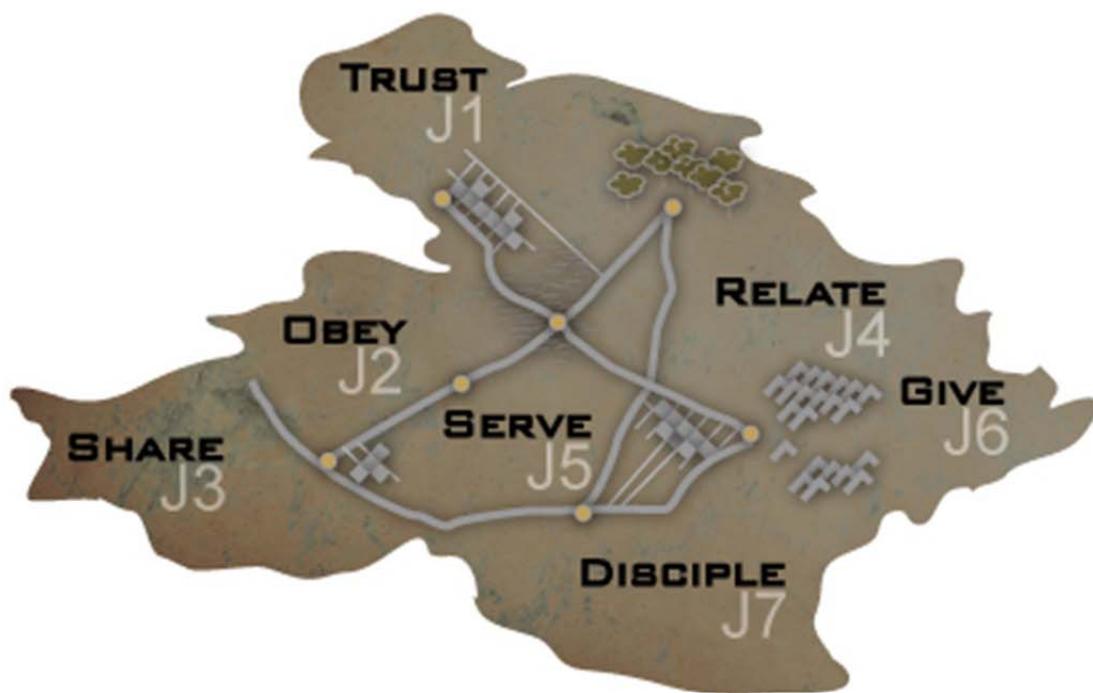


7 Journeys



**S
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E**

JOURNEY 5
CONSUMER TO PRODUCER



Is western consumerism dead? (and what does it have to do with me!)

By the time an American child is ten years old, they can identify _____¹ different logos?

According to the New York Times, each day the average American sees _____² desire inducing advertisements.

True or False: Before Listerine there is no mention of bad breath in American culture.³

So which came first—bad breath or Listerine?

Where were you...

- *when President Kennedy was shot?*
- *when the Space Shuttle exploded?*
- *on 9/11?*
- *when the Stock Market Crashed on September 29, 2008?*

Daniel Schorr of Watergate fame, now with NPR, suggests that the economic crisis of 2008 spells the end of the “culture of consumerism” in the United States because it tore the fabric of our lives so deeply?

Agree or disagree? Explain.

More than once in my history of leading Shoal Creek Community Church, I’ve been told by people that they were “church shopping” to find the right church for them.

Does the term “church shopping” suggest a consumerist mentality in the church?

How do you think Jesus would respond to this idea of “church shopping?”

¹ 300 to 400 (Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*)

² 3500 (Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*)

³ True (Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*)

Approaching Christianity as a brand explains why the majority of people who identify themselves as Christians live no differently than other Americans. (Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*)

Agree or disagree? Explain.

In this study we are going to suggest that a “consumerist” mentality explains much of what is wrong with the “Church” in the west. In this case, “Church” is being used to describe the formal groups that gather weekly under a name like First “insert denomination” Church.

This has implications to both you the individual and the church as a whole.

Signs of Trouble

- All major denominations are in decline and have been for some time.⁴
- The death rate of Christians when compared to those coming to Christ shows the end of the church in the west.⁵
- Those who call themselves Christians are fleeing the church.⁶
- The general population still likes Jesus, God and the Bible; it is the church they don't like.⁷

Which of these do you find the most surprising? Why?

We could spend more time on the troubles of the Church but it seems to be a self-evident truth that the Church is in trouble!

What does this have to do with you? You are both a part of the **problem** and the **solution!**

In his book, *Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard says,

Consumer Christians utilize the grace of God for forgiveness and the services of the church for special occasions, but do not give their lives and innermost thoughts, feelings, and intentions over to the kingdom of the heavens. Consumer Christians cheat themselves

⁴ (James Engel & Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest*)

⁵ (George Barna *Revolution*)

⁶ (George Barna *Revolution*)

⁷ (George Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People*)

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out of the mystery, power, and transformation God intended for them to experience in life. (*Divine Conspiracy*, p. 342)

Circle the words below (honestly) that best describe your spiritual journey so far:

Consumers

Consumes

Uses wealth

Is served

Focuses on self

Demands “Feed me!”

