

RESTORATION APPRECIATION WEEK 2022

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Preface

Great Lakes Christian College proudly embraces our heritage in the Restoration Movement and celebrates that heritage with our constituent churches. To foster greater appreciation for our rich heritage among our students, staff, and affiliated churches we launched GLCC's first annual "Restoration Appreciation Week" back in 2016.

We were pleased to host our seventh annual Restoration Appreciation Week, October 18-21, 2022. Our celebration kicked off during Tuesday chapel with Esther Hetrick's wonderful summary of the noteworthy figures and key motifs of the early Restoration Movement, titled "Harmony by the Book: Restoration for a New Generation." Esther recently completed 35 years teaching music and worship for GLCC and continues serving the school and church in a variety of ways. In this essay, she frames her knowledge and love for the Restoration heritage in a distinct and delightful way that leans into her musical passions. On Friday, John Mark Hicks, former professor of theology at Harding and Lipscomb universities and prolific author from the a cappella churches of Christ, spotlights Acts 2:42, which has been a key passage for all congregations seeking to emulate the practices of the early church. This essay unpacks the role that the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer played not only within the Stone-Campbell Movement, but also in the Protestant Reformation that preceded it by several centuries. We seek to keep these important conversations going by making both presentations available in this pamphlet.

Both sessions were also live streamed, recorded, and made available to watch on GLCC's website at <https://www.glcc.edu/advancement/restoration-appreciation-week>. Also available online are resources and pamphlets related to prior Restoration Appreciation Week celebrations.

GLCC is continuing this tradition by hosting Restoration Appreciation Week in October of 2023. We invite you to join us during chapel on the 17th and 20th – whether in person or online. We also encourage your congregation to join others in naming Sunday, October 22, Restoration Appreciation Sunday. For the most up-to-date information and congregational resources for past and future events, frequent our website at <https://www.glcc.edu/advancement/restoration-appreciation-week/>.

Harmony by the Book: Restoration for a New Generation
Esther A. Hetrick

I grew up hearing the phrase “The Restoration Movement.” My dad preached in Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in Illinois and Indiana, so I grew up hearing that phrase as a good thing. I didn’t know many details about these churches until I attended Lincoln Christian College and took a course on the history of the Restoration Movement. Though not a scholar or authority on the Restoration Movement, I seek to highlight the value of the Restoration Movement for a new generation.

As I began putting this essay together, I looked up synonyms for key restoration terms. I began with the word “restore” (nothing especially helpful there) and then I moved on to “unity.” There I came across a very familiar word to me as a musician: “harmony.” As Professor of Music at Great Lakes Christian College and director of the Concert Choir and numerous other ensembles, I was drawn to this word.

Harmony can be defined as the process by which individual sounds are combined into whole units. This term also refers to simultaneously occurring frequencies, pitches, or chords. Today I would like to look back at the “individual sounds” of early Restoration leaders, each with a big idea in their time and place, that resonated with others to become an ecclesial harmony that continues today.

Description of Restoration Movement

The Restoration Movement dates back to the early 1800s and began as a unity movement with different leaders from around the country who each had a vision to unite believers around some simple, reasonable truths: Jesus is Lord; Scripture is our authority; and we can come together simply as Christians who are seeking to restore the principles and practices of the New

Testament church. It became and continues to be a movement of independent congregations who govern themselves by wise lay leaders and formally trained ministers. Congregations often gather for conferences, big events, or to support a parachurch organization (like church camps, mission organizations, and Bible colleges). However, no governing convention or denomination provides official cohesion for these congregations. Each one quite independently seeks to follow the Bible and replicate the pattern of the New Testament church in ways that make sense for their time and place.

Churches in the Restoration Movement are often called Christian Churches or Churches of Christ. Just in the Lansing area, we have South Lansing Christian Church, West Lansing Church of Christ, Delta Community Christian Church (DC3), University Christian Church in East Lansing (which shares its building with the Greater Lansing Church of Christ, a non-instrumental congregation), Holt Christian Church, Duplain Church of Christ, Dewitt Christian Church, and 2|42 Community Church, all of which are independent, non-denominational churches that come together for fellowship during area-wide events. Non-instrumental Churches of Christ, like Holmes Road Church of Christ also share our Restoration heritage.

