

PLEASANT SPRINGS DISCIPLESHIP

The War College Church

How believers should practice Church — the Altar Call, the Pulpit, the Lord's Table, and the 2,000-year history of our worship

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← Discipleship School

Where this fits: A Pleasant Springs Discipleship lesson on ecclesiology — the practice of the Church. We trace the way Christians have worshipped and formed disciples from the first century to present-day American evangelicalism, looking carefully at how the pulpit, the Lord's Table, and the congregation's life together have shifted. We will name a specific modern invention — the altar call — and its creator. And we will end with J. P. Moreland's searching question: is the church we gather with each Sunday a *war college* for the King, or a social club with a sound system?

THE OPENING QUESTION — J. P. MORELAND'S CHALLENGE

“In the midst of all this, the church has become a hospital primarily to soothe empty selves instead of a **war college** to mobilize and train an army of men and women to occupy territory and advance the kingdom until the King returns. Of course, the church should be both a hospital and war college and, in fact, much, much more.

But there is no question that we are not succeeding in mobilizing such an army and training them with the intellectual and spiritual skills necessary to enter deeply and profoundly into the spiritual life to destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God.

A church incompetent cannot effectively be a church militant. And make no mistake, like it or not, we are in a war for the hearts, minds, souls, and destinies of men, women, and children all around us.”

— J. P. Moreland, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, 2012

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

If you have walked into almost any large American evangelical church in the last twenty years, you have walked into a specific architectural and liturgical environment: a dark auditorium, colored stage lights, a band playing worship music on a raised platform, a large screen projecting song lyrics, a preacher at a music stand or plexiglass lectern, a greeter team, a coffee bar in the foyer, and a pattern of weekly service that feels a great deal like attending a concert with a motivational talk at intermission. This environment is roughly forty years old. It did not exist in 1960. It did not exist for 1,900 years of the Christian Church before that. And it was not invented by accident.

This lesson is not a complaint about worship music, or coffee, or lighting. It is a careful historical and biblical question: *what is the Church actually for?* The New Testament and the historic Church give one answer. The Finney-to-Willow-Creek tradition that has come to dominate American evangelicalism gives another. Pleasant Springs Church chooses the older answer — a War College for the King, built on the Word preached with authority, the Table eaten weekly, the saints formed in doctrine and discipline, and the gospel carried by trained soldiers into every vocation.

We will tell the story. We will name the figures. We will point to the Scriptures. We will state what Pleasant Springs practices and why. And we will end by inviting you, our members and our friends, into a form of Christian life that is harder than easy and deeper than shallow — a life that the Apostles, the Fathers, the Reformers, and the Puritans would recognize as their own.

Greek NT (2 Cor 10:4–5): τὰ γὰρ ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας ἡμῶν οὐ σαρκικά, ἀλλὰ δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων, λογισμοὺς καθαιροῦντες καὶ πᾶν ὕψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως

τοῦ θεοῦ.

2 Corinthians 10:4–5 (ESV): “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to **destroy strongholds**. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

PART 1 — THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH: A SIMPLE PATTERN

When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, Luke gives us a four-line summary of how the first Christians practiced Church:

Greek NT (Acts 2:42): ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.

Acts 2:42 (ESV): “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Four marks, in this order:

1. The Apostles’ Teaching (*didachê*). The Word preached, explained, received. The Apostles spoke; the church listened, memorized, obeyed. This is what would eventually become the preaching of Scripture itself after the New Testament was written.

2. The Fellowship (*koinônia*). Deep sharing of life together — practical (Acts 2:44–45, the sharing of possessions), social (meals in homes), and spiritual (mutual encouragement, confession, prayer).

3. The Breaking of Bread. The Lord’s Table, weekly, centered on the gospel made visible in bread and cup. Not a side event; a core meeting.

4. The Prayers (plural, with the article — *tais proseuchais*). The corporate prayers of the gathered assembly, likely including the structured Jewish prayer hours the Apostles still

kept (Acts 3:1).

That is the founding pattern. There is no choir, no band, no stage lighting, no coffee bar, no children’s ministry, no greeter team, no altar call, and no professional clergy. There is Word, Fellowship, Table, and Prayer — in the homes of believers, on the Lord’s Day, across Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, and the far ends of the empire.

Greek NT (Acts 20:7): ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συνηγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον, ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς...

Acts 20:7 (ESV): “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them...”

Paul’s visit to Troas. The first day of the week. The purpose of the gathering: to break bread. The sermon goes until midnight because Paul was leaving the next day and they had much to learn. This is the Church.

For the first three centuries — under Roman persecution, largely in homes, often at night before work, usually led by elders rather than a professional clergy — this pattern held. The *Didache* (c. AD 100), the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr (c. 155), the letters of Ignatius (c. 110), all describe it: on the Lord’s Day, the community gathered, heard the memoirs of the Apostles read aloud, listened to exhortation, prayed, and shared in the bread and the cup. Justin’s description (*First Apology* 67) is exactly Acts 2:42, flowered out into a recognizable liturgy.

PART 2 — FROM SIMPLE PATTERN TO MEDIEVAL MASS (300–1500)

Four developments over 1,200 years slowly transformed the simple apostolic pattern into the medieval Latin Mass.

AD 312–500

Constantinian basilicas replace house churches

With Constantine’s Edict of Milan (AD 313) Christianity became legal; within a generation it was the favored religion of the empire. Large basilicas were built. The

intimate home gathering gave way to monumental public architecture. The lay community was pushed further back from the action, while the clergy took their place in the apse behind a screen. The Word could still be heard and the Table could still be seen, but the distance — physical and psychological — had begun.

