinking process: *empathy, define, ideate, prototype, and test*.⁹ Within these five steps, those engaged in the design thinking process deploy strategies and tools to help generate knowledge and information before making inferences and leaps toward solutions. The process builds from empathy to testing and builds rough prototypes and quick experiments to generate innovative solutions to problems.

⁷ From this point forward, The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design is called the d.school.

⁸ Scott Doorley & Scott Witthoft. *Make Space*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012. 15.

⁹ The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design. *Design Thinking Bootleg*. Available for Download at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/5b19b2f2aa4a99e99b26b6bb/1528410876119/dschool_bootleg_dock_2018_final_sm+%282%29.pdf, accessed 11/23/2019.

Given the flexible nature of design thinking, others have chosen to group, shape, and emphasize different aspects of the process. In *Change by Design*, Tim Brown of IDEO defines the design thinking process as “a way of describing a set of principles that can be applied by diverse people to a wide range of problems.”¹⁰ To be more specific, though, he considers his process in cycles of ‘Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation.’¹¹ Brown uses these three “I’s” as broader categories and combines the more specific steps of the d.school’s process. For Brown, empathy and define are a part of generating inspiration. Ideation serves as an imaginative step to generate ideas based on the experience of those in need of a solution. Prototyping and testing fall under implementation, which is a continually iterative process of moving from rough prototypes to more refined solutions.

In their book, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good*, Jeanne Liedtka, Randy Salzman, and Daisy Azer use completely different language. Their work focuses on using design thinking in the social sector so they root their design process in a series of questions. They ask: *What is? What if? What wows? And what works?*¹² The first two questions consider the stakeholder needs through empathy, defining the problem, and ideating. Then the latter two questions look toward viable solutions for prototyping and testing. Ultimately though, Liedtka and her team recognize that “once innovators get comfortable with design thinking’s methods, tools, and mindsets, they mix and match the steps, emphasizing some and skipping others, and pick and choose among the variety of tools offered.”¹³

¹⁰ Brown, *Change by Design*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² Liedtka et.al, *Designing for the Greater Good*, 246.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 248.

A fourth and final variation on the design thinking process comes from *Design a Better Business*. This book describes design thinking as a continuous double loop or a figure 8.¹⁴ The process begins and ends in the center with a “point of view.” Moving into the top loop, a designer seeks to understand and ideate around a particular point of view. The process loops back through the center and turns to prototyping and validating before returning to the center. From the center and moving up to the top loop, the design thinking process focuses on empathy, problem definition, and ideation. After returning through the center, the design thinker works on prototyping and iterating to validate a solution for someone with a problem. This model perpetually builds refinement and iteration into generating meaningful solutions through design thinking. And this process can continue indefinitely. There is always another round of empathizing, iterating, refining, and testing to come.¹⁵

At this point, congregational design thinking might feel like a reach. These cycles and processes are strange and might sound like a foreign language. However, understanding design thinking comes quickly through engagement. Furthermore, design thinking overlaps with some other processes that some congregational leaders may be more familiar with. In recent years, many seeking understanding about leadership looked to Ronald Heifetz and his books, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* and *The Practices of Adaptive Leadership*.¹⁶ Heifetz applies adaptive leadership through a simple cycle of

¹⁴ Patrick van der Pijl, Justin Lokitz, and Lisa Kay Solomon. *Design a Better Business*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016. 17.

¹⁵ Moutee chooses to consider ten design thinking principles when he writes about integrating design thinking into business. His principles are that design thinking is: action-oriented, comfortable with change, human-centric, integrates foresight, a dynamic, constructive process, promotes empathy, reduces risks, can create meaning, can bring enterprise creativity to the next level is the new competitive logic of business strategy. For Moutee, applied design thinking works its way beyond a strategic series of steps into the daily practices necessary to reshape frameworks that provide innovation for businesses today and beyond. Idris Moutee. *Design Thinking for Strategic Innovation*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. 64-73.

¹⁶ Ronald Heifetz. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998. and Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linksy. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009.

observe, interpret, and intervene.¹⁷ This cycle is not about design thinking at all, though as an overview, these three steps provide a framework to understand the actual steps of a design thinking process. Observe and interpret relate to empathy, define, and ideate, while intervening happens at prototyping and iterating. In a very real way, one can see how the steps of a design thinking process put flesh on the categorical ideals of observing, interpreting, and intervening that many of Heifetz's readers are familiar with.

All of these explanatory aspects of design thinking are academic until they are embraced and engaged. Then they have power. Jennifer Riel and Roger Martin embrace design thinking in *Creating Great Choices* because it is a "way to create something new, something that does not now exist. It is an approach to solving mysteries about the world, creating new ways to meet the needs of users, and producing new value for organizations."¹⁸ By carrying participants in the process through a series of steps that unlock creativity, design thinking helps participants innovate where they are. Tim Brown of IDEO writes that, design thinking pushes through the limits on creativity by being "a set of principles that can be applied by diverse people to a wide range of problems" since "it taps into the capacities we all have but are overlooked by more conventional problem-solving practices."¹⁹ Design thinkers, regardless of experience, begin to "see the world as a place that welcomes new ideas, rather than a hostile environment that punishes change."²⁰ For this thesis, design thinking and its distinct steps help those willing to engage in the process, to create patterns, practices, and pathways that generate life, hope,

¹⁷ Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 32.

¹⁸ Martin and Riel. Xvi.

¹⁹ Brown. 4, 7.

²⁰ Roger Martin. *The Design of Business*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009. 153.

and possibilities for a church by enhancing the ways the local congregation can fulfill its mission to be witnesses for Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Local congregations that embrace design thinking can work through design thinking cycles to address problems and areas that need change. They can begin to create the conditions for innovation. And finally, specifically, they can build an innovative culture through a framework of traditioned innovation. Design thinking is uniquely suited for the church seeking to embody traditioned innovation because it generates new possibilities from within. This allows the change to feel cultivated rather than imposed. Change becomes a work of the congregation. It is not imported from the outside. And this is possible because design thinkers believe that everyone “has the capacities to be creative.”²¹ Therefore, everyone has a role in designing the future for a congregation.

As a congregation looks to design anew, both before it starts and actually as a first step in the design thinking process, it must understand how the articles, arenas, rules, and roles have formed the church's current ethos. This examination should uncover some factors that limit change while revealing opportunities. This will also reveal the rub between design thinking and the church as it functions today. That is why it is worth considering how the industrially-shaped church came to be across the last century.

The Industrial Church

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke provides three snapshots of the early church and the faithful practices that make it a church. Each of these instances opens a different window to the inner life of the newly gathered Christian community. While is it relevant to recognize how Luke uses the summaries as transitions in his narrative, these three

²¹ <https://dschool.stanford.edu/about> Accessed November 21, 2020.

instances also serve as guideposts for the ongoing tradition and traditioning that the church is still working on today.²² The summary of Acts 2, verse 42-47 sets the traditions of the church by first naming devotion to the apostles teaching, Christian fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Then in Acts 4, verses 32-35 further enumerates on the sharing of goods so that everyone had what they needed and on the authority of the apostles as leaders of the community. And finally, in Acts 5, these previously internal practices move into the public square as the congregation gathers for prayer at Solomon's portico, people find healing through the ministry of the Apostles, and again, the ministry of the church leads to growth.

In these three interludes, Luke establishes a set of traditions for Christian churches across time. From these interludes one can derive numerous practices that become tradition and for the sake of this thesis, they all fit under the umbrella of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. Acts specifically mentions that a traditional Christian congregation will (1) gather under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, (2) to learn from the apostles' teaching, (3) engage in fellowship, (4) worship, (5) participate in the sacraments, (6) share resources, and (7) reach out as the community of believers grows. These seven specifics, under the overarching traditions of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service, fulfill the traditions necessary for a gathering of believers to become a congregation. Without them, one can certainly find meaningful fellowship, spiritual community, holy friendships, and even significant outreach to the orphans and widows. However, a church embodies these traditions and practices in ways that bring

²² Johnson, *Acts*, 61 and Willimon, 42.

meaning, cultivate a connection to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and reach out beyond itself to the larger world.

Across time, the mechanics of these traditions change. For example, Jesus did not institute communion with Welch's and wafers. In this way, these traditions find meaning and hope by following the movement of the Holy Spirit in a given time. Learning from the apostles' teaching certainly changes shape as a society moves from illiterate to literate. Gatherings for worship adapt in times of war and global pandemics. The sharing of resources in the twenty-first century is most certainly unique as folks place tithe checks in offering plates or text-to-give instead of bringing in the first fruits of a harvest from the fields. Nevertheless, these practical changes maintain a spiritual connection to the basic traditions that make a church a church. And furthermore, the changing shape of traditions should be enlivening for a community of believers as the congregation experiences the fresh winds of the Holy Spirit in their time.

However, these days, people in the church feel stuck and beholden to a particular time, place, or orthodoxy because they are unwilling to allow the mechanics of a tradition to change shape. For much of the last 100 years, industrial thinking built on analytical forms of reasoning has heavily influenced society. Chapter 2 will consider this analytical thinking in greater depth related to empathy in the design process. However, it bears mentioning in relation to a congregations' articles, arenas, rules, roles, and the overall design problem the church faces because most local churches exist as industrial expressions of congregational life. Whether design decisions were intentional or unintentional is inconsequential. Those decisions have led to an industrial church and identifying this is a recognition that the church has been designed to be this way.

Acknowledging this allows one to step back and evaluate the overall system to uncover aspects of the industrial expressions that inhibit innovation.²³ Such a removed view also helps identify the embedded orthodoxy and assumptions at play within the industrial congregation's ethos.²⁴ Naming this influence helps one understand the dynamics of the currently designed situation as an early part of the design thinking process.²⁵ It also provides agency to the individuals and groups within the system when it is time to explore change.

Today, the church might not feel troubled if the world were not as chaotic. However, because forms of the church's traditions often mirror the society in which they are birthed, churches struggle when society changes. Today, life feels chaotic because everyone knew a world shaped by the predictable industrial assembly lines and factories of the 20th century. These were not just the analogs for the church. They were the economic engines of a community and the dominant framework of a shared life. For much of the last 100 years, industry organized life. Folks were on board. The structure made sense, so traditions were mechanized. However, times have changed, and industrially organized life is failing. Seth Godin scathingly describes the pervasive nature of such industry when he writes:

The industrialist lobbied to build his plant on the river and then filled it with effluent. He opened the doors to repetitive jobs and the numbing hierarchy of middle management. He demanded a seat at every table - a voice in how we ran our government, our schools, our science, and our spiritual organizations. But it was all okay, because the productivity he created made us relatively wealthy, fed our children, and delivered medical care as well. Industrialism brought hospitals and CD players and the Egg McMuffin. What could be bad about that?

²³ Heifetz, *The Principles of Adaptive Leadership*, 17.

²⁴ Bansi Nagji and Helen Walters. "Flipping Orthodoxies: Overcoming Insidious Obstacles to Innovation" *Rotman on Design*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 256.

²⁵ Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, quoting Eric Weiner "the past matters. We can't innovate without building on the past, and we can't build on the past unless we know it." 53.

[But the impact on] culture went further than most expected. Another change followed.

Change our dreams. The overwhelming impact of more than a century of indoctrination can't be overstated. We have embraced industrial propaganda with such enthusiasm that we have changed the very nature of our dreams.²⁶

Industry and factories fueled much of the twentieth century's economic and social growth, and they provided a framework for organizing and understating community life.

Godin notes that organized religions followed suit two pages later when he continues:

Organized religions have followed this model as well. So have big-time sports. Powerful industrialists make decisions about what leads to long-term dominance and stability, as opposed to celebrating risk and humanity. These decisions change what we watch, how we live, and what we dream about.

The industrial model of command and control and the avoidance of failure now permeate every corner of the culture. (29)²⁷

Godin describes that on one side of town, the factory gave many people meaningful work in service to building stuff by the river. Then, in another part of town, children matriculated through an industrially-shaped education system, which prepared them for a life in town. Elsewhere in the community, there was a church or collection of mainline churches. These congregations, shaped by the dominant culture around them, found ways to enact the essential congregational traditions of Acts 2, 4, and 5 by arranging themselves as spiritual factories. They blended the Spirit of God's inspiration and a passage like 1 Corinthians 12 and organized a division of labor that operated with great efficiency. "The Body of Christ Christian Education Assembly Line" made children and adults into well behaved Christians. The church was, in fact, a spiritual factory, and the people loved it! It made sense. It was the fulfillment of an inspired evangelical message of salvation meeting an industrial method of implementation. But factories do not do

²⁶ Seth Godin. *The Icarus Deception*. New York: The Penguin Group. 2012. 26-27.

²⁷ Ibid, 29.

VUCA. So, when the dominant analog for understanding life breaks down, it is time to look for a new one.²⁸

Marshall Goldsmith applies the mantra "what got you here, will not get you there" in his coaching practice, and it is true for organizations.²⁹ The days of the church relying on what always worked are gone. Today, a broader set of skills is necessary to help the church out from under the weight of industrial-like processes, which keeps congregations from innovating in a changing world. Ultimately, this lack of innovation inhibits the Holy Spirit's movement, which has thrown the church's industrial expressions and mechanized traditions into a doom loop, spiraling and maladapted for today's VUCA world.³⁰

As Roger Martin describes the power of design thinking in *The Design of Business*, he positions it as a way forward from the single-minded industrial expressions of yesterday's business environment. He highlights how design thinking cultivates the conditions for innovation by helping problem-solving approaches hold together different types of reasoning simultaneously. By its nature, the design thinking process relies on connecting to people's actual needs in ways that differ from the exclusivity of 'just-the-facts' analytical thinking or 'what's the gut say?' intuitive reasoning. Therefore, design thinking does not allow those involved to settle for an easy but inferior solution that already exists.³¹ By embracing design thinking, organizations like churches should increase the likelihood of better outcomes through authentically designed solutions. The

²⁸ Brown, 59. "For the moment, the greatest opportunity lies in the middle space between the 20th-century idea that companies created new products and customers passively consumed them and the futuristic vision in which customers will design everything they need for themselves."

²⁹ Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter. *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. New York: Hachett Books, 2007.

³⁰ Jim Collins. *Good to Great*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. Doom Loop, 178-184.

³¹ Martin, *Design of Business*, 25.

authors of *Design a Better Business* write that design thinking can provide a different way forward since design:

is not about throwing away the processes and tools you have. Quite the opposite is true. Just as design has enabled countless upstarts to create new business models and markets, design will also help you decide when to use what tools in order to learn something new, persuade others to take a different course, and at the end of the day, make better (business) decisions.³²

From Industrial Church to Design Thinking Church

For the church to design a future from yesterday's industrial expressions, it will need to embrace the empathetic, constraints-recognizing, action-driven, iterative process of design thinking. This will help address old problems while generating new outcomes and possibilities. But what does that look like in the church? Design thinking is naturally flexible, so named below are the essentials of a congregational design thinking process. These steps will integrate thinking and decision making through a specific sequence to provide a fruitful balance between intuitive thinking and analytical thinking, validity and reliability.³³ This process, though it is a progression, will help give stability to those concerned about moving beyond the industrial expressions of congregational life. The sequence begins by determining a guiding star and progresses with three significant movements: empathizing, problem defining, and prototyping.

A Guiding Star

Some design thinking projects start exclusively with empathy. In these situations, the designers may have no idea what they want to build, they are only determined to meet a need. While this is the purest form of design thinking, it is impractical for the church. The church has an overarching mission and vision as it embodies a set of traditions. Jesus

³² Pijl, et al., 9.

³³ Martin, *The Design of Business*, 137.

gives the church its guiding star in Acts 1:8, “And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and to the ends of the earth.” Everything the church designs is toward that telos. The church designs and organizes itself to propel believers to embody Jesus’s witness to the ends of the earth.

Fortunately, most actual design thinking processes have guiding stars as well. There is almost always a guiding star or telos for working on a project. Outside of the church, the telos may be vague, like “improving access to food for hungry people in Durham, North Carolina.” Such a broad telos could mean taking on homelessness, food insecurities, economic disparities, transportation issues, crime, and even gentrification. The project’s scope and near stars will be determined in the following steps. The church will narrow its focus in the steps to follow as well. For example, a church design process may “seek to help children embrace their role in helping bring Jesus’s love to the ends of the earth.” But no matter how small or big the project is, it will always work towards a guiding star.

Empathy

Empathy is the quality of understanding something or someone from a point of view that is not your own. To empathize is to walk in someone else’s shoes, to live someone else’s experience, and to seek to understand, maybe just a sliver of someone else’s world in a real way.³⁴ The d.school’s *Design Thinking Bootleg* reminds designers that “the problems you’re trying to solve are rarely your own, they’re those of a particular user. Build empathy for your users by learning their values: observe, engage, and immerse.”³⁵

³⁴ Martin and Riel, *Creating Great Choices*, 48.

³⁵ *Design Thinking Bootleg*.

For the church to design solutions to its problems, it must understand the dynamics and depth of the problems. It must uncover the complexities of change across a congregation. It must be able to anticipate the consequences of making shifts across age and interest groups. And having the understanding to make the leaps necessary to anticipate these reactions requires knowing the congregation, in its generalities and its particularities, which comes from embodying empathy. Those seeking to solve problems and innovate must begin with empathy. This means taking time to understand the people one is designing for. It is not the fastest way to approach problems, however, empathizing with an actual human being is the foundation of design thinking.

Define the problem

Listening to users will likely help identify many potential problems for a design team and design process to tackle. Since problems can address all areas of congregational life, a promising design process will narrow its focus to something like “improving the midweek experience of members.” Within this named problem, a team could approach the church’s discipleship opportunities or the need to provide fellowship opportunities during daylight hours. How the team chooses to narrow its focus depends on the congregation and the project's scope. A team may eventually look to help improve the mid-week experiences by taking on multiple projects. However, to generate the best outcomes, it is imperative that a team focus on a specific and clearly defined problem and then tackle projects through individual design cycles.

There are tools and practices to assist in identifying the problem. These are described in the problem definition chapter, including reframing problems, identifying constraints, and embracing diversity for radical collaboration.

Prototype

Once a problem is defined and shaped, it is time to build something. Designers think visually and build things to explore solutions through action.³⁶ Design thinkers must not be afraid to try things. Designers learn by working with their hands, so they will build prototypes from things that are lying around. Then, by returning to an empathetic listening and learning phase, the designer can discern how to iterate with the prototype.

In this way, design thinking is not merely a thought experiment. It is tactile because the roots of design thinking are in engineering. Engineers build things. For congregational leaders, this means design thinking will begin to shape their congregation in a way that is more akin to engineers working in a lab or studio than an employee filling a role in a factory. Designing experiences that lead to spiritual flourishing will take experimenting. Leaders will need to try and fail. To innovate as a design thinker means to engage the design process and particular situations through action and experience.

Test and Iterate

Building a prototype always leads to testing and then usually, iterations. To iterate means to change something for the better, and within design thinking, iteration becomes an aspect of the prototyping step that utilizes mindsets and practices from other steps. Iteration comes from using empathy and problem identification skills before further adjusting the prototype. This practice of learning, trying, and retrying is the core of design thinking. For some designers, this is what makes design thinking, design thinking. It is the empathetically iterative process that generates new and innovative solutions that makes design thinking fruitful. This may not be the most revelatory aspect of design

³⁶ Jon Kolko. *Well-Designed*. Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2014. On thinking visually, 4.

thinking for the church, but it may prove one of the most challenging aspects for the church to embrace.

Inspiration from Acts

There is nothing inherently Christian or spiritual about design thinking. However, recent books like *Canoeing the Mountains* serve as a bellwether for congregations' use of design thinking.³⁷ A growing number of ministers and faith leaders have studied at innovative places like the d.school to understand models to adopt from outside the church.³⁸ It will be fruitful for the church to appropriate design thinking models for use in the church; however, merely appropriating a model is not enough. The church draws on the instruction and inspiration of scripture across two thousand years of embodied tradition. Overlaying the latest fad on congregational practices is a shallow expression of innovation and tradition. However, designing around and innovating upon the traditions of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service helps the church to faithfully meet the needs of one's time and place. Therefore, this thesis draws from the traditions of the church from Acts as described above and it finds spiritual inspiration for design thinking from the stories of Acts. Throughout Luke's narrative, the work of the Holy Spirit cultivates the conditions necessary for innovation and the expansion of the Gospel. In this way, the church's embodiment of its traditions, its reliance on scripture as authoritative for practice, and its fidelity to orthodoxy can allow the church's best to emerge through the giftedness of Christians expressing their faith.

³⁷ Tod Bolsinger. *Canoeing the Mountains*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015.

³⁸ Two published faith leaders worth mentioning that I am familiar with are Ken Evers-Hood, who wrote about game theory in his book, *The Irrational Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock. 2016. And Andy Hogue, who recently published *Navigating the Future* with L. Gregory Jones. L. Gregory Jones and Andy Hogue. *Navigating the Future*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2020. I have also completed a program at the d.school.

When the church considers how to change, design, or redesign itself, it looks to the stories of Acts. These stories are authoritative in that they set the traditions and the embodied faith of congregations through all time. Acts tells what the church did and does as it points the church of every age to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Drawing inspiration from the scriptures in ways that inform our experience of the world and practices of faith within the world is an essential aspect of the Christian faith (not to mention one essential aspect of traditioned innovation).^{39 40} As it relates to design thinking in the church, the Acts of the Apostles is both a guide for the practices of today's church and gives rise to inspiration through scriptural imagination. Richard Hays succinctly described scriptural imagination when he said it is

the capacity to see the world through lenses given to us in scripture - when we see the world through such lenses, it doesn't just change the way we see the contemporary world but also changes the way we see scripture. There's a hermeneutical circle between the reading of the text and the reading of the world in which we find ourselves.⁴¹

When a congregation reads the scriptures together, faithfully, and consistently, the stories of the church's past reanimate themselves through the church today. This comes through letting the scriptures live, breathe, and find meaning within today's context and world. Scripture inspires innovation by retelling the early church's stories in ways that the church today brings to life again. Then, the practical application of inspiration on to a process, like design thinking, roots that inspiration in the now. It is a way of incarnationally expressing the call to be the witnesses to the ends of the earth.⁴²

³⁹ Johnson writes, "I must admit to another bias, the one perhaps disproportionately important in my thinking on this issue. This bias says that when the church makes decisions, the Bible ought somehow to be involved. Luke Timothy Johnson. *Decision Making in the Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. P11.

⁴⁰ In *Christian Social Innovation*, Jones practices scriptural imagination with the Exodus. Here, we will use Acts. Jones 22-33.

⁴¹ Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. *A Beginners Guide to Scriptural Imagination*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2020. 10.

⁴² L. Gregory Jones. "Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*. 143-159. Edited by Ellen F. Davis, Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Jones' essay provides background for this reading practice coming to life in a congregational context.

As the stories of Acts unfold, it is impossible to miss the ongoing struggle between what was and what will be. The call to proclaim the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth puts the apostles at odds with the religious authorities. The established Judaism resists the growing post-resurrection faith. And these patterns repeat themselves. The church of every age looks back at these initial struggles between authorities who hold tradition as convention and resist the movements that lead to innovation. This is not to imply that the resurrection was merely an innovation. It was obviously far more than that. However, the struggles between what was and what could be are as consequential as the resurrection and sometimes as common as how tables are arranged in the fellowship hall.

Below are several entry points for authority and inspiration from Acts as it relates to design thinking in the church. A more thorough exploration of these particular passages will follow in subsequent chapters. This is an overview of what is to come as the stories of Acts inspire the design thinking church.

Acts 1 – Where are we going?

In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father. As Jesus ascends, he declares, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Luke positions this as a driver of his work, and it remains a guiding star for the church.⁴³ The disciples' movement, and soon the church's movement, is from learning and knowing about Jesus to acting by sharing the Gospel.⁴⁴ In the same ways that this command from Jesus pushed Peter and the apostles to reach beyond a small band of

⁴³ J. Bradley Chance. *Acts: Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary Series*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007. 37.

⁴⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson *The Acts of the Apostles: Sacra Pagina Series*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992. 31, 32.

followers from around Jerusalem and pushed Paul to the whole region with dreams to reach Spain for the gospel, this command also pushes the church today. This command and guiding star include the call to actively reach those they already know the gospel is for and those the previous iterations of their faith were not for. The call is not just to Jerusalem and the unseen ends of the earth, but also to the despised Samaritans next door.⁴⁵ This guiding star inspires an outward direction, a previously unimagined approach to others, and the willingness to experiment within the constraints of the faith in order to fulfill the call to be witnesses. As today's church begins its transition from an industrial factory to an experimental design studio, it does so to better fulfill the imperative to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. This is the guiding star of the book of Acts and remains the church's guiding star in every age, no matter what forms and practices congregational life takes.