“Note-worthy” Leaders and Influencers

Several “*note-worthy*” leaders (or “influencers,” if you will) pioneered the Restoration Movement. The first is Thomas Campbell. He was born in Ireland and tried to bring unity to the religious conflicts among Roman Catholics, Protestants, and factions within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Conflict and turmoil among believers frustrated him. His church was an “Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church,” named after various religious and political factions in his time. He immigrated to America for a fresh start and came to believe that identifying Scripture as our primary authority could promote

Christian unity. He sought to base his life and preaching on Scripture. He also cultivated a lifelong habit of memorizing a portion of the Bible every day.

Thomas's oldest son, Alexander Campbell, followed his father to America. On his own he had come to similar beliefs about uniting Christians by restoring New Testament Christianity. Together they began a unity movement in 1809. Alexander was an interesting young man growing up, more interested in sports than study. He was about 6 feet tall and was homeschooled, mostly by his dad. Eventually he developed an appetite for books and ideas, which he retained well due to a great memory.¹ Alexander was a farmer who would get up at 4:00 AM to get in 16 hours of work and study. He had a keen knowledge of human nature, was well-educated and an eloquent speaker. He could speak for 2-3 hours without notes, was a skilled debater, and a proficient writer.² When we look at historical figures, we tend to focus on their accomplishments independent of whatever hardships they may have endured. Alexander was familiar with grief and loss. His first wife died when he was 38, and 10 of his 14 children died before him, six of whom were daughters and young mothers. Still, he had a great sense of joy. Alexander launched his ministry as a debater and solidified it as a writer and editor.

Barton W. Stone, another early leader, was born in Maryland. His father died when he was 3 years old. His family moved around quite a bit, living in Virginia and Georgia, and eventually settling in Kentucky. Stone's parents were Anglican, mostly in name only, and so he didn't grow up with a strong knowledge of God. As a young man he pursued law in an academy run by a Presbyterian minister. There he encountered the Bible and what it means to live a life of

¹ Leroy Garrett, "Campbell, Alexander (1788-1866)," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Foster, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 116.

² Garrett, "Campbell, Alexander," 112.

faith. He was also influenced by a wave of revivals that swept through Kentucky. He had what Calvinist Presbyterians called a conversion experience.

Barton W. Stone's life and work are difficult to summarize concisely. He was loved for his Christian spirit even by many of his religious opponents, and his good moral character was recognized by all.³ He was also a "man of war from his youth," engaged in theological controversies most of his life.⁴ He had both the heart of an evangelist and a mind that struggled with the theological teachings of his time. Though eventually ordained as a Presbyterian minister, he struggled with the Calvinist doctrines of election and predestination. He gleaned some helpful ideas from Kentucky Baptists, later called "New Testament Baptists." In 1804, he and some of his colleagues determined to take no other name than "Christians," believing that this was the name of the first disciples of Christ.⁵ They "allowed each other to read the Bible, and judge of its meaning for themselves, and they did not bind each other to believe certain dogmas as terms of fellowship."⁶ Stone met Alexander Campbell in 1824, but it wasn't until 1832 that they agreed to combine their efforts. "Raccoon" John Smith, another frontier evangelist, spoke at the preliminary meeting where they joined forces. He made this statement, "Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stone-ites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible, and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need."⁷

³ D. Newell Williams, "Stone, Barton Warren (1772-1844)," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 701.

⁴ Williams, "Stone, Barton Warren," 701.

⁵ Williams, "Stone, Barton Warren," 710.

⁶ Williams, "Stone, Barton Warren," 715.

⁷ Bruce E. Shields, "Smith, 'Raccoon' John (1784-1868)," *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 691.

One final leader of “note” is Walter Scott. He came from Scotland as an educator who had broken with the Church of Scotland. He met the Campbells and became an evangelist, traveling around the country preaching the gospel message. He developed a “five finger exercise” that he used when speaking to children. The first three are what we do—believe, repent, and submit to baptism; the next two are what God does—forgive sin and grant the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. This idea of using five fingers to describe salvation was still around when I was a child. I remember it as believe, repent, be baptized, be obedient to God’s Word, and enjoy eternal life with God.

I commend these early leaders for having a vision for unity—not based on trying to create new methods or theological systems—but returning to the simple, essential truths found in Scripture. Their call for restoration of the New Testament Church drew more than four million people by the beginning of the 21st Century.