AD 500–900

Latin becomes the sacred language — while the people lose Latin

Across the Western empire, ordinary speech evolved from Latin into the Romance vernaculars (proto-French, Spanish, Italian). But the liturgy stayed in Latin. By the eighth century the congregation could no longer understand what was being said at the altar. Scripture readings were heard as sacred noise, not as comprehensible text. The Word was still present but it was increasingly mystified.

AD 900–1300

The Mass becomes sacerdotal; the laity stop communing

The priest, facing the altar with his back to the people, performed the Eucharistic action alone. The doctrine of transubstantiation was defined at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The bread and cup became objects of adoration rather than a meal the people shared. By the thirteenth century the laity commonly took the sacrament only once a year (at Easter), and when they did they received only the bread, not the cup. The Lord's Supper — originally a shared family meal — had become a priestly ritual that most Christians watched but did not eat.

AD 1300–1500

The Word disappears behind the altar

Preaching from Scripture became rare. Most sermons (when given at all) were allegorical, drawn from saints' lives, or concerned with popular devotions. The Bible was chained in the few libraries that had it, in a Latin version ordinary Christians could not read.

Laypeople were not expected to read Scripture; they were expected to venerate relics, pray the Rosary, pay for masses for the dead, and wait for the priest to do his work. The

pattern of Acts 2:42 — Word, Fellowship, Table, Prayer, all shared by the whole community — had been inverted.

PART 3 — THE REFORMATION RECOVERS THE WORD (1517–1700)

Luther’s nailing of the 95 Theses in 1517, Zwingli’s reform at Zurich in 1522, and Calvin’s arrival at Geneva in 1536 were, at heart, a recovery of the Word in the assembly. Three changes mattered most.

1. Scripture in the vernacular. Luther translated the New Testament into German in 1522 and the whole Bible by 1534. Tyndale gave England an English New Testament in 1526. Olivetan gave France its first Protestant French Bible in 1535. Every Christian could now hear, in his own tongue, what the text of the apostles actually said. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

2. The sermon restored to the center. The pulpit — which had existed for centuries but had been decorative — became the principal furniture of Reformed worship. Calvin preached expository sermons through whole books of the Bible at St. Peter’s in Geneva, often two sermons a day, for twenty-three years. His goal: to let the congregation hear the full counsel of God’s Word (Acts 20:27).

3. The Table in the people’s language, with both bread and cup. Calvin wanted weekly communion (*Institutes* IV.17.44); the Geneva city council refused him and gave him four times a year. Nevertheless, the cup was restored to the laity, the liturgy was in French, the bread and cup were received together, and the meaning of the sign was explained from Scripture rather than hidden in Latin.

Greek NT (Col 3:16): ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως, ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, ψαλμοῖς, ὕμνοις, ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς.

Colossians 3:16 (ESV): “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

PART 4 — THE PURITANS: THE WAR COLLEGE FORM OF CHURCH (1600–1700)

What the Reformation began, the English Puritans refined into something very close to what J. P. Moreland calls a war college. Their form of the Lord’s Day is worth studying because, in almost every detail, it is the opposite of the modern American megachurch.

- **Two services on the Lord’s Day** — morning and afternoon, each typically two to three hours long. Between services, families went home to eat, catechize the children, discuss the morning sermon, and pray. The whole day was the Lord’s.

- **The central pulpit** — raised, in the middle of the meeting-house, with the Bible open on it. The congregation’s attention was physically directed toward the Word being preached. Many Puritan meeting-houses had no altar at all, or a simple wooden communion table at the front of the congregation rather than the back of the building.

- **Expository preaching** — the pastor worked through books of the Bible verse by verse. William Perkins (1558–1602) wrote *The Art of Prophesying*, the Puritans’ homiletics textbook: read the text, open its meaning, draw doctrines, apply them to the hearers. Sermons commonly ran 60 to 120 minutes, and listeners took notes.

- **Catechesis** — the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) were memorized, word for word, by every child in a Puritan household. Doctrine was not incidental; it was the backbone of discipleship.

- **The Lord’s Table** — served with a table (not an altar), with the minister among the people rather than above them, with both the bread and the cup, with a sermon to prepare

the congregation for the meal. Frequency varied (monthly in some Puritan churches, quarterly in others, weekly among the Scottish Covenanters).

- **No altar call, no emotional invitation, no “sinner’s prayer”** — because none of these existed. The Puritan pastor called his hearers to repentance and faith from the pulpit, week after week, and trusted the ordinary means of grace (Word, Sacrament, prayer, discipline) to produce conversion over time. When a person came to faith, he or she was examined by the elders, gave public testimony before the congregation, was baptized (if not already), and was welcomed to the Lord’s Table.

- **Serious church discipline** — members who persisted in open sin were suspended from the Table and, if unrepentant, eventually excommunicated. The boundary between the Church and the world was visible.

- **The whole of life under the lordship of Christ** — the Puritan pastor preached about marriage, money, vocation, civic life, death, and the training of children, bringing all of it under Scripture. The congregation was expected to read their Bibles daily, to pray at morning and evening, and to keep family worship in the home.

John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Watson, Thomas Brooks, Jonathan Edwards — these men were not entertainers. They were generals. Their sermons were called, without shame, “plain preaching,” and the plainness was not dullness but precision: every doctrine applied to the conscience and the will of the hearer. Their people read the Bible more than any generation before or since. They produced a body of Christian literature (Baxter’s *Reformed Pastor*, Owen’s *Mortification of Sin*, Watson’s *Body of Divinity*) that many modern evangelical pastors are only now rediscovering.

Why we remember this history. The 17th-century English Puritan and New England Puritan meeting-house is the closest historical model to what Moreland calls a war college. It trained men and women intellectually and spiritually, equipped them for vocations, taught them Scripture in

depth, and sent them into the world with confidence that Christ was King over every square inch of it.