Acts 2 – Getting Started as the Church

The movement toward the ends of the earth begins with the remarkable events of Acts 2. The Holy Spirit on Pentecost brings the Gospel in different languages and foreshadows the Gospel's reach. In addition to the flaming tongues of the Holy Spirit on people from every region, Peter interprets these events through his understanding of the prophets and tradition, which seed the potential for traditioned innovation. It is from what Peter knew that the apostles spread the good news. And the pattern of sermons inspired by Old Testament prophecies continues throughout Acts. Drawing upon what was to explain what is and what can be is repeated by Peter, Stephen, and Paul. The church has embraced this way of preaching and teaching across its entire existence. This can inspire

⁴⁵ Beth Allison Barr, Bill J. Leonard, Mikeal C. Parsons, and C. Douglas Weaver. *The Acts of the Apostles: Four Centuries of Baptist Interpretation*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009. TB Maston quote, 92.

today's church to engage in empathy, problem identification, embracing constraints, radical collaborations, and prototyping. Acts 2 reflects these traits in unique ways as it supports a framework of traditioned innovation.

In the concluding verses of Acts 2, verses 42-47, Luke offers an idealized vision for the church as a community that gathers, worships, shares, and grows. Several times in Acts (chapters 2, 4, and 5), Luke uses idealized paragraphs like this as a bridge from one story to the next and to set the course for the church. From Acts 2, the church throughout time derives the traditional practices of gathering, learning and growing, worshipping, the sharing of resources, and the administration of the sacraments. It is upon these traditions, that the church innovates. And, as it has been noted above, across time the contemporary expressions of these traditions change; however, the traditions themselves do not. The church innovates from gathering for worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. The embodied expressions of the gospel in every time and place are built upon these essential traditions.⁴⁶

Acts 6 – Ordaining Deacons

The first story in Acts 6 is short on details as the believers ordain the first deacons. However, it is long on inspiration for design thinking. This passage reflects an attention to the needs of the entire community as an expression of empathy and problem identification. It then inspires a collaborative approach to designing a solution to meet the congregation's deep need. The early believers designed a path forward when faced with a significant problem that resulted in an inequity. This is, therefore, a source of inspiration for the design thinking process that churches can embrace. In many ways, this brief

⁴⁶ See also the previous notes on Acts 4:32-35 and 5:12-16.

passage inspires each step in the design thinking process, which is why it will make repeated appearances in the pages to come.

Acts 8 – Phillip Teaching in Two Places

Phillip's stories in Samaria and baptizing the Eunuch in Acts 8 describe the church's expansion beyond what it previously thought was possible. As Phillip teaches in Samaria, the limits of the Gospel are pressed out again. Though Phillip would see the Gospel reach far beyond expectations in the baptism of the eunuch, the constraints of orthodoxy are upheld as he corrects Simon the sorcerer. The inspiration of the story comes in the form of empathy as Phillip listens and explains how that meets the eunuch's needs. The story reflects an appropriate expansion of diversity and inclusion as the eunuch receives baptism. Therefore, both stories of Phillip in Acts 8 reflect how the Holy Spirit can inspire intuitive leaps. And ultimately, Acts 8 welcomes the believers into the family of faith on appropriate terms, all the while reaching beyond what the believers previously thought was possible.

Acts 10 – Cornelius and Even the Gentiles

If the believers did not yet understand that the good news was for those beyond the Jews of Jesus's reach, Acts 10 makes it definitive. Peter's dream and ministry to Cornelius throw open the gates of faith, emphasizing the need to speak in ways that others can understand, reach beyond the family of faith in diverse and inclusive ways, and be open to new possibilities previously unimagined. Acts 10 makes it certain that the message of Jesus going to the ends of the earth was not just so that the church could make sure that the good news was proclaimed everywhere. When the Italian Centurion, Cornelius, embraces the faith and converts his whole family to the faith, the implication

is clear; the good news will not just be proclaimed everywhere, some will receive it for themselves.

Acts 15-17 – Paul’s Post-Council Missionary Journey

In the middle of Acts, the ministry of the Apostle Paul takes center stage. After his conversion in Acts 9, Paul is a background figure until his ministry becomes Luke’s focus. Paul’s ministry moves from place to place. He teaches in different synagogues, proclaims the message of Jesus, and identifies followers who embrace this message. Paul meets resistance in most places, and in a few places, he escapes under the threat of death.

Paul has varying degrees of success throughout these stops, but as Luke writes the story, there is a progression.⁴⁷ Paul gets better at what he is doing the more he does it. He is not perfect on his first foray into a preaching ministry. Yet in Berea, his last stop before Athens in Acts 17, Paul has great success.

It takes reading scripture with an appropriate sense of imagination, but Paul’s journeys can inspire design thinking with their progressive success. As he hones his message and approach, it is easy to imagine Paul as an inspiration to experiment, prototype, iterate, and work on a project until it is right. Whether Paul did this or not, readers of Acts will never fully know. Luke is not as interested in disclosing every detail as he is shaping a narrative. However, as portrayed by Luke, Paul’s process should inspire the church to experiment and refine its operations. Just as Paul found his voice over time, long after his initial conversion in Acts 9, so too will the church find its voice and success through persistent and perpetual iterations of its work and message.

Acts 17 – Paul in Athens

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Acts*, 11.

In Acts 17, Paul's sermon in the Areopagus provides all the inspiration the church needs. It is a significant high point in Luke's plot. For years, Paul worked on the message of the Gospel as he sought the ends of the earth. Now, as he reaches the philosophers of Athens, it is prime time. Paul speaks in ways they understand, reflects respect for the symbols that are important to his audience, identifies their problems explicitly, proposes the message of Jesus as a way to address their issues, and does so with no guarantees that his message will be received and heard. Paul's message is received. Some respond. And others, though they are coy in their response, say, "We will hear you again about this."

As the church seeks inspiration for design thinking, Paul's sermon at Athens is a capstone. It inspires empathy, problem identification, and prototyping. It inspires embracing diversity, leveraging constraints, quickly prototyping and then iterating, and finally, moving on with a finished product. It is all here for the church seeking inspiration for new models and frameworks.

Acts Conclusion

Acts tells how the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread from a small band of believers to the ends of the earth. For 2,000 years, individuals, congregations, and the church universal has looked to Acts to inspire contemporary expressions of an ancient faith through tangible embodiments of faithful traditions. Today is no different. The stories of Acts can inspire churches to embrace the simple and relatable practices of design thinking to more fully and faithfully express the good news of the gospel in a world that needs it. In doing this, the church will once again faithfully discover inspired traditions that help the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ reach towards the ends of the earth today.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with the statement that "everything is designed." Recognizing this reality helps one identify their agency within a given situation or organization. That the church today has reached a point where the effectiveness of its past forms and practices are waning is not new. This has happened in every age. The most recent iteration of congregational life in the United States functioned like a factory, but it was not always this way and need not be this way forever. However, as Greg Jones writes in *Christian Social Innovation*, the church can no longer reorganize itself into the innovation and change it needs.⁴⁸ The congregational factory does not need a pick-me-up; it needs a redesign. It needs to change from a factory to a lab or studio. By embracing the practices of design thinking, the Christian factory will give way to Christian designers.⁴⁹

Since the church's mission has not changed, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit remains present, this transition is possible. The church can change from feeling like a factory to feeling like a laboratory or design studio. This will happen when congregations embrace design thinking to meet today's needs within congregational life. Doing this will provide the transition, structure, and constraints necessary for the church to design ways to embody the necessary traditions that help proclaim the Gospel for today and tomorrow. This radical transition does not change the telos of a congregation as an expression of the Kingdom of God working to be Jesus's witnesses to the ends of the earth. It may not even change a particular congregation's substantive ethos because it is the congregation itself that is designing its path forward. Instead, the embodiment of design thinking habits and

⁴⁸ "We now think and act as if we can restructure and reorganize our way into renewal. We complain about our lack of growth, we long for better leaders, and we develop nostalgia for the good old days." Jones. *Christian Social Innovation*, 25.

⁴⁹ "shift from what you know to what you can imagine." Birsel, 115.

practices can help a congregation better fulfill the call of God through reimagining embodied traditions. The church of Acts did a version of this. The church of every other age did as well. Today's church, drawing inspiration through the Spirit of God as reflected in the stories of Acts, will do so for this generation and the next.

Chapter 2 – Start with Empathy

Chapter two turns to empathy, its role in the design thinking process, and the untapped power of empathy for the church. As an early part of every design thinking process, empathy means spending time with people to understand their experiences. Approaching people with empathy allows designers to develop insights and make inferences that can lead to innovative solutions to problems.¹ To that end, this chapter begins with an example of how congregations often fail at empathy. Then, there is an examination of other decision-making methods before considering how empathy will enhance these previous methods. Finally, there is a turn to Acts to seek inspiration for an empathetic approach to problem solving before closing with a selection of habits and practices Christians and churches can use to engage in an empathetic approach to understanding problems and meeting needs.

Failure at Empathy

Congregational design thinking within the framework of traditioned innovation starts with empathy. A congregation seeking innovation through design thinking seeks a change in the habits and practices of its participants. The church aims not to gather a new congregation, nor to undermine the traditions of the church, but to behave in ways reflective of a renewed version of itself. One difficulty for integrating design thinking in a congregational context is that individuals often fail to exercise empathy. Traditionally, individuals may be very good at meeting the needs of someone in crisis. However, within

¹ Moutee, 69.

the everyday flow of life, Christians often mindlessly engage in practices that reflect the opposite of empathy.²

Every church can tell the story of when a guest was asked to change seats. These tales follow a predictable pattern. A person remembers their first visit and says,

I was visiting for worship for the first time. I got there early, and there were only a handful of folks in the sanctuary. I took a seat near the back on the aisle. A few moments before the service began, an older gentleman approached me kindly. He told me he was happy I was visiting but that I was in his seat. I initially wished he had asked me to step out of the pew because then I could have slipped out the back door. Instead, I scooted in, and now, of course, I am glad I stayed. It was difficult on that day because even though I love Jim now, his comments were profoundly unwelcoming.³

This story is so familiar that saying, “I was told I was in someone’s seat,” is a punchline. However, the joke is not funny because it hits too close to home. An individual who asks someone to move reflects a lack of hospitality and empathy. One of the causes of the lack of empathy is that members are often much better at identifying their place within the existing system than helping someone new fit in. It leaves one to wonder if this is the result of a church operating as a factory. For the church to move from factory to laboratory requires an understanding of how individuals fit within a current factory model and how it comes to life in a congregational system.⁴

The last chapter framed the church as an industrial factory. In a factory, individuals have specific jobs. There is honor in fulfilling these jobs well. Jim, from above, found honor in his job at the factory. This role shaped his identity and place in the world, not just his place at work. Could that be why he wants a specific seat on Sunday morning? Maybe Jim worked at the automobile assembly plant, and before Jim retired,

³ Jim is a persona named after my maternal grandfather, who did not attend church regularly.

⁴ Moutee, 29.

from Monday through Friday, he worked the line. For eight hours a day, he mounted every passenger side fender correctly. Jim did this work with loyalty and a sense of duty. Though aspects of the assembly line changed over time, his loyalty did not. Jim rarely missed a day of work. He never used all of his vacation time. And his colleagues at the plant held him with high esteem.

Jim carries this duty and devotion into his whole life. He serves in official capacities in the community, civic organizations, and in the church. Jim attends the council meetings regularly and worships weekly. Jim is every bit as devoted to his church as he was to his work at the factory. His devotion is beautiful, and it is a part of the problem.

Jim believes that things work well when everyone does their part. Jim's life in the factory solidified this understanding. He loves the image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians, and that manifests itself in needing to sit in his specific seat for worship. Jim does his job for his church and the Lord by being in that specific seat, the same way he works in his spot at the factory every day. If Jim is not in his seat, who fulfills his role? How will his responsibilities in the body of Christ be fulfilled? Such devotion is essential for an industrial assembly line to run smoothly, but it is not particularly good for generating empathy. Ardent devotion to a particular role within a system makes it difficult to see and feel how others see and feel. The focus turns to the self instead of the whole system.⁵ To Jim, if someone else takes his pew, he is either letting the church down or on the way to being replaced. A guest in his seat subconsciously puts him out

⁵ Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer. *Leading from the Emerging Future*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2013. Scharmer and Kaufer discuss shifting from an ego-system to an eco-system. The goal is to focus not only on one's particular role and that role alone but also on situating the individual within the entire system.

like discarded workers from a factory shutting down. Unfortunately for good churches, this means a guest might unknowingly threaten Jim's view of himself, his church, and his world. Jim and folks like him unknowingly approach the world in a way that is almost the opposite of empathy. Rigid systems like factories have roles for individuals to fulfill, and there is no need for empathy in that way of structuring the world. Hence, many churches are bad at empathy because of the individuals who make up the congregation and the formation they experienced that gave them a place within the congregation.

The church as a factory that fails at empathy (and of course, this is painting with a broad brush) is the result of a congregation organizing itself around something from a different time. Factories thrive on loyalty, duty, and obligation. However, now, with factories moving offshore and no longer serving as the dominant image for arranging a community, a new way of understanding systems is needed. Most people in the church do not realize this, which leaves a congregation struggling with both society's changes and the loss of a dominant organizing metaphor. In response, many folks become resistant to change, conflating tradition with convention, to hold onto things, so they do not get lost.⁶

The world is now VUCA, and those who remember the good old days of the industrial church fall in love with those patterns and practices. They love the practices but forget their purpose. They assume that "it was good enough for us, it should be good enough for folks these days," which unempathetically misses the point. It attempts to draw subsequent generations into an industrially governed view of the world that no longer exists. Today is not yesterday. Production is now cheaper in other parts of the world, and the parent company does not provide fair wages or a viable pension.

⁶ Using convention as a synonym for tradition comes from Thomas Merton and Casper ter Kuile. Casper ter Kuile in *The Power of Ritual*. New York: Harper One, 2020. 127.

Therefore, there is no good reason for young folks to buy into the model for organizing all of life. Seeing the world this way is a spirituality of obligation that lacks empathy. As a result, the church's soul only knows how to look to past success instead of seeking a way forward that reflects what people need today. To make the transition, churches must learn how to practice empathy rather than force everyone into what has always been done.

Beyond Analytical Alone

Organizing church around industrial and factory-like practices worked for a long time. Though the church needs to grow in its understanding of itself, it does not need to dismiss everything that has carried it to this point. Embracing ways to be empathetic is a key to the church's path forward, but some of the skills that helped the church flourish in the post-World War II era will also be helpful. Jim's job placing fenders on cars on an assembly line results from an industrial system that streamlined processes to maximize efficiency. Christian denominations adapted this type of assembly line model to plant and grow churches in the growing suburbs. It reflects the power of analytical thinking that Roger Martin describes in *The Design of Business*. Martin explains that this type of analytical approach is powerful yet insufficient in predicting how best to design and proceed into the future.

In *The Design of Business*, Martin explains that organizations typically rely on either analytical thinking or intuitive thinking when designing their processes to generate desired outcomes.⁷ In the predictable world of the last 100 years, most companies utilized data-driven analytical thinking and reasoning processes because this method typically

⁷ Martin, *The Design of Business*, xvi.

minimized risk and generated a basis for clear decision-making. This way of organizing cultures and businesses accelerated growth and increased production.⁸ In the years following World War II, many of the world's most successful companies relied so heavily on analytical thinking that it was applied far beyond places one might expect to see the repeated process of an automobile assembly line or in the optimization of numbers and analytics in certain offices.⁹ The continual refinement of a factory assembly line is the result of refined analytical thinking. And one recognizable business that shaped its culture and executed its processes based on analytical thinking, and all of its outgrowths, is McDonald's.

In the late 1950's drive-in burger joints were popping up all over the United States. During this time, Ray Kroc, a salesman in southern California, made a living selling milkshake mixers to restaurants all over California, but his most significant account was with a small chain of restaurants owned by the McDonald brothers. The brothers had a viable business, but it began to wane due to loitering customers at their drive-ins and their customer base's changing needs. Through different experiments and approaches, the brothers developed a standardized heuristic which became the prototype for a quick-service restaurant.¹⁰

After Kroc had sold all of the milkshake machines he thought he could, he convinced the McDonald's brothers to sell him a franchise. He developed a franchise agreement with the brothers and eventually took their "Speedee Service System" for

⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹ Roy Glen, Christy Suci, Christopher Baughin "The Need for Design Thinking in Business Schools." 653-667. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*: Boise State University, 2014. Vol. 13. No 4. 653-655.

The authors cite the prevalence of the rational-analytic paradigm in business school education, which is both informed by the ways businesses shape the school and then the ways graduates shape the businesses they go on to work in.

¹⁰ Martin, *The Design of Business*, 2-3.

preparing food and expanded it far beyond the kitchen. Kroc applied analytical thinking at every step in the restaurant and business and developed such efficient processes that McDonald's could grow its business with exacting precision around the world.

McDonald's precise system involved cooking burgers, hiring staff, choosing locations, managing stores, and, of course, franchising.¹¹ The company exploited analytical thinking within an industrial framework outside of the factory assembly line, board room, or accounting departments.

McDonald's shows how analytical thinking is useful in reliable and repeatable situations. For the most part, the United States in the years that followed World War II was also relatively predictable, which provided an excellent environment for analytical thinking and reasoning to flourish. When changes can be incremental, the principles of analytical thinking allow for small adjustments over time. This leads to analytically driven organizations and systems that feel predictable and safe. However, analytical thinking's blind spot is that its future success depends on the future resembling the past. Tomorrow must look like yesterday. So, when the changes that come at an analytically driven organization or business are not incremental in degree, they are VUCA, the system cannot adjust quickly enough, and tradition and convention become the places to which folks retreat. More on this is addressed below.

For now, McDonald's represents one example of successfully applied analytical thinking and reasoning, but analytical reasoning is not the only way to run an organization. Martin observes that some organizations, rather than utilizing analytical processes, operate through intuitive thinking. These organizations prioritize ingenuity,

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

gut reactions, and seek flashes of insight drawn from creative instincts. Ultimately, intuitive organizations believe that the best answers to problems emerge without the specific proof of algorithms or the assurance of analytical reasoning. This intuitive method of reasoning stands in stark contrast to the data-driven models of analytical organizations.¹² Intuitive thinkers and intuitive organizations are always looking to leap when it comes to discovering a client or customer's needs. They assess the world around them; they consider what the future might be like and leap through inference. They seek to create or discover something new without necessarily basing the new things on past success or reliability.

For an example of intuitive thinking, look again to *Moneyball*.¹³ In *Moneyball*, Billy Beane and the Oakland A's choose to integrate analytical thinking, "analytics," into player decisions. Beane repeatedly battles the tradition of the established managers and scouts. The traditional scouting processes relied heavily on intuition. The team manager arranged his lineups based on his gut feeling, not the numbers. The scouts in the player development area of management relied on "the eye-test" when it came to which player should be drafted, promoted, and played. Sports has historically been an intuitive business. However, Beane in the late 1990s, and then Theo Epstein with the Boston Red Sox and Chicago Cubs, and even Daryl Morey of the NBA's Houston Rockets and Philadelphia 76ers have integrated analytics into sports with great success.

As churches seek direction in the VUCA world, it will no longer be enough to run ministries and approach problems in either bifurcated, analytical or intuitive, ways. The future and design thinking need a blend of all the best available resources. This blend is

¹² Ibid., 5–6.

¹³ *Moneyball*. Bennett Miller, Director. Columbia Picture, 2011.

called abductive logic. “Abductive logic sits squarely between the past-data-driven world of analytical thinking and the knowing-without-reasoning world of intuitive thinking...the design thinker can add abductive logic to the reasoning repertoire to drive the organization.”¹⁴ That is why design thinking, though it considers what an analytical approach can provide, reaches beyond the numbers to leap to inferences and hunches by relying on empathy.¹⁵ Design thinkers use both analytics and intuition to understand what people see, think, and feel and then work to look around the next corner to actively develop solutions to these real problems.¹⁶ In a VUCA world, human needs become the most reliable place for inferences and interpretive leaps to emerge from. With industrial settings disappearing and purely intuitive leaps being too unreliable, empathy provides insights into both the real problems that can be solved and the solutions individuals might most like to see and experience for themselves. That is why design thinking starts with empathy first. Churches that adopt an empathetic posture toward each other and the world will be better suited to fulfill their vision, meet people’s needs, exercise the embodied traditions in meaningful ways, and ultimately be Jesus’s witnesses to the ends of the earth.

An Empathetic Approach (or, how to do empathy)

As stated in chapter one, *empathy is the quality of understanding something or someone from the point of view that is not your own. To empathize is to walk in someone else's shoes, to live someone else's experience, and to seek to understand, maybe just a*

¹⁴ Martin, *The Design of Business*, 26.

¹⁵ Glen, Suci, Baughn, 661. “Business Strategy is often shaped by a culture that requires rigorous, quantitative analysis to prove that a proposed initiative will succeed. This undermines substantive innovation (Kotler & Rath, 1984; Liedtka and Ogilvie, 2011; Martin 2007, 2009). Design thinking has been seen as a means of addressing the imbalance created by overly analytic approaches to strategic management, providing a cost-effective means of discovering unmet needs of potential users early in the strategic planning process.”

¹⁶ Glen, Suci, and Baughn. P654.

sliver of someone else's world in a real way. By building empathy, a designer learns the value and emotions that drive the user. Designers can use countless different methods for generating empathy, all of which fall under the larger categories of observing, engaging, and immersing with users as they interact with a product or in their environment.¹⁷ Since the key to generating empathy in design thinking is understanding the world as someone else does, there are few limits on how this might work. Several of the most accessible and academic methods include ethnographic methods like interviews and observations.¹⁸ This could also mean traditional research methods like reading books, articles, and reviews of products. Empathy work can mean impromptu conversations with individuals and groups. It can be also mean observing users in a specific situation or environment. The observing designer can practice the tools of sociology and maintain a distance to watch others in action, often without intervening. Ultimately, designers practicing empathy are, in the language of adaptive leadership, "getting off of the dance floor and onto the balcony" to see the situations, patterns, and the environment in ways that are almost impossible to see from the ground level.¹⁹ There are no perfect ways to observe the world, so designers will use many different methods to understand the values and emotions that drive a user. These are all a part of empathizing in a design thinking process. What follows are a few of the most accessible examples designers use to generate empathy, which will provide the seeds for a congregational approach to empathy in design thinking.

¹⁷ *Design Thinking Bootleg*.

¹⁸ Glen, Suci, and Baughn, 657. "The fundamental principles underlying such observation come from ethnography."

¹⁹ Heifetz, *Adaptive Leadership*, 32-33.

Observe

Designers watch people interact with their environment, free from judgment. The point of observing people is to see how people live and move within a space, situation, or environment. For example, when considering a public works design project, a designer may spend many hours watching how people enter and exit public transit, check out books in a library, circle a parking lot, or arrange their groceries. Product designers will do the same with existing products, specific products, or even prototypes of products in focus groups (but that is jumping ahead to chapter 4). When observing, the designer watches as a fly on the wall to understand what might lie behind what is happening.²⁰ Observing is a judgment-free exercise early in the design process. As a designer seeks to meet people's needs, it is essential to identify their needs rather than impose one's understanding and beliefs onto a situation.²¹ There is a time for the designer to make inferences and judgments, but that comes later in the design thinking process. When observing, the designer is, to borrow the image from above, moving between the dance floor and the balcony to make sense of the situation.

Engage – Individual Interviews

The best designers are curious and ask thoughtful questions. To that end, when a designer wants to know what a user wants, they find a way to ask them. Interviewing is an obvious way to do this. The best interviews create room for people to express how they feel in ways that allow understanding to emerge.²² By doing this, designers can begin to understand what it is like to be someone else. As questions are asked, a

²⁰ Pijl, Lokitz, and Solomon, 86.

²¹ Glen, Suci, Baughin, 662.

²² Martin and Riel, *Creating Great Choices*, 43.

designer's curiosity can take hold in ways that allow for in-depth conversations. The key, of course, is asking the right questions. Asking good questions is a learning process, but it builds on itself and fosters reciprocity. The interviewee will want to be more engaged as a result of good questions. While individual interviews always carry the risk that they might be abused, appropriate steps can be taken to protect all parties. As a designer working for good, safely digging deep with someone allows for better insights, which will provide better solutions down the road.

The key to the interview process, again, is asking good questions. The best questions lead to storytelling, which is where an interviewer can gain the most insights.²³ For example, if one were interviewing a church member about their church, it would be tempting to say, "Tell me about your church and why it is so important to you." The typical response to this question is, "My church is so loving and kind. They are always there for me." This, of course, is great to hear and completely useless. Who goes to a church that is unkind? Why would anyone invest in a congregation, social group, or friend circle that treated them terribly? They wouldn't. To that end, the better questions are, "Tell me a story about when your church was at its best. When was your church most there for you? When was a time your church made a difference in someone's life? And, how has your church achieved its greatest dreams?" These questions allow interviewees to reflect on their experiences of the church rather than offer a weak adjective to describe the distillation of countless experiences.