Key Motifs

Next, I’d like to share some key motifs of the Restoration Movement. In musical terms, a “motif” is a distinctive musical idea that is recognizable within a musical piece, like the first four notes of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony. Several key motifs or slogans were associated with the Restoration Movement, including “Not the only Christians, but Christians only,” “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent,” and “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity (or love).”

The early leaders didn’t always agree, but they tried to be unified on the essentials of Scripture as they understood them. For example, Barton W. Stone believed that baptism by immersion was biblical. Alexander Campbell still practiced infant baptism, as in a tradition he had grown up in. However, when Campbell had his first child, he made the decision not to

baptize her as an infant but to wait for her to make a personal decision when she was old enough to understand. His father, Thomas, wasn't quite on the same page, but supported him. Soon after, when Alexander decided to be baptized by immersion, his father and his wife did so as well.

A second example can be found in the names chosen for the congregations that grew out of the Restoration Movement. Alexander Campbell liked the name "disciples" (a good biblical name) so congregations that he influenced were called "Disciples of Christ." Barton W. Stone liked the name "Christians," so congregations that he influenced were called "Christian Churches" or "Churches of Christ." Early on, these names were used interchangeably. Eventually different stances on church activities led to three distinct groupings, which I discuss below.

4-Part Harmony

I have probably stretched the musical metaphors as far as I should, but as I was thinking back on growing up in the Restoration Movement, I thought of four areas (4-part harmony, if you will) that I especially value from my tradition and that I think are helpful to new generations of believers.

First is the importance of Scripture. Much like the soprano that carries the melody in 4-part music, without which the music is indiscernible, the importance of reading, learning and following the truths of Scripture has been a foundational element of the Restoration Movement. I remember an important lesson I learned about this as a child—a lesson that was probably more "caught" than "taught." In third grade, my friend Lynn and I always ate lunch together in the school cafeteria. She was a Jehovah's Witness, which meant nothing to me at the time, except that she didn't get to do a lot of the holiday party activities at school. I don't know how our conversation got around to this, but she announced that her church's leader, who was a prophet

(my eyes got big at that), had determined when Christ was going to return (I think it was the late 1970s). I didn't know what to think about that, so when I got home, I got out my Bible. I remembered something about Jesus' return like a "thief in the night" and that nobody knows the day or time, so I went to the Scriptures. My dad came in and saw me going through my Bible and asked me what I was looking for. I filled him in on the conversation from lunch, and he directed me to Matthew 24-25. I was feeling proud of myself and ready to prove my friend wrong, when my dad taught me a valuable lesson. First, he asked me whether I just wanted to prove that I was right or whether I actually cared about my friend? He said the Bible wasn't meant to be a "club" to hammer our point home or prove someone else wrong; it is meant to teach us how to live as followers of Christ and, by our actions and our words, to invite others to follow Him. So, we prayed for my friend, and my dad challenged me to speak truth in love—not to win an argument but to glorify the God who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

More recently, I was reminded again of the importance of looking to Scripture as our primary instruction for life. One of the ministers at my church (a GLCC alum!) was talking to volunteer small group leaders about how to deal with messy "people" issues in their small groups. He noted that often we want to ignore a problem and hope it just goes away; or we may blame a particular person and try, covertly or overtly, to get them out of the group. But this leader reminded us that we need to take action, and the first action should be to look to Scripture and see how Jesus treated people and what principles we could apply to the situation. Is there a truth that needs to be taught, in love? Is this an opportunity to stretch our "compassion" muscles? Instead of relying on ways our culture deals with difficult people, we should look to Scripture and view people through the lens of God's love for them.

I am thankful for the value of Scripture as the source of truth personally and for the church. Just as it was for the early Restoration leaders in their divisive culture, I believe it is relevant and helpful for us today.

