

Preface to Leadership Reflections

Dear Wheat Field congregation,

This reflection piece was written as a response to two questions/concerns. The first is a question about our third decade as a fellowship. Wheat Field just entered its twentieth year, and in my devotional time I have been sensing that I may have one more decade of vital vocational ministry ahead of me. With that in mind, I began assessing our first two decades to gain insight on how we might proceed into and through our third with an eye toward the transitions that will eventually come. The second is a concern about my own leadership effectiveness. Recently we have experienced tensions at the leadership level that I believe have stalled our movement and vitality as a body. These included both personal and philosophical tensions. At the same time, in a separate context I was receiving constructive criticism of my leadership effectiveness and style.

When I feel a need for increased clarity I often take retreat time to focus my prayer and thoughts, to listen to the Lord with fewer distractions, and to journal my impressions. This past summer I spent three days in Silverton, CO in this process, then presented these pages to Mark, our elders, and Ivan Koves, our BOD president who sits with our elders to represent the board. Our hope was to carve out an extended time, perhaps a retreat, to pray and sort through the ideas and questions contained here. So far, we have not created that opportunity.

Points of reflection include our history, original values and philosophy, growth and change that has occurred, my strengths and inadequacies as a pastor/leader as I perceive them, philosophical tensions in ministry, an assessment of Wheat Field's strengths and weaknesses, an imaginative brainstorming of possible future scenarios for our third decade, and an invitation to our elders to help assess where/how/if I fit in these various scenarios.

This process was helpful personally to reaffirm understanding of my gifting, calling, and commissioning by the Lord. It is honest and somewhat raw as journaling tends to be. It is made available to you unedited with one exception: in considerations of how we will minister most effectively now and in the future as well as who ministers and who we will minister to, I originally used specific names to make my thoughts more concrete. This was intended with full affirmation; still, it seems wise and honoring in a public forum to remove specific names while maintaining the content/intent of these portions. These are the only changes.

I hope you find these pages helpful.

Bless you all,
Rick

Cover Letter

Dear Mark, Chuck, Mike, Bill, and Ivan,

I'd like to introduce this as a very personal reflection about our history, philosophy, track record, and future as a fellowship. I think there are a number of helpful observations and ideas included, but they are clearly mine. I'm not intending to speak definitively for us or the church, but rather to invite you into my process of reviewing and coming to terms with who we are as a body, how we got here, and where God may take us in the future. I hope we can take some extended time together—perhaps an elders retreat—sometime this fall or winter to listen to God, envision together, and clarify our plans and purposes moving forward.

Throughout these pages I make references to leadership dynamics and relationships. Many of these stem from conversations Mark and I have had over the past several years as we have assessed the strengths and challenges of our partnership in ministry. I think these are helpful because Mark and I have had, based on our roles, the greatest influence on what WFF is becoming. These conversations reflect our sometimes complimentary, sometimes contrasting styles and priorities in ministry, and I've tried to approach them in a balanced and mutually affirming way. I welcome Mark's perspective on these points as we review this together. So please keep in mind, the issues addressed are not about persons and personalities but about discerning God's vision and approach to ministry in the decade ahead; therefore, assessing our strengths and weaknesses to this point may provide insight for our future.

My primary goals in this are: a. my own clarity as I/we emerge from a difficult, often discouraging, and ultimately (I continue to pray) refining and redeeming season in church life; b. an honest assessment of our health and viability as a church at this time; c. discerning God's will and purpose for us as we move into our third decade of ministry; d. determining what adjustments we should make as we prepare for this third decade; and e. examining where I fit in this future season of ministry and transition at Wheat Field Fellowship.

I look forward to whatever mileage we get out of this.