Engage- Group Interviews/conversations

²³ Pijl, Lokitz, and Solomon, 88.

The principles of group interviews are the same as that of individual interviews. However, by engaging in group conversations, the designer can see people differently and hear what they say in a different light. For example, if the designer were to record, transcribe, and code the interview, they might find that what a group discussed is quite different from individuals' conversations. This can be good or bad; however, at this point, that does not matter. Observations during an empathy phase are value-neutral. What is important is that group conversations provide different, occasionally deep reflections on particular topics. Do people pick up and run with something the interviewer never expected? Did something from far afield evoke passion in the group? Did someone unexpected dominate the conversation? Suppose the designer knows the people involved, which is likely within the context of this thesis. In that case, coding interviews allows the designer/interviewer to evaluate who talks, how much, and what weight their voice holds in the room.

Immerse

In addition to interviews and conversations, a designer can immerse themselves in a situation. Usually, this allows that designer to get closer to walking in someone's shoes and hopefully better understand an individual's experience of the world. Martin and Riel, in *Creating Great Choices*, write, "Sometimes the best way to build understanding and empathy is to actually experience what another person goes through. If you're redesigning a process, you might try working through the process as a customer would, explicitly focusing on stumbles and moments of truth in your journey."²⁴ To do this, designers will walk the paths that users walk. If a prototype is available, they will use the

²⁴ Martin and Riel, *Creating Great Choices*, 51.

prototype in the same way a user would in order to understand how the users themselves will experience the product in the real world. And, of course, by immersing oneself in another's world, the designer should be able to see new things that cannot be seen from the outside.

Tim Brown tells a great story about this in his book *Change by Design*. Several years ago, Amtrak wanted to improve ridership between Boston and Washington D.C. After considering what they wanted to improve, Amtrak approached IDEO to redesign the seats on their trains to generate more riders and profits. IDEO could have easily designed a new seat for Amtrak but decided to immerse themselves and ended up designing what would later become the Acela experience. By going through the paces of an everyday train rider, the designers at IDEO found that the journey,

for most customers, had ten steps, which included getting to the station, finding parking, buying tickets, locating the platform, and so on. The insight that proved the most striking was that passengers did not take their seats on the train until stage 8 - Most of the experience of train travel, in other words, did not involve the train at all. The team reasoned that every one of the prior steps was an opportunity to create a positive interaction, opportunities that would have been overlooked if they had focused only on the design of the seats.²⁵

Walking in someone's shoes to experience how they see and interact with the world can be more arduous than simply designing products, interactions, and opportunities in a lab. However, design thinking aims to provide meaningful and innovative solutions that individuals could not have known they needed otherwise. To provide a new experience for someone that they did not know they needed, a designer must understand what an individual is currently experiencing so they can design something better.

Photovoice – let them help you see what they see

²⁵ Brown, 94-95.

The last approach comes from the emerging field of visual sociology, which may prove immensely helpful in the years to come. Roman Williams, a sociologist and professor of visual sociology, writes about using photovoice in congregations as a research tool. It also adapts well to generating empathy because photovoice allows others to see what the person taking the photo sees.

In his article, "Engaging and Researching Congregations Visually: Photovoice in a Mid-Sized Church," Williams outlines a process "Rivertown Church" engages in a collaborative study of photos taken by members of the congregation.²⁶ By allowing members to submit how they see their church through photographs, others get a new perspective and gain exposure to things they may not have otherwise noticed. Given the proliferation of smartphones, photos sharing websites, the prioritization of photos and videos on social media platforms, and the intangible joy that sharing photos provides so many, utilizing photovoice to provide points of view is a great way a congregation can generate empathy.

The Empathetic Approach Conclusion

The five methods for generating empathy listed here are not exhaustive but represent a few of the most accessible ways for generating empathy in a congregational context. These approaches provide empathetic insight as a design team begins to strategically assess what is important to a congregation seeking innovation and renewal. Any plan for renewal that wants to build from the existing body but in innovative ways as an expression of traditioned innovation must first embrace the history of those seeking to grow and change; second, recognize the fear and apprehensions at play; and third,

²⁶ Roman Williams, "Engaging and Researching Congregations Visually: Photovoice in a Mid-Sized Church," 5-27. *Ecclesial Practices*, May 15, 2019, volume 6, issue 1.

uncover the hopes and dreams of those involved. Without generating the empathy to understand the people and concerns within a specific congregation or ministry context, adaptations and changes will probably just be the result of an outside force leveraging an analytical or intuitive solution on a system. This is the opposite of designing from within. Since design thinking seeks to build toward innovation from the ground up, starting with empathetic practices like these will allow a group to grow from where they are, rather than being imposed upon from the outside. Furthermore, given the church's historical bias toward relationships, fellowship, and personal pastoral care, these practices specifically build on the strengths of what the church does best. The task for the church that seeks to be empathetic rather than industrial is to realize how their behaviors within the embodied traditions can help individuals understand each other better. It is to see how Jim is not trying to be inhospitable when he asks a guest to move seats; he is afraid. And then, through the language, practices, habits, hunches, and inferences that are to come, help bring those like Jim alongside the processes, rather than designing folks like Jim out of the church, which often happens in changing congregations. Through relationships, testimonies, conversations, and intentional immersion, the church can learn better who it is to discern what it might want to become in the days ahead. All it needs to do is begin to pay attention by generating empathy.

Acts and Empathy

Luke Timothy Johnson's bias that "the bible ought to somehow be involved" rings true for the church as it seeks inspiration to empathize. Of course, it bears repeating that it is impossible to identify places in scripture that directly correlate to today's practices. However, scriptural imagination invites us to see how what happened can

inspire us today. Luke is not concerned with laying the groundwork for a design thinking process that could be used in churches in 2,000 years, he tells the story his way and with his own agenda. By following the Spirit's movement through the apostles and the early church, and conveying the truth of the power of resting on the people throughout the known world, he inspires the church in every age. Luke does not need to write about empathy, problem identification, or innovation. Instead, the stories Luke tells inspire the church to be more empathetic. By reading and embracing these stories as the church's stories, one can see how taking an empathetic approach to problems can be inspired by God and can result in the presence, power, and movement of the Holy Spirit among the church still today. What follows are a few passages that inspire empathy for congregations because of how the church worked in days past. These are not exhaustive, but hopefully, they can begin the conversation for any congregation embracing the practices of design thinkers to spark innovation within a framework of traditioned innovation.

Acts 2

Immediately following the commission of Jesus in Acts 1, “to be witnesses to the ends of the earth,” the apostles take center stage. Acts 2 tells the story of the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. It is a foundational story for the church as all those gathered heard the disciples speaking in different languages. Those gathered heard their languages from home, but those speaking their languages were local, not from the diaspora. The clear implication of this passage has long been that the Holy Spirit would empower believers and the church to reach people's needs, no matter who they were, where they were from, or what language they spoke. The good news was for

everyone, and this is a step God takes for the church to carry God's mission to the ends of the earth.²⁷

This passage provides inspiration to the church of all times and invites an empathic approach to ministry in that, through the presence and power of the Spirit, it is always possible to speak in ways that others might hear. Though speaking in ways that connect to others will be a struggle through the whole of Acts, the church's emerging practice will be that not everyone needs to ascribe to every practice that came before. The gospel can reach you where you are, which is good news. The power of the Holy Spirit provides ways to be open to everyone, of all languages. Conformity to the language of Judaism would no longer be a requirement. Instead, the message of Jesus and his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are headed to the ends of the earth. As it spreads, it will do so in others' language so they too can hear it, experience it, and ultimately share it with those they encounter.

On the other hand, it does not take long for those who do not want to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to form an opposition. In chapter 2 verse 13, "Others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'" In short order, Peter responds that they are not drunk because it is only nine in the morning, but the die is cast. The religious establishment is not interested in how others think, feel, and experience the world. For them, religious innovation that exists outside of their understood norms is heresy. This is not an area of life where they care what people need and feel because the law was the law, and it was not to be understood differently or transgressed in any way outside of their interpretation.

²⁷ Willie James Jennings. *Acts: Belief A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. 2017. 32.

Throughout the rest of Acts, this thread will continue. The Holy Spirit's movement undermines the power and influence of the establishment, so the religious leaders worked to tamp it down the same way that the intuitive scouts in *Moneyball* dismissed analytics as innovation. For the church, cultivating empathy for people in ways that spark innovation outside of the establishment will always prove to be a difficult hill to climb. However, as the Spirit moves, if Acts 2 holds, the power of God will be revealed in ways that others can hear and understand. That is one inspirational legacy of this passage.

Acts 6

Acts 6 inspires every aspect of this thesis, empathy included. As the Hebrew apostles seek to meet the needs of the Hellenists, they do so by deliberately assessing their needs. Though it is not precisely recorded this way in Acts 6, it is no great stretch to imagine the apostles asking, "What do the people really need?" The story reveals the complaint that the widows of the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking disciples, were overlooked in favor of the Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking widows. Recognizing that this was not right, the disciples seek a solution to the widows' needs as it relates to food.²⁸ Of course, there is no particular insight given into the decision-making process. Luke does not record the ethnographic tools used for data collection, nor the "ten best ideas for distributing food to the widows," but he does record the solution. The congregation selects deacons to assist in equally meeting everyone's needs. Seven are selected, and the apostles devote themselves to teaching and prayer. The result is that the movement continues to grow.

²⁸ Jennings, 65. Jennings writes about how this interaction demands the apostles now understand who really matters. It is not just the religious insiders but those who are brought into the fold who matter.

Listening to this passage with an empathetic posture reveals several things that are absent yet are common in life today. The Hebrews, the established group and the holders of tradition, do not declare that "this is how we have always done it and so it must be now." Throughout Acts, there is a battle between what was and what will be, but progress arises, and innovation comes by not holding on too tightly to that which was. By meeting actual needs, the congregation finds room to grow. The distribution of food grew, and then, so did the reach of the church.

Of course, this instance of empathy goes almost unnoticed in relation to the lack of empathy present in the passages immediately preceding Acts 6. Looking back to chapter five, Ananias and Sapphira look inward instead of outward. This couple is fearful of this new enterprise, the church. Even the most sympathetic reading of the passage must admit that their lack of faith meant they were saving for a rainy day, if they were not stealing. And this fear led them to attempt to deceive the apostles and the church. It is, one can see, quite challenging to practice and embody empathy in the presence of great fear. As Ananias and Sapphira hold back money from selling their land, they choose something other than empathy. They fail to see the overall needs and cannot understand what someone else might feel and how someone else might see things. Their selfishness leads to death.

Another prelude to establishing deacons for the distribution of food in Acts 6 is the arrest of Peter and the apostles for teaching in the temple courts in Acts 5. There are certainly more interesting aspects of this story than that these apostles were arrested as a threat to the religious establishment. However, that the apostles would bring about changes to tradition and convention meant they stood in opposition to the establishment,

who could not bear the change. The high priest and the council resist the apostles' work, are unwilling to listen to other possibilities about what might be going on, and therefore see changes in the people as a threat, rather than an opportunity to experience the power and presence of God in a new way.

These threats do not come to a head in chapter five. Instead, they show up in chapter six and seven during the Stephen narrative. By all indications, Stephen understands the movement of the Spirit as it is happening in the church. He is filled with the Spirit and embodies exceptional faith. Stephen is precisely who churches today would elect to serve in important roles. Imagining what could have been, Stephen's presence and wisdom would have been a stabilizing force in the life of the church navigating a VUCA world. This makes him a threat to the un-empathetic establishment. His wisdom and Spirit are precisely why he is killed. Once again, the conventional establishment acts out of fear and vengeance, rather than empathy, and the result is death. The result of trying to hold on too tight to what was, rather than looking toward what could be, is most certainly, death.

The Church's Tools for Empathy

For far too long, the church has clung to patterns and practices that cause it to be bad at empathy. On a congregational level, it means that well-meaning people prioritize their role in a system and perpetuate that system above all else. The church becomes loyal to convention and how things have always been done, which will not cut it in the days to come.²⁹ For the church to rediscover its call to be witnesses of Christ to the ends of the earth, it must become a more empathetic institution than it was forced to be as it was

²⁹ Kuile, 127.

shaped by the standards and expectations of an industrially driven, analytically shaped institution. The church can shift from the factory of yesterday to becoming the design lab or studio of tomorrow. The first step in doing so is to capture some of the innovative practices from the modern world, hold them alongside the embodied traditions, and through scriptural imagination, discern how these practices can faithfully intersect.³⁰

Inspired by the ways the church in Acts met the needs of those who were new to the faith and represented the church's growing edge towards the ends of the earth, congregations can begin to take the right steps toward innovation when they can see each other empathetically. Truly seeing someone and their needs makes it much more difficult to characterize them as a threat to tradition. When Christians can engage in practices that work the muscles of empathy while revealing the inner needs of folks connected to the church, they begin to understand how others feel about things within the congregation instead of assuming everyone is fine. In this way, a congregation can see that more than a mild reorganization is necessary to truly experience renewal.

So, what should the church do? First, it needs to cultivate cultures of conversation and care to expose that which is inside and needs to get out. The church needs to step back and observe its shared life. This can mean observing how people are interacting in the congregation, how guests access congregational life, or how the congregation fits within the fabric of the surrounding community. Depending on the area that the congregation wants to work on, this could be as simple as observing how people with limited mobility access church buildings or it could be as complicated as tracking how people move through their church on a given week to reimagine facilities. The scope of

³⁰ This is the outgrowth of scriptural imagination as Richard Hays describes chapter 1.

the project does not matter. The first step to approaching a congregational system and its problems is to step back far enough to observe the problems at play. This is what the Apostles did in Acts 6. They looked and listened carefully enough to realize the unmet needs.

Secondly, the church can engage strategies that actively seek information beyond the analytical data of numbers and noses. Conversations with folks that have varying relationships with the church will provide new insights. Some congregations have a tradition of testimony and pastoral care. These are two practices that can serve the empathetic congregation well. Testimony is the act of one telling their story. Practically speaking, this is what interviewing and storytelling does.³¹ These allow a person to uncover that which is meaningful to them while also giving room for them to tell what they think and feel. It is not uncommon for folks to share their testimony as a part of Christian worship or discipleship. As Paul demonstrates throughout Acts and in his letters, telling the story of faith from one's perspective is a powerful tool for allowing others to either walk in another's shoes or at least see the paths that one has trod.

Another practice that is likely overlooked within industrial systems but is essential in today's dynamic systems is what the church calls pastoral care. While one's immediate thoughts may jump to visiting the sick as a primary duty of pastoral care, these types of relationships need not be limited to the sick. A congregation seeking change and innovation needs to bring itself close to each other amid change, and intentional conversations within the context of mutual care serve this purpose well. By listening to those who are unsure about the path ahead, a leader embodies empathy.³² Those who fear

³¹ Moutee, 86.

³² Scharmer and Katrin, 12.

they may be left behind due to change can be heard. They must be understood, and understanding can be conveyed to them. Interviewing within the context of a congregation preparing for change is not just a one-way street. It is an opportunity to engage with one another that provides mutual support and care. This is the embodiment of empathy within a congregational context. And any church seeking to embrace design thinking within the framework of traditioned innovation truly will serve itself well if it is caring for itself during change.

Finally, churches seeking change and working to develop more empathy can take on particular projects like Roman William's photovoice strategy to heighten a sense of empathy within the congregation. Picture a congregation walking down the hallway of a church lined with annotated photos from fellow members. These photos can concisely articulate the struggles of today and the dreams of tomorrow. Imagine how helpful it might be to know that someone else feels the same way or has the same dream. By pulling out a smartphone and using the camera to reveal a perspective, understanding what is and would be will grow exponentially. Photovoice, interviews, pastoral care, storytelling, and observing are just the tip of the iceberg of what is possible when the church begins to consider its expression of embodied traditionalism and convention to reevaluate what it needs for today and what is truly possible for the congregation. Like the congregation in Acts 6, a congregation can thrive if it is willing to see what everyone needs, rather than holding back and saving for a rainy day like Ananias and Sapphira did in Acts 5.

Conclusion

This chapter began with Jim asking for his seat in church. Jim wanted his seat, not because he is a mean old man stuck in his ways but because of how he sees the world. His presence in his seat fulfills his duty to his church and his faith. This is his understanding of how he fits into the world. The church, and churches everywhere, may never be able to change Jim, but the best chance they have is through empathy rather than reprimand. In the same way that the leaders in Seattle had to look carefully enough to see that the people in Pioneer Square needed to both immediately open but eventually fix the high-tide-toilet-problems, congregations everywhere need to be able to understand the motivations and fears of their Jims in order to begin to design new and more hospitable ways forward. Congregations need Jim to be able to see how intimidating it is to visit a church. It did not use to be this way, but now, people in congregations have fears similar Ananias and Sapphira's. This leads them to be entrenched rather than open. They want stability rather than change. That is where empathy is helpful. By generating empathy, one can understand the problems that need to be overcome with greater depth. However, within a congregational context, generating empathy provides the added benefit of deepening relationships and trust through the approaches mentioned above.

By getting the church to observe, interpret, and engage to understand itself, one another, and the most pressing issues the church is facing, those in leadership engaging in a design thinking process give themselves the best chance to deepen the capacity of the church to engage in innovation while uncovering the real problems that can be approached while seeking innovation. And for that, the conversation turns in the next chapter to identifying the right problems.

Chapter 3 – Problem Identification: From “We learned” to “How Might We”

“If I’d asked my customers what they wanted, they’d have said a faster horse”

– Henry Ford, *maybe*¹

Chapter three moves to problem identification and understanding how to isolate the problem a design cycle can solve. As churches embrace design thinking to solve problems, several things will come into play related to problem identification. The congregation/design team must remember the church’s guiding star: “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” The local design team will also need to stick to the congregation’s particular mission and vision. These should line up and serve as the guiding star and nearer stars related to a particular project that will make an impact by solving a problem for the congregation.

Once the course is set toward the near and guiding stars, the problem identification phase works through the data generated during the empathy phase to find insights and eventually make leaps through inferences. Problem identification must resist the tendency to reinvent what has always been done or replicate what someone else is doing.² This is important because identifying the problem is separate from both naming a symptom of a problem or framing an existing solution as a problem.

In this way, problem identification is a tricky aspect of a congregational design thinking process because it demands resisting a previous era's problem-solving strategies. A problem is separate from its symptoms, and a problem is not a once successful solution. Casper ter Kuile notes that congregations and religious institutions, and by

¹ Patrick Vlaskovits, “Henry Ford, Innovation, and That “Faster Horse” Quote.” 29 August, 2011. HBR.org <https://hbr.org/2011/08/henry-ford-never-said-the-fast> So, maybe he didn’t say it, however the sentiment rings true.

² Kolko, 43.

extension individuals, fall in love with specific solutions rather than continuing to innovate to meet needs.³ Design thinking is a way to discover and design a new path forward that is likely different from previous practices. That does not mean everything from before gets kicked to the curb just for grins, but it means that design teams in the congregation need to be aware of what has come before to not fall into the traps of industrial problem-solving strategies.

Reopening is Not the Problem

In March of 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States. Early on, businesses and organizations of all kinds quickly closed following government-issued stay-at-home orders. These “lockdown orders” followed a pattern set across the world. The stories of overrun hospitals in Spain and Italy led leaders to act to “flatten the curve” quickly.

As the stay-at-home orders were adopted, many re-hung Christmas lights in support of frontline workers. However, by May, driven by weariness, the fear of a crashing economy, and small businesses' failure, opposition to stay-at-home orders mounted. Eventually, protests arose demanding the reopening of states and small businesses.⁴

For many, the problem was clear: let us reopen. Many said, “If Lowe’s and Wal-Mart can be open, why can’t small businesses?” The logic behind the statement is, if all businesses can reopen, everything will be fine. In reality, this reflects how easy it is to misdiagnose a problem.

³ Kuile, 21.

⁴ Josh Shaffer and Ashad Hajela. “Protesters rally for NC to reopen. One woman arrested for violating governor’s order.” *News and Observer* April 14, 2020, 12:05 PM, Updated April 15, 2020, 08:57 AM <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/article241999131.html#storylink=cpy> Accessed 10/23/2020.

Reopening a business is a solution, not a problem. Though this may seem like splitting hairs, separating problems from symptoms and solutions is an essential aspect of problem identification in a design thinking process. Design thinking cannot generate a solution if it does not have an identified problem. After a design team gathers enough information through empathy, the team can identify a specific problem expressed by users. Then the designer can begin to ideate, prototype, and iterate toward solutions.

In the case of small businesses that closed during the early days of the pandemic, to situate reopening as the problem is to misplace it within a design thinking process. Consider a local shop or restaurant with a well-formulated guiding star. A children's boutique might "provide unique, high-quality clothing at a fair price." A restaurant might "provide joyful experiences around amazing food for all who visit." In both cases, COVID-related closures throw a wrench in the execution of a business' mission. They may cause a near star reevaluation, but closing for a pandemic only changes the guiding star if the business pivots radically. Sure, it is more difficult for a closed store to provide high-quality clothing at a fair price or a closed restaurant to facilitate joyful experiences, but reopening alone does not solve the problems caused by pandemic closures.

The real problem caused by any business closure is the loss of revenue.⁵ A boutique does not succeed by being open; it needs to generate revenue by selling clothes. A restaurant does not thrive by unlocking the doors; it must sell food. Both businesses generate revenue while fulfilling their mission, but merely reopening is not enough.

⁵ Paula Gardener. "Michigan retailers worry COVID spike will keep customers away. Again." *Bridge Michigan*. October 26, 2020. https://www.bridgemi.com/business-watch/michigan-retailers-worry-covid-spike-will-keep-customers-away-again?utm_source=Bridge+Michigan&utm_campaign=7ac6cc6850-Biz+Watch+10%2F26%2F20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c64a28dd5a-7ac6cc6850-82348884.

Operating hours are a way to generate revenue, but opening a business does not guarantee cashflow. Businesses generate revenue by meeting needs, not unlocking doors.

During the summer of 2020, some businesses that had the opportunity to open ultimately closed. Many restaurants could not sustain themselves on takeout alone, and shops could not fully transition to internet commerce.⁶ These businesses closed because they could not generate revenue while fulfilling their mission. Therefore, the problem they needed to solve was not being open. It was generating revenue. Pandemic induced closures and limitations on meeting customer needs are constraints. Restaurants faced the constraint of “no in-person dining.” Opening freely and fully would have, theoretically, removed the primary constraint but did not guarantee revenue. The reason is, people's level of comfort with shopping and dining in-person during a pandemic was the real source of the revenue generation problem. Though many blame the statewide lockdowns for causing their small businesses to close, the reality is, these lockdowns were imposed constraints. Lack of revenue caused business failures, not the constraints alone.^{7 8}

The lesson here is that it is tempting to consider a constraint as a problem when identifying a problem to solve. Open and closed was not the business problem of the pandemic. The business problem of the COVID-19 pandemic was revenue generation, and innovative businesses could leverage constraints in productive ways.

⁶ “Triangle restaurants we lost in 2020” *WRAL.com*. December 10, 2020, updated January 6, 2021. <https://www.wral.com/triangle-restaurants-we-lost-in-2020/19419966/> accessed 2/10-2021.

⁷ “Disney to Cut 28,000 Resort Jobs in U.S.” *New York Times, NYTimes.com*. Updated September 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/09/29/business/stock-market-today-coronavirus> Accessed 10-3-2020.

In late-September 2020, Disney laid off about 25% of its resort workforce. In California, Disneyland had not yet reopened due to restrictive orders statewide. In Florida, Walt Disney World reopened in July with limited capacity. However, the Florida resort experienced lay-offs as well due to “attendance [that] has been weaker than Disney expected, with concern about coronavirus safety a major factor.” An opening is not the problem; revenue is. Opening is a solution to a problem but not the only one necessary when businesses deal with a problem as wicked as a global pandemic.

⁸ Stacy Cowley and Amy Haimerl “These Businesses Thrived as Others Struggled to Survive” *New York Times, NYTimes.com* 12/24/2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/24/business/small-business-coronavirus.html?auth=login-email&login=email> accessed 2/10/2021.