The second “part” I find valuable is seeking to follow the pattern of the New Testament church. This may be compared to altos in 4-part harmony. Head’s up, I grew up singing alto, so I’m a bit biased. Altos, in my opinion, are a steady, solid bunch. They tend to grab their part and hang on to it. They don’t try to be sopranos but are secure in their role to accompany and enhance the melody. Likewise, seeking to follow the pattern of the New Testament church goes right along with valuing Scripture. Numerous glimpses of the New Testament worshipping community emphasize togetherness.⁸ “They all joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14), “All the believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2:44), “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46).⁹

A central component of early church worship is the Lord’s Supper. Early Restoration leaders detected a New Testament pattern of breaking bread and taking the Lord’s Supper as part of weekly corporate worship “on the first day of the week.”¹⁰ To me, this is kind of amazing. Three hundred or so years before the Restoration Movement, the Reformation sought to make some significant changes to worship practices. Many of the key leaders—Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli—wanted worshippers to take the Lord’s Supper or communion more frequently. But so much fear and superstition had surrounded this practice in the past that none

⁸ Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 120.

⁹ All Scripture references are from the New International Version, hereafter NIV.

¹⁰ Cf. Acts 20:7.

of them were able to convince their people to take it weekly. It took 300 years, but Restoration leaders, seeking to emulate the New Testament church, successfully revitalized the ancient practice of weekly Lord's Supper.

Having grown up in this tradition, I have always found it valuable. When I was a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, some of my friends pushed back on such frequency, asking, "Doesn't taking communion every week make it less important, more of just a ritual or habit?" And I would respond, "No, in my experience it really doesn't." Every week we have the opportunity to remember and celebrate with gratitude and thanksgiving what God accomplished through Jesus.

I love that the symbol for the Lord's Supper is a table. A table brings to mind a gathering place where people connect with friends and family, enjoy a meal together, and build relationships by telling stories from the past and catching up on each other's lives. Historically, some have portrayed the Lord's Supper with the symbol of an altar, a place where sacrifice is made and blood is shed. But John Mark Hicks, in his book *Come to the Table*, reminds us that the cross is where the blood was shed, where we feel the weight of our sins and the need for a Savior. But the table is where we come, at the Lord's invitation, to give thanks and remember with gratitude the relationship we now enjoy with God, through Christ.¹¹ I am thankful for the value of following the pattern of the New Testament Church. The glimpses of church life we find in the book of Acts and the instructions we receive in the letters to the churches provide direction as we gather as communities of faith, the Body of Christ.

¹¹ Hicks, John Mark, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2002), 36-37.

The third “part” that I value is seeking unity among fellow believers. I would compare this (with a little “tongue-in-cheek”) to the tenor section. The tenor part in 4-part harmony is beautiful. In my experience, however, tenors tend to be a fun-loving, talkative, mischievous, and slightly unruly bunch who are sometimes hard to wrangle, though the end result is certainly worth it. In similar fashion, the Restoration ideal of unity has proven difficult to achieve. While early leaders like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and others believed that upholding Scripture as our authority and following the New Testament pattern would bring unity, it has remained an ideal that is elusive. The Stone-Campbell heritage has three streams or branches: the Disciples of Christ, which became their own denomination in the early 20th century; the non-instrumental, a cappella Churches of Christ; and the independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Unity is an ideal that is hard to achieve, but worth working for. These three branches share a common story and many common goals. Efforts continue to be made to bring them together, at least for fellowship and scholarship.

One example is the Stone-Campbell Journal and Conference. This yearly scholarly conference brings together leaders and educators from all three branches. Several GLCC professors and students attend each Spring. We have had students present papers and win awards and professors deliver papers and plenary addresses.

GLCC has participated in numerous unity initiatives, especially with non-instrumental Churches of Christ. In 2004, we hosted the Restoration Forum. This annual unity meeting, which began in 1984, gathers in various places around the country and is open to all who share our common Restoration heritage. When asked to host, we requested to host it jointly with Rochester College, a non-instrumental Church of Christ college in eastern Michigan. This was the first time two colleges from different branches of the movement hosted together. It was held on the

campus of Rochester College. GLCC Vice President Phil Beavers served on the planning team. There were numerous issues to work out. On the opening night, our choirs each performed a mini concert. Initially, it was thought that we could do our part of the concert with piano accompaniment, but it was preferred that all music be a cappella. So we honored that preference and our choir sang a cappella as well. We sang two songs together as a combined choir (again a cappella). It was a pretty big deal for our choir of thirty members since their choir was more than twice our size. Joining with them created a big beautiful sound that was quite memorable. Overall, it was a very positive experience that encouraged a true sense of fellowship, even if fleeting.