Bless you all,
Rick

Leadership Reflections

History and Development

Wheat Field began as a place of fellowship for displaced Christians who desired to worship and follow Jesus simply and sincerely without the complicated trappings of an agenda driven church vision. Many of those who came originally had significant relational bonds formed in the crucible of shared ministry, shared lives, and shared struggles. Early on, others were drawn to Wheat Field's simplicity and lack of church promotion after seasons of heavy investment in the vision of other churches without adequate nurture, replenishment, or promised reward. A handful over the years came to Christian faith through the ministry of Wheat Field itself, but the majority of growth was transfer growth. People were welcomed into the community without expectation to perform in any way while being invited to serve if, when, and how they felt led to do so. We prayed and believed that unless the Lord built the house the labor would be in vain, and if building Wheat Field was God's plan, he knew what resources he needed to build with; therefore, we received people with the belief that God brought them to us to bless them through what WFF offered and to bless WFF through the gifts, skills, and faith experience they brought with them.

A handful of early values/priorities helped define our church experience. We desired a combination of substance in faith and simplicity in style and practice. We focused on Jesus and essential Christianity. We emphasized musical worship and methodical teaching of scripture in our Sunday gatherings. And we desired relational perseverance, a value that led to the descriptive phrase, "a growing community of people who could grow old together." This phrase embodied both (a) the hope that people would be able to relationally work through the inevitable tensions that arise in churches rather than simply leaving because of conflict as well as (b) the hope to regularly welcome new people into our growing faith community.

With this as context, people's experiences have been mixed over the years. Some have come and simply attended with various levels of involvement in groups and ministries, some attending for years before gradually investing again in body life. Some have come and jumped into levels of investment quickly. Of the latter, some stayed and have positively influenced the body, and some, not achieving soon enough the level of connection they hoped for, the influence to which they were accustomed, or the changes they hoped to see, chose to leave. We have also seen some leave over relational conflicts that they were either unable or unwilling to work through, while those who have stayed and done that hard relational work have grown.

A significant result of our openness to the faith, gifts, experience, and ministry influence of those who join us has been the rise of ministries under individual leadership without cohesion to a common vision. This is a result of both the above mentioned philosophy and my lack of directive, cohesive, visionary leadership. Ministries could arise and even flourish in a permissive and encouraging climate without a sense of a purposeful, unified

whole. While we have seen good things come from this pattern (dance, WOCA, Adventure Camp, Cleansing Stream...), two difficult consequences of this have been (a) a sense of random ministry activity and busyness without the satisfying sense of effective focus and purposeful progress, and (b) a simmering frustration within some strong leaders who initially welcome the freedom but eventually resent the lack of guidance, framework, unifying vision, and strong leadership above them.

WFF Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

We have attempted to remain faithful to three of the four values/priorities listed above: simplicity and substance; Jesus and essential Christianity; and worship and biblical teaching.

We are highly pastoral and relational.

Our people have strong servant qualities and a high level of commitment.

Several jaded Christians have been restored to a more vital faith.

We have provided crucial support to ministries in Central Asia.

We have established a visible and favorable presence in the community through Adventure Camp.

The Three Priorities provide a guiding filter for ministry and spiritual growth.

We have seen many of our children grow into personal faith and ministry.

We are considered a warm and welcoming church.

We consistently seek the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit.

We are increasingly becoming a praying church.

We have above average participation in small groups.

We are above average (I believe) in personal and corporate giving.

Our leadership structure provides internal accountability in light of our lack of denominational covering.

Many have the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts and pursue appropriate forms of ministry.

God's provision is faithful and sufficient.

We don't have a building.

Weaknesses:

We see few new conversions through personal evangelism.

We have little active, consistent ministry to the poor and "the least of these."

We have not effectively penetrated into our community and culture to bring Jesus' influence.

We have rarely intentionally sent out people in ministry or multiplied the ministry of WFF.

Prayer is growing but is not yet as vital as it could be.

We lack strong visionary leadership from the Sr. Pastor.

As an independent church, we are largely isolated in the body of Christ (though some movement is happening).

We are an aging congregation (less so as we enfold twentysomethings; still a gap in the thirties and *gasp* forties).

Our children and youth population is shrinking.

Our youth ministry lacks stability and consistent leadership.

We don't have a building.