Problem identification in Acts 6

Interestingly enough, Acts 6 provides a scriptural lens through which to consider problem identification. Despite the passage's brevity, as Luke tells the story, it reflects the importance of explicitly identifying a problem. However, Luke almost makes it look too easy. The problems in Acts 6 are the unequal distribution of food and that the feeding ministry keeps the apostles from preaching God's word. These problems are ones of equity and are complicated given the circumstances. However, they also inspire the church today to identify problems that undermine equity and inclusion.⁹

In this passage, the diaspora is together in Jerusalem, but things are not smooth. The Hellenist believers speak up about their widows not receiving the same treatment as the Hebrews. The Hebrews came to faith close to Jerusalem, and the Hellenists were the outsiders. As these two groups gather, there is friction. The Hellenists now feel like outsiders though they share the same faith. The articulation of, and resolution to this problem, make it clear that in all ways, believers in the church were to be treated with equity, equality, and fairness.¹⁰

This problem, distributing food to the widows equally, is multi-faceted. Therefore, typical solutions may not work. Carried forward to today, a congregational oversight committee might appeal to the apostles to work harder. This worked for the assembly line, and it was useful in previous strategic planning processes adapted from business and industry. However, if the problem were really about the apostles' work

⁹ Johnson, *Acts*, 110-112. Johnson writes that this passage is not just about distributing food, but Luke is writing about succession and setting up the deacons to succeed the apostles. He notes that Philip and Stephen are chosen to be deacons, but chapters 6-8 highlight not their ministry of service but the ministry of prophetic preaching. Johnson points out this inconsistency. However, drawing inspiration for today's church by observing that the collected congregation identified a specific problem and designing an innovative way to address it is fair. It is not the most in-depth reading of the text, nor does it completely address all the text's particularities, but no single interpretation can. Nor does the local church on a day-to-day basis. The point is to draw inspiration from the story, not gain clarity through textual criticism.

¹⁰ Jennings, 64-66.

ethic, wouldn't they have done it? Of course! In the end, though, this problem was not just about distribution; it is connected to the vocation of the apostles.¹¹

The Hellenists needed food, and the apostles could not provide it, so a body of deacons came to take care of the believers' basic needs. The appointment of seven disciples to serve as deacons reflects the apostles' awareness of the dynamics present. It inspires an empathetic approach to identifying problems and generating solutions. It also fulfills the traditional obligation of fellowship, sharing, and caring, through an innovative method. Furthermore, by approaching this problem with the guiding star of reaching the ends of the earth, the solution generated inspires collaboration beyond the traditional Jews who were close enough to experience the ministry of Jesus first or second hand. Since the church needs to reach the ends of the earth, it needed to diversify. It needed new voices. It needed ways to reach beyond who it was at the beginning. And these solutions help press the story of the gospel beyond the first generation of the church. The good news is now rooted in a ministry that meets the needs of the diverse family of faith while the prophetic ministry grows on the twelve apostles' shoulders.

The Church Needs a Revival?

It is a familiar cry, "What this church needs is a revival." Though the individual, call him Jim once again, means well, he is in love with a solution rather than a problem. Jim remembers revivals when the church would take a week, bring in a guest speaker, and the congregation would rally around activities, initiatives, meals, and worship services for an intentional time of spiritual growth. In the same way that Gus Portokalos in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* believes that Windex will cure anything, many older folks

¹¹ Wall, 115.

remember revivals and believe they should anchor the church calendar once again.¹² These times meant so much. However, these folks often forget that many churches discontinued revivals because eventually, Jim and his friends were the only ones showing up. The younger generations connect to faith differently. Households with two working parents lack the time and energy to invest in a week of evening worship services in the church in the middle of the year. And though everyone would love to experience all of this again, the way folks want to meet their spiritual needs has changed. Jim, and good folks like him, fail to see that the need revivals met still exists, but the church must identify and design innovative ways to meet the need today. To run a revival in 2021 like a congregation did in 1957 is akin to treating a knee injury by taping an aspirin to the kneecap or treating a headache by spraying Windex in an ear. It does not account for the problem; it is merely imposing an existing solution that will not work. It is embodying tradition in a stale, disconnected way. Design thinking processes do not rubber-stamp solutions that already exist. Design thinking seeks innovative solutions to intriguing problems.¹³ If the solution already exists, implement it. If the solution is no longer working, then it is time to explore the deeper problem.¹⁴ And solutions like, "We need a revival" do not necessarily identify a problem. It identifies ways a tradition was once embodied, and a problem was once met. However, it is not a solution for a new day.

¹² "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." Wikipedia.com, Wikipedia Foundation. Accessed 9/11/2020 https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/My_Big_Fat_Greek_Wedding

¹³ *Design Project Scoping Guide*. Hasso Plattner Institute of Design. <https://dlibrary.stanford.edu/ambiguity/design-project-scoping-guide>. 6. "Scope a project by giving it bounds to the area to explore, not by dictating the solution space. Create design challenges that contain intriguing issues to learn more about. Think about redesigning experiences (verbs), not solutions (nouns)."

¹⁴ Ibid 7. "An open design challenge is one where neither the solution nor the form of the solution is known from the beginning."

Wicked Problems, Reframing, and Constraints

Everything in this chapter so far, illustrates the point that identifying a problem to be solved is difficult but essential. In the case of businesses closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, being closed is a constraint, not the solution. The church member longing for a revival also proposes a solution before identifying the problem a revival solves.

Therefore, this chapter, finally, moves into the nuts and bolts of identifying a problem to solve as a part of a design thinking process. However, one more quick detour is necessary related to problem-solving. The detour considers wicked problems, reframing, and the power of constraints.

Wicked Problems

There are countless books, articles, theses, and dissertations on the subject of wicked problems. First defined by mathematician Horst Rittle in the 1960s, wicked problems are ill-formulated and confusing problems that defy a straightforward solution.¹⁵ These problems are different from technical problems, which have a straightforward solution that can be found or designed.¹⁶ Technical problems can come in all shapes and sizes. In the d.school's *Design Project Scoping Guide*, Thomas Both writes that "if there is a universal right answer to your question – independent of individuals, circumstance, and culture – then you don't have a design challenge."¹⁷ You do not have a wicked problem either. You have a technical problem. Technical problems range in complexity from a dark room that needs a lamp to a calculus equation on a standardized

¹⁵ Martin, 14-17, 94. Richard Buchanan. "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking" *Design Issues*. Spring 1992 vol 8, no2 pp5-21.

¹⁶ Heifetz, *Adaptive Leadership*, 19.

¹⁷ *Design Project Scoping Guide*, 3.

test. In both cases, the solution may take time and effort, but there is a straightforward solution to a dark room or a calculus problem. Wicked problems are different.

Jennifer Riel in *The Design of Business* sums up wicked problems with a few points. First, they are "complex and ambiguous." Second, they are difficult to categorize. Third, working on solutions can change the problem. And fourth, there is no clear stopping point. The problem can continue, and there may be no discernable endpoint to the problem. An overly simplified image to describe a wicked problem is the classic "Whac-A-Mole" arcade game.¹⁸ With each attempt to tamp down the problem, another aspect of it shows up. In the world, wicked problems range in scope from homelessness to pandemics. World hunger, global poverty, and the end of oil are also wicked problems.¹⁹ In all of these cases, no single project or design team will fully tackle the problem.

The reason for this brief section on wicked problems is to point out that churches will encounter these problems. Homelessness and poverty are likely to emerge in the work of mission-minded design teams seeking to embody the traditions of service in innovative ways through congregational life. These problems will not go away quickly, but that does not mean they should be avoided. Instead, by shaping a problem statement about a particular aspect of a wicked problem, a congregation can take on one aspect of the problem. And two keys to being able to isolate one aspect of a wicked problem are understanding reframing and the power of constraints.

¹⁸ "Whac-A-Mole." Wikipedia, Wikipedia Foundation. Accessed 2/12/2021/ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whac-A-Mole>

¹⁹ Martin, *The Design of Business*, 94.

Reframe

In *Designing Your Life*, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans write that "reframing is how designers get unstuck. Reframing also makes sure that we are working on the right problems... reframing is essential to finding the right problems and the right solutions."²⁰ Design thinkers develop an ability to reframe situations quickly. This talent helps the designers see all aspects of a difficult problem, allowing particular aspects to be isolated. Now, reframing is not easy, but the good news is, it can be learned.

There is an old riddle based on gender stereotypes that can illustrate the importance of reframing. The riddle is:

A father and son have a car accident and are both badly hurt. They are both taken to separate hospitals. When the boy is taken in for an operation, the surgeon (doctor) says, 'I cannot do the surgery because this is my son.' How is this possible?

The answer: The surgeon (doctor) is a woman. She is the boy's mother!²¹

For a long time, this riddle worked because surgeons were mostly men. No one imagined a female surgeon.²² Of course, the point of the obnoxious riddle is not just about the potential for designing equity into the system that trains surgeons. The point is that reframing is necessary to identify the real problem in the riddle. Reframing this riddle demands that one recognize that either parent could be a surgeon. Since the surgeon cannot operate on her son, and her spouse is at a different hospital, the reluctant surgeon is the boy's mother. By reframing the gender identity of the surgeon, one can solve the riddle. Without the ability to reframe, the riddle remains unsolved. That is why reframing is such an essential skill for designers to develop when identifying problems.

²⁰ Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. *Designing Your Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. xxvii.

²¹ Devorah Blachor. "Gender Bias Riddles." *McSweeneys.net*. April 5, 2017. <https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/gender-bias-riddles> Accessed 10/7/2020.

²² Julie A. Freischlag, MD. "Women Surgeons — Still in a Male-Dominated World." *Yale Journal of Biological Medicine*. Vol 81(4) 2008 Dec: 203–204. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2605307/> accessed 10/7/2020.

Other great examples of reframing come from *Designing Your Life*. The book uses the design thinking process to help individuals reimagine and build a “well-lived, joyful life.” Throughout the book, the authors invite readers to reframe the problems in their life to get unstuck. By reframing dysfunctional beliefs, a pathway forward can emerge. Burnett and Evans write to individuals seeking to reshape their own lives, but their reframing examples can scale up to a congregational level. Some examples of reframing from Burnett and Evans include:

Dysfunctional Belief: I should know where I’m going!

Reframe: I won’t always know where I’m going – but I can always know whether I’m going in the right direction.²³

Dysfunctional Belief: I’m stuck.

Reframe: I’m never stuck, because I can always generate a lot of ideas.²⁴

Dysfunctional Belief: I have to find the one right idea.

Reframe: I need a lot of ideas so that I can explore any number of possibilities for my future.²⁵

Dysfunctional Belief: I need to figure out my best possible life, make a plan, and then execute it.

Reframe: There are multiple great lives (and plans) within me, and I get to choose which one to build my way forward to next.²⁶

Fully understanding a problem comes when one can thoroughly reframe the problem.

This means approaching a problem from many angles to discover possibilities rather than roadblocks. This means different things in different contexts, but like Copernicus, who was willing to reframe the cosmos, designers must consider multiple possibilities and aggressively reframe. The world now knows that a proper model of the universe means the earth is no longer its center. In the same way that an accurate model of the universe

²³ Burnett and Evans, 39.

²⁴ Ibid, 64.

²⁵ Ibid, 65.

²⁶ Ibid, 90.

only emerges after reimagining and reframing a human's location in the cosmos, identifying a specific problem to solve happens when designers can identify the true center of the problem.²⁷ Reframing helps immensely with this.

The Importance of Constraints

Though it is an affront to motivational speakers and fans of R. Kelly's "I Believe I Can Fly," Tim Brown writes that the "willing and even enthusiastic acceptance of competing constraints is the foundation for design thinking."²⁸ Instead of imagining a design process as a "the sky is the limit" process, design thinking cycles embrace constraints and manage a peaceful coexistence between desirability, viability, and feasibility.²⁹ The sky is not a limit, but the good news is that it does not have to be. The ability to reframe the problem, focus on the possible opportunities, and creatively leverage resources and assets are how innovative solutions emerge.

Playing a sport is an exercise in leveraging constraints. Leagues limit roster size, substitutions intervals, the length of games, and the size of the field of play. For example, professional soccer only allows three substitutions per game, while hockey allows team substitutions freely, even during play. These are constraints. Another example is that out of bounds lines exist in almost every sport. Without boundaries, home runs would just roll 600 feet, Michael Jordan's free throw line dunk in the 1987 slam dunk contest would have just been a dunk, and the drama of Dwight Clark's "The Catch" in the corner of the endzone during the 1982 NFC Championship game would be lost. From field position to substitutions to clock management, coaches and players leverage their sport's constraints

²⁷ Kuile, 3.

²⁸ Brown, 18.

²⁹ Ibid, 19.

to gain an advantage. However, leveraging constraints in sports is not just about creating advantages on the field. Two illustrations of constraints come from ESPN, the leading sports television and entertainment network in the United States.

ESPN started as a small network in Connecticut in the late 1970s but is now a global leader in sports broadcasting. One of ESPN's recent successes is the *30 for 30* documentary series. Bill Simmons and Conner Schell pitched the idea of 30 one-hour documentaries to celebrate ESPN's 30th anniversary. The constraints they put on the project were that the films would be 60 minutes, the filmmakers would tell the stories they wanted to tell, and they would have \$500,000 to make the film.^{30 31 32} What began as a series of 30 films is now over 150 episodes of evergreen content for ESPN that generates millions of dollars in revenue.³³ *30 for 30* is striking because this constrained \$15 million investment gave way to a signature brand. However, such a return on investment is not necessarily the norm, even at ESPN. An example of failing around constraints is "ESPN the Phone."

In the early 2000s, ESPN poured millions into the development of a cell phone. The phone launched and was a total flop. By 2006, ESPN wrote off over \$135 million because the phone did not sell.³⁴ Financially speaking, the sky was the limit in phone development, yet the concept flew over people's heads and budgets, so it flopped. ESPN wrote off almost ten times more in phone losses than it invested in the first run of *30 for*

³⁰ Richard Sandomir. "Documentaries Are the Go-To Players of Sports Television." New York Times, NYTimes.Com. March 21, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/sports/documentaries-are-the-go-to-players-of-sports-television.html> accessed 10-9-2020.

³¹ Scott Bayer. "Tackling Sports History: ESPN's '30 for 30.'" *International Documentary Association*. Documentary.com. September 12, 2010 <https://www.documentary.org/column/tackling-sports-history-espns-30-30> accessed 10-9-2020.

³² James Andrew Miller and Tom Shales. *Those Guys Have All the Fun: Inside the World of ESPN*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011. 727-729.

³³ "30 for 30." Wikipedia, Wikipedia Foundation. Accessed 10-9-2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/30_for_30

³⁴ Miller, 623. "Steve Jobs famously panned the phone idea before its public release when he told then ESPN head George Bodenheimer, 'Your phone is the dumbest f---ing idea I have ever heard,' before walking away. I guess not even ESPN can win them all."

30 films. Of course, there are many reasons the films work, and the phone did not, but one that Simmons talks about is the value of adequately leveraging constraints.³⁵ The film parameters were clear. The phone parameters were not. Even in a company like ESPN, huge investments do not guarantee success. The ESPN phone was a solution in search of a problem. *30 for 30*, on the other hand, was an untapped market. Filmmakers had stories they wanted to tell. Viewers wanted to hear these stories. ESPN had the platform. A viable product emerged through properly leveraging constraints, and the old cell phones now belong in the electronics recycling bin.

Within congregational life, constraints abound. Christian congregations embrace constraints of orthodoxy, tradition, and scripture. They tie themselves to specific ways of expressing a shared life. And, of course, most congregations have physical constraints tied to building management. The constraints of congregations and design cycles shift over time and vary from project to project. However, there are always constraints.

Adam Morgan and Mark Barden outline four basic constraints in their book, *A Beautiful Constraint*. These four constraints are:

- constraints of foundation (where we are limited in something that is usually seen as a foundational element for success);
- constraints of resource (where we are limited in an important resource, such as money or people);
- constraints of time (where we are limited in the amount of time we have to do something);
- and constraints of method (where we are limited by having to do something in a certain way).³⁶

Morgan and Barden invite readers into a six-step process to reframe constraints from punitive restrictions that stifle innovation to propellers that generate opportunities. The

³⁵ Ibid, 623.

³⁶ Adam Morgan and Mark Barden. *A Beautiful Constraint*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015. 6-7.

work demands ingenuity and imagination, which of course, is good news for the church. For 2,000 years, working within constraints has been the work of people.

Constraints set the parameters of a project but do not determine the success of a design cycle. Constraints shape countless factors related to feasibility; however, a single constraint alone rarely keeps a team from approaching a problem. Of course, there will always be constraints particular designers and teams might avoid but avoiding a problem because of a constraint is almost always a design choice.³⁷ Successful design cycles manage to utilize and leverage constraints toward opportunities. Innovators in a VUCA world may let a constraint steer them, but they will not let a constraint stop them. Neither should a congregation.

Detour Conclusion

Now that the table has been set, the next section suggests a systematic approach to problem identification. So far, this chapter has been about some tools and practices that help with what is to come. As a matter of review, any design process that misplaces a solution for a problem will fail. Remember, a statement like, “we need a revival” is not a problem statement. The ESPN phone was not a problem either. Like a revival, these are both solutions in search of problems. A designer and design team must recognize the difference between solutions and problems. When solutions emerge prematurely, and they will, it is best to set them aside and avoid working toward these pre-determined outcomes. Such work is not design thinking. Working backward from a solution is a viable strategy, and Christians always keep the end in view as they work, discern and design. However, in this case, working backwards alone does not reflect an authentic

³⁷ Morgan and Barden, 37. “organizations lock-in self-reinforcing processes and cognitive rigidities” called path dependence.

design thinking process because it risks isolating the end as a technical solution to be solved.

The examples of the COVID-19 shutdowns highlight the importance of identifying specifically the problem that needs to be solved. In businesses and protests, the problem is revenue generation, not being open or closed. From local restaurants to airlines and up to Walt Disney World, businesses that cannot generate enough revenue, open or not, will not survive. Businesses need to see openings, closings, and capacity limitations as constraints to work within, rather than absolute roadblocks.

Finally, Tim Brown told the story of Amtrak and the Acela seat redesign in chapter two. Amtrak fell in love with the idea of redesigning the seat to increase ridership. When they approached IDEO about redesigning the seat, IDEO found that the seat was not the problem but that taking the train was arduous. Sitting down in the seat was the eighth step in a complicated process. IDEO changed gears to help Amtrak design a delightful experience. This design cycle eventually included better seats, but again, a comfy train seat was the solution in search of a problem.

The stories above reflect how it is easy to misassign a constraint or a solution as the problem. It is appealing to fall in love with a solution. However, this chapter's real work is helping a person or team identify a problem that they can work to solve. This chapter's remainder turns to a series of steps that move from the empathy generated in chapter two to isolating a problem. This will then lead to prototyping in chapter four. Design thinkers love to ask questions by beginning with the phrase, "How might we?" Therefore, in the move to what is next, it is fitting to ask, how might one identify a problem rooted in empathy that leads to a prototype?

Identifying the Problem, In Steps

What follows now is a set of steps to guide a team through a process of interpretation, exploration, and convergence toward a problem statement. Though they appear linear, they are less a step-by-step progression and more a process that moves in an overarching direction, from empathy toward exploring the possibilities of what could be and eventually landing on a statement of the problem to be solved. Depending on the project's flow, there could be overlaps in the steps or multiple cycles through each step. Each project will feel and work differently. But overall, the problem identification process is the team interpreting information generated by the users in ways that allow for problems to emerge, leading to a brief about the project and preparing the team for prototyping and iterating cycles.

The Guiding Star – The Nearer Star

“You have to set a vision, a North Star, or a key problem you are trying to solve.”³⁸

Chapter one identified that every design process must aim toward a guiding star. Just as a design process is aimed toward an end, so too is a congregation to play a part in fulfilling Jesus’s command, “Be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and to the ends of the earth.” It is worth noting that not every design thinking process has a guiding star. Some engage in design thinking that will start solely with empathy and attempt to work backward toward meaningful user experiences.³⁹ This undefined direction for a design thinking process is the purest form of design thinking, but ultimately not practical for the church. For the most part, recent writing and practice in design thinking identifies a

³⁸ Kolko, 67.

³⁹ L.Gregory Jones. “Innovation and design thinking are necessary but insufficient” *Faith & Leadership*. faithandleadership.com August 22, 2017. <https://faithandleadership.com/l-gregory-jones-innovation-and-design-thinking-are-necessary-insufficient> accessed 10-8-2020.

guiding star for each project. In this way, the design process mirrors the book of Acts' structure, which begins with the guiding star of Jesus' command and then proceeds to work out that call.⁴⁰

A congregation's design team will know its overall guiding star, which relates to the universal church's mission and the local church's mission and vision. Then it must also designate a nearer star to work towards. The nearer star narrows the focus for a project's field of vision.⁴¹ Examples of a nearer star that facilitates problem identification could be:

How might we help fulfill our mission by improving the discipleship experience of youth in middle school in high school?

How might we fulfill our mission by creating engaging mission opportunities for children?

How might we fulfill our congregation vision by identifying the difficulties our adults are having with prayer and spiritual disciplines?

Or, how might we fulfill our mission through increased community engagement around a particular social need?

These statements narrow the lens in the direction of the guiding star and become the nearer star. They bring to the forefront one area of focus while keeping in the distance the guiding star. The problem identification process begins by aligning the nearer star with the guiding star, then taking small steps to progressively constrain the problem, eventually leading to the actual problem statement.

Interpretive work

The last chapter's work, engaging in empathy, is the first active step in every design thinking process. The empathetic work allows the design team to "understand and

⁴⁰ Kuile, 189-192. Spiritually speaking, it is worth noting the sentiment of Casper ter Kuile in *The Power of Ritual*. He writes about personal constraints he imposes as spiritual disciplines. In reference to a weekly digital sabbath, he writes, "I need a north star, something that reminds me why I started the practice, why it is important to me, to keep bringing me back to what I know truly matters." These practices reflect the importance of returning our gaze to a guiding star while also underscoring the value of constraints in life and design cycles.

⁴¹ Two more worthy resources are concept maps found on pages 144-15 of Kolko's *Well Designed* and the *Design Project Scoping Guide*.

share the same feelings that others feel," and without it, "the idea and potential of human-centered design isn't fulfilled."⁴² To empathize appropriately, the design team shut off the urge to interpret everything it was hearing and seeing. As good ethnographers, they observed and sought raw, unbiased information and data. However, design thinking is more than empathy because acting only from an empathetic posture risks path dependence. Therefore, understanding and interpreting the data happens next. The design team organizes the empathetic information to make intuitive leaps and develop a viable and useable problem statement.

Borrowing once again from the field of adaptive leadership, Heifetz states that the "act of interpreting might be understood as listening for the 'song beneath the words.'"⁴³ Usually, people know what they want to say, but they may not know what they need (see "a faster horse" quote above). It is the design team's task to interpret the data in ways that unlock deep needs. A team is now asking itself how it might gain a fuller, more in-depth understanding of what was said and what they saw. The goal is to "translate the observations into insights." In the context of a congregation, those insights will later transform into initiatives, projects, ministries, or programs that improve congregational life while fulfilling the mission and vision of the local church.⁴⁴

This interpretive work is at the heart of design thinking because it is where the intuitive leaps happen. Though interpretation that leads to intuitive leaps comes naturally to some, it is not instinctual for everyone. It is easy to get hung up on what one person

⁴² Thomas Lockwood and Edgar Papke, *Innovation by Design: How Any Organization Can Leverage Design Thinking to Produce Change, Drive New Ideas, and Deliver Meaningful Solutions*. Wayne, NJ: Career Press, 2018. 122.

⁴³ Heifetz, *Adaptive Leadership*, 34 Heifetz continues, "...The idea is to make your interpretations as accurate as possible by considering the widest possible array of sensory information...ask yourself, 'What underlying values and loyalties are at stake?'...If you do not question your own and the group's preferred interpretation, you and your organization may end up colluding in avoiding the difficult work of addressing the more important issues." Interpretation is an essential step in circumventing path dependence.

⁴⁴ Brown, 49.

says or fail to hear below the surface. Some do this well, but not everyone does.

Fortunately, the d.school designed a simple set of “Point-of-View” (POV) statements that allow anyone to structure their understanding to make intuitive leaps.⁴⁵ When reviewing ethnographic information, a team might use this simple, four-sentence statement structure:

1. We met: <insert name>.
2. We were surprised to learn: <some insight from this person>.
3. We wonder if this means: <insert inference here>.
4. It would be game-changing to: <insert idea here>.

This Point of View framework helps structure the design challenge into an actionable problem statement so that a team can begin brainstorming solutions. If a team conducts several interviews, receives significant feedback, and has a useful data set, multiple POV statements will emerge during the interpretive process. Furthermore, if the research is good, multiple POV statements and insights will be generated from each subject who provided meaningful data.