Producers

Invests

Creates wealth

Serves

Focuses on others

Responds “How may I help you?”

If being a consumer is a “0” and being a producer is a “10”, how would you rate your journey at this point in time and why?

The type of Christian that the Church has produced is tragically similar to the type of citizen that capitalist nations in the west have produced—consumers. It is no wonder since the message of the Church has traditionally been, “God loves me, Jesus died for me, the Bible is written for me, it must be all about ME!”

Jesus left heaven to come to earth and enlist humans in the expansion of God’s family to the ends of the earth. The whole of God’s redeeming actions are leveraged on followers of Jesus becoming re-producers in God’s kingdom enterprise.

So to make sure that we don’t pollute the Church by bringing our western consumerism into the church we must take a fresh look at who God made us and what he intended for us.

Who am I?

Let’s take a look at our purpose or why we exist on this speck of dust floating through space called earth. Dallas Willard says,

We were built to count, as water is made to run downhill. We are placed in a specific context to count in ways no one else does. This is our destiny. (*Divine Conspiracy*, p. 15)

Based on your life so far, grading whether your life is “counting”, what grade would you give yourself?

A B C D F

Why?

Willard goes on to say,

Our hunger for significance is a signal of who we are and why we are here, and it also is the basis of humanity's enduring response to Jesus. (*Divine Conspiracy*, p. 15)

Although it may not be a well used option for most, it does make perfect sense that if God is our creator (Colossians 1:15-20) that we would turn to him for significance, purpose and meaning in his world. Just as it doesn't take long to learn that tools are made for a purpose and when used according to their design, they work best. If you've ever tried to pound a nail in with a screwdriver you know this truth first hand. You may eventually get the nail in but the collateral damage to your hands, the screwdriver and the surface the nail went into tells a painful story.

Key movements to becoming a Producer

- Journey 1 - it is essential that a clear understanding of moving from earning to becoming an heir is in hand. I didn't pick Jesus like a consumer picks a restaurant or a piece of clothing off a rack; Jesus purchased a new life for me with his death and resurrection. This transaction paid a debt too large for me to pay. Just as my entrance into the family of God was not accomplished by earning, neither can my peace of mind or secure place in the family be based on "paying" God for the priceless sacrifice he made for me.

What difference is there between doing something out of gratitude and serving because you feel a need to give back?

- Journey 2 - to sustain the life of a producer, the transforming process—moving from self hearted to soft hearted—must be active in your life. Burnout from serving is a sure sign of a hardening heart. A soft heart serves with perseverance. The constant reminder of the Father's love and connection to his mission sustain a heart growing softer.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14.

What do you think happened to these folks?

A lifestyle of producing for the King and his Kingdom is fueled by being a lifelong learner of His ways. When followers of Christ learn to feed themselves they put themselves in the best position to live a life of servanthood.

- Journey 3 - watching someone come into the family of God is a privilege like no other. There is a mysterious transaction in our soul when we share the gospel and participate with Kingdom expansion. If statistics are true about most churches not seeing people coming to Christ, then it is no wonder the American church is dying. Participating in new birth rejuvenates a child of God and reminds us of the miracle of God when someone crosses the line of faith.

How is your spiritual journey affected when you are actively engaged with people who are far from God and seeking?

- Journey 4 - Jesus intended for your spiritual journey to be a team sport. Isolation is another way to abuse your soul. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says,

**Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (NIV)**

Likewise a person with a community around them has an advantage.

Most serving functions around Shoal Creek are done in teams. Working alongside someone, you have the opportunity to encourage and be encouraged as you participate in growing God's mission through Shoal Creek.

Care to share a story about serving on a team?

- Journey 5 - Take your place in the Church?

So just what is the church?

If you surveyed 100 people, what percentage would give the following answers?

- *Building at 6816 S. Church Road*
- *Meeting usually held on Sunday mornings*
- *A group of people who win, gather and multiply followers of Jesus*
- *A group of people who have a set of shared beliefs*

Why did you choose your answer?

The primary picture of the church in the Bible is that of a body. Paul uses this picture in Ephesians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 12. It gives a good image to understand what Jesus had in mind for the church.

As in any body whether it be a physical body or a group of people there is:

- a head
- organizing principles (DNA)
- members with different functions (body parts)

Head

It is obvious who the head is, Jesus. (Ephesians 4:15)

Jesus delegates authority to the spiritually mature to give his direction to local churches and carry out his mission (1 Timothy 3). It is important to note that local church leadership doesn't imply a hierarchy of value. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Organizing principle

The first organizing principle of the church is found in Jesus' last words to his followers.

God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20, *The Message*)

Bound in Jesus' command is the idea of multiplication. Just as a couple has two kids and their two kids have two kids and so on. Jesus introduced the idea that the normal life of a follower of his was to reproduce themselves in the lives of others.