Leadership Dynamics, Development, and Philosophy in our First Two Decades

As a shepherd leader, my felt priority and motivation emphasizes the individual, the health and welfare of each 'sheep,' wanting each person to grow and thrive in their relationship with Jesus and to give expression to it as befits their unique design and purpose. I am influenced by John 10, Ezekiel 34, and Jesus' parable of leaving the 99 sheep to search out the one. Then, as the individual develops in a healthy faith, the flock grows in health corporately as well. In the context of a small flock, this was sustainable. My role as pastor included teaching broadly applicable Biblical truths to the congregation and meeting individually with people to encourage their personal and practical application and growth. After the pattern of John 10, the shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep know, trust, and follow the shepherd. The primary tools of shepherd leadership are teaching, listening, pastoral counseling, caregiving, guidance, presence, and much patience. Growing (vs. building) is a time dependent process and difficult to measure along the way.

The obvious limitation to this model is size. Once the congregation grows beyond the shepherd's capacity to maintain the pattern, it begins to break down. To compensate for this, I had anticipated that a simple focus on Jesus, my example of personal relational investment in the lives of others, the margin and freedom carved out by a reduction of church commitments and meetings, and the reviving work of the Holy Spirit would lead to two outcomes: first, a reproduction of my style of ministry investment so the caregiving and discipling among us would grow organically and exponentially, thus accommodating growth; and second, a grass roots expansion of the faith (and church) through the vitality of life, faith, and love—i.e., the authenticity--demonstrated by our members in the day to day arenas of life.

Instead, the 'style of ministry' reproduction did not occur as greatly as I had hoped. People were in relationship but too often stayed within existing circles and too rarely intentionally extended beyond them to invest meaningfully in the lives of those less connected. At the same time, we did see growth and expansion, slow but relatively steadily, for the first ten years. Gradually I became stretched in my capacity for personal ministry and the oversight of the ministries and logistics of church and entered into a season of burnout.

During this period we hired Mark as an associate to assist me in serving the pastoral needs of the congregation. Our original plan had been to hire a youth pastor who could also provide pastoral care for the adult members of Wheat Field. When no youth pastors presented themselves, we selected Mark as "the best athlete available." Thinking as a shepherd, I envisioned Mark working alongside me to increase our capacity to care for

the congregation. Although Mark is pastoral, he is a ministry builder and leader as well. I gave Mark the informal endorsement to “make us better,” in keeping with the ‘both receive and invest (Ps 127)’ theme articulated above. My intent was, “Help increase my/our capacity to do the kind and quality of ministry we already do.” Mark, according to his design, gifts, and background, heard, “Help us find new ways to minister more effectively.”

The difference is not great, but that difference in understanding combined with Mark’s gifts, personality, skill set, leadership abilities and ambitions has led to a mix of benefits and stresses, making us a combination of ‘better’ and ‘different.’ We have worked hard at working together, respecting each other’s strengths, and attempting to forge a “two are better than one” partnership. We have become more current in our technology, more organized in our Children’s Ministry, more polished in our organization and presentation of ministries overall, more intentional and programmatic in our outreach, and we involve many more people in church ministry and activities than in the past. In the process, we have lost some of the simplicity of our earlier years.

This has at times produced tension for us, similar to that experienced by other strong leaders working under my leadership style, and I recognize that from the beginning I have fostered a climate that makes this possible and even inevitable. To illustrate, in my previous church the Sr. Pastor nurtured a highly prophetic environment which thrived for a time until the prophecies began to turn contrary to his own vision and ambition for the church. He was faced with the dilemma of either relinquishing his vision or discrediting the very climate he had nourished. Similarly, my permissive vs. proactive leadership style cultivated the soil in which multiple ministries and contrasting ministry philosophies could germinate, thrive, and eventually compete. Resisting this pulls the rug out from under these leaders and contradicts the philosophy of ministry I encouraged, while embracing it sacrifices the simplicity I envisioned in the beginning and gives increasing potential for busyness, competition, and conflict.