As the interpretive work moves from empathy to a problem statement, it considers some of the actual or potential constraints. Though the sky is not the limit, this is also not necessarily the time to perfectly thread the needle of every possible constraint. When Simmons and Schell pitched *30 for 30* to the ESPN executives, they kept the constraints general. They identified that the 30th anniversary of ESPN was coming up, and there needed to be a way to celebrate that. One way to celebrate could be to make films that told some stories from the last 30 years. They would later work out the granular level details set by ESPN as a part of the prototyping and iteration process. Early on, Simmons and Schell acknowledged, in a point-of-view statement framework that:

⁴⁵ *Design Thinking Bootleg*, 11.

1. We love to identify the quirky and unique stories in sports as we work for ESPN.
2. We noticed that ESPN likes to celebrate itself every five years.
3. We wonder if ESPN could make some films to celebrate some yet to be told stories from its history.
4. It would be game-changing if excellent filmmakers would partner with us to help tell those stories on ESPN.

Ultimately, that is what happened. An investment of \$15 million became a signature ESPN product that everyone now knows and loves. Simmons and Schell interpreted the landscape, designed a winning formula, and the rest is history. Of course, such innovative ideas are not limited to television networks. Through good interpretive work, churches can meet the needs of their congregation and community as well.

The team's interpretive work is to construct and evaluate the constellation that emerges through the generated point-of-view statements. In congregational design thinking, multiple problem sets will likely emerge. So, by grouping the problems and point-of-view statements, a design team can develop a set of potential problems to take on. A team does not have to know how to take on every problem or navigate every constraint. Instead, the hope is that the team can focus on a problem or set of problems that will generate meaningful solutions for some in the congregation.

A Focused Problem Statement (or statements)

Since “A good solution can only come about if the design team has understood the problem,” the team's interpretive work moves through evaluating constellations toward a focused problem statement.⁴⁶ In the next chapter on prototyping and iterating, sections are devoted to brainstorming, ideation, and convergence, but it is fitting to mention here that brainstorming and convergence will likely bleed into problem

⁴⁶ Michael Lewrick, Partick Link, and Larry Leifer. *Design Thinking Playbook* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018. 53.

identification. These brainstorming and convergence processes often use post-it notes, whiteboards, wide-ranging conversation exercises, and off-the-wall ideas to fully explore a potential project. Because of this, on the surface, to many outsiders, design thinking is just about the hip workspaces, iteration cycles, sharpies, whiteboards, and post-its. Of course, those are some of the tools used in the process, but design thinking works due to its ability to identify what is important and then solve those problems.⁴⁷ Design thinking works to identify the root problems with culture, situation, or opportunity and then solve for that in ways that make real, lasting gains.⁴⁸ Yet, for those with an embedded industrial mindset, all problems are technical. The insights from the interpretation and adaptive leadership practices are overkill, and the quickest fix that emerges is often what happens.⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ Therefore a congregation's design team must not be tempted to settle for quick, technical fixes the way an industrial problem-solving mindset and structure might have. The design team building on insights from the ethnographic research will likely provide several problem statements that can be taken on in different ways, all of which begin with one of design thinking's favorite phrases, "How might we...."

"How Might We" is a phrase design thinkers use throughout the design thinking process because it helps refocus the design work. Formally, this thesis's congregation design thinking process uses "How Might We..." to write a final problem statement. When "How Might We" does not work, other phrases that lead to good problem

⁴⁷ Lockwood and Papke, 118.

⁴⁸ Ibid 118.

⁴⁹ Ibid 115.

⁵⁰ But as the above examples, and the example of the Helsinki Public Pool show, a technical fix may not identify or address the real problem. In their book, *Innovation by Design*, Thomas Lockwood and Edgar Papke tell the story of a public pool in Helsinki in the years following World War II. Initially, the pool had great membership, robust programs, and a thriving culture. Then, seemingly overnight, membership and participation began to decline. Like Amtrak and IDEO, the council hired an architect for a pool redesign. After the architect did the research, he brought a bus schedule to the council. By changing the bus schedule meant that people could not visit the pool at prime times. They left the pool because of the schedule, not the design. In this case, a design process revealed a technical fix.

statements are, “What might be possible if...?” and “What could change if we...?”

Though these problem statements are open-ended, they provide a project scope and an area to work in.

Earlier, this chapter considered a church revival and opening businesses during COVID lockdowns. In each case, a solution was misidentified as a problem. The church member proposing a revival wants that solution but has disconnected it from the problem revivals once solved. Those who clammer for businesses to be open as the solution to the problems forget the need to generate revenue. Therefore, a different interpretive process needs to occur to get those users to adequate problem statements.

In the case of the revival, the design team heard from Jim that the church needed to have a revival again. If they did good work, they asked him to describe what he remembered about revivals, why they were necessary, and how he thought a revival might be a key to congregational success. Maybe he remembered the fellowship of a churchwide dinner. He likely remembered good preaching from a new voice. He probably believes kids these days need more Christian education and that some of the kids in the church need to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. The design team needs to hear that Jim wants more than a revival. The team must see past Jim’s words to realize that Jim misses his whole church being together: the embodied tradition of congregational fellowship. He misses collective opportunities for spiritual growth outside of Sunday morning worship: the embodied tradition of discipleship and worship. He wishes the dinner tables for Wednesday night supper included a few more folks of different ages. Jim misses something from the past but does not grasp why his prescription of a revival may not work. He only sees the loss of certain ways of

embodying the tradition. He does not understand what might prevent a revival's viability today.

Jim spends most evenings at home. Since his grandchildren live out of town, he does not see that school days often extend until 6 PM and extracurricular activity schedules often push into the evening. Families are busy, and free evenings are hard to come by. It is not that these folks do not want a revival; in fact, they would love it. However, their previous commitments prevent a full buy-in. They have scheduling conflicts, and therefore, they foresee the empty sanctuary on a Monday night that Jim cannot. They know his solution will not work for them. But what might?

Hearing beyond Jim's complaint and the constraints of families is the work of the team in identifying the problem. They need to discern that Jim wants the embodied traditions of worship, discipleship, and fellowship. They must discern that families care about these traditions also, but they are also overworked, overscheduled, and overwhelmed. The teams point-of-view statements will likely create multiple constellations to interpret, and they might lead to a problem statement like:

How might we provide fellowship opportunities for the whole church to engage in, even though the schedules and rhythms everyone faces leave us little room for implementing yesterday's solutions?

Or,

How might we provide spiritual growth and discipleship plans across generations when generational patterns and schedules now vary more widely than ever?

These are just two potential problem statements that might emerge from an excellent interpretive process. They will lead to different kinds of prototype and iteration cycles. However, both statements take what they learned in the empathy process, reflect interpretive work done by a team, and then help set up the prototyping and iterating steps that come next.

Businesses could follow a similar process. Above they wrestled with the COVID-imposed closings, but exploring needs to interpret the landscape in a way that solves problems rather than imposes solutions is similar. Businesses do not just need to be open; they need to generate revenue in service to their mission. So,

How might a restaurant provide an excellent dining experience that generates adequate revenue within the constraints imposed by COVID-imposed closings?
Or,
How might a children's boutique continue to generate revenue and meet the community's clothing needs without the ability for people to browse and make hands-on purchases?

These two examples reflect that identifying aspects of problems caused by closing businesses reveals that solutions are not met through a traditional remedy. In the same way that families have barriers to participating in a revival, COVID-imposed closings mean that many are not comfortable with dining and shopping immediately going back to normal. This complexifies the business problem and shifts it from merely reopening to adapting. Therefore, it is imperative to find a problem or set of problems to be solved and not merely isolate a solution to implement.

Develop/Review the Brief

The problem-solving process now closes with the development of a brief. In design studios, every project has a brief. It is usually the starting point of a project and serves as a home base. Briefs help a team remember the project scope and mission while laying out the project's constraints, goals, and hopes.⁵¹ As a metaphor, the brief defines the sandbox the design team plays in. Tim Brown writes that “a well-constructed brief

⁵¹ For congregational design thinking, I place the brief here because it is an excellent time for a team to assess all of the components it has been working with. It serves as a review before heading to prototyping.

will allow for serendipity, unpredictability, and the capricious whims of fate, for this is the creative realm from which breakthrough ideas emerge.”⁵²

The Design Thinking Playbook contains several resources for developing an adequate brief.⁵³ A brief can be as simple as answering, “Why? Who? What? With what? Who else? How much? When? and How?” These questions will help form the basics of the brief. As a project unfolds, or in a situation where a brief is provided to an outside team, a host of additional parameters will be defined, including:

- definition of design space and time,
- definition of already existing approaches to solving the problem,
- definition of the design principles,
- definition of scenarios that are associated with the solution,
- definition of the next steps and milestones, and
- information on potential implementation challenges.

Another, more straightforward way of outlining a brief for congregational work comes from the d.school’s *Design Project Scoping Guide*. The guide includes “A Tool: Five elements to frame a challenge.”⁵⁴ The structured tool provides a focused project space for the design team to answer What, For Whom, Context, Goals, and The Crux.

What: Create ways to (Human Action) or Redesign the (human experience) experience.

For Whom: For (user group); (while considering (other stakeholders)).

Context: In a world where (context) -or- Keeping in mind (context).

Goals: We aim to (outcome) in the project/in this project phase.

The Crux: We really need to figure out (question/assumption).⁵⁵

Regardless of how broad or concise a brief is developed, within a congregational context, a brief would likely hold:

- the church’s mission and vision statements,
- the scope or field the team is working to address problems in (worship, ministry, facilities, culture, administration, missions, community involvement, etc.),

⁵² Brown, 22-23.

⁵³ Lewrick, Link, and Leifer, 53.

⁵⁴ *Design Project Scoping Guide*, 8-11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* 8-11.

some of the expectations and hopes,
a plan for doing the empathy work as well as the raw data collected from the
empathy work that was completed,
a general plan for how a problem might be identified, and
when prototypes (or possible plans for implementation) might be available to
move to the next step of congregational adoption.

Within a congregation, many things related to values such as vision and mission statements will also be knowledge embedded in the team. A mix of constraints and resources will be identified, which will likely include explicit constraints like the project's scope and implicit ones like the church's budget and assets. The team will always need to keep an eye on a plan to get new ideas off the ground and lean toward action instead of waiting to start something until it is perfectly formed. Reframing the use of existing resources can be both an essential part of the brief and the result of the brief. By laying out all of these components, a team can have a clear picture that drives their process.

A congregation running its own design thinking process can be more informal with a brief because the specs and cost of a project can be more fluid. Much of the knowledge a design studio like IDEO needed for a project like Amtrak is already understood by an internal, congregational team. Regardless of the formality, the team needs to get specific with a brief. The brief takes the implicit assumptions and make them explicit. It forces a team to get the assumed and embedded knowledge out, which frees a team from the assumed constraints that lead to path dependence. Organizations of all kinds, especially congregations, fall in love with specific solutions and risk worshipping those solutions.⁵⁶ This path dependence often prevents innovation and evolution in ways that would continually meet the needs of constituents. By doing the work to develop a brief, naming a real scope and constraints, rather than assuming an implicit scope and

⁵⁶ Kuile, 21.

constraints, a design team gives itself the best chance possible to identify problems that open the team up to meaningful and innovative solutions.

Finally, since a brief can be a simple outline or an intricate collage, it will likely contain statements, images, or artifacts important to the process. No matter its complexity, the brief will contain aspects of every element contained in this chapter. The guiding star will be set. The findings from the empathetic work are organized. The constraints and resources will be identified. The interpretive work will be laid out. And ultimately, all of this identifies at least one, if not several, feasible problem statements. From the brief, the team will take the next step in developing innovative solutions to complex problems while meeting their constituency's needs and building a prototype.

Conclusion

“If I’d asked my customers what they wanted, they’d have said a faster horse.”

Henry Ford?

This chapter opens and closes with this well-worn Ford quote attributed to Henry Ford because it underscores people’s inability to identify their actual problems and highlights that everyone loves an incremental solution. These tendencies often manifest themselves in the hope that yesterday’s solutions will also solve today’s problems. Of course, if yesterday’s solutions still worked, today would have different problems.

In the first twenty minutes of the film *Moneyball*, there are several scenes when Billy Beane, played by Brad Pitt, is fed up with the A's scouting and player development reversion to the status quo. Like a pastor who has heard one too many times that "what this church needs is a revival," an exasperated Beane sees an entirely different problem. His scouts are obsessed with cheap replacements for his three best players. However,

Beane realizes that the A's problem is not player development; it is the advantages his competition exploits due to their massive resources. Beane reframes and rearticulates a problem that those around him are not willing to face. His success results from facing a problem he can solve rather than developing a faster horse. The church must do the same.

In the church, yesterday's remedies will no longer solve today's problems. When a congregation understands that, it can identify real problems and begin generating innovative solutions. The church can be innovative. It can design solutions that meet its needs. It can design the re-embodiment of its traditions. Identifying the problems and articulating constraints in concise ways is an essential step in this process and gives way to the real fun of design thinking as chapter four moves from problems to prototypes.

Chapter 4 – Let’s Try This!

Rule 17. Don’t edit in your head

‘A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.’

James Joyce, Ulysses

Let me build on something I’ve said multiple times in this book: there are bad ideas, but all ideas are worth chasing. Sometimes when you’re sure a certain idea will be a failure, you end up surprising yourself and it turns out better than you thought. But I promise that if you take the idea as far as you can and try as many ways of getting there as possible, at some point you will learn something that makes it worthwhile. I see so many young chefs who dismiss a thought without first seeing how it turns out. Every dish and service is an opportunity to collect data. It’s only a mistake if you don’t learn from it.

David Chang¹

In the children’s book, *Jonathan James and the Whatif Monster*, Jonathan James faces situations while a monster beside him asks scary questions that paralyze Jonathan James in his decision making.² For the first half of the book, the Whatif monster paralyzes Jonathan James with the questions: What if it’s scary? What if it’s hard? What if everyone laughs at him? In the middle of the book, things take a turn. Jonathan reframes his situation and asks: What if it’s fun? What if others don’t laugh at him? And what if things go great? In the end, Jonathan tames the doubt and constraints imposed by his Whatif monster and reframes his way into great experiences as he tries new things.

Moving from problem identification to prototyping means taming the Whatif monster. Endless possibilities sometimes allow people to imagine their way into paralysis. It is natural to mentally edit opportunities and convince one’s self that trying

¹ David Chang. *Eat a Peach*. New York: Clarkson Potter, 2020, 275.

² Michelle Nelson-Schmidt, *Jonathan James and the Whatif Monster*. Tulsa, OK: Kane and Miller, a division of EDC publishing, 2012.

something else is impossible, no one will like the idea, and the status quo is more manageable than attempting something that fails. However, like Jonathan James, design thinking forces teams to see beyond the fear without editing in one's head. Design thinking means acting and trying because the mind can generate countless ideas, most of which die if they do not get out. So, design thinkers let wild ideas run. Wild ideas beget great learning experiences, which is why design thinking demands the building of a prototype.

Chapter four turns to prototyping. A significant aspect of design thinking is that it is better to learn by doing than to wait to act until after acquiring all the knowledge.³ Therefore, designers use prototypes to think with their hands and learn through making, not just thinking.⁴ Quickly building low-fidelity prototypes with whatever supplies are at hand is prototyping. Prototypes test ideas and allow designers to understand their assumptions which generates better results.⁵ Tim Brown in *Change by Design* writes, "The faster we make our ideas tangible, the sooner we will be able to evaluate them, refine them, and zero in on the best solution."⁶ That is why designers, as David Chang instructs in his "33 Rules for Becoming a Chef," do not work or edit only in their heads.⁷ Designers accelerate learning through hands-on experimenting, visualizing, and prototyping.⁸

Actively building a prototype is not the only aspect of prototyping. Decisions about which prototype to build is an outgrowth of the problem identified by the team. The

³ Glen, Suciu, and Baughin, 657.

⁴ *Design Project Scoping Guide*, 2.

⁵ Brown, 89.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Chang, 275.

⁸ Lockwood and Papke, 23.

brief from the end of chapter three likely names several problems the team could address. So, before designers grab the cardboard, post-its, and Legos, a sequence of brainstorming and convergence through ideation and feedback helps to isolate an idea to prototype. Once the idea is selected, designers build a prototype to evaluate and improve through iterative cycles. These cycles allow a designer or team to improve on assumptions and correct the flaws of the design. This chapter provides a congregation the framework it needs to move from the problems to possibilities through prototyping and iterating. Though congregational design work is not product-focused, it is possible to prototype gatherings for worship, fellowship, discipleship, service, and even pastoral care because design thinking is about more than just designing products.

Ideation: Brainstorming and Converging

Ideation is a design thinking buzzword. There are always buzzwords that catch hold and gain cache around innovation. Ideation and iteration could become design thinking clichés. However, ideation is still an essential step in design thinking because ideation is the point when a designer or team generates ideas. Within congregational design thinking cycles, an ideation phase helps isolate which prototype to build through a simple, two-step process. First, generate as many possible ideas as possible. And second, converge on one idea to move forward and build-out. In the ideation space, a team considers the brief from chapter three. The team will ask, “What is the problem? What are the resources? and What are the constraints?” all in service to exploring “What then is possible?” The two-step ideation process involves divergent and convergent thinking, which begins with brainstorming.

Brainstorming

Many people are familiar with brainstorming. Alex Osborne first described brainstorming in 1953 in a book titled *Applied Imagination*. Bill Burnette and Dave Evans write in *Designing Your Life*, "He described a method of generating ideas that relied on two rules: generating a large number of ideas without concern for quality, and deferring judgment so that participants would not censor ideas."⁹ The simple goal of brainstorming is to "generate as many ideas as possible so you have lots to experiment with and prototype."¹⁰

One goal for brainstorming draws heavily on the design sensibility of radical collaboration and listening to voices for ideas from extreme users or the fringes. Tod Bolsinger, in *Canoeing the Mountains*, describes the importance of looking to the fringes as he references James Davidson Hunter's *To Change the World*. Bolsinger writes, "Change is often initiated outside the centermost positions. When change is initiated in the center, then it typically comes from outside the center's nucleus. Whenever innovation begins, it comes as a challenge to the dominant ideas and moral systems defined by the elites who possess the highest levels of symbolic capital."¹¹ This means that those looking for innovative solutions need to develop a diverse network of collaborators to find unique ideas from the fringes. Brainstorming helps to do this by getting out of the linear, analytical ways of generating ideas, solving problems, and isolating solutions. In a brainstorming process, a design team must carry ideas to the extremes. By getting all the way out into the far-fetched possibilities, a design team can

⁹ Burnette and Evans, 120.

¹⁰ Burnette and Evans 59

¹¹ Bolsinger 199, James Davidson Hunter. *To Change the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 599-600.

imagine opportunities that exist beyond their assumed capacity. In this way, design teams begin to chip away a wicked problem by making part of the problem graspable.¹²

There are countless approaches and strategies for brainstorming. Design thinking does not identify a right or wrong way to brainstorm. However, it aims for a fun and collaborative process. Brainstorming should get basic ideas on paper and consider the wild ideas. Within the design community, brainstorming often happens around whiteboards with sharpies and post-it notes (another cliché of design thinking), but no law requires these. The accouterments are tools that help move a team toward an innovative solution to a complex problem. There are a few "rules," best practices really, for brainstorming in the design community. These principles help teams get the most out of their work.

In the *Design Thinking Playbook*, the authors identify three specific principles for brainstorming: "Inspire creative confidence, choose quantity over quality, and there should be no criticism."¹³ The goal is to generate as many ideas as possible because unexplored ideas leave potential innovations off the table. The team will inevitably return to the center, but during this process, the key is ideas. Tim Brown reminds readers that the reason for generating so many ideas is that "there is no silver bullet to innovation. Think of it more as 'silver buckshot.'"¹⁴

Brown writes explicitly about best practices. For example, teams should defer judgment, explore wild ideas, stay focused on the topic, and most importantly, "build on the ideas of others."¹⁵ One tactic to do this is to utilize a "yes, and" approach from

¹² Brown, 13.

¹³ Lewrick, Link, Leifer, 91.

¹⁴ Brown, 233.

¹⁵ Ibid, 78.

improvisational comedy. In improv, after an invitation, a partner responds affirmatively to the request, no matter how outrageous the request is, and then builds positively on that request, eventually carrying the idea to its extreme. While this approach makes for great comedy, it also gets to the extreme types of ideas that teams can learn from while design thinking. So, when Brown tells teams to build on others' ideas, he takes improv and laddering seriously. He writes that building on the ideas of others "is right up there with 'thou shalt not kill,' and 'honor thy father and mother,' as it ensures that every participant is invested in the last idea put forward and has the chance to move it along."¹⁶ This way of brainstorming helps teams by getting lots of ideas out, even radical ones. The thing is, by exploring and exploiting possibilities like this, teams learn quickly. These cycles provide the seedbed for interesting prototypes that lead to meaningful innovations.

Another strategy for brainstorming processes is called plussing. Like “yes, and,” the goal of plussing is to build upon and improve ideas without using judgmental language. Teams must say “and” instead of “but” when giving feedback. In *Little Bets*, Peter Sims describes plussing as Pixar uses it. During the creative process, someone might say something like, "I like Woody's eyes, and what if we..."¹⁷ By moving from a "but" about Woody's eyes to an "and," possibilities are opened up rather than closed off. What is already great about Woody's eyes stays while the new ideas build through successive iterations. This keeps the good ideas flowing and growing in brainstorming.

A common problem in brainstorming is short-circuiting divergent thinking by focusing on a particular idea too early in the process.¹⁸ Brainstorming and divergence

¹⁶ Brown, 78.

¹⁷ Sims, 71.

¹⁸ Tim Brown, in *Change by Design*, writes, "Don't settle for the first good idea that comes into your head or seize on the first promising solution presented to you. There are plenty more where that came from. Let a hundred flowers bloom, but then let them cross-pollinate." 239.

need to be expansive and need time to breathe. In order to prevent this, a helpful image is to follow the practices of divers searching the ocean floor. When they are searching, divers map a grid of the search area. When they find something interesting that needs further exploration, they will mark it on their map and return later. During preliminary searches, they do not let one discovery get in the way of thoroughly exploring everything.¹⁹ This is necessary for divergent thinking. The task is to mark the good ideas and then move on to explore more idea. The good ones will be there when the team is ready to come back to them.

The point of brainstorming in design thinking is to open up possibilities. It is divergent thinking predicated on generating extreme ideas and a massive quantity of ideas rather than just a few. Brainstorming and divergence can be used elsewhere in the process but always come after a team's empathy and problem identification work to bridge toward converging on a prototype. During this brainstorming phase of the process, teams defer judgment and build on the ideas of others. But this cannot continue indefinitely. At some point, the team will have enough ideas to move towards convergence. Here, a team begins to synthesize information and build towards insights all in service to reaching the next waypoint of building a prototype.²⁰

Divergence to Convergence

Brainstorming is divergent thinking that opens up possibilities. Convergent thinking, by contrast, narrows choices while moving in a particular direction. After building up as many ideas as is possible, the process can begin to converge.²¹ Wide-

¹⁹ Diver story and image from a prototype of the yet-to-be published book, *Be Ambiguous: A Designer's Guide to Navigating Ambiguity*. Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, 2018.

²⁰ Liedtak et al, 2.

²¹ Brown, 82.

ranging ideas now likely include practical solutions, difficult solutions, and wild, half-baked, hair-brained ideas. The reason for naming both the practical and the impractical is some wild ideas can be honed and shaped in ways that might integrate into something useful through the convergence process. This brings up one more warning for the divergence and convergence process: do not kill the impossible ideas during brainstorming. Let them sit and breathe. Maybe they will find a place in a possible solution down the road.²² So, as a team begins converging, it needs to make sure it has stepped back, explored as much as possible, and felt unhindered about getting ideas out that could solve the problems the team is beginning to focus on.

Of course, at some point, the convergent thinking begins. The team considers a few ideas to chase as it works toward a prototype. Teams do this in different ways, but this process will likely feel natural as the team settles “down in an intense period of synthesis, begin to organize, interpret, and weave many strands of data into a coherent story.”²³ Teams group ideas that are similar or complement each other. Depending on the constellations of ideas, multiple paths may emerge if more than one idea is promising. Though one path will initially be chosen, developing several ideas before moving forward is a healthy part of the convergence process.

As a team develops ideas, they need strategies to decide how they want to move forward and make their ideas better. To converge on a single idea, a team may often vote. Depending on the situation, all different kinds of voting processes could occur. Processes could be simple or elaborate. However, the ultimate goal is to identify one idea worth converging on and building toward. The team can then map out desired outcomes and

²² Liedtka et al, 32. “No need to push every constraint and impossibility as soon as an idea emerges...”