PART 5 — CHARLES FINNEY AND THE INVENTION OF THE ALTAR CALL (1820S)

The American Puritan inheritance was still largely intact in 1800. It was shattered in the 1820s and 1830s by one man.

Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875)

BORN WARREN, CONNECTICUT • APPRENTICED LAWYER, ADAMS, NY, 1818–1821
• CONVERSION 1821 • REVIVALIST AND ITINERANT PREACHER IN THE “BURNED-OVER DISTRICT” OF WESTERN NEW YORK, 1824–1835 • PASTOR, BROADWAY TABERNACLE, NYC, 1834–1837 • PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, OBERLIN COLLEGE, 1835–1851 • PRESIDENT OF OBERLIN, 1851–1866

Finney is the inventor of what he called the “New Measures” — a set of deliberately engineered techniques for producing revivals. Among them, and most enduring: the **anxious bench** (later called the **altar call**). Under Finney’s method, near the end of an emotionally intense preaching service, those who were “under conviction” or “wanted to find Christ” were invited to come forward to a front bench or rail, where they could be prayed for individually and counseled to make an immediate decision. The music was deliberately used to heighten the emotional pitch. The pressure to come forward was deliberately applied. The decision was understood as the crucial moment.

Finney’s 1835 *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* stated his philosophy openly: a revival “is not a miracle. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.” Revival, in other words, is a technique. If a preacher applies the right measures — protracted meetings, the anxious bench, emotional music, specific public calls — revival will result. This was a radical theological departure from the preceding Reformed tradition, which had taught that revival is a sovereign gift of the Spirit through the ordinary means of grace.

The theology behind the method. Finney was not theologically neutral. He was a self-taught lawyer-theologian whose doctrinal positions were a carefully constructed alternative to Calvinism:

- He denied original sin as inherited guilt (though he affirmed total depravity in a modified form).
- He denied that regeneration was a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit; rather, regeneration was a human decision in response to moral suasion.
- He denied penal substitutionary atonement and taught a form of the moral-government theory instead.
- He taught that perfect sanctification was achievable in this life (what his followers called Oberlin perfectionism).
- He was a classical Pelagian on the will — sinners have the natural ability to repent at any moment, requiring only the right stimulus.

The altar call was the natural pastoral expression of this theology. If the sinner has the native ability to choose Christ at any moment, then the preacher's job is to apply sufficient pressure to get that choice made tonight. The Princeton theologians — Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield — recognized Finney's theology as a departure from historic Reformed Christianity. But the altar call survived Finney's theology.

What the altar call is not: it is not in Scripture. Nowhere in the New Testament does a preacher ask the convicted to come forward at the end of a service for prayer. The biblical pattern is different: the preacher preaches (Peter at Pentecost, Acts 2:14–36); the hearers are cut to the heart (Acts 2:37); they ask what to do; the response is to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38); they are added to the number that day (Acts 2:41). The response is *baptism*, not a raised hand at the music stand. The response is a *public entry into the life of the gathered Church*, not a private emotional transaction at a rail.

Greek NT (Acts 2:37–41, selected): ἀκούσαντες δὲ κατενόγησαν τὴν καρδίαν, εἰπόν τε... τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί; Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· μετανοήσατε, καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν...

Acts 2:37–41 (ESV, selected): “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.’”

The apostolic altar call was baptism. Preaching ran to conviction; conviction ran to the water; the water ran to incorporation in the Church. Three thousand in a single day.

PART 6 — THE ALTAR CALL’S DESCENDANTS (1870–2000)

Finney’s innovation propagated through the next 150 years of American evangelicalism.

1870–1899

D. L. Moody and the mass evangelism campaign

Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899), a Chicago shoe salesman-turned-evangelist, took Finney’s techniques to a new scale. Working with song-leader Ira Sankey, Moody preached to enormous crowds in America and Britain and used an inquiry room for individual follow-up — the altar call refined and streamlined. Moody was theologically more orthodox than Finney, but the method was the same.

1900–1930

Billy Sunday and the theatrical tent revival

A former pro baseball player, William Ashley “Billy” Sunday (1862–1935) brought athletic performance to the pulpit. His campaigns involved “sawdust trails” — sinners walking down aisles covered in sawdust to shake the evangelist’s hand at the front, a physical altar call. The theatrics were unapologetic: jumping, sliding, shouting. The decisional theology was unexamined.

1947–2000

Billy Graham and “Just As I Am”

Billy Graham (1918–2018) preached to roughly 215 million people in person over his sixty-year career — the largest-scale evangelist in history. At the end of every crusade sermon, as the choir softly sang Charlotte Elliott’s 1835 hymn “Just As I Am,” Graham invited his hearers to come forward from their seats to make a decision for Christ.

Graham, unlike Finney, held an orthodox Reformed-leaning evangelical theology and never claimed that a walk down the aisle was itself salvation. But the decisional altar-call method became definitive of American evangelicalism.

1970–2000

The “sinner’s prayer”

A refinement: even without walking an aisle, a hearer could “receive Christ” by praying a specific formula — “Lord Jesus, I know I’m a sinner... come into my heart... amen.” The sinner’s prayer had no biblical precedent and no historical precedent before roughly the mid-20th century. It was often combined with a card to fill out, a pamphlet to read, a follow-up phone call. A whole generation of American Christians came to believe that “getting saved” meant praying a specific formula at a specific moment — and that they could point to that moment on a calendar.