Through the years I have considered that I—my shepherd/permissive style--may be a barrier to God working more effectively at Wheat Field and have attempted to develop a more assertive leadership style. The results have been frustrating for both me and others, a ‘Saul’s armor’ experience that feels inauthentic, wears me out, and bears little if any fruit. This leads to a personal conflict: How can I be an effective leader in our culture while living a Christianity that seems to run counter to the culture? My concept of Christian leadership was shaped primarily through the words and example of Jesus and the writings of Thomas ‘a Kempis. Jesus’ teachings of the greatest in the Kingdom being the one who serves, Psalm 18:35’s description of God stooping down to make us great, and Kempis’ heavy emphasis on humility and radical submission have shaped my view of both faith and leadership. Now, in our current season, it leads me to ask a number of questions: “How does this kind of Christian lead?” “Can I be a Christian of this flavor and still provide the leadership expected by the people I pastor?” “Are people’s expectations shaped more by the world and culture than by Jesus’ example, and if so, does integrity require me to go against this grain to be a faithful shepherd and pastor?” “While this may have been a valid model earlier in our history, have we now outgrown it,

and does Wheat Field need a different kind of leadership going forward?” With these questions in mind, I am wrestling between doubt and resolve as I consider my adequacy to serve Wheat Field as Sr. Pastor now and in our next decade.

Vision

We have established the Three Priorities as a cornerstone to our vision as a church: Our goal is to help people develop a healthy Devotional life (loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength; personally and consistently seeking and depending on him), Relational life (loving neighbor as self; contributing to the body of Christ through service and gifting), and Incarnational life (loving neighbor as self; being ambassadors for Christ; making disciples). I believe this is a legitimate cornerstone, though we have not yet developed a consistent model for discipleship and ministry around this. In *Simple Church*, the authors said ruthlessness is required in eliminating programs that are not specifically designed to accomplish the goals identified and, stated positively, that the ministries are designed and/or screened exclusively on the basis of accomplishing the goals. Here again, we see the need for a proactive, prescriptive style of leadership.

Mark and I, who as the two pastors have the most influence on how this is carried out, have had to wrestle with contrasting styles, values, and approaches to ministry in our attempt to work together toward these goals. We have discussed at length over the past several years how best to blend our gifts and priorities into an effective partnership. We have acknowledged our respect and admiration for each other’s strengths, and acknowledged our own weaknesses. Out of those discussions I once crystallized my thoughts into a Walden/Disneyland analogy. I choose these two names because Mark and I both understand that they represent something significant to us personally, and we acknowledge the desirability of both. At the risk of oversimplifying, let me explain.

For me, Walden represents my rural background and introvert sensibilities as well as my spiritual bent for reflective disciplines, simplicity in externals, and emphasis on the personal nature and responsibilities of the Christian faith. For Mark (as I understand in part), Disneyland represents his Orange County background and more extroverted sensibilities as well as his enthusiasm for creative and active expressions of the gospel, his playfulness, his commitment to excellence, and his capacity to establish structures that unfold and involve people in corporate body life and ministry (how did I do, Mark?). I am influenced by books by dead guys, the subtleties of salt, the nature of Jesus, and expression in words. Mark is influenced by books by Francis Chan, the compelling attraction of a city on a hill, the works of Jesus, and expression in action. These are not mutually exclusive, black and white delineations for us by any means—again, Mark and I have many similar pastoral values and sensibilities--but simply descriptive tendencies as I understand them. Along with these distinctions, we both share a common and passionate pastoral commitment to the body of Christ, a hunger to see people saved and become disciples, and a desire to help people discover who they are in Christ and follow and serve him accordingly.

I strongly affirm Mark and his effectiveness in ministry as he expresses it and I believe he strongly affirms me. And while in many ways this combination appears very complementary, even ideal, the Walden/Disneyland illustration produces a tension: Walden, by its nature and definition, can't exist alongside Disneyland and continue to be Walden. Here I would commend both of us for working around/in spite of this tension for a decade. Mark has done an impressive job of honoring me and humbly serving under my leadership. I also have tried to honor who God has made him to be and give him freedom to pastor, develop, and lead according to his design and passions. But I believe this tension, or dissonance, ultimately has an impact on our body: my support of Mark's work is sometimes less than enthusiastic (as illustrated by my concerns over Adventure Camp), Mark is subjected to significant stress while trying to honor me and still serve authentically, and my Walden-esque vision is at best muted and at worst eliminated as I try to bless and support his and others' approach to ministry.