The Michigan Christian Convention, which is held each April on our campus, has had speakers from non-instrumental churches and has had non-instrumental worship teams lead musical worship for a main session. At times there has been a special effort to involve non-instrumental leaders to help in the planning of the convention. I am thankful for the Restoration Movement's value of seeking unity among believers. It is an ideal worth working toward.

The fourth "part" I value is a heritage that is meaningful, even when hard to explain. I liken this to the bass part. I appreciate basses, but sometimes they need a little extra help in getting their part. And if there's an optional low note, even if I've explained that we're not going to take it, invariably one of the guys will try, confident that he can hit it, even though it's usually just a low growl. Growing up in an independent Christian Church, when someone would ask my church tradition, I would say "Christian Church." They would respond, "Of course, it's Christian, but what church?" They want to know what denomination. So I would explain that I'm part of a fellowship of independent, non-denominational Christian Churches that seek to follow the Bible and reflect the pattern of the New Testament Church. At this point, they would get a

little glassy-eyed and perhaps suspicious, as if I was part of a cult. In recent years, many churches have left their denomination or dropped their denominational name, so the idea of an independent, Bible-based church has become more familiar.

At times the discussion arises as to whether the Restoration Movement has actually become a denomination. The Disciples of Christ, for instance, chose to become a denomination in the mid-20th century. As far as I can tell, the Campbells and Stone weren't necessarily against being a denomination; they just weren't looking to start another one. They wanted to unite Christians, not divide them further. Both led churches that joined associations, Presbyterian and Baptist, for a time. They ended up either being kicked out or leaving due to issues that they didn't deem compatible with the Bible. At one point, Campbell spoke favorably about denomination language, but was strongly against being a "sect."

My response to the question of whether the Restoration Movement is a denomination is a pretty firm no, especially after learning about the Southern Baptist Convention during my Master's work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. We have no delegates to a convention that votes on positions, no fees paid to a governing organization, no mission boards to commission and financially support missionaries, no centralized resources to provide training, and no hierarchy of leadership above the local church. What we have instead are parachurch organizations that raise their own support and assist churches when asked, conferences that promote fellowship and encouragement, Bible colleges that provide training, and various churches that organize retreats or events and invite area churches to join.

I value my heritage in the Restoration Movement, even when it's a little hard to explain to others. I would also add that to new believers and sometimes older disillusioned believers the simple premises of the Restoration Movement can be very appealing. In 1993, I was part of a

new church plant in Okemos, MI, and we had several families with young children who began to attend. Some had grown up in the church but left when they went away to college. Some didn't have much of a church background but wanted something more for their family and decided to check out our church. The idea of a church simply trying to follow the Bible was attractive. Just recently, I was helping at the "Next Steps" table after a worship service. This is a place where visitors ask questions and those interested in getting more involved can find out about our small groups and service opportunities. An older couple stopped by, it was their first time at our church. They had a lot of questions about the church and what we believe. The man seemed especially well-read and had a lot of thoughtful questions. They came from a different church background and were intrigued by our church. I spent quite a bit of time talking with them. I saw them back the next week, and about a month ago the man made a point to find me and tell me that they were "all in." They had met with one of the ministry staff and were excited to plug in to our church. The idea of a church that aspires to follow the Bible and replicate the pattern of the New Testament Church appeals to many.

Conclusion

Last week I was contacted by a friend of GLCC regarding a hymnal she had found while out shopping for antiques. It was entitled *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Original and Selected* and was compiled by Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and Barton W. Stone, listed as "elders of the Christian Church." It was published in 1860. As I held this little book—about an inch thick, 3 inches by 5 inches, fragile but surprising well-preserved—I stood in awe of the sense of history it represented. At the end of the preface, Alexander Campbell wrote, "No exercise of social worship is more delightful, solemn, or sublime, than singing the praises of the Lord. And

when we address him in sacred song, care should be taken that the substance and the form, or the matter and manner of our song, be such as will be acceptable to him.”

As a musician and choral director, I know that harmony only happens when we’re all reading from the same musical score, not just knowing our own part, but listening and blending our voices with others, so that together we become one harmonious sound. It isn’t easy and it takes work, but the end result can be beautiful. The early leaders of the Restoration Movement held out an ideal for unity among believers by holding Scripture as our authority and using the New Testament pattern as our guide. It is an ideal we continue to seek.