An important word about Billy Graham and his tradition. We are not dismissing the countless men and women genuinely brought to Christ through altar-call ministry. God has used crooked sticks to draw straight lines throughout history; Graham’s ministry led many to real faith, and Pleasant Springs honors that work. Our concern is not that God cannot use an altar call. Our concern is that the altar call, as it has come to function, has replaced the biblical pattern of Word → conviction → baptism → incorporation. It has produced a generation of nominal “converts” whose faith consisted of one prayer at a crusade or a Vacation Bible School fifteen years ago, and who have never been disciplined in the doctrine, sacraments, or shared life of the Church. Surveys consistently find that roughly half of self-identified American evangelicals cannot articulate the gospel. This is, in significant part, a product of a method that treats conversion as a moment rather than a life.

In 1975, a young pastor named Bill Hybels began Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. His explicit strategy: build a church service designed to appeal to the religiously unchurched suburban American, removing whatever might be intimidating about traditional Christianity. Willow Creek's innovations — and those of Saddleback Church under Rick Warren, beginning in 1980 — have shaped a generation of American evangelical practice.

- **Dim auditorium, stage lighting, rock band, large screens.** The physical environment of a concert. Worship music (now lasting 20–30 minutes at the front of the service) is participatory but performance-oriented. The spotlight is on the platform.

- **The pulpit removed or minimized.** Often replaced by a music stand, a plexiglass lectern, or a small table. The preacher speaks from a position of equality with the congregation, not authority over them. The Bible is often quoted on the screen rather than opened and read from.

- **The Lord's Table quarterly or less.** When offered, often rushed through in a few minutes as a congregational self-serve, with little catechetical framing. In some megachurches the Table is skipped entirely in Sunday services, moved to midweek or campus groups.

- **Topical, motivational preaching.** Twenty-five to thirty-five minutes on a theme drawn from contemporary life, with Scripture verses selected as supporting illustrations. The rigor of expository preaching — reading a biblical text, explaining what it means in its first-century context, drawing and applying doctrines from it — is uncommon.

- **Coffee bar, greeter team, family-friendly atmosphere.** The church has become a destination service. Hospitality is emphasized — a real good — but often in ways that replace the deep fellowship (*koinônia*) of Acts 2:42 with consumer comfort.

- **Discipleship outsourced to small groups.** The Sunday morning gathering is designed for seekers; the “deep” work of Scripture and discipleship is delegated to home groups that a minority of members actually attend.

A remarkable admission from Willow Creek itself. In 2007, after a three-year internal study called *Reveal*, Willow Creek publicly confessed that its seeker-sensitive strategy had failed to produce mature disciples. Bill Hybels said at his own leadership summit: “We made a mistake. What we should have done when people came to Christ... is teach them how to read their Bibles, how to walk with God... We should have started telling people... you have to take responsibility to become a self feeder.” This was the founding megachurch of the movement admitting, from its own data, that the method was not producing soldiers. It was producing consumers.

PART 8 — THE PULPIT: WHERE THE WORD IS PREACHED

The shape of the meeting place tells you what a church believes. Walk into a building, and the location and prominence of the pulpit, the Table, and the stage tells you where the authority sits.

LXX (Neh 8:4–5, 8): καὶ ἔστη Ἐσδρας ὁ γραμματεὺς ἐπὶ βήματος ξυλίνου ὃ ἐποίησαν εἰς τὸ λαλεῖν... καὶ ἤνοιξεν Ἐσδρας τὸ βιβλίον ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ, ὅτι αὐτὸς ἦν ἐπάνω τοῦ λαοῦ... καὶ ἀνέγνωσαν ἐν βιβλίῳ νόμου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐδίδασκεν Ἐσδρας, καὶ διεστελλόμεθα ἐν ἐπιστήμῃ Κυρίου, καὶ συνῆκεν ὁ λαὸς ἐν τῇ ἀναγνώσει.

Nehemiah 8:4–5, 8 (ESV, selected): “And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood... They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”

The biblical pulpit, in one paragraph. Ezra stood on a raised wooden platform so that he could be heard. The Book was opened in the sight of all the people. The Book was read. The Book was explained. The people understood. When the people understood, they responded — some with tears of repentance, some with joyful feasting. The pulpit is a platform for *the Book*, not for the

personality of the preacher. The authority in the room is the Word of God, mediated through a faithful minister.

The historic architecture of faithful Christian worship puts the pulpit visibly at the center of the gathered assembly, raised enough for the preacher to be heard, with the Bible physically opened and visible. Geneva, Edinburgh, Puritan New England, and the parish churches of the Reformed world all share this feature. The pulpit is not a lectern for the speaker's notes; it is an altar for the Word.

The modern megachurch stage puts the band in the center of attention, relegates the pulpit (if it exists at all) to a side position, and often removes the physical Bible entirely — the Scripture appears only as text on a screen, in whatever translation the preacher prefers that week, in whatever verses he has chosen to cite. The spatial message is unmistakable: the band is the main event; the sermon is a short monologue in the middle; the Word is a resource, not the authority.

Greek NT (2 Tim 4:1–2): διαμαρτύρομαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ μέλλοντος κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς, καὶ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ· κήρυξον τὸν λόγον, ἐπίστηθι εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως, ἔλεγξον, ἐπιτίμησον, παρακάλεσον, ἐν πάσῃ μακροθυμίᾳ καὶ διδαχῇ.

2 Timothy 4:1–2 (ESV): “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

PART 9 — THE LORD'S TABLE: THE GOSPEL MADE VISIBLE

If the pulpit is where the gospel is proclaimed, the Lord's Table is where the gospel is handed to the people. It is the gospel in their mouths. Jesus did not say “think about my body”; he said “take and eat.”

Greek NT (1 Cor 11:23–26): ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου... ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον, καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν... ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV, selected): “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’... For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Four biblical convictions about the Table.