Let me further illustrate by comparing two consistent ministry priorities Mark and I have had over the years. Mark has invested heavily in developing Adventure Camp, holding AC 8 of the 11 years he has been on staff. It has been a point of common investment for a large majority of the congregation, giving many opportunities to serve and utilize their gifts. This year may have been our best, and I was blessed to see both leaders' and campers' enthusiasm throughout. It is a time and energy intensive ministry that requires many people to invest through a complex program of the church over a period of months. And it is consistent with our Incarnational priority and to a lesser degree our Relational priority. On the other hand, I have often taught, both on Sundays and in groups, spiritual disciplines that emphasize personal patterns such as quietness, reflection, simplicity, a resistance to busyness, as well as the obvious disciplines of study and prayer. My vision for this is to de-emphasize church activity to allow the individual to be more active outside church, being salt and light in our personal traffic patterns. Drawing from Richard Foster, in effectively living for Christ and reflecting the gospel, our need is not for busy people but deep people. John Stott adds: The problem with today's church is growth without depth. My emphasis is less productive as we tend to measure productivity, and it is difficult to measure. It emphasizes our Devotional priority and to a lesser degree Relational and Incarnational priorities. Our patterns are both commendable in their own ways and are at once complimentary and conflicting, and I have so far been unable to fully resolve my own tension.

To bring this back to our 3PC vision cornerstone, I would choose to pursue the priorities entirely through spiritual formation, using church gatherings to instruct, encourage, and refresh as we seek and worship God together. I would discourage all but those programs that encourage training, formation, and service that takes us beyond our church context. And in doing so, we would risk eliminating good things and possibly become a passive and inactive people. Or we may become more personally involved in our living arenas outside of Wheat Field activities.

This summer is a good reflection of the concerns I wrestle with. We are involved in a series of events that are consuming much time and energy from our people. In an attempt to be a good team player, I am supporting and involved in all of the summer events on

our schedule, but see the busyness occurring that I would prefer to minimize. I am trying to weigh this as we go to give God opportunity to expand my vision and sensibilities regarding event-oriented ministry. I would like us to compare our perspectives in the fall.

Looking Ahead to Our Third Decade

Let me begin by listing some relevant considerations and questions:

1. As we approach 20 years as a church, are we approaching the end of our usefulness to God and the Kingdom? If so, how do we gracefully bring Wheat Field to closure to make room for what God intends next? If not, what is our compelling reason for existence moving forward into the next decade?
2. Thinking in terms of normal retirement patterns as well as the future vitality of WFF, this will almost certainly be my last decade of pastoring Wheat Field. Mark has approximately 15 years left. Though a transition is not immanent, ten years is not too far off to begin anticipating what we want transition to look like and to begin preparing for it during the course of our next decade.
3. Who will we be ministering to a decade from now? Mostly our contemporaries, or will we see continuity and growth in our current twentysomething population? Will we continue to be a predominantly white middle-class congregation? Will yearly attrition significantly shrink our youth and children's ministries?
4. Ten years from now, the physical demands of holding church in a school will be more challenging if the same people continue to do the same tasks.
5. Will the Three Priorities continue to be the cornerstone of our vision? If so, how will it shape us in the next decade?
6. Should we look intentionally to send out a new church plant in the next decade? If so, who, where, and why?
7. What is our responsibility to young and gifted people who are gifted and called to ministry?

I don't intend to respond to these methodically, but to share thoughts in light of them.