May we, as Christ followers, commit to the kind of harmony the Apostle Paul espoused in Romans 15:5-6: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Defining Marks of the Church: Acts 2:42 and Restorationism
John Mark Hicks

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

“Progress of Reform” was a monthly feature in Alexander Campbell’s *Millennial Harbinger*. For forty years, from 1830-1870, the *Millennial Harbinger* was the most important and widely read periodical of the American Restoration Movement. The monthly provided fifty pages of teaching, encouragement, and progress reports on reformation activities.

Typical of these progress reports is one by H. M. Bledsoe of Paris, Kentucky, in 1834. Yet, his report is particularly significant. It describes the union of a Reforming Baptist congregation and a “Christian Church.” The former was influenced by Alexander Campbell and the latter was the fruit of Barton W. Stone’s work. On August 17, these two communions adopted a resolution to unite as one body in Paris, Kentucky.

On August 31, 1834, after a three-day conference, the two congregations formally organized a church under the name “the Church of Christ in Paris” with four “Elders or Bishops, and four Deacons.” With this, the community solemnly committed itself “to meet every Lord’s day, and endeavor to ‘continue steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread and in prayers.’”¹

This union between these two congregations imitated the union of the Campbell and Stone trajectories in Lexington, Kentucky, on January 1, 1832.² What happened in Lexington,

¹ E. M. Bledsoe, “Progress of Reform: Extracts from Letters,” *Millennial Harbinger* V, no. 9 (September 1834): 476-77.

² There are many accounts of this meeting in the standard histories. The first account is found in Barton W. Stone, “Union of Christians,” *Christian Messenger* 6, no. 1 (January 1832): 6-8. Though Alexander Campbell ultimately accommodated this union, his response to the

happened regularly though not universally across the American upper Midwest. Through these mergers, Campbell's Reformation Movement among Baptists and Stone's Christian Church Movement were united. This became the American Restoration Movement, now often referred to as the Stone-Campbell Movement.

This report is important for another reason. It represents how Acts 2:42 was formative for the movement's articulation of the gospel's simplicity. Union was not based on creeds or complex statements of faith but on the simple practice of Acts 2:42, which became a way of thinking about the marks of an authentic church. Acts 2:42 became a hallmark of the Restoration Movement because it epitomized the simple goal to follow the practices of the church in the New Testament. Such a commitment, however, was neither unique nor innovative. Acts 2:42 has an almost five hundred year history of such use.

The Reformed Tradition

Just as Campbell could call his movement a reformation, the idea of restoration was part of the vocabulary of the sixteenth century Geneva reformer Jean Calvin. According to Calvin, the goal of the Reformation was, as Schulze explains, "the restoration of the true service of God."³ By "true service of God," Calvin means both a godly life and a godly liturgy or, as free church traditions typically call it, a worship service.

Lexington meetings was not as enthusiastic as that of Stone. See Alexander Campbell, "Union," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (March 1832): 193-95; H. C. Coon, "Communication for the Millennial Harbinger," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 4 (April 1832): 191-92; L. Fleming, "A Complaint," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 5 (May 1832): 237-38; and Alexander Campbell, "Remarks on the Complaint," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 6 (June 1832): 279.

³ See Ludolf Ferdinand Schulze, "Reformasie as herstel van die ware diens van God: enkele aanwysers by Calvyn en Zwingli," *Koers* 63, no. 3 (1998): 153.

Calvin was interested in the idea of restoration, though reformation was his preferred language. He taught that the worship of God should conform to God's rule or standard, which is found in Scripture, particularly from the Apostles. He replied to Cardinal Sadoletto about the reformation in Geneva, saying,

The primary rudiments, by which we are wont to train to piety those whom we wish to gain as disciples of Christ, are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which he himself approved from the beginning. . . . In short, we train them, by every means, to be contented with the one rule of worship which they have received from his mouth, and bid adieu to all fictitious worship.⁴

His explicit interest was to “renew that form of the Church . . . which the Apostles instituted” which is “the only model of a true Church, and whoever deviates from it in the smallest degree is in error.”⁵ For Calvin this renewal project was focused on “three things on which the safety of the Church is founded, viz., doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments.” Its object was to “restore the native purity from which they had degenerated” over the past centuries by which they might “resume their dignity.”⁶

In fact, one might characterize Book IV of Calvin's *Institutes for Christian Religion* an advocacy for this restoration of the true church. The heading over Book IV describes its content as “the external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ.”⁷ Calvin insisted that, in compliance with the apostolic model of a true Church, the use of these means was essential to authentic Christian faith and practice. These practices include participation in a

⁴ John Calvin, “Reply to Sadoletto,” in *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. by John Dillenberger (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1975), 89-90.