1. It is the Lord’s, not ours. We do not invent it, shorten it, or reschedule it to suit our service flow. We receive it as Christ’s gift to his Church.

2. It is weekly, or as frequently as is fitting. The first-century Church broke bread on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7). Calvin and Zwingli both wanted weekly celebration; the Scottish Covenanters practiced it; the Plymouth Brethren restored it; many Presbyterian and Reformed and Anglican congregations practice it now. Pleasant Springs commends weekly communion as the biblical pattern.

3. It is the gospel made visible. When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are preaching a sermon with your body. You are saying: Christ’s body was broken for my sin. Christ’s blood was shed for my forgiveness. I am taking his death into myself as the basis of my life. The Table is evangelism as gesture.

4. It is communal. It is not a private transaction between an individual soul and God; it is the shared meal of the one Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17, “because there is one bread, we who are many are one body”). We come to the Table together.

What Pleasant Springs does not do: we do not relegate the Table to once a quarter as a side event. We do not hand out plastic cups with a wafer as consumers of a religious service. We do

not skip the Table because it “slows down” the service. The Table is *the point* of the Sunday gathering along with the Word — these are the two ordinary means of grace Christ has given his Church (Word and Sacrament), and we honor them both.

PART 10 — BUILDING THE WAR COLLEGE: TEN PRACTICES

We have described the drift. Now, positively: how does a congregation function as a War College for the King? Ten practices, each rooted in Scripture.

1

Preach the Word with authority, not entertainment

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1–5; Acts 6:4; Nehemiah 8:1–8

The Word of God, read and opened, is the center of the assembly. The preacher stands behind an open Bible, not a music stand. The sermon is exposition (working through a biblical text) rather than topical motivation. The length of the sermon is determined by the depth of the passage, not by the attention span of a consumer audience. We aim for 40–55 minutes of real biblical teaching, weekly.

2

Celebrate the Lord’s Table weekly and centrally

Scripture: Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Luke 22:19–20

Bread and cup, together, every Lord’s Day. With words of institution read from Scripture. With the table physically at the front of the congregation, not hidden. With adequate time, not squeezed between songs. Open to every baptized believer in good standing.

3

Baptize converts into the visible Body, not just “pray a prayer”

Scripture: Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 2:38–41; Romans 6:3–4

The biblical response to conversion is baptism, not a raised hand. We take converts through doctrinal preparation, a public testimony, a public baptism,

and full incorporation into the shared life of the congregation.

4

Catechize members in the historic faith

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Ephesians 4:11–16; 2 Timothy 2:2

Every member is taught the core doctrines of the Christian faith deliberately and systematically. We use the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and our *Sinner's Statement of Beliefs* as our catechetical backbone. Children are trained from the earliest age.

5

Train the mind as well as the heart

Scripture: Matthew 22:37; Romans 12:1–2; 2 Corinthians 10:4–5; 1 Peter 3:15

“Love the Lord your God with all your mind.” We teach our people to think — in logic, in history, in philosophy, in apologetics, in cultural analysis. Moreland's phrase: “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.” We read serious books. We equip our people to defend their faith intelligently. Our Discipleship School and Lesson Archive are the bones of this effort.

6

Pray as a gathered army

Scripture: Acts 2:42; Acts 4:23–31; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; Ephesians 6:10–20

Prayer is not a transition between songs. It is the air the War College breathes. Corporate prayer, intercession for the persecuted Church, prayer for the unsaved by name, prayer for rulers and vocations and schools and neighbors. Meetings for prayer, not just meetings that include prayer.

7

Exercise real church discipline

Scripture: Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; Galatians 6:1

The boundary between the Church and the world must be visible. We love our members enough to confront sin, to restore the fallen, and, when necessary, to

remove from the Table those who persist in open unrepentance. This is not cruelty; it is the biblical love of a people set apart for Christ.

8

Build deep *koinônia*, not consumer hospitality

Scripture: Acts 2:44–47; Romans 12:10–16; Hebrews 10:24–25; James 5:16

Not coffee-bar friendliness that dissolves at 11:30. Actual fellowship — shared meals, shared burdens, shared resources, shared confession. The small community where people’s names are known, their children are known, their struggles are known, and the cost of their sin is borne together.

9

Equip people for every vocation

Scripture: Genesis 1:28; Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

Every Christian is a soldier of Christ deployed in a specific place — farm, factory, office, classroom, home. The War College equips each soldier for the terrain God has placed him in. We teach a theology of work, vocation, marriage, parenting, and civic life, and we send our people out ready.

10

Go on mission — local and global

Scripture: Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14–17; 2 Corinthians 5:20

A War College exists to send soldiers into battle. We support missionaries, we plant churches, we evangelize our neighbors, we serve our community. The gospel is for every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and we will not be found sitting in the barracks when the King returns.

PART 11 — MORELAND’S REFURBISHING: A PRACTICAL BLUEPRINT

In the chapter of *Love Your God With All Your Mind* that produced our opening quote, J. P. Moreland goes further. He does not simply diagnose the problem. He lays out a practical

blueprint for rebuilding the local church as a War College. We are going to walk through his actual proposals, with Scripture, because they are the most concrete and most usable reform plan in modern evangelical literature.

A. Three Philosophy-of-Ministry Principles

1. No Senior Pastors — a Plurality of Elders

Moreland argues, with the New Testament, that the local church is to be led by a plurality of *elders*, not by a celebrity senior pastor. In his view, the modern senior-pastor model is one of the chief sources of American church dysfunction. More and more men enter the pastorate to meet their own significance needs; congregations, filled with “empty selves”, come to prop them up. Without meaning to, the system produces codependence: the pastor feeds on the attention, and the parishioners remain passive spectators. If a visitor asks “where is the minister?”, we point at one man — when the New Testament would have us point at the whole congregation, because every believer is a minister of the new covenant.