First, I don't think our time is finished. The purpose of the church is to provide a venue for the people of God to gather to worship, make disciples, build up one another in faith, and influence the world for the Kingdom of God through the expansion of the gospel, all for God's glory. I believe our three priorities affirm our commitment to these things, although we have work to do to become more effective in consistently forming them in our lives. Also, we see fruit in our midst: many of our children have embraced Jesus and are serving him, we have seen people restored from disengagement to active faith, we continue to make a significant contribution to the mission field, we are making a favorable impression for Christ in our community (much of it through Mark's work with AC, much of it though Lisa Bjorgum's relentlessly incarnational life and ministry), and we are currently seeing God do a remarkable work of reconciliation among us of a kind I

have not witnessed before. We are certainly not yet complete (Jas 1:2-4), but we are persevering, and I believe God is still at work among us.

With that said, the intent to form believers in the Three Priorities is itself a compelling reason to exist...if in fact that is happening. Therefore, a primary goal for us moving forward is to become intentional and effective in forming WFF folks in these areas.

Part of this formative process will be to prepare those who are called and equipped to serve, lead, and pastor. We have many young men and women in our midst who will serve God significantly in the years ahead. What a privilege to be part of their formative process. I realize that the twenties are an unsettled decade of life. We will see some come and go, but regardless of their length of time with us, we will have invested in their spiritual formation. Having said this, we should begin soon to intentionally prepare these younger ones to assume leadership in the body of WFF. If we hope they will stay and take on this leadership, we should do at least three things in a timely manner: a. Communicate our hopes, intentions, and time frame; b. Include them in levels of leadership that will both prepare them and allow them to influence what WFF is becoming and will be when they assume leadership; c. Begin an intentional training/mentoring process that prepares them for the work they will do. When the time for transition comes due to my retirement (10 years or so?), Mark will still have five years to support a new pastor, provide stability and continuity, and prepare someone to fill his role when he retires.

Now let's take a completely different approach. Ten years is a long time when your twentysomething...I vaguely remember that. Also, those called and gifted to pastor may want to start something fresh that they can form more after their own vision. In this case, sending out a new church plant is another option. Sending can be an invigorating process for a church if done well. It also comes with costs/risks. Those going feel the excitement of doing a fresh thing, and those who go tend to be a mix of pioneers and buzz seekers—those who want to invest in a new thing and those who just want new stimulation. Those who stay can feel a letdown and will certainly feel the loss in size, though they have the satisfaction of launching/birthing something from their midst. For a church our size, it would make two small churches vs. one small to medium church. It provides a new access point that may draw new people in. The churches could continue to cooperate in some areas (youth, office space, men's and women's events, outreach, mission support, etc.). The joint mission support would be crucial to maintain our commitments in Central Asia. And it provides an opportunity for transition for an up and coming pastor much sooner. If we would go this route, it is possible that most of our younger folks would go with them, thus diminishing some of the vitality we have enjoyed in recent years. The upside is that our sent church would have tremendous vitality and many fresh and gifted ones to begin well.

Another church plant option is sending out Walden, giving Mark and I the opportunity to develop both Walden and Disneyland to their full potential. Again, there could be much cooperation between the two churches while emphasizing the different leadership styles. Each of us could take on a younger 'apprentice' to work with and develop for an eventual

transition. The two congregations could be fluid if Mark and I can consistently honor each other and each other's approach to ministry. If someone at Walden feels restless to be more active in ministry they could move to Disneyland and participate in more structured and proactive ministries and activities. If someone at Disneyland feels overbusy and distracted by activity they could move to Walden and enter into a more reflective, contemplative faith experience with a more organic expression.

All of these ideas admittedly have pros and cons and need consideration and refinement. My purpose in this is to prevent us from reactive vs. proactive transitions that must inevitably come.

Next, the question, "Who will we be ministering to ten years from now?" is intriguing. Churches consistently attract people like them unless they do very intentional things to change that. To illustrate, we are a white, somewhat middle class congregation and the people who come and stay fit that description with very few exceptions. To become a multi-racial/ethnic congregation we would need to do intentional things such as hire a non-white staff member, change our music and preaching styles, and specifically target non-white demographics for an extended period of time. In doing so, we would probably lose some of our current folks. While racial diversity is commendable, I believe it is secondary to developing 3PC. With this in mind, we will likely continue to be and attract white middle class people who are much like us.