⁵ Calvin, “Reply to Sadoletto,” 92.

⁶ Calvin, “Reply to Sadoletto,” 93.

⁷ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), IV.

“well ordered and governed church . . . since these are the means by which God’s children may be confirmed in the faith and are stirred up to live and die in his obedience.”⁸ In this way, to use Calvin’s language, “the restoration of the church” is an ordinary and necessary means by which God forms people into the image of Christ.⁹

Restoration is important because “it is not for us to devise such means; we must use the ones God has ordained.” This is no mere legal prescription. On the contrary, “the order and policy which God has established in his church” is how God trains us “in the faith, in the fear of God, in holiness, in despising the world, and in the love of the life of heaven.” The children draw near to their loving Father by these means of grace as an “assembly of the people of God.”¹⁰ And, according to Calvin, those who absent themselves from these assemblies or privatize their faith without community or the order God has ordained “are more stupid than the dumb beasts.”¹¹

Like leaders in the early American Restoration Movement, Calvin found a well-ordered church in the pages of the New Testament, sought to restore that order in the congregations he led, and identified that order primarily, though not exclusively, with Acts 2:42. While we see this in many places in Calvin, his commentary on Acts provides an accessible example. There he notes four “exercises” to which the early church was committed. He observed that “they studied continually to profit by hearing the apostles; that they gave themselves much to prayer; that they did use fellowship and breaking of bread very much.” Calvin identifies these as “four marks

⁸ John Calvin, “Four Sermons from John Calvin Treating Matters Which Are Very Useful for Our Times with a Brief Exposition of Psalm 87,” in *Come Out from Among Them: The “Anti-Nicodemite Writings of John Calvin,”* translated by Seth Skolnitsky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 130.

⁹ Calvin, “Four Sermons,” 130-31.

¹⁰ Calvin, “Four Sermons,” 178-79.

¹¹ Calvin, “Four Sermons,” 184.

whereby the true and natural face of the Church may be judged,” and by these marks we “see the true Church of Christ.” This is the “rule of worshipping God, which ought to be fetched out of the pure Word of God alone.” And “we must endeavor to keep and observe this order, if we will be truly judged to be the Church before God and the angels.”¹²

This perspective is endemic to the Reformed Tradition, begun in Switzerland and practiced among Presbyterians, Puritan Congregationalists, and Baptists. This tradition affirmed a regulative principle of hermeneutics (that is, the true service of God is regulated and limited by Scripture alone) and an obedience to the order found in Scripture as the mark of the true church. Calvin’s legacy was codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith and its Catechisms (1646-1648). For example, the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647 stated: “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, Sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.” The statement is supported by the citation of Acts 2:42, 46-47.¹³

The Puritan tradition, in both its congregational and Baptist forms, continued this Reformed use of Acts 2:42. For example, the 1611 Baptist Confession, written by Thomas Helwys, states “That every church ought (according to the example of Christ’s disciples and primitive churches) upon every first day of the week, being the Lord’s Day, to assemble together to pray, prophecy, praise God, and break bread, and perform all other parts of spiritual

¹² Jean Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Christopher Fetherstone and Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 138-142.