²³ Brown, 69.

generate feedback about how the prototype might play out in the real world with real users. All of this work happens in conversation as a team while utilizing their design sensibilities in ways that build up ideas and possibilities rather than limit them.²⁴ It is easy to limit possibilities. Tearing ideas down and throwing sticks in the spokes is simple. The team that works toward converging on an idea benefits from the support and positive feedback, which propels the work.

Two feedback strategies that can be used throughout the design thinking process that are especially helpful in convergent thinking are, “Love it, Change it, and Leave it,” and “I like, I wish, I wonder.” Both of these feedback structures help teams see what is right and what needs adjustment. With a “Love it, Change it, Leave it” feedback structure, feedback is focused and pointed.²⁵ It is a helpful way to structure feedback and identify problem points as it forces specific feedback that leads to incremental improvements. This structure also allows for negative feedback, which, though discouraged, is sometimes necessary.

With an “I like, I wish, I wonder” structure, the feedback is inherently more positive, though it is still critical.^{26 27} “I like” makes sense. Everyone knows how to give this type of feedback. By adding, “I wish,” and “I wonder,” individuals giving feedback reframe their comments toward building up solutions rather than tearing them down. “I wish” identifies a problem or deficit in an idea or prototype, but it does so constructively. It plants seeds for a solution rather than dwelling only on inadequacies. A similar thing holds for “I wonder.” “I wonder” invites expansive feedback. It pushes a team further.

²⁴ Burnett and Evans 125.

²⁵ Lewrick, Link, Leifer, 48.

²⁶ The d.school uses this framework as a feedback method. There is no citation beyond my experience of this as a part of the Designing for Social Systems program in June, 2018.

²⁷ Lewrick, Link, Leifer, 123. “I like,” “I wish,” “What if,” and “What is the benefit?”

This does not mean the team will design further, but this feedback adds to the quiver of possibilities, which is what prototypes need.

These two methods of providing feedback can return as a part of an iteration process below and can also be used at any point in a design thinking process. While feedback is essential in prototyping and iterating, design thinking processes utilize feedback throughout projects and conversations. From generating ideas to building up possibilities, these two simple feedback mechanisms propel work forward or get it back on track at any point during a design process. However, this type of feedback is crucial for identifying an idea to prototype, which is the heart of this chapter and phase of the design thinking process.

Inspiration to Act: Drawing Inspiration from Acts 8 and Acts 10

Scripture has no significant examples of prototyping. Finding a prototype in Acts comes from unfairly imposing modern language, conventions, and understandings onto the early church. However, finding prototyping in scripture is not the goal. The church looks to scripture for inspiration, not necessarily a one-for-one example. The stories of Acts inspire Christians to take leaps of faith toward God's call through the Holy Spirit. Such actions parallel intuitive leaps made in design thinking as hunches lead to intuitive leaps. Therefore, as the church infuses design thinking with the Spirit's inspiration, inspiration comes from the apostles' leaps following the Holy Spirit. These inspired leaps explore the unknown and test assumptions. The stories of the eunuch in Acts 8 and Peter's dream in Acts 10 lead to Spirit-inspired leaps in ministry.

Acts 8

Chapter 8 of Acts centers on the ministry of Philip. The first half of the chapter tells the story of Philip in Samaria interacting with Simon the Magician. The second half tells the story of Philip on the wilderness road ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch. Simon the Magician seeks to short circuit the Apostles' power when he asks for their power through the Holy Spirit. Peter and John disapprove and name the wickedness of Simon the Magician seeking personal gain. This story merits a mention because of the contrast in motivation from the eunuch in the second half of the chapter.

Philip, following the guidance of the Spirit, goes to the wilderness road. He meets an Ethiopian eunuch, a prominent servant in the Ethiopian Queen's court on the road. The eunuch is reading scripture, and when Philip approaches his carriage, he begins to ask questions. His questions show thoughtfulness and deep reflection. Philip helps answer the questions for the eunuch before explaining the gospel. Following Philip's explanation, the eunuch asks, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Immediately the chariot stops, Philip baptizes the eunuch, and the story ends with the eunuch rejoicing.

So how does this passage inspire a team or congregation engaged in design thinking? What about this story in Acts makes it inspirational? In the *New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Acts*, Robert Wall considers Philip and writes that

The essential task of the prophet, then, is to clarify membership requirements of those belonging to God, sometimes in ways that redraw Israel's boundaries to include the excluded ones. The Ethiopian eunuch symbolizes the eschatological horizon of Israel in the last days that is now taking form because of Jesus under the aegis of the Holy Spirit.²⁸

²⁸ Wall, 142.

Philip, along with all the disciples and apostles, knew their guiding star and mission was to "be witnesses to the ends of the earth." For this to happen, they looked to new places and ideas. Acts reflects this. Actively working toward an expanding gospel reality means that the spread of the gospel takes shapes and forms that differ tremendously from their previous patterns, methods, and expectations. Philip believed that baptism initiated new believers into the gospel's good news and commissioned them for a Christian mission.²⁹ But are readers to believe that Philip had a clear vision of what the implications of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth would mean? That is not likely. No one connected to Pentecost could have sketched out a plan for sharing the gospel with the Ethiopians by baptizing a eunuch from Candace's court beside the wilderness road. Such an interaction was unimaginable seven chapters ago. But now, as the apostles feel their way through an expanding ministry one step at a time, it seems normal. And with each step, each interaction, and each instance that carries the gospel towards the end of the earth, the apostles, in design thinking language, test their assumptions related to what was reasonable, likely, and possible.

Philip's interaction with the eunuch and countless other stories of the gospel's spread reflects growth, change, and expansion in the church. From the unleashing of the Spirit at Pentecost, all the way through the eunuch and beyond, the Spirit inspired outgrowths of the faith towards the ends of the earth. Yet these expressions, guided by the Holy Spirit, were still surprising. That is also clear in the story of Peter in Acts 10.

Acts 10

²⁹ Ibid, 144.

Peter's dream about unclean animals and subsequent ministry to Cornelius is a watershed moment in the expansion of the gospel "even to the gentiles." From this series of stories, Christians have, for 2,000 years, been inspired to reach beyond their common convictions to share the gospel. Therefore, this story provides a wealth of inspiration for Christians to prototype and experiment beyond what has always been done. Though it is not fair to impose upon this story that Peter was a design thinker ahead of his time, his dream, ministry to Cornelius, and retelling of this sequence in Jerusalem, actually reflect a pattern similar to a design thinking experience and process.

In Acts 10, the Spirit of God meets Peter and Cornelius. Peter is open to the Spirit, but he has questions. While resting and praying on a rooftop, he falls into a trance. The Spirit calls him beyond his level of comfort. The image of a blanket full of animals, clean and unclean, reflects the expanse of possibilities before him. In a design thinking process, this is similar to divergent thinking as a team brainstorms a world of possibilities. For Peter, the expanse is so great he is uncomfortable. This expanse challenges what he knew his whole life. However, the Spirit assures him that food created by God is good for him to eat and that this dream is about more than an expanding diet. This dream reflects the movement of the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is not just that food is no longer off-limits. He can eat anything and therefore must now spread the good news beyond what once seemed impossible.

Peter, the denier who hid behind locked doors for a week after the resurrection, senses the Spirit's guidance and responds to Cornelius. It turns out, Cornelius sensed the Spirit as well. It is as if, echoing the famous Steve Jobs quote that "people do not know what they need until they see it," Cornelius could not identify his needs until he heard

them from Peter.³⁰ When Peter shows up, escorted by Cornelius' men, many are gathered and ready to hear the gospel.

It is essential to remember that Saul crucified Stephen with no other political authorities' intervention just three chapters earlier. Jesus, of course, was also crucified by Roman authorities. Sure, the Romans were mostly doing the work of the Jewish religious authorities to keep the peace. Still, it is precarious for a lone apostle to enter the home of a Roman Centurion. Though God told Peter it would happen, one can imagine Peter had a bit of uneasiness related to the leap he was making.

As the story unfolds, Cornelius and Peter find common ground. They converge on the shared message of the gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And not only that, but as Peter is speaking, a second Pentecost event occurs as "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." All the circumcised believers who are with Peter now see that the Holy Spirit cannot be withheld, and everyone who received the Holy Spirit was baptized on that day.

Seeking inspiration for a design process, one sees the divergent and convergent nature of opening up possibilities only to narrow in on a prototype, as a pattern in this story. Peter's dream about the sheet opening up possibilities should inspire divergent thinking and brainstorming. All the animals of the earth were possible to eat since God created them all. Echoing Genesis 1, that which God created is good. This can inspire design thinker's openness to the broadest range of possibilities when considering prototypes and possibilities.

³⁰ Sims, 134. "People don't know what they want until they've seen it," is an often-cited Steve Jobs quote and is also used below.

In Peter's experience, it is not just that possibilities arise; there is a specific convergence toward possibilities. He specifically needs to speak to Cornelius and his gathered family and friends. The rubber of the gospel's expanding nature to the ends of the earth meets the road in this specific interaction. Peter's understanding of clean and unclean changes. Understanding those who were with Peter and ultimately the authorities back in Jerusalem also changes as they later proclaim, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life." (11:18)

As the church imagines ideas to solve problems, it is almost impossible to imagine an idea from as far afield as Peter experiencing the Holy Spirit's outpouring on a Centurion and his family. So, if Peter can follow the Spirit in ways that led Cornelius and his family to the gospel, then the church can, and must, feel the inspiration to generate wide-ranging possibilities for solving a problem. Furthermore, the church can anticipate a convergence in ways that lead to new understandings of what is possible through the Holy Spirit's inspiration. It is impossible to know how God calls a team or congregation to embrace a far-fetched idea, but the call is to be as open to the Spirit as Peter was. Therefore, in the same way that Peter's dream about what is fit for him to eat inspires him to share the gospel in a previously unimagined way. Peter's ministry to Cornelius also inspires the church to move into previously unimagined possibilities. This is the very nature of a prototype in the church. It is an attempt to learn, to experience possibilities, and test the previously held understandings and assumptions. The Holy Spirit pushed Peter to do this, and prototyping pushes design thinking process in a similar way.

Prototyping for Churches

...for years, organizational management has been developing methods for increasing productivity and minimizing risk and errors that tend to stifle creative experimentation. The predominant approach to management that evolved during the industrial era, known as scientific management, broke down jobs into specific, sequential tasks, which could allocate appropriate time for completion in order to optimize efficiency. Hierarchical organizations with centralized, top-down decision-making facilitated this process and became the norm. These methods famously allowed Henry Ford to streamline the automobile production line, first revolutionizing manufacturing and then the service business as well. But the emphasis on linear systems, top-down control, and relentless efficiency and eradicating failure left little room for creative discovery and trial and error.³¹

In this era of ever-accelerating change, being able to create, navigate amid uncertainty, and adapt using an experimental approach will increasingly be a vital advantage.³²

Peter Sims, *Little Bets*

As the design thinking process moves from brainstorming to converging on an idea, it reaches a moment when it is time to build a prototype. Prototypes take on many shapes, styles, and forms. Ideally, it is in this stage of the process that the team moves toward the innovation Steve Jobs described and was referenced above when he said, “People don’t know what they want until they’ve seen it.”³³ In the church, far too often, people think they want a better version of what they had. The industrial church consistently delivered Henry Ford’s “faster horse.” However, the design thinking church seeks to meet real needs which require innovation beyond what we have known. In today’s VUCA world, even the faster horse cannot keep up. Therefore, the design team and the design project must build something to meet unmet needs. This will mean

³¹ Sims, 15.

³² Ibid, 17.

³³ Ibid, 134.

building differently than before. And though this type of prototype can vary greatly depending on the setting, the need, and the team, it is essential to remember that a prototype exists to “implement something tangible and that an interaction with a potential user can [bring] into being.”³⁴

The language of prototyping may seem strange for congregations since the term prototype usually brings to mind experimental consumer products. An automobile manufacturer builds prototypes. Toy companies build prototypes. So how might a church generate a prototype? Stand-up comedians like Chris Rock provide a template or at least a different frame to imagine prototyping for people, systems, and programs.

Chris Rock is an actor, a former Saturday Night Live performer, and stand-up comedian. As a comedian, he has filmed several comedy specials. It is tempting to believe that Rock just writes jokes and then, at some point, just goes on stage in front of a camera and audience. However, that is not how his process works. Imagining Rock’s work as the product of a solitary pursuit falls perfectly in line with a dysfunctional belief from *Designing Your Life*. Burnette and Evans encourage a reframing of the belief, “If I comprehensively research the best data for all aspects of my plan, I’ll be fine,” into “I should build prototypes to explore questions around my alternatives.”³⁵ So, how is it that Chris Rock does this?

Rock works on new material in short sets at a local comedy club, unannounced. He knows that early in the process of building a new show, most of his jokes fall flat. As he repeatedly works through his test set, he takes notes, sometimes even on stage, about

³⁴ Lewrick, Link, Leifer, 115. “prototypes exist in different manifestations and can be processed in different ways. What is important is that we implement something tangible and that an interaction with a potential user can come into being.”

³⁵ Burnette and Evans, 111.

what works and what doesn't. He shapes and reshapes the set to improve night-to-night. Rock does many nights in the small club before he hits the big stage. During these nights in the small clubs, Rock prototypes. He is testing and retesting. He checks his assumptions and learns from his audience. Finally, when the jokes are ready and the set is tight, Rock enters what he calls "full preacher mode." Now he is ready for the cameras. After countless days and nights of working and reworking the material, it is finally ready for the rest of the world.

In *Little Bets*, Peter Sims notes that "Most people are surprised that someone who has reached Chris Rock's level of success still puts himself out there in this way, willing to fail night after night, but Rock deeply understands that ingenious ideas almost never spring into people's minds fully formed; they emerge through a rigorous experimental discovery process."³⁶ Rock is like the online satirical website, *The Onion*. Writers for *The Onion* will propose up to 600 possible headlines per week to get 18 that will run. That is a 3% success rate.³⁷

The lesson is if it takes Chris Rock hundreds of hours to get something right, and *The Onion* writes headlines at a 3-4% success rate, how can the church launch ideas, programs, and initiatives that fulfill a congregation's mission and vision with just a few committee meetings? The answer is it can't. Industrial congregations can since they are just checking in for a tune-up. It takes far less time for a congregation to refine their practices and speed up the horse than to engage in design thinking. However, to improve its shared life and move on from the inhospitable industrial structures to the VUCA world, the church must develop an openness to prototyping. The church needs to

³⁶ Sims, 1-3.

³⁷ Ibid, 3.

encourage prototypes and experiments regularly. Congregations need both to try new things and let old things go. They also need to crave experimenting and prototyping even if ideas are not guaranteed to succeed. Without a passion for trying different things, congregations will get stuck on the cusp of prototyping but never actually change anything. Therefore, in some ways, launching a prototype might be the most challenging aspect of design thinking for congregations. It can be difficult to try something new in static systems. It is especially difficult when those systems fear failure or define failure as anything that is not a wild success. However, if a congregation can tolerate learning through failure, it will find both joy and success through the power of prototyping as a part of the design process.

Prototyping is energizing. Moving from gathering information to building something is exciting.³⁸ The exhilarating work of design thinking emerges when folks engage in exercises like the *New City Experience*.³⁹ Through this exercise and any number of others, design thinkers of all skill levels can generate information, process feedback, and rapidly develop a prototype to create a new user experience. A room can be transformed from a meeting space to a nature walk and then shaped for a virtual reality concert studio, all in a matter of minutes. Of course, the room is not literally transformed. However, by rearranging chairs, adding signs, building a quick model, and delivering a short improv set, a user gets a newly designed experience. This quick test carries the user into what could be through a simple prototype. Exercises like this reflect the power of

³⁸ Brown, 231. "A promising prototype will generate buzz among members of a design team, who will become enthusiastic advocates as it becomes a candidate for funding and support."

³⁹ The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, *New City Experience*. [https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/dtbcresources/wiki/bdb3f/attachments/e3cfa/NewCity-Facilitators-Guide-March2014-\(V6\).pdf?sessionID=8a36f7a15079a8053bd6f424e621f46e9692f705](https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/dtbcresources/wiki/bdb3f/attachments/e3cfa/NewCity-Facilitators-Guide-March2014-(V6).pdf?sessionID=8a36f7a15079a8053bd6f424e621f46e9692f705) accessed 11/6/2020.

design thinking to reshape experiences. They also reflect how rapid prototyping can generate congregational feedback quickly.

Prototyping Practices for Congregations

Practically then, how does a congregation prototype? How might a congregation begin to engage in the practices of prototyping to learn? Below are seven specific practices and mindsets to move a congregation from empathy and ideas into practical prototyping. These methods can be adapted for use inside and outside of a specific design process. Though the ideal situation for a congregational team is to converge on an idea that addresses a problem that emerged from empathy work, these practices can be fruitful no matter the overall problem-solving approach.

Embrace experimental innovation

In *Little Bets*, Peter Sims theorizes that “we can use a lot of little bets and certain creative methods to identify possibilities and build up to great outcomes. At the core of this experimental approach, little bets concrete actions taken to discover, test, and develop ideas that are achievable and affordable.”⁴⁰ He then identifies leaders and innovators who learn and grow their businesses through "experimental, iterative, trial-and-error approaches to gradually build up breakthroughs.”⁴¹ Sims believes individuals, businesses, and organizations of all kinds must try things to see what happens. In the same way that Chris Rock needs to try out jokes to understand their power and sequence, everyone seeking improvement and innovation needs to try, even in just small ways, to make things better.

⁴⁰ Sims 8.

⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

This is why Sims tells the cautionary tale of Hewlett Packard's business practices. By the mid-1990s, HP "only looked at opportunities that were already billion-dollar markets."⁴² The company had lost its way. HP grew exponentially, partly because of what co-founder Bill Hewlett loved to call "small bets." HP had grown by intuitively building products to meet customer's unmet needs, making small bets along the way, but by the 1990s, it had gotten so big it chased only the big projects. It craved financial success through big wins and huge jumps in its stock price. This led it away from what first made it a great company.⁴³

Congregations in the United States face the same stress. The congregational growth common in decades past convinced the church that it is not healthy if it is not growing exponentially. The belief is that a congregation is not fulfilling God's call unless it is growing in numbers and noses. While there may be some truth in that, what is also true is that the world has changed, and the success of the past does not necessarily guarantee success going forward. Therefore, congregations need to learn to make little bets along the way. Churches should try small things, solicit feedback, and then adjust. This may not immediately provide the tremendous innovative leaps the church ultimately needs, but it begins to till the soil for innovation in the future and can bring meaningful reimagination and health to the congregation's embodied traditions.

Borrow Tools

Learning design thinking happens by doing design thinking, and the same is true about prototyping. If the only thing one can imagine about a prototype is a Lincoln

⁴² Ibid, 20.

⁴³ Ibid, 19-22.

Futura, prototyping will never happen.⁴⁴ So, what if a committee utilized a tool like *Redesign A Meeting*, a resource from the d.school's Nadia Roumani, to have a better experience in meetings and make committee meetings more joy-filled and productive?⁴⁵ In some settings, rearranging tables and chairs is a radical step, but by borrowing a tool like *ReDesign A Meeting*, a leader or team can practice prototyping and generate feedback safely and easily.

For those willing to take on a more significant project, the *New City Experience* referenced above can take groups through an entire design cycle and to the presentation of rough prototypes in less than two hours. Putting together a prototype with supplies from Sunday school classes, the church office workroom, and whatever else is lying around costs almost nothing but can generate interactions that lower the threshold of what prototyping can be while cultivating joyful experiences among colleagues, congregations, or workgroups.

A third specific resource that can help provide the resources for individuals new to prototyping is *Mission Possible* by Rooted Good.⁴⁶ *Mission Possible* gamifies the design thinking process in ways that are accessible to everyone. The steps in the process lead to the pitch of a social initiative, so there is not an actual prototype, but teams work with practical resources to generate a solution to a difficult problem. This type of tool opens the mind to possibilities tied to prototyping and reflects what Peter Sims puts forth in *Little Bets*, that changes can come by reallocating what is at hand.

⁴⁴ The Futura is a futuristic automobile prototype built by Lincoln in Italy for \$250,000 in the 1950s. "Lincoln Futura." Wikipedia, Wikipedia Foundation. Accessed 11/13/2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_Futura.

⁴⁵ Nadia Roumani. *Redesign a Meeting*. Hasso Plattner Institute of Design. <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/design-engaging-in-person-and-remote-meetings>, Accessed 11/14/2020

⁴⁶ Rooted Good. *Mission Possible*. Accessed 11/14/2020 <https://rootedgood.org/mission-possible-suite/>.

Leaders ready to implement prototyping and design thinking practices into their organizations and congregations are wise to utilize the tools like these to introduce design thinking to teams and congregations. Through these tools, everyone can see the possibilities of design thinking and imagine how small changes can beget significant results.

Don't Spend [first] to Solve Problems

There is a false belief that the next product, the next investment, and the next capital acquisition will finally get things over the hump. It usually isn't true. While this is pure speculation, a quick search for treadmills on craigslist.org, overlaid with obesity rates, might lead one to the conclusion that buying a \$1,000 treadmill is not a good way to lose weight. The weight loss industry in the United States thrives on the idea that spending money helps with weight loss. Congregations fall into similar traps around believing that an online product to help with attendance, building a family life center to bring in young people, or that projectors and screens impact the presence of the Spirit in worship. Each of these scenarios is like spending the way to skinny instead of looking at what makes a real change.

There are many steps congregations need to take to care for one another, invest in their community, improve hospitality, become more aware of others, and design ministries that facilitate gathering around a meaningful ministry. However, the most impactful solutions usually do not require spending money first. Hospitality solutions come from a change of pattern and mindset. An openness to others means more than hanging a flag. Congregations can consider ways to make small changes and then measure the impacts of the change to provide the seedbed for larger shifts in the future.

Remember, a “prototype should command only as much time, effort and investment as is necessary to generate useful feedback and drive ideas forward...[the goal is to] grow from an idea to learn about its strengths and weaknesses and to identify new directions for the next generations of more detailed, more refined prototypes.”⁴⁷ Congregations should not spend their way toward innovation because spending does not shift the institution's articles, arena, rules, and roles.⁴⁸ Congregations should prototype and invest in ideas first. Allocating resources can come later.

When product designers build an early prototype, they use what is available. In the same way that one might make a list on a scratch sheet of paper, a professional designer will use Legos, Post-its, tape, craft supplies, foam, cardboard, or anything else that is cheap and readily available to build a prototype.⁴⁹ Designers do not invest big money in early prototypes because they know that prototypes change. So, neither should churches. The design thinking process continues beyond the first prototype, so building something quickly helps test assumptions and invite learning opportunities. Since a church is more likely to build an experience than a physical product, it can use improv-style interactions to help folks understand the potential changes. A game show-style question and answer session can help prospective users get in the right frame of mind to embrace a new concept. Ultimately, the goal is to learn about needs and experiences so teams can start small, work quickly, and get users in the place to understand concepts and provide feedback.⁵⁰ Therefore, the design team should first find ways to try things out without committing fully to a project or idea prematurely.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Brown, 91.

⁴⁸ Crouch, 174.

⁴⁹ Brown, 90, 92.

⁵⁰ *Design Project Scoping Guide*, 2.

⁵¹ Burnett and Evans, 108.

Start in the Safe Places

As much change as the church needs and much as design thinkers are ready to tweak every system, overhauling every part of the organization, and adjusting every process simultaneously is not prudent. In fact, becoming the design thinking church that immediately and aggressively prototypes and learns through failing fast, right out of the gate, is probably unwise. Congregations have their articles, arenas, rules, and roles, so change introduces uneasiness and can incite grief. Prototyping is often a harbinger of change. For congregations with buildings, since there is always something to be repaired, always something to clean and reorganize, or always be rearranged, this can be a safe way for congregational design thinking to start in a safe place. The new minister should now prototype a new meeting space by rearranging the church parlor, relocating the church library, or covering the church's wall of history. However, working on building repairs can be relatively safe.

Could a building team working on a leaky basement try a series of lo-fi mitigation tactics before bringing in an engineering firm? Sure. Could the same team figure out their leaky basement problems more quickly by introducing water to the leaky side of the church instead of waiting for one of the two annual deluges that cause the biggest problems? Yes. There are always low-cost, lo-fi prototypes to be built around the problem. The use of prototypes on church facilities can improve individuals' experiences and provide a great introduction to prototyping for a congregation.

Moving tables in a crowded hallway, adding information to a bulletin board or hosting meetings and discipleship opportunities in different spaces can be prototypes with little effort and cost that beget great results. Leaders and teams who believe their

congregation is not ready for significant change should look around the building. Imagine how the ideas from *Make Space: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration*⁵² can help a congregation.