Greek NT (Acts 14:23): χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους, προσευζάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν παρέθεντο αὐτοὺς τῷ κυρίῳ.

Acts 14:23 (ESV): “And when they had appointed **elders** for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord.” — *elders*, plural, in every church.

Further biblical evidence: Acts 20:17–28 (Paul calls for the elders of Ephesus); Philippians 1:1 (“to all the saints... with the overseers and deacons”, both plural); 1 Timothy 5:17 (“let the elders who rule well”); Titus 1:5 (“appoint elders in every town”); Hebrews 13:17 (“obey your leaders”, plural); James 5:14 (“let him call for the elders of the church”, plural); 1 Peter 5:1–4 (Peter addresses “the elders among you”, plural). The New Testament knows nothing of a single senior pastor. It knows plural elders, shepherding together.

No one person has enough gifts, perspective, and maturity to be given the opportunity disproportionately to shape the personality and texture of a local church. If Christ is

actually the head of the church, our church structures ought to reflect that fact, and a group of undershepherds, not a senior pastor, should collectively seek His guidance in leading the congregation.

— J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, rev. ed. 2012

2. The Pastoral Staff Equip — They Do Not Do — the Ministry

Moreland calls Ephesians 4:11–16 “the most critical section in the entire New Testament for informing the nature of local church leadership.” The evangelists, pastors, and teachers God gives to the Church have one job description: to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Not to do the ministry themselves while the saints watch and applaud. This inverts the senior-pastor model entirely. The test of the evangelist’s gift is not how effective *he* is at winning converts; it is his track record at training others to evangelize. The test of the pastor-teacher is not his preaching popularity; it is whether his people are growing in doctrine, depth, and discernment.

Greek NT (Eph 4:11–12): καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους... τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ephesians 4:11–12 (ESV): “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ.”

The Greek *katartismos* means “to set in order, to fit out, to prepare for action.” It is the word used for mending nets (Matt 4:21) and for a general preparing an army for battle. The pastoral office is the quartermaster’s office of the War College: we exist to fit out the saints for their work.

3. Distinguish *Forms* from *Functions*

A New Testament **function** is an absolute biblical mandate that every church must do — preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2), celebrate the Table (Luke 22:19), baptize converts (Matt 28:19), pray (Acts 2:42), disciple (Matt 28:20), discipline (Matt 18:15–17), love one another (John 13:34), send on mission (Acts 1:8). Functions are nonnegotiable. A **form**, on the other hand, is a culturally specific means of fulfilling biblical functions — whether Sunday school meets at 9 or at 10, whether songs are accompanied by pipe organ or

guitar, whether the meeting-house has pews or chairs, whether youth ministry is age-segregated or family-integrated. Forms are adjustable; they serve the functions.

The category confusion that destroys churches: treating forms as though they were functions (“we have always done it this way; therefore, we must never change”) or treating functions as though they were forms (“weekly expository preaching is optional; let’s do a TED-talk instead”). Moreland’s point: we have *no right* to adjust the biblical functions, and we have *a duty* to examine our forms constantly for effectiveness. A church that never changes its forms is as unfaithful as a church that never keeps its functions.

B. Practical Reforms

Moreland offers concrete proposals he has implemented in churches where he has served. We summarize them here because they are immediately usable.

1

Overhaul the Sermon — from Filling Station to Teaching

The “filling station” approach — show up, get topped off, leave — is running out of gas. Most Christians sense in their hearts that they know far too little about their faith and are embarrassed about it. They want to be stretched.

Moreland’s three reforms:

- *Substantial supplementary handouts.* Not a three-point bulletin insert. A detailed two-or-three-page handout with structured sermon notes, study exercises, recommendations for further reading, and a bibliography. After a series, these assemble with audio into a full minicourse.
- *Assigned reading before the series.* Before a series on 1 Peter begins, order 75 copies of a good commentary; sell them in the foyer; list each week’s text with the commentary page numbers. People come to the sermon prepared — which forces the preacher to work harder because his hearers have already read the passage.
- *Vary the intellectual level of sermons.* From time to time a sermon should be pitched to the upper third of the congregation intellectually. Most of the time we dumb our sermons down so far that the thinkers go hungry and look elsewhere for spiritual food. The rest of the time this will motivate those in the lower two-thirds to work to catch up.

- *Rotate the preachers.* No one person should preach more than half the Sundays in a year. First, no one person is adequate to shape a congregation through the pulpit alone. Second, no one can do adequate study for a weekly message; reliance on speaking ability eventually substitutes for deep preparation and the sermons go hollow. With four preachers on rotation, each knows that he has a four-to-eight-week series coming up in three months, and can work the material to the bone. **Moreland's test:** if your main preacher moved to another church, would the attendance collapse? If yes, your church is going about its business wrongly. The gift is not being shared; the body is not being equipped.

2

The Church Library — Enlisting an Army of Readers

Moreland: “Those in charge of the church library should see their job to be one of enlisting a growing number of church members into an army of readers and learners who, over the years, are becoming spiritually mature, clearly thinking believers who know what and why they believe.” The church library should be *large* and should contain serious intellectual resources, not just self-help books. It costs money; our investment reflects our values.

In one church where Moreland served as pastor-teacher, the library held 12,000 volumes. Because most church libraries are off the beaten path, every single Sunday volunteers set up tables in the foyer with 500 rotating books, greeted people at the door, and invited them to check out a volume or purchase a minicourse from a past sermon series. Hundreds of books moved every month that would have stayed on the shelf. Book reviews appeared in the bulletin; several featured volumes were stocked on consignment and sold in the lobby each month. Moreland's railroad-industry analogy: the library staff do not serve to process books and keep the room open. They serve the *mission* — developing a thinking, reading, literate congregation.