Age is another consideration. We are not only middle class but middle-aged (or older... ouch!). If we hope to enfold younger people as well, we may still have to adjust some of our stylistic elements while giving more place in leadership and ministry to those a generation younger. We are already moving in this direction informally, and I believe it is to our advantage to be intentional about it soon.

The next consideration is who will we minister to spiritually? This one is very difficult to put into words. I love the maturity and faithfulness of so many of the folks at Wheat Field. It is a joy and privilege to be in fellowship with them/you. And I realize that just about anyone could pastor them and they would thrive because they are mature. They would do well, maybe better, under someone else's leadership, pastoral care, and teaching. This isn't false modesty, just an understanding that God raises up and equips servants everywhere. My desire in serving pastorally is focused primarily on those still forming their faith, still grappling with foundational understanding and formative practices, and still learning what it means to surrender to and follow Christ. People who are broken and know they are broken. This tends to include younger folks and ones who have been broken down in their faith and need to be restored. I believe it fits Jesus' Is 61 mission statement. The most mature of believers don't really need what I bring to the table, do they? Though I love them, I am confident they can easily thrive anywhere. Those still in their formative process are people I am more drawn to, who sense they are still far from where God wants them to be but are determined to continue limping toward Jesus. These stir my pastoral fires. Mark once observed that I seem to be drawn more to hurting people than healthy people. I am. This may point to some deficiency in me or it may point to God's design and calling—or both—but it evokes passion in me, while the

programmatic aspects of church dull my enthusiasm. I believe I can meet people in that place and encourage them toward Jesus. In a congregational context, I want to emphasize those things that help these folks grow, with much grace and patience. On the downside, this may do little to encourage those who are mature and well on their way to holiness, who may feel that they're getting too much milk and not enough meat. I make no claims to be a deep theologian, and I would not argue with their assessment.

Potential Church Models for Our Third Decade

With these considerations as background, I believe it is wise to evaluate the kind of structure and leadership Wheat Field requires to be effective in its third decade. I offer these models to catalyze our dialogue and planning.

Model #1: Continue in complementary tension.

No human institution exists without tension. Many good things have happened under a permissive form of pastoral leadership. With the increased involvement of our elder team, we can address tensions and disagreements as they arise while seeking God's counsel together, regularly assessing the needs of the congregation and how best to minister to them, and establishing and adjusting structures and ministries as we move forward; however, given the recent strain and fatigue, we should evaluate if this is the best investment of our energies. We will see some strong personalities come and go in this process, as well as seeing some come and stay and gain influence. Mark and I will continue to serve as we do with the help and guidance of the elders, both of us supplying pastoral care with my emphasis on teaching and counseling and Mark's on minister and ministry development. In this, I would endeavor (with elder accountability) to affirm and support Mark's work in developing ministries that give expression to our Three Priorities. At the same time, I would like to be less involved in structural/programmatic plans and development, giving more time to study, prayer, and one-on-one discipleship. I would also like to take the lead in developing a 3PC discipleship plan that we would eventually implement as a foundational piece of our Core Group ministry. We will continue to encourage people to take initiative in ministry and service as God leads them and give them opportunity to serve according to their gifts and calling.

Model #2: *Simple Church* approach to the Three Priorities

Eliminate all ministries except a consistent discipleship program designed around the Three priorities. Core Groups, Youth, Children's, Men's and Women's ministries, would follow similar 3PC patterns. Church activities would be limited so people would be free and encouraged to initiate ministry on their own outside the church umbrella, but WFF would not organize and direct such ministries. This is a shift from our current pattern and would require fleshing out if we pursue it. Also, in either Model #1 or #2, our pastors, elders, and group and ministry leaders will need to define and agree on how we will minister in light of the Three Priorities. This will guide our development, implementation, and oversight of ministry.

Model #3: Replace a Sr. Shepherd with a Sr. Leader.