Finally, as unsafe as it might feel to change a meeting room, or as odd as rigging up plastic sheeting outside the sanctuary to divert rain can feel, the stakes are far lower than changing a schedule or proposing a new administrative structure. If a congregation cannot tolerate prototyping around simple building solutions, meeting room arrangements, or informational bulletin boards, can they embrace changes to administrative patterns and practices? It behooves a leader to start small and straightforward so that when the time comes to broach the articles, arenas, rules, and roles, the congregation will have less fear around prototyping.

Adjust Expectations

Over time, it is only the most epic of failures that people remember. People often overinflate their successes which leads to skewed expectations, but few remember the little failures. In 1888, a group of women founded the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alabama. The WMU remains an influential force in Southern Baptist congregational life today. In many Baptist churches, the WMU is instrumental in fulfilling the congregation's mission and vision and leads in missional awareness and missions education. But not every organization, ministry, or initiative is as powerful as the WMU. Therefore, congregations need to adjust their expectations when they try new things.

⁵² Doorley and Witthoft, previously cited.

Hewlett-Packard went through a decade of struggle chasing only the billion-dollar ideas. However, chasing only the big ideas limits the possibilities. It is unreasonable to expect an innovative ministry to immediately, or even eventually, have as much influence as the WMU. Furthermore, it is impossible to predict which ideas will be fruitful in 150 years. Therefore, congregations must adjust expectations. Congregations must develop the capacity to let initiatives come and go so the congregation learns through failures and successes. In a VUCA world, congregations need to prototype with silver buckshot, not just the silver bullets.⁵³

Prototype through Conversation and Invite Imagination

The empathy phase of design thinking focuses on listening to people's real feelings and problems. This happens with prototypes as well. Since a prototype tests assumptions, actual users must experience the prototype even if it is an imagined one. Designers, leaders, and those seeking to bring change to congregational contexts can invite folks impacted by a change to engage in conversation about the future. Though inviting someone to imagine a different possibility is a skill, prototypes can be born through conversations about possibilities. A team can develop tools by helping people to imagine a new reality. This is a prototype. Sometimes talking people through newly imagined scenarios is enough of a prototype for a team. It might be all that is needed.

Commit to Following Through

The last step in the prototyping process is review and iteration. There is more to come on that below, but it is crucial that leaders commit to working beyond an initial

⁵³ Robert Fri "Energy's Silver Buckshot." PBS.org November 24, 2010 <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/opinion/energys-silver-buckshot/5333/>, accessed 11/14/2020. Silver buckshot is a phrase used in climate science to refer to many ideas addressing climate change simultaneously rather than just one great idea being the end-all for every problem.

prototype. It is a cliché to say, "If at first you do not succeed, try again," but it is a prototyping rule to live by. Just like every preacher wants to forget their first sermon, few prototypes are a home run on the first try. Therefore, making a meaningful change will take a few tries. However, the leader or team that does not follow up and try again risks inoculating a congregation to change. Congregations can build up a tolerance for trying new things because they realize, "Well, we only have to deal with this once, then it will go away, and we can get back to our regularly scheduled dysfunction."⁵⁴

Just like mRNA or a dead virus spurs the human body to develop antibodies, congregations can become resistant to the change they know they need. Therefore, launching prototypes is an effort in faithfulness and resilience. First-run prototypes do not completely solve problems. Iterations are always necessary. It is easy to forget the failures of the past, so early prototypes are often forgotten. The goal is to learn from the mistakes, make adjustments, solicit feedback, and keep trying.⁵⁵

Iteration

"The focus of prototyping is always on learning...It's a never-ending story: Prototyping means to iterate, iterate, and iterate still again."⁵⁶

The final step in prototyping is a decision-making step that leads a team to decide if their solution is ready to launch. In most cases, it is not. Therefore, the team needs to build upon its initial design to improve its viability. Eventually, a team will have something ready for launch, and deciding a solution's readiness is the final step in their design process. However, since it is nearly impossible to design the perfect product or

⁵⁴ Sims, 54. "If we haven't invested much in developing an idea, emotionally or in terms of time or resources, when we are more likely to be able to focus on what we can learn from that effort than on what we've lost in making it."

⁵⁵ Sims, 62. "It is better to fix problems than prevent errors."

⁵⁶ Lewick, Link, Leifer, 109.

service to launch with a single prototype, this chapter's final step is the commitment to iterate until something is ready for the congregation.

Though every step in a design thinking process is essential, iteration is a lynchpin that holds the design thinking process together. Without iteration, each step is impossible. Successful design teams commit to iterating from the beginning and throughout the process. So, refining a prototype based on information gathered from testing is an essential step in the process. Without the commitment to iterate, innovative solutions are unlikely, promising possibilities fall apart, and teams will be discouraged. A failure to iterate means relying on an initial prototype alone. Chris Rock did not do this, and he is a professional. In *Little Bets*, Peter Sims writes that a team must "Repeat, refine, and test frequently, armed with better insights, information, and assumptions as time goes on, as Chris Rock does to perfect his act."⁵⁷ This aspect of design thinking makes it unique and fit for use in a VUCA world.

The commitment to iterate acknowledges that things change, so all processes, especially a design thinking cycle, exist for continual learning. This commitment to iteration keeps a team's posture open to information, improving their prototypes and ability to adapt.

The commitment to iterate also begets language like "a design cycle." A cycle refers to returning to an earlier point in the design process following the feedback generated by releasing a prototype. Since the team knows their prototype is not perfect on the first try, it commits to cycling back to a different phase of the design process with new information that allows for a new iteration of a prototype. While this makes some

⁵⁷ Sims, 14.

design processes lengthy, it is what allows for innovative solutions to emerge. The design process exists to meet needs, not just come up with a cool product or service; therefore, if a prototype does not meet a need, the team needs to refine its work.

Once a team shares a prototype, they step back and use empathy to gather information. Then, following the user's feedback, the team will infer new meanings, make adjustments to improve the prototype, and, hopefully, share their work again. Each iteration cycle builds off of the previous ones.

Occasionally, a team might completely miss the mark as the prototype falls too flat. In this instance, a team may need to return to a different point in the design process. A team may need to reassess the problem they identified and work back through brainstorming and convergence again. This can be disheartening, but it happens. Consider the story about Amtrak. Amtrak enlisted IDEO to design train seats. However, instead of a redesigned seat, they redesigned everything about riding the train. Despite failing in their initial assessment, by willingly restarting their design process, attending to what they learned, and following the necessary changes, the Acela line became one of Amtrak's most popular services.⁵⁸

Iteration, the willingness to keep working toward solutions, is the lynchpin of the design thinking process. Design thinkers often use iteration in their design thinking definitions and see its iterative nature as the key to the process.⁵⁹ Jeanne Liedtka et al. in *Design Thinking for the Greater Good* writes that design thinking is iterative as "it conducts cycles of real-world experiments to refine ideas, rather than running analyses using historical data. We don't expect to get it right the first time – we expect to iterate

⁵⁸ Brown, 94-95, and see Empathy Chapter.

⁵⁹ See definitions in chapter 1.

our way to success.”⁶⁰ At some point, when a product or service is finally ready to launch, the iterations are no longer necessary. But without the willingness to learn and keep trying, generative solutions remain elusive. Therefore, teams that engage in design thinking must commit to iterating. Without iteration, the rest falls apart.

Conclusion

The words of James Joyce and David Chang opened this chapter. Both challenge readers to learn from mistakes on the way to success. Joyce goes so far as to say there are no mistakes, only failures to learn from things that do not work. Of course, for some, trying something, putting out the work, and experimenting beyond the realm of ideas is scary. Like *Jonathan James and the Whatif Monster*, fear of failure or embarrassment paralyzes far too many people. The thing is, designing innovative solutions to complex problems takes work. It takes trial and error. Therefore, this chapter invites folks to try. To engage in design thinking means reframing, prototyping, and iterating as steps toward the best ideas. Prototyping sets up “a pre-experience by providing a concrete and tangible artifact that allows your potential users to imagine the future more vividly.” Again, Liedtka et al. write that “The goal of prototyping is not perfection, or even getting it right; it is to bring concepts to life in others' minds to reduce the risk of innovation failure by learning from and adapting to the best feedback we can get.”⁶¹

Moving forward, the church must build prototyping and iteration into its articles, arenas, rules, and roles. It must be willing to prototype within and beyond the embodied traditions of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. The predictable society, communities, and cultures that gave rise to the industrial church are gone. In today’s

⁶⁰ Liedtka et al., 6.

⁶¹ Ibid, 37.

VUCA world, it takes different skills and solutions to meet the needs of Christians in congregations and congregations seeking to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. This is something the church has done before and can do again. Acts reflects and inspires these very practices.

Acts reflects that Peter and the church embrace change and growth. Peter's posture, skills, call, and way of going about his mission develop as Acts unfolded. The same happens in the church across time. Acts 8 and Acts 10 reflect the expansion of the gospel's message clearly, as Phillip and Peter inspire today's church to learn as it moves into new territory. What began as Jesus's ministry on earth changed with his ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, the call of the church from that moment remains the same. Through countless iterations across 2,000 years, the church continues to fulfill the call to be witnesses of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This inspires today's congregations to learn through action. As congregations fulfill their mission in pursuit of the guiding star, they draw the inspiration to prototype and iterate from the shifts in life and ministry that Luke records in Acts. Through the urging of the Spirit, the church adapts and transforms practices in ways that bless the world and bring renewal to the people of God.

By using the tools of a given time, infused with the Holy Spirit's inspiration, transformation comes. It is not necessarily immediate. It will not be magical. Incremental improvement is likely. Therefore, while scripture cannot provide the instructions for how to prototype spiritually, it does provide nourishment to the fertile soil of inspiration. The only question that remains is: Is the church, fueled by the Spirit's inspiration, guided by the tools of design thinking, willing to explore what is possible? How might the church

draw inspiration from the Spirit to generate change in the world in service to the guiding star of being witnesses to the ends of the earth? There is no answer yet, but the next chapter guides congregations through steps when they are ready for the challenge.

Chapter 5 – Designing a Way Forward

Chapter five brings this project together. As the church draws inspiration from scripture and engages a design thinking process, the design practice's overall scope, sequence, and culture shape the congregation's culture. This process moves away from dated paradigms and mental models as the congregation engages the steps described in previous chapters. All of this reflects a renewed mindset shaped toward traditioned innovation. This chapter brings together *Faith by Design*, and it begins by drawing inspiration from Paul in Athens in the 17th chapter of Acts.

Paul in Acts 17

A culmination of journeys

Paul arrives in Athens for the second half of Acts 17. This arrival is significant due to Athens' reputation as an intellectual center and cultural hub for the world.¹ Paul reaching and preaching in Athens is also significant for the progression of Luke's narrative. Here, Paul's mission to the Gentiles is further legitimized as he interprets the signs and signals of Athenian culture in ways that allow him to proclaim the gospel as both a philosophically legitimate understanding of the world and the good news sent to save all people. And this event is a culmination of sorts. Luke leads the reader here and highlights this passage as he reflects the expanding nature of the gospel to the ends of the earth, the mission that started in chapter 1, verse 8.²

In Acts 15, the council in Jerusalem meets again to discuss the gospel expanding to the Gentiles. The church determines that James will remain in Jerusalem while Paul,

¹ Chance, 305.

² Johnson, *Acts*, 318-319.

Barnabas, and others would bring the good news to the Gentiles without making it difficult on them (15:19). On the heels of this decision, Paul sets out. He visits several locations to share the gospel or check on communities he already knew. Chapters 15-16 reflect the ups and downs of Paul's ministry. However, the overall trajectory of the ministry is upward.³ Luke describes increased success in sharing the message at each stop, which culminates with a stop in Berea, a safe-haven, where Paul and Silas are safe among both the Jews and Greeks. However, word comes that agitated crowds were on the way, so Paul narrowly escapes to Athens. In Athens, he is free from the Jewish agitators as he works to proclaim the gospel toward the ends of the earth. Luke's narrative reflects the continuing progression of Paul's Spirit-inspired mission to proclaim the faith and share the good news of the gospel.

Athens is a noteworthy way-point on this mission. Paul's time there and speech to the Aeropagus is a bit of a culmination. In this speech, Luke works to legitimize Paul outside of the synagogues. He fashions Paul in the mode of a philosopher like Socrates, appealing to the Athenians' high culture.⁴ Whether this is what actually happened, one cannot know. In this story, Luke is much more interested in telling a great story that carries forward his narrative of an expanding gospel than he is interested in the intricate details of "a day in the life of Paul in Athens."⁵ However, the storytelling works. In this scene, the reader feels that Paul brings together his education, experience, skills, and history to uniquely and convincingly share the transformative gospel story.⁶

³ Ibid, 10. Luke's use of journeys allows disparate events to develop an aspect of character and give a sense of space and elapsed time.

⁴ Wall, 242, 243.

⁵ Johnson, *Acts*, 318. Critically one can question whether Paul actually engaged in intellectual sparring with Athenian Philosophers, see Wall, *NIB*, 243. However, Luke is interested in what could have happened and how he can tell that story.

⁶ Ibid, 319.

Of interest for this thesis is how Paul's method and proclamation reflect that of a philosopher. Luke Timothy Johnson calls this an innovation in the proclamation of the gospel as he "deliberately takes up the position of the Cynic philosopher, who would confront folk in the agora."⁷ By echoing Greek poetry in his sermon, Paul takes a more philosophical tone than in other places in Acts. In this way, he meets his audience's needs and lands the message. It is clear to some that this philosophy and message are worth listening to and following. Of course, as in other places, some reject the message out of hand, but given that he is not jailed or run out to the edge of town, Luke conveys that his message is accepted as they declare, "We will hear you again about this."

The philosophers wanted to learn more. Paul met them on their terms. He has translated the gospel from its traditional setting and home in Judaism and gave it a place in the philosophical conversation of the world.⁸ It is not just Paul's passion to proclaim that carries the story; now, the philosophers will explore these new ideas on their terms.⁹ In this way, Paul takes a transformative gospel and gives it the power to transform the Athenians by lending direction to their longings and filling in a gap previously left to an idol or a mysterious unknown god.¹⁰ Though the actual gains in Athens are modest, Luke's point is made as the gospel has now reached the level of discussion and debate in Athens, an intellectual and spiritual center of the world.

This section of Acts began in chapter 15 with a debate about the gentiles' legitimacy in participating in the gospel at all. In chapter 17, it reaches a climax through

⁷ Ibid, 312.

⁸ Wall, 246. "Paul's first words intend to cultivate the impression that he is a skilled practitioner of the scholar's trade who went through the city' and 'looked carefully at the objects of worship,' concluding that the Athenians are 'extremely religious in every way.'" This characterization of Paul should inspire empathy. This is what the task of observing is, even if Luke takes some liberties by idealizing Paul in his storytelling.

⁹ Johnson, *Acts*, 314.

¹⁰ Ibid, 319.

the acceptance by the most gentile of gentiles. It is a triumph for Paul and an essential step for Luke as he conveys the story of the expanding gospel through the church and its apostles.

As inspiration for the church now, again, anew

As Luke spins his Pauline tale, it makes for great reading and is significant for the church today. Paul's story inspires the church to engage in the faith in ways that meet the needs of those who might receive the gospel. This inspiration shifts the question to today's church which can now ask, given Paul's successes and failures, how might congregations be inspired for ministry today? And in that way, this section of Acts read through a lens of scriptural imagination with an eye towards design thinking is quite inspirational.

Luke tells Paul's story to intentionally reflect Christianity's progression and expansion beyond Jerusalem and the synagogues toward the gentiles in every town and region. Paul engages in the faithful innovation of the tradition of engaging in the apostles' teachings. Luke Timothy Johnson uses the word innovation to describe Paul engaging the city square in verse 17.¹¹ Watching Paul move from place to place and synagogue to synagogue invites the reflective question, "How might he have continually honed his message and presentation of the gospel?" A modern reader, holding scripture in one hand and an iterative design thinking process in the other, might faithfully wonder if he finds success in the synagogue at Berea because he finally, most fully, understood how to communicate due to his previous failures? Was this simple interaction in Acts 17:10-12 the culmination of a set of preaching experiments, trial runs, and prototypes? Luke and

¹¹ Ibid, 312.

Paul could not have said that, of course, but as the church reads with a scriptural imagination, the progression in these stories serves to inspire.

In Athens, Paul, again, understands his surroundings and conveys his message in ways that use his audience's language, style, and symbols in a generous way. He appeals to the philosophers, intellectuals, and crowd of non-believers on Mars Hill to express the gospel's expanding ministry. Could he have done this earlier? Before Berea? It is impossible to know. However, Luke conveys a narrative of progression that reflects how Paul adeptly and respectfully interprets the Athenian culture while translating his message. Today's design thinkers reading Acts might imagine Paul running through prototypes until he finally reaches the launch point. In Athens, according to Luke, Paul's preaching is finally a finished product. After being run out of town and continued missteps, he converts a few folks and receives an invitation to revisit his message later. Subsequent generations read this story and can see it as the invitation to seek new models for conversation, innovation, and collaboration. These stories can inspire a congregation around a gospel conveyed through proclaimers and teachers ready to listen, explore, work, and refine how to carry out a Spirit-inspired mission. Like Paul, though not exactly like him, the church today listens generously to its surroundings, speaks in ways that connect to deep needs, and launches ideas and initiatives that invite engagement. Of course, Paul was not a design thinker 2,000 years ago, but the way Luke conveys chapters 15-17 can undoubtedly inspire the church at the intersection of tradition in scripture and the innovation in the world.

The Design Thinking Congregation

From Factory to Studio/Lab

Chapter 1 introduced the industrial model of the church in which everyone fulfilled a role in the Body of Christ in a way that mimicked an assembly line. In the industrial church, thoughtful congregations identified the skills, gifts, talents, and desires in each member and isolated them in a corresponding ministry area. This contained talents and siloed conversations. In many ways, the stratification of a congregation mirrored the community's social stratification under the auspices of "Spiritual Gifts for the Body of Christ." There will always be aspects of this model that work and make sense. This is also an honest reflection of the post-WW2 church culture, which means it is ill-fit for the emerging era. This model for organizing a congregation isolates programs and ministries and lacks the cross-pollination necessary for thriving in the emerging VUCA world.

Moving forward, the church will do well to identify less as a factory and more like a lab or studio. In design and design thinking, the terms lab and studio reflect places where thinking, collaboration, experimentation, discovery, and reflection occur. Labs and studios are human-centered places that explore opportunities and test possibilities. In them, failure provides opportunities to learn through repeated cycles of experimentation and prototyping. Furthermore, everyone can have a place in a lab, just like everyone has a place in the factory. However, the mindset behind the work is different. The mindless repetition of assembly line work is replaced with real people working on real problems. Everyone has a voice, and everyone has a stake in the whole project. Shifting the mental metaphor from a place where everyone contributes to just a small part of the whole to a

place where the whole community has a part in the whole project better fits what organizations and the world need today.¹²

Therefore, congregations that want to thrive while better addressing the deep problems facing their community and world must design an atmosphere where “leadership is committed to creating a culture that tolerates mistakes and learns through iteration.”¹³ Many will find this shift difficult as they are unaccustomed to ministries that begin but have no intention of living forever. Some will struggle with teams that actively seek cross-pollination. Many will initially experience acute discomfort as the mirage of predictably is dismantled in favor of acknowledging ambiguity and change in the world. However, all of these things build toward a context where behaving in different ways feels safe and makes sense. Through this, the church begins to embody the studio and lab's freedom while creating structure and accountability around the design thinking process itself. The congregational culture shifts through collective work and group experimentation in the studio, as the structure folks crave comes from the design thinking steps of the process.

The Design Thinking Process for a Congregation

Once the church sets the conditions and expectations around working differently, it moors itself to the design thinking process for stability as it seeks to innovate from its embodied practices of worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. The process itself creates the conditions for safely operating and innovating upon these traditions in different ways.¹⁴ The sections below outline the steps a congregation takes to work the

¹² Brown, 105.

¹³ Liedtka et al., 14.

¹⁴ Liedtka et al., 12.

design thinking process and project. These steps are repeatable and adaptable for projects of all kinds. Each design cycle gives the congregation a way to approach projects and problems and builds the traits reflected by a congregation equipped for thriving in today's VUCA world.

Form a Team

The best way for a congregation to explore design thinking is to form a team that will take on a task or problem. The team can research design thinking, engage in design thinking exercises that shape design thinking muscles, learn a set of design thinking steps, and experience the process's power. Exercises and literature are littered throughout the thesis, but two excellent exercises can provide a great introduction.

The New City Experience by Stanford's d.school provides a great introduction to the design thinking process. Participants listen deeply, make intuitive leaps, design a rough prototype, test it, refine it, and present it to a user. These steps help someone design a new product or experience quite quickly. When run well, this energizing exercise provides a design thinking experience in an energy-filled 90 minutes.

Mission Possible by Rooted Good provides a design thinking practice for small groups as it leads teams to address an aspect of a wicked problem through resources, constraints, and ingenuity. This exercise emphasizes the power of leveraging constraints, dreaming big, and solving problems beyond the scope of the team. Run well, this exercise flips constraints to possibilities, liabilities to resources, and the world's wicked problems come untangled, just a little bit, by approaching them on a local level.

A wise leader gathers a team and begins with some orientation rather than going straight to work on a problem. Exercises like these, carried out during a retreat or series

of regular meetings, begin to reshape the team's mindset. In addition to the exercise, those with different learning styles will benefit from articles, books, and podcasts as a way to supplement these experiences.

After an orientation, the team gets to work on a project. The team knows the congregation's mission and vision. The mission and vision provide the guiding star. The scope of the project is the nearer star. In a congregation seeking to meet local needs as a fulfillment of the gospel, a team may look to a particular ministry area or underutilized resource within the congregation. The team could consider areas of congregational discipleship or mission. It could explore its facilities or capital to set a nearer star. As an example, a team could want to “provide a better experience for young adults through the church’s Wednesday night fellowship and discipleship ministries.” The team then works to renovate the congregation’s traditional Wednesday night ministries for young adults through the design thinking process. They will reflect on their own experiences as a part of their research. They can determine their nearer star and guiding star within the congregation's mission and vision. And then, they will get to work with the first step, which is empathy.

Empathize

Chapter two describes the importance of empathy. Design thinking begins with humans understanding others' needs, which means a congregational design team must listen to the congregation. This should happen in several ways. The team can begin with individual conversations and interviews. Individual interviews create opportunities for deep reflection with a single individual. While an interview can be wide-ranging, it is crucial to have a focus and to be able to listen well when asking questions. Also,

interviewers must allow time and space to listen to what is said, what is not said, and to infer what is behind the words. Interviewers should take notes and be clear about the role anonymity and confidentiality might play in the design process.

Teams can also host sessions to listen to groups of people connected to the congregation. The advantage of a group session is that others can build off ideas, and one's experience can spark the memories and reflections of another. The danger in group conversations is that specific individuals naturally dominate conversations while others naturally recede. Therefore, a team is wise to implement strategies that allow minimized voices to have equal weight. In this way, space is made for the extreme users and those who might otherwise be marginalized.

Overall, the empathic step should feel natural. It is taking people seriously and seeking to understand their needs. A team does this through an amalgamation of anthropology, psychology, and sociology. These learning methods work together to help the team better understand needs.¹⁵ The team must observe people in times and settings that fit their project's scope and prepare to bring observational findings, intuitive leaps, and open minds to allow ideas to flow from what they have seen, heard, and experienced. In this way, the team works to design for the needs of the users they face while not becoming a team that serves its own needs or uses research to proof-text for previously imagined outcomes.¹⁶

Problem Identification

The outward-facing empathy steps should naturally give way to the more inward-facing work of problem identification. This process utilizes the steps from chapter three

¹⁵ Kolko, 95.

¹⁶ Liedtka et al., 25.

that include laying out and organizing all of the data generated in the empathy step. Organizing the data leads to brainstorming about the meaning of the data and the generation of possibilities that address learnings. A team will eventually converge on a problem or small set of problems to address through a prototype or series of prototypes.

Problem identification will mostly happen within the work of the team. This step is crucial because a team cannot solve a problem it cannot identify. An ill-defined problem will give rise to disparate prototypes that can only meet a need out of luck. Most ill-defined problems will beget prototypes that miss the mark completely. Therefore, during the problem-solving phase, the team must remember the tools to keep their focus.

Reframing is important at every step and can be a game-changer in the problem identification phase. Reframing helps teams work in places that others are stuck and helps turn liabilities into opportunities and resources. In problem identification, as a team rethinks the congregation's sacred cows and challenges the traditionalism of the local church to make space for meaningful possibilities to emerge, reframing these things can help immensely in making way for new pathways to emerge.