3

Sunday School and Study Centers — Real Education

Traditional Sunday school classes largely function to *enfold* people in mid-sized groups — which is fine, but is not education. Moreland's proposal is to develop

parallel classes with a distinctively educational focus. At Grace Fellowship Church in Baltimore, he helped run the **Grace Discovery Center** with a quarterly course catalog: Greek, counseling, systematic theology, church history, apologetics, the history of philosophy, medical ethics, Christianity and science, education and childhood development. Courses cost \$25–\$75 depending on contact hours. Some met Wednesday nights, some ran four consecutive Saturday mornings, some packaged Friday evening into Saturday afternoon. Each had a syllabus, required texts, written assignments, and grades. Texts included both believing and unbelieving authors, published by Oxford University Press as well as evangelical houses.

If a single church cannot resource such a study center, two or three churches band together to sponsor one jointly. The Discovery Center also hosted focused weekend retreats on specialty topics (Christianity and politics, medical ethics) with invited scholars and required pre-reading.

Ministry by vocation. When twenty members completed a year-long study of psychology and pastoral counseling under a local Christian psychologist, the elders brought them to the front of the church one Sunday, distributed a list of their names and phone numbers to the congregation, laid hands on them, and dedicated them as the counseling ministry of the church. Eighteen engineers and scientists completed an eighteen-month study of science and Christianity and were dedicated the same way. For the first time in their lives, what these men and women had studied and chosen as a vocation became *relevant to their discipleship*.

4

Raise the Visibility of the Intellectual Life and the Christian Intellectual

A group's values shape its behavior. If the local church is to overcome its anti-intellectualism, it must raise the visibility and honor of the intellectual life among its members.

- *Vocational and apologetic testimonies in the service.* Selected worshippers given five minutes to share how they are growing to think more Christianly as a businessperson, a teacher, a nurse. What are they reading? Which issues are they wrestling with? Where has apologetics aided their own evangelism?

- *Monthly book reviews.* A brief review of a significant new book, including books by influential unbelievers the Church needs to understand.
- *Celebrate Christian intellectuals.* Most believers know the leading Christian radio personalities. Few know the Christian intellectuals laboring faithfully at universities. We should know them, pray for them by name in our services, celebrate their publications, and hold them forth as vocational role models for our teenagers. We do this for missionaries. We should do it for Christian scholars, because the war of ideas is every bit as real.
- *Prepare teenagers for the university.* The summer after high-school graduation, hold a summer institute in apologetics and worldview. Prepare the young saints for what they will face in the secular university. Challenge them with the idea that college is not a credential but a vocation.
- *Enfold graduate students.* Every August, print a list of members heading to graduate school with their name, university, and major. Bring them to the front; admonish them to develop Christian minds in their studies; lay hands and dedicate them. Pair each with someone in the congregation in the same vocation for ongoing support.
- *Fund evangelical scholarship.* Ask honestly what percentage of your personal giving and your church's budget supports the development of Christian scholarship. Evangelical colleges and seminaries are grossly underfunded; their faculty are underpaid and strapped with inordinate teaching loads; their students carry high tuitions and little scholarship support compared to secular universities. If we are tired of being underrepresented in media, universities, and government, we have to fund the institutions that raise up intellectual leaders.

C. The Brad Stetson Vision

Moreland closes his chapter with a story. Reading the newspaper one morning, he came across an editorial in the *Orange County Register* defending Promise Keepers from feminist and liberal critics — articulate, evangelical, carefully argued, read by millions. What moved him was not just the substance but the author: **Dr. Brad Stetson**, a young evangelical who had recently completed a PhD in social ethics. Stetson was, for Moreland, a symbol of a new generation of Christian intellectuals able to engage the public square.

What I am saying in this chapter is that we need one hundred thousand Brad Stetsons to write editorials, penetrate secular universities, write books, speak on talk shows, and much, much more. The local church needs to be more intentional in finding and developing the young Brad Stetsons now in her ranks. May almighty God help us to do just that.

— J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, rev. ed. 2012, ch. 8

This is the War College Church. Not a hospital that soothes empty selves. Not a concert venue with a motivational talk. A *mobilizing institution* — disciplined, serious, intellectual, prayerful, sacramental, disciplined, mission-ready — sending one hundred thousand equipped saints into every profession, every university, every public square, every foreign field. Pleasant Springs Church is small. But we intend to be faithful in our small corner, and we intend to produce our own Stetsons, our own Morelands, our own Heisers, our own Wrights, our own nameless faithful who will stand in their vocations and testify, intelligently and winsomely, to the glory of Christ.

Greek NT (2 Tim 2:2): καὶ ἃ ἤκουσας παρ' ἐμοῦ διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων, ταῦτα παράθου πιστοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οἵτινες ἱκανοὶ ἔσονται καὶ ἑτέροισι διδάξαι.

2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV): “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, **who will be able to teach others also.**”

Paul’s four-generation pipeline: Paul → Timothy → faithful men → others. The War College is a reproduction machine, not a consumer service.

PART 12 — WHAT PLEASANT SPRINGS PRACTICES

Pleasant Springs Church in Henderson / Pinson, Tennessee, is a small congregation committed to being a War College for the King. We are not against good music. We are not against friendliness. We are not against attractive buildings. But we have ordered our life together around what we understand the New Testament and the historic Church to command, not what American marketing has made popular.

OUR PRACTICE

The Word is central. Our Lord's Day service is built around the reading and expository preaching of Scripture. The pulpit stands at the front; the Bible is open on it; the sermon is the heart of the service, not its filler.