This idea is best seen in a story from India. When the creator of the game of chess showed his invention to the ruler of the country, the ruler was so pleased that he gave the inventor the right to name his prize for the invention. The man, who was very wise, asked the king this: that for the first square of the chess board, he would receive one grain of wheat, two for the second one, four on the third one, and so forth, doubling the amount each time. The ruler, arithmetically unaware, quickly accepted the inventor's offer, even getting offended by his perceived notion that the inventor was asking for such a low price, and ordered the treasurer to count and hand over the wheat to the inventor.

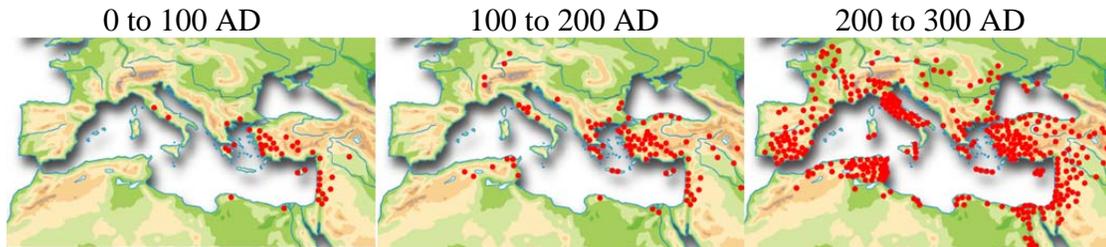
Care to take a guess what it added up to?

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18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains of wheat, weighing 461,168,602,000 metric tons!

Notice how the early followers of Jesus *carried out* his wishes (the dots indicate groups of Christians):



Care to offer any ideas why the early followers of Jesus succeeded and the church in the west is in such a pathetic state these days?

The second organizing principle is found in John 13:34-35.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (NIV)

What percentage of your friends would say that the "Church" is a loving organization?

A long sad history marks the Church's reputation as opposite of what Jesus commanded. Barrels of ink have been spilled over the reasons why but probably none better than the mistake Jake and Elwood (the *Blues Brothers*) made assuming their "mission from God" gave them the right to act any way they wished.

Jesus specifically commanded his followers to love one another while attempting to share the love of the Father with all of humanity. The way the church operates is just as important as the mission it is trying to accomplish. There is a verbal witness that followers of Christ have to the transforming power of Jesus in their lives and there is a corporate witness that comes from the way followers of Christ treat others.

Members

Finally we come to the members of this organization called the church. Notice how Paul describes the church in Romans 12:3-8,

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (NIV)

Using the body as a picture of the church gives us a couple operating truths:

Unity without Uniformity: There is **one mission**, bring people into the family of God, yet there are **many different** parts that make up that mission.

Significance is found in serving: Since everyone has a place, the body only functions when everyone is in their place.

What place do you think you play in this “body?”

When you dream about making an impact on the world, what do those dreams look like?

Think of the church as a group of ecclesiastical entrepreneurs with divine resources. What is it that Shoal Creek is not doing that you would like to help start doing?

Peter puts it all together

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things

God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11, NIV)

Notice the spin Peter puts on this. When you serve you serve as God's representative. He doesn't refer to clergy in any way here, just normal ordinary people.

In fact several chapters earlier he played his cards,

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10, NIV)

When it comes to your spiritual life, have you ever thought of yourself as a priest/priestess? If not, why not?

In light of this passage, do you think it is appropriate to make distinctions in the Church, like calling certain people "Pastor"?

How does thinking of yourself as a "priest/priestess" or in modern terms a "holy person" affect the way you think about your place in the Church—Christ's Body?

Finding your place in Christ's Body is not an easy task but it is not a mysterious one either. The first place to start is to understand we were created to serve. Our spiritual DNA wires us to find significance in serving the King, Jesus and his Kingdom. It may take exploring Journey 2 – Self hearted to Soft hearted to get that straight in our soul. Our culture has created us consumers and attempted to wire us to worship comfort, 180 degrees from our Creators intentions. Once our wetness is exposed and the new heart that we have is allowed to grow, giving our lives away for a significant cause starts to become natural.

The best way to "find our place" and to expose our wetness is to experiment with opportunities. A brief assessment of your current passions and innate gifts can be a great place to start.

Work Style

Are you fast paced or more deliberate paced?

Do you enjoy getting things done or being with people?

Personal History

What have I enjoyed in the past?

What have I found the most success at in the past?

Passions

What do I dream about?

What keeps me up at night?

What causes a Popeye moment? (“I just can’t stand it anymore!”)

What do I feel God drawing me to?

Community

How would people who know me and have worked with me answer the questions above?

Let’s conclude by reviewing.

- You’ve grown up in a consumer culture.
- You were created to be a producer for God’s Kingdom.
- Jesus purchased the right for you to enter God’s family.
- God’s family is a “body” and you play a significant part.

So what’s your next step?

- *Acknowledge my consumer mentality.*
- *Change my attitude toward my consumerism.*
- *Seek a place to serve to challenge my desire to consume.*
- *Celebrate my movement from consumer to producer.*
- *Seek a place to begin my journey from consumer to producer by attending Intro to Serving.*