Tools for problem identification include *Design Thinking Scoping Guide* referenced earlier. It invites the team to work through personas through the structured statement.¹⁷ Design thinking resources provide many different kinds of simple, fill-in-the-blank sentences that help a team focus on identifying a problem from a divergent data set. The best teams will learn how to use these tools in ways that quickly identify and articulate problems and bring energy to the prototyping process while meeting the unspoken, underlying frustrations of the users a team is trying to solve for.

¹⁷ *Design Project Scoping Guide*, 11. "We met Jane. We were surprised to learn this about her experience. We wonder if it means this as we infer something. And it would be game-changing for Jane if we could do this."

One final tool that bridges problem identification to prototyping is called SCAMPER. SCAMPER is an acronym that stands for: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to other uses, Eliminate, or Rearrange. SCAMPER is useful when one needs to “stimulate creativity and find more ideas. SCAMPER can be used for nearly anything: products, processes, systems, solutions, services, business models, and ecosystems.”¹⁸ If a team is stuck, SCAMPER can help open doors to a conversation around sets of data. As a team hones in on a problem, SCAMPER helps by reframing the problem, so the team is sure it addresses as many facets of a problem as possible. No single solution can solve every problem; however, anytime a team can address multiple problems with a single solution, it is better for everyone.

Prototype

Once a team identifies the problem it wants to solve, it works toward a prototype to test a user’s experience. If one wanted to add something to the assembly line in an industrial system, the solution needs to fit the system perfectly, immediately. Things that integrated into that system needed to integrate seamlessly. However, as the congregation shifts from the factory to the design studio, the importance of prototyping increases. Simultaneously, the stakes of early prototypes decrease, and hopefully, the overall user experience gradually improves. A team will likely engage in creative experiments to explore multiple dimensions of an issue.¹⁹ The purpose of the early prototypes is not to launch ideas that are plug-and-play but to run experiments that generate feedback and allow the team to continue exploring while opening up the users' minds in the system.

¹⁸ Lewrick, Link, Leifer, 96.

¹⁹ Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, 10.

Since this method of meeting congregational needs is different from how the industrial congregation's needs were met, this will take acclimation. It will not happen overnight. However, by engaging in the iterative nature of the prototyping process, the design team will discover the freedom to try things that they could not try before. This will lead to great insights for the team. Those on the prototyping process's user side may initially bristle at their first few prototyping experiences because they are quite different from launching initiatives immediately, completely, and indefinitely. However, with time, experience, and a few cycles of prototyping, a familiarity and rhythm will develop. The people grow encouraged by prototypes over time, and the potential for the congregation to find game-changing breakthroughs is energizing.

The commitment to iterate and keep working is the final step in the prototyping process, and ultimately it is the most important aspect of prototyping. The design team that does not commit to reviewing the prototype and iterating might as well not engage in the process at all. The stakes are low for initial prototypes because the goal is to gather information to make the prototype better. As the iterative process builds upon itself, the stakes grow. The likelihood of meeting needs also grows. This happens as the design team commits to seeing a project through to its final launch. It cannot quit after a single failed prototype. And the best teams won't because they will see the value in failing fast to succeed sooner.

Finally, in *Change by Design*, Tim Brown writes, "One way to help design thinking diffuse throughout an organization is for designers to make their clients a part of the experience. We do this not just to give them the thrill of peering behind the wizard's curtain but because we find that we get much better results when the client is on board

and actively participating.”²⁰ This leads to three things as it relates to prototyping. First, as stated above, including the users in the prototyping process brings energy. Second, Brown notes that prototyping often begets better results because it gives better data with each iteration cycle. And finally, it serves to integrate the steps, practices, and frameworks into the whole of the congregation and not just the design team. Since the beginning, this thesis's long-term goal is integrating design thinking into the life of the congregation, both to solve immediate problems and to help shape the life of the congregation in ways that help it better adapt to experience thriving in a VUCA world. Working these steps can help accomplish that.

Now that we are design thinkers, how do we know this works?

The introduction declared that “*Faith by Design* invites congregations to innovatively explore and experiment within the rich Christian tradition in ways that allow for the emergence of renewed practices and behaviors which cultivate the conditions for life, vitality, and hope in ways the intersection of industrial models and an evangelical impulse no longer can.” This thesis's primary goal is to give congregations a pattern by which they can take on problems and experiment toward solutions in ways that reimagine traditions and reshape a congregational culture toward thriving. The hope is that every congregation would learn a skillset for approaching problems that allow for thriving in new ways. This will take time. It will take repeated uses of the congregational design thinking process. However, as a congregation gains familiarity with the process and the practices become second nature, it should lead to health and thriving. Determining what is healthy and thriving may be difficult to quantify and may vary from congregation to

²⁰ Brown, 63.

congregation. Nevertheless, some identifiers within the congregation's life reflect a growth toward health.

The paragraphs that follow define three tiers of traits that reflect how a design thinking congregation might assess its road to health. The first tier is essential. These are traits that any church must understand and embrace as it begins its moves towards health and thriving. The second tier reflects traits that should develop quickly due to introducing the design thinking process in a congregation. Finally, the third tier describes a set of practices and skills essential for the emerging VUCA world. All of these traits and skills go hand-in-hand with the design thinking process. They both make the design thinking process work, and the design thinking process itself helps cultivate these traits in those who engage faithfully.

Tier One- The Essentials: Guiding Star, Mission, and Values

The design thinking congregation must know its guiding star. A congregation determines its guiding star by understanding its Vision- where they are going, Mission- how they plan to get there, and Values- the operating traits that the congregation stands for and works through. These have been laid out before but bear repeating because they are among the basics of organizational leadership and congregational leadership. A congregation will not develop the capacity to thrive if most of its leaders and members cannot clearly declare and fully embrace these three things. Design thinking congregations should have these down pat.

Tier Two – The Next Level (If a congregation does not know these, it's time to get to work)

The traits in this tier should be recognizable and describable by most leaders in a thriving congregation. If a congregation is thriving without being able to articulate these things, it might be a result of external circumstances that, upon changing, will inhibit thriving. Congregations may not know all of these traits as they begin a journey towards thriving through design thinking, but they should arrive at an understanding of these traits fairly quickly.

Know Your Strengths

A design thinking congregation will learn its strengths and how they flow from idea to practice while rooted in the congregation's mission and vision. In many churches, program ministries are expressions of strength. The best programs grow out of the vision, mission, and values with healthy alignment as they carry out one or more of the church's embodied traditions. Design thinking congregations will be able to identify their strengths and leverage the traits that lead to those strengths in ways that address problems across the life of the congregation while fulfilling the call to worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service, in ways that spread the gospel towards the ends of the earth.

Seek and Seize Opportunities

A design thinking congregation can see opportunities and get to work on them relatively quickly. The design process demands care but also a bias toward action. Congregations that grow in their design skillset will develop the capacity to quickly and faithfully follow the Spirit's movement by efficiently leveraging their existing systems and structures. Congregations that do not thrive can have ideas, articulate dreams, and see opportunities, but their structures and processes inhibit movement and action.

Reframing Weakness as Understanding Points of Collaboration

Design thinking congregations will know their weaknesses and can reframe a weakness as opportunities for collaboration. Though every post-World War II community remembers congregations that were "full-service one-stop-shops for all your spiritual needs," that memory is just as crafted Luke's retelling of Mars Hill. Folks remember something that may or may not be completely accurate. However, today, it is far more critical that a congregation know what is good at and where it needs help than it be a one-stop spiritual needs shop. By understanding weak points, design thinking congregations become collaborators and co-laborers with others in their community and networks. As a result, areas of strength generously assist others, and areas of weakness allow others to carry out their call and use their gifts in collaborative ways.

Tier Three – Skills and Practices for the emerging future

As the world changes and that change accelerates, the following set of traits, practices, and skills must become second nature for design thinking congregations.

Lead with Listening

To best embrace the future, lead with empathy. This is necessary for every facet of congregational life, not just the design process. In generations past, the local church was driven by programs. Programs shaped a Christian life by answering questions and engaging in passionate apologetics for the faith. In short, through programs, Christians told their neighbors how to get right with God and gave them the pathway to do so.

The evangelical passion that undergirded this way of operating is vital for today's church. However, today the church needs to do more than speak. Congregations and

Christians must also listen. The volatile and changing world demands the church now lead with listening if it wants to meet its community's real needs.

Some may dismiss this posture as it appears to lack the passion of evangelical apologetics and the authority of the Jack Welch model of leadership. However, the world has changed, and congregations that thrive will embody traditions in ways that uniquely meet needs as they fulfill their mission, vision, and values. Meeting needs in unique and authentic ways demands a posture of listening first.

Desire Diversity

Most mainline protestant churches cannot become multi-racial, economically varied, and radically diverse overnight. Nevertheless, a design thinking church will embrace more diversity today than it did yesterday.²¹ Design thinking churches will learn how to thrive by listening carefully to new voices, different voices, marginalized voices, and unexpected voices. If a congregation believes in a radically loving and forgiving Gospel, then the church will find itself growing more whole by seeking diversity.

The Courage to Try

A thriving church will try new things. Traditionally, churches are good at doing something they know they can accomplish independently, without God's call or involvement. The design thinking church steps beyond itself into the realm of the Holy Spirit. God calls courageous congregations to act in ways they can only imagine. To that end, if a congregation wants to experience health and vitality, it must be willing to try new things as it follows the Spirit's call, even if the call seems impossible. This means

²¹ Note the use of 'today' over 'yesterday' rather than a more diverse tomorrow than today. Placing the onus of diversity in tomorrow delays the urgency with which individuals and congregations must act. Equity, inclusion, and diversity are problems for today, not tomorrow. The design thinking church knows this and makes space for it.

some ideas and initiatives will fail. In those instances, a congregation with the courage to try is also a congregation that can learn.

The Courage to Let Go

The post-World War II church flourished in a relatively stable and reasonably predictable era: tomorrow always resembled yesterday. These days, everyone wishes that were the case! It is not; therefore, many 50- to 75-year-old ministry initiatives will not make it in our rapidly changing world. Thriving congregations are willing to let go of the programs and processes that no longer serve them well. In this way, a congregation needs to have the courage to reimagine embodied traditions, rather than rely on the rote motions of traditionalism that feel so familiar.

A Care for the Whole Church

Letting go of a ministry or program does not mean letting go of people. A design thinking congregation cares for everyone on the roll and everyone to whom it connects. Thriving churches care for the orphans, the widows, the dynamic young families, and the retired adults. A congregation that embraces design thinking will find ways to nurture its care for itself and not leave anyone behind. This is not just the staff's job; it becomes a part of the congregation's ethos as all voices are valued. A congregation's genuine care for one another can drive the urgency of the design process because a team is determined to meet the needs of its friends, neighbors, and fellow Christians.

Three Tiers Conclusion

The church that embraces design thinking works through the process and allows the skills and traits from within the process to shape its congregational life and will begin to identify these traits in itself. It will learn who it is, what it can do, and it will not fear

the emerging future because it will have the skills and practices to address the future. These three tiers of markers are not exhaustive in any way. However, these traits represent what a thriving church will be able to identify. Most of these traits will emerge as outgrowths of the design thinking process and in this way, design thinking becomes a way of operating and integrating the embodied traditions of the church, and not just a hip project or trendy exercise for a given season.

Traditioned Innovation Revisited

This thesis's introduction stated, "The church needs viable ways to move forward and innovate." As the church looks to innovate, design thinking provides a set of practices, strategies, and steps that allow for anyone to cultivate the conditions for innovation and see meaningful innovation through from need to solution. Design thinking is promising for the church because it allows the church to operate within the context and constructs of traditioned innovation. Again, traditioned innovation is "a way of thinking and living that holds the past and future together in creative tension."²² A church can operate within the framework of traditioned innovation while it designs and discovers ways that lead to hope and life.

Design thinking works on the premise that anyone can be innovative. Anyone can take the steps of the process, and when executed well, it can lead to innovative breakthroughs that address wicked problems. The church that chooses to engage in design thinking takes on the hope of innovating from within and upon the embodied traditions that have marked the church since its gathering in Acts 2. While this is a shift in the church's operating system, it does not demand that the church transform itself into

²² Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, 51.

something it is not to be innovative, emergent, or cutting edge for the next generation. Instead, a congregation that intentionally takes on the work of identifying its problems through empathy and listening, generates possibilities from within, and eventually tests prototypes to launch, seeks to innovate while representing the tradition through who they are. The traditional church can innovate because people can learn and innovate. The traditional church also innovates because it knows that it is not changing the embodied traditions of the church, rather it looks to tweak and reimagine how those traditions work themselves out for a new generation. Because of this, the country church can innovate; the suburban big-box church can innovate; historic downtown churches can innovate. Through design thinking, this innovation becomes an authentic expression of who the church is and seeks to be. It builds from the inspiration of scripture through a set of modern methods and carries forward the core convictions and traditions that have made the church the Lord's church for almost 2,000 years.

Design thinking, therefore, is a way to embody traditioned innovation. Design thinking provides a set of practices that lead toward innovation without throwing everything out. It is a way to build and transform the church toward generating meaningful solutions to wicked problems from within. Design thinking can flourish while working within the constraints and convictions of the church. In this way, design thinking builds from the church's strengths, its convictions, its history, and its connection to the Holy Spirit and provides a new operating manual that anyone can embrace. The practices and processes do not demand a congregation embrace unproven attempts to transform their culture from outsiders. Instead, a congregational design thinking process relies on the embodied traditions to hold the church while seeking innovation in the way these

traditions are carried out. This, of course, is demanding. However, it does not demand the church throw away everything that made the congregation what it is. Instead, the innovation comes as an authentic expression of God's call upon a particular congregation and community. This is what today's traditional, historic, established congregations need to navigate the VUCA world around them. Will it work for every congregation? It is hard to say. For those with the courage to try, will it be worth it? Designers and innovators from every field that have embraced design thinking practices and processes would submit that it most definitely is.

Conclusion

*"None of these inspiring innovation leaders had any formal training in design. What they had was a passion for exploration and learning and the courage to try."*²³

Toward the end of his book, *Well-designed: How to use empathy to create products people love*, Jon Kolko takes a shot at theologians. In response to a question about project management helping everyone move forward and make decisions, Kolko writes, "The chief technology officer of a company I worked for was a theologian. He would say, 'This is the way it's done.' And he was compromised if we didn't do it exactly that way...If you are a theologian, you won't be successful as a product manager."²⁴ Now, Kolko is not explicitly referring to a theologian in the same way a church or divinity school might. As he writes about colleagues who say, "That's not how it's done in Agile. And we run Agile," it is clear that Kolko is taking a swipe at anyone who is overly rigid or dogmatic about how to do things. These are his theologians. Of course, that makes his choice of words provocative for churches, ministers, and leadership teams working to

²³ Liedtka et al., 246.

²⁴ Kolko, 172.

build well-designed spiritual experiences. He could have used dogmatic leaders. He could have said, rigid middle managers. He could have said factory supervisors do not make great managers for design projects, but he didn't. He said theologians which leads all who seek to innovate through design thinking methods to pause, reflect, and remember the task at hand.²⁵

In his new book, *The Innovative Church*, Scott Cormode reminds his readers that "The central task for a Christian leader is to make spiritual sense. The most powerful way to make spiritual sense is to change the mental models of the people entrusted to our care – that is, replace their Big Lies with the truth of the gospel. This is how Christian innovation happens."²⁶ In that way, taking Kolko's warning that leaders must not be too rigid and dogmatic in their ways of carrying out the embodied traditions of the church. Drawing inspiration from Paul, the church's path forward is to move from the rigid mindsets of the factory-shaped traditions to the flexible experimentation of the studio-lab as a congregation seeks to embody tradition in fresh ways.

The church can, and must, become more innovative to fulfill its mission to spread the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth. As Tim Brown reminds his readers at the end of *Change By Design*, design thinkers' practices are learnable and accessible in ways that will cultivate the conditions for innovation. Brown writes,

“The tools of the design thinker – getting out into the world to be inspired by people, using prototypes to learn with our hands, creating stories to share our ideas, joining forces with people from other disciplines – are ways of deepening what we know and widening the impact of what we do...the designer's skills can indeed be applied to a wide range of problems, but also these skills are not innate and are assessable to a far greater range of people that may commonly be supposed.”²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, 172.

²⁶ Scott Cormode, *The Innovative Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 70.

²⁷ Brown, 227.

As the church learns to use these tools and develops these skills, the process of innovating from within and expressing ways of sharing the gospel that meets the needs of congregations and communities today will emerge. In this way, the church expresses the strength and spirit of traditioned innovation as Greg Jones imagines it and, turning back to Kolko, begins to shape the church's practices and processes around the power of design thinking. Kolko, as if he were in conversation with Andy Crouch's definition of an institution, writes that,

A good strategy becomes ingrained within the DNA of the company and becomes second nature to those who need to execute it. Why are we doing these things? How do they all relate? Why am I in the weeds, sweating the details of this tiny user interface decision? Oh, that's why: because it builds to a much grander, more purposeful intent. A design strategy gives you a reason to go to work.²⁸

The congregation's goal is to know its mission and become shaped around the practices and parts of design thinking that it impacts the congregation's overall life and culture. It is an expression of the gospel on the ground and fulfills the call to the ends of the earth. Along the way, some of the church's traditions, as well as its articles, arenas, rules, and roles move from an industrial factory's overly structured dogmatics to the flexible experimentation of a design studio-lab while giving agency to the entirety of the congregation. All can participate in the work of embodying church for the world, and all can fulfill their role in expressing the gospel in their lives the way Paul did in Athens in Acts 17.

The design thinking church is an innovative church that can follow the Spirit's call, no matter its context or constraints. No matter its setting or system. It listens to those near it. It understands their problems. It designs possibilities to meet those problems. And

²⁸ Kolko, 117.

because it is not afraid to fail and keeps trying, again and again, it will find meaningful paths forward that fulfill its mission, no matter who is a part of that mission.

The Conclusion – Choosing to Design

In 2016, Joe Anderson, owner of the Hoosier Heights climbing gym, had a crazy thought, "What if I bought the church?" Joe did not want actually to buy the congregation, only the building. He had his own set of embodied traditions to drive his business. He did not need a congregation and its practices, he just wanted the space. At that time, McDoel Baptist Church, founded in 1925, was struggling and decided to move gatherings to a location more befitting their size. Therefore, the building was for sale. Anderson loved the old church's aesthetic and wanted the building to remain in the community, so he reimagined the space for his growing business. Hoosier Heights' new location boasts "nearly 20,000 square feet of climbing space, an upstairs MoonBoard nook, and a yoga room." Though the Baptists moved out, "certain important features, such as a baptismal pool in the sanctuary and pews in the church's lounge, were kept for posterity. A parish library that formerly stored bibles and hymnals was filled with decades' worth of back issues of climbing magazines."¹

Across the rust belt, several church buildings now house climbing gyms like Hoosier Heights. These success stories are easy to follow, while McDoel's story is familiar as well. Historic churches with declining engagement struggle to cover the fixed costs of aging buildings. Congregations then face difficult choices as they consider what ways of embodying tradition to hold on to and which ones must fade away. When business owners move in, they reframe the building's constraints and make it their own. These conversions are, in a way, the result of the church's embodied traditions no longer

¹ John Burgman. "Indiana Gym Takes Climbing to Church." *Climbing Business Journal*, July 2, 2018. <https://www.climbingbusinessjournal.com/indiana-gym-takes-climbing-to-church/> and Craig Ferhman. "How an Indiana Church Became a Rock Climbing Gym." *Outside Magazine*, July/August, 2019. 40.

meeting the needs of people. You see, the need for a worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service still exists. Unfortunately, congregations sometimes now struggle to meet that need and embody those traditions in meaningful ways.

In *The Power of Ritual*, Casper ter Kuile writes about several folks whose need for communities of fellowship and shared life are summed up in the phrases, “‘Tough Mudder’ is my faith community,” and “‘CrossFit’ is my church.”² This sentiment underscores the reality that people still need a gathered community; however, many local churches struggle to thrive in a market they once cornered. The contention of this thesis is, in large part, that one reason for this is congregations have lost the ability to innovate and reimagine their traditions. By becoming so entrenched in the efficient, analytically driven industrial church, congregations get lost in particular ways of embodying traditions rather than continuously exploring how to embody those traditions in renewed ways. These lost congregations end up experiencing upheaval as they sell their buildings to entrepreneurs who transform sanctuaries into climbing gyms, restaurants, and inns.³ In the end, the task of reimagining traditions happens anyway, reactively instead of proactively.

This forced transition does not need to be the fate of every traditional congregation in the United States. Every building does not need to be sold to some other expression of an alternative community. The church and local congregations must embody traditions that fulfill Jesus's command to reach the ends of the earth with the good news, and that command has not changed. The way congregations live out that command has changed and the ways the embodied traditions of worship, fellowship,

² Kuile, 8-9.

³ One example is the Belfry Inn and Bistro in Sandwich, MA <https://www.belfryinn.com/>.

discipleship, and service must continue to change as well, which is why, for the congregation seeking to find renewed expression of a Spirit-inspired existence, design thinking shows promise.

A congregation gives itself an excellent opportunity to thrive if it begins to carry out the steps of design thinking processes and embody the design thinkers' ethos. By seeking the guiding star, empathetically engaging the congregation and community, carefully identifying problems to solve, and actively prototyping to meet needs, a congregation can begin to reimagine what matters and rebuild itself in fresh ways inspired by the Spirit of God. It will not be easy. However, selling a building and moving a congregation is not easy either. Nevertheless, when congregations embrace a pathway to innovation that meets real needs and begins to reshape the congregation's ethos, momentum, and spirit, it will all be worth it.

The end of scripture closes with the Lord making all things new. Though that promises to be glorious, the church is not there yet. Therefore, a closing word of inspiration comes from a modern-day prophet, Jay-Z. In his book, *Decoded*, he writes about a line from his song, "Renegade." The line in the song is, "I drove by the fork in the road and went straight." About this line, he writes:

I love this concept: Instead of being forced into a [messed] up choice where you lose either way, choose your own path. The fork in the road I was presented with was either having those pockets full of lint, or pockets full of dope. I went straight – stopped selling drugs – but I also didn't accept the false choice between poverty and breaking the law. I found my own way through and with my music, I try to help others see their way through it, too."⁴

In 1889, Seattle found itself at what many considered a fork in the road. The city had burned ,and it was time to make some decisions. Would the city rebuild in the swamp

⁴ Shawn Carter. *Decoded*. Spiegel and Grau: New York, 2010. 105.

because that location, despite its plumbing problems, was most advantageous? Or, would the city move its center to higher ground? Seattle's leaders reached the fork in the road and went straight. Their brave decision to imagine a different reality gave way to an innovation that inspires still today.

Many congregations face or will face a similar fork in the road. Could they grab a shiny, off-the-shelf method for generating membership that perpetuates dysfunction or will they stay the same and ride things out to the bitter end? Will they remain rooted in dated expressions of embodied traditions or will they just move to the megachurch down the street? Such binary choices are unsatisfying. Furthermore, there are not just two choices. The church can imagine and design a different path forward. For two thousand years, the church adapted and innovated the embodied expressions of its core traditions to meet people's needs, wherever they were. This will happen again. The hope and prayer are that the people of God, through the inspiration of the Spirit, find inspired innovation through the simple steps of design thinking. Furthermore, the hope is that this experience of inspired innovation will come through the renewal of embodied traditions in ways that reflect traditioned innovation to help God's people thrive while carrying the good news to the ends of the earth.

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Biography

Christopher Roy Aho was born in Laurium, Michigan and considers the Keewenaw Peninsula/The Copper Country to be home. However, as the oldest child of an IBM-er, “he’s been moved.” In the early 1990s, his family settled in Keller, Texas.

Chris responded to a call to ministry while in college. His call was nurtured by involvement in University Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, and his experience as a student at Baylor University. He graduated from Baylor in 1999 with a Bachelor of Arts in Religion.

After Baylor, Chris went on to study at Duke Divinity School and graduated with a Master of Divinity in 2004 and a Doctor of Ministry in 2021.

Beginning in 2000, Chris began serving local congregations in various settings. He served Zebulon Baptist Church in Zebulon, North Carolina, as Youth Minister; the First Baptist Church of Mount Airy, North Carolina, as the Associate Minister and head of CORE, Hillcrest Baptist Church, in Mobile, Alabama, as the Resident Pastor, and Oxford Baptist Church in Oxford, North Carolina as Pastor. He has recently been called to serve the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as the Director of Thriving Congregations.

Chris enjoys cycling, running, snowboarding, Duke Basketball, the Carolina Hurricanes, being outside, eating great food, traveling, listening to podcasts, and being with his family.

Chris is married to Natalie Ann Aho, a graduate of Baylor University and Quinnipiac University. They are the parents to two fantastic boys, Cameron Kyle, and Finley Phillip. His family also has a cat named Nora. Chris, however, does not have a cat and Nora is fine with that.