The Table is weekly. We share the bread and the cup every Lord's Day as the Acts-2:42 Church did, with the words of institution read from 1 Corinthians 11, with both elements served to every believing member.

The altar call is replaced by the biblical response: baptism, examination, and public profession of faith before the gathered Church. If you come to Christ under our preaching, we will rejoice with you, counsel you, catechize you, baptize you, and welcome you to the Table. There is no rail to come forward to; there is a family to be joined.

We do not use dim auditorium lighting or a concert stage. Our meeting space is lit and clear. The band (when we have one) serves the congregation's singing, not its own performance. We sing the Psalms, the historic hymns, and the best of modern worship music — texts that teach doctrine, not just repeat emotion.

We catechize our children. The Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and our *Sinner's Statement of Beliefs* are memorized, taught, and understood.

We disciple our men and women intellectually. Our Discipleship School and Lesson Archive are evidence. Our members read — books, Scripture, history, doctrine. We are building the War College.

We exercise discipline. Our members are known. Sin is confronted privately, then elder-ward, then congregationally, following Matthew 18. The goal is always restoration.

We expect our people to carry the gospel. Every vocation. Every neighborhood. Every Monday through Saturday. The war is not confined to Sunday morning.

Greek NT (Eph 4:11–13): καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ephesians 4:11–13 (ESV): “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Paul’s vision of pastoral ministry: not to entertain the saints, but to *equip* them for the work. The Greek is *katartismos* — “to set in order, to fit out, to prepare for action.” A military word. A War College word.

SIMPLIFIED SUMMARY

THE WAR COLLEGE CHURCH IN ONE PAGE

The biblical pattern (Acts 2:42): Apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers. That is Church. For 300 years, in homes, under persecution, the Church kept this pattern and conquered an empire.

From 300–1500, the simple pattern was slowly replaced by the medieval Latin Mass: Word obscured, Table priest-centered, laity spectators.

The Reformation (1517–1700) recovered the Word in the vernacular, restored expository preaching, and re-centered the pulpit and the Table among the gathered community. The Puritans refined this into what was, in effect, a War College — serious preaching, catechesis, discipline, and vocational equipping.

In 1821, Charles G. Finney, a New York lawyer-turned-revivalist, invented the altar call (the “anxious bench”) as part of his “New Measures.” His theology was heterodox (semi-Pelagian perfectionism); his method was theatrical; and his legacy was a century-and-a-half of American evangelicalism that treated conversion as a decisional moment rather than a life incorporated into Christ and his Church.

From 1975 onward, the seeker-sensitive megachurch movement further reshaped American evangelical practice: concert stages, dim lighting, coffee bars, topical

preaching, quarterly or rare communion, pulpit minimized. Willow Creek itself admitted in 2007 that the model had failed to produce disciples.

Pleasant Springs Church returns to the historic pattern: Word preached from a central pulpit; Table celebrated weekly; baptism (not altar call) as the biblical response to conversion; catechesis of the mind and heart; real fellowship and discipline; training for every vocation; mission to the ends of the earth. This is what J. P. Moreland calls a War College for the King. This is what the Apostles, Fathers, Reformers, and Puritans would recognize. This is what we intend to be.

And Yet — We Love Our Evangelical Family

Many faithful believers worship in coffee-bar-and-stage churches, were converted at Billy Graham crusades, prayed the sinner's prayer at age eight, and love the Lord Jesus with all their heart. We do not doubt the reality of their faith. We do not despise the ministries that formed them. We are not calling anyone to leave a church where Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered. We are simply saying, with all the history and Scripture we have summarized above, that there is an older, deeper, more serious form of Christian practice to recover. We want Pleasant Springs to be that form. We invite our brothers and sisters to consider it with us.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). “Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2). “Equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). These four verses, taken seriously together, are enough to remake any congregation into a War College.

PRAYER

Captain of the Lord's armies, Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us the Church we have settled for. We have exchanged the pulpit for the stage, the Table for the concession stand, the discipline of the saints for the amusement of seekers, the Word for the slide deck. Forgive us, and build us back. Make us, in our small place and small numbers, a people who know your Word, who feed on your Table, who love one another, who pray with power, who think with rigor, who work with diligence, who

witness with courage, and who suffer with hope. Train us to be a war college of men and women able to stand against every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and to carry the gospel into every place you send us. When the great day comes and you return with your holy angels, find us not hiding in a coffee bar but on the wall, watching, ready. In your name, who is Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of the Church, Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Acts 2:42 aloud. List the four marks. Now compare them honestly with the last three Sunday services you have attended. Where is your church strong? Where has it drifted? What would it mean to recover the apostolic pattern?

2. Charles Finney invented the altar call in the 1820s as part of a self-conscious theological project. Before Finney, no Christian church had used it. Does this history change how you hear the familiar phrase “I want everyone to bow their heads, close their eyes, no one looking around...”? Is the altar call helpful as a pastoral tool, or has it largely replaced the biblical patterns of conviction and incorporation?

3. Willow Creek’s 2007 *Reveal* study found that the seeker-sensitive method had not produced mature disciples. Bill Hybels publicly apologized. Has this admission changed the actual practice of the American evangelical megachurch in the 17 years since? If not, why not?

4. J. P. Moreland says the Church should be both a hospital and a war college. Most American churches are mostly hospitals. Pleasant Springs wants to be a war college *too*. What will it cost you personally to take up the War College disciplines — serious preaching, weekly Table, catechesis, real fellowship, a trained mind? Are you willing to pay it?

5. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. Paul’s picture of the Christian life is a war. The modern American evangelical picture is often more like a spa. Which picture better matches the New Testament? Which picture better matches the needs of the culture around you?

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