Wheat Field has developed to a point that requires a new kind of leadership. A clear and proactive vision needs to be identified, articulated, and pursued under a visionary and strategic leader. Ministries will be developed and pruned according to their consistency with the vision. A new leadership culture and structure will be developed to effectively serve the vision. A clear and common mission will define the church and people will be able to more easily determine involvement based on their view of the mission. The church will have the potential to impact the community more specifically and deeply. This profile suits Mark well, and Mark could move into the Sr. Pastor role. Rick could continue as a teaching pastor; the teaching responsibilities could be shared and Rick's position eliminated, making room for a youth pastor or other staff member as best fits the vision; or a pastoral search could be made to bring fresh vision into Wheat Field.

Model #4: Plant a Walden congregation and fully develop WFF Disneyland. Walden by its nature can be smaller, minimizing the impact of sending. Disney requires more resources, and the bulk of the body would need to be maintained. In doing this, it would be vital that both bodies maintain a commitment to supporting the ministries of Central Asia. With Mark leading the larger body and now being the primary contact person, he would be well positioned to oversee these relationships. WFF Disney may want to change its name to more accurately reflect its vision and style of ministry. Regardless of any significant changes in church structure, we may want to consider a name change—Wheat Field Fellowship doesn't have the currency that it did 20 years ago and may no longer reflect the culture we are developing.

Model #5: Pick any of the above models and insert a young pastoral candidate to either lead or apprentice under Mark and/or me.

Model #6: Jesus comes back on October 21st. Maranatha!

Rick's Suggested Job Description

For context here, I offer two formative influences in my faith and calling. First, a series of scriptures and directive words God has used to guide and shape me through the years: (1) I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (Jn 12:24). (2) In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps (Pr 16:9). (3) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son... (Ro 8:28, 29a). (4) God said, "Do what is in front of you." (5) God said, "You get out what you put in." I won't elaborate on these here, but if you need elaboration at some point I will be glad to discuss the influence these words have had in my life.

The second is the commissioning I received from the Lord in 1992: "I have made you a shepherd, a Levite, and a counselor." A shepherd leads and feeds his flock with their well-being as his primary concern. The flock does not help the shepherd arrive at his goal; the flock is his goal. A Levite serves in and draws livelihood from the context of

temple worship; in other words, he vocationally facilitates people meeting with and worshipping God. A counselor facilitates spiritual healing, wholeness, and growth through a process of patient personal involvement in the life of the individual. These continue to inform my understanding of how God intends me to serve and pastor.

Organizational and structural thinking are important parts of organizational leadership, and they fall outside my scopes of skill and enjoyment. I struggle to do these things well and find them extremely draining. I also confess that, as an opinionated person, in the past I have had difficulty keeping my hands off when others have taken them on.

Ideally, I would like to invest my time in prayer, study, teaching, and the people oriented investments that include pastoral care, discipleship, and counseling. I am particularly energized by mentoring and encouraging younger men and women, and with the decadal transition we are anticipating, this is all the more compelling. Given the necessary time and discipline, I would like to write and develop materials consistent with our 3PC philosophy, and eventually, if God provides the grace, a book on the humility of Jesus.

These things are pastoral and instructional, but they do not provide organizational leadership. I feel like an old school pastor in this regard, given the care of a collection of people to serve them and grow them into Christlikeness in the context of committed community over the long haul. Is this still a viable ministry to our fellowship? Has Wheat Field outgrown what I offer? Do we need someone who can lead a 'different' church into a new decade?

As we consider these questions, I want you to know that, in light of my recent teaching on humility, God has impressed on me that this is my time to hold loosely my place at the table. I am willing and (I think) prepared to take a lower seat—even leave the table if asked--if that serves God's future purposes for Wheat Field. I want no more of Saul's armor, meaning I don't want to waste the next decade trying to do things that are not mine to do and best suited for someone else. To try would be disobedience to God, detracting from the glory He should receive from our service, disservice to our congregation, it would wear me out, prevent me from serving in other ways God intends, possibly deny someone else the opportunity to serve, and ultimately bear little fruit. I am trusting God to speak to us together about this.

Thank you for wading through this, my friends. I hope it leads to helpful movement as we look forward.

In Christ,
Rick