¹³ Westminster Shorter Catechism, accessed September 7, 2022 at <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-shorter-catechism/>.

communion for the worship of God, their own mutual edification, and the preservation of true religion, and piety in the church (John 20:19, Acts 2:42 and 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2).”¹⁴

British dissenters from established religion in Scotland and England in the 18th and early 19th century also continued this Reformed tradition of regulated worship and ordered assemblies. For example, the Haldane brothers who planted independent congregations across Britain used Acts 2:42 as the central plank in their restorationist plea. James Haldane’s 1805 book, *A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians Drawn from the Sacred Scriptures Alone*, is a primary example of their agenda. According to Haldane, the apostles taught early disciples to “assemble together” and “to observe certain ordinances. . . regularly on the first day of every week.” Acts 2:42 was the primary proof text for this assertion.¹⁵ Haldane explicitly identifies “fellowship” with “the contribution jointly made by the church for the relief of the poor.”¹⁶

This use of the Reformed hermeneutic and order is also found in other dissenting congregations who began to meet independently. Alexander Campbell enjoyed quoting letters written by some of these congregations regarding the order (or, as Calvin called it, “the true service of God”) restored by these dissenting independents. He thought they shared his own vision for restoring the ancient order. Two examples will suffice. One letter was from the “Church of Christ in Leith Walk, Edinburgh” Scotland to the “Church of Christ in New York” on July 31, 1818 (organized 1798). About 150 gathered weekly for communion and believed that the church “ought to be guided by the apostolic traditions” such that what was commanded “we

¹⁴ Thomas Helwys, “Declaration of Faith,” accessed September 22, 2022 at <http://evangelicalarminians.org/helwys-declaration-of-faith-the-first-baptist-confession/>.

¹⁵ James Alexander Haldane, *A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians Drawn from the Sacred Scriptures Alone* (Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1805), 282.

¹⁶ Haldane, *Social Worship*, 289-90.

are bound to obey; if not, it is in fact prohibited.” That is the regulative principle at work.¹⁷

Another example is the Manchester, England, church of Christ which was formed in 1810. Their letter to the church in New York explicitly cites Acts 2:42. As a newly formed church of Christ, they committed “to come together in one body for the observance of all the ordinances and institutions of our Lord and Master, continuing in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayers.”¹⁸

The Restoration Tradition

The first journal to emerge out of the Restoration Movement was the *Christian Baptist*, begun in 1823. Near its beginning a pseudonymous author, styled Theophilus, articulated the central place Acts 2:42 had in the restoration of the ancient order:

Upon the whole, without resuming particulars here, we found that the entire subject of their preaching was Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and that the whole of their teaching was brotherly kindness and charity, with a stedfast [sic] and persevering attention to the ordinances; viz. to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread or of the loaf, and to the prayers. See the original, *Acts* ii. 42. For the continual observance of all which, it appears they were pre-eminent. Hence we clearly perceive what they believed and practiced; namely, that the subject matter of their faith was the gospel, or everything the apostles preached concerning Jesus—and of their practice, everything the apostles commanded them to do in obedience to his authority.¹⁹

Beginning in 1825, Alexander Campbell explained his “restoration” agenda for apostolic assemblies in a series entitled “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.” There he discussed the “order of worship” and some of the specific ordinances of the Christian assembly.

¹⁷ The Church of Christ in Leith Walk, Edinburgh to the Church of Christ in New York, “An Attempt at the Restoration of Ancient Order,” *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 5 (3 December 1827): 392-95.

¹⁸ William Jackson and Benjamin Beddone, “An Attempt at the Restoration of Ancient Order,” *Christian Baptist* 5, no. 7 (4 February 1828): 414-15.

¹⁹ Theophilus, “The Disciples Were Called Christians First in Antioch,” *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 5 (6 December 1824): 115.

He argued that (1) “there is a divinely authorized order of Christian worship in Christian assemblies” and (2) “the acts of worship on the first day of the week in Christian assemblies is uniformly the same.”²⁰

Like Calvin before him, Campbell’s commentary on Acts identified the four phrases of Acts 2:42 as “acts of social worship”: teaching, contributions to the poor, Lord’s supper, and all forms of prayer.²¹ For Campbell,

When the inspired Apostles set in order the church of Jerusalem, which was to serve as a pattern to all others to the end of time, they appointed as stated observances of the Lord’s day, the Apostles’ doctrine, or preaching of the word—the fellowship, or contribution for the relief of the poor, and other necessary purposes connected with the keeping of the public worship of God—the breaking of bread, or commemoration of the Lord’s death—and the prayers and praises which must always form part of the worship of the Most High under every dispensation of religion—these they instituted as stated observances, Acts ii.42.²²

These “Christian ordinances” have a social character since “Christianity is superlatively social in its genius and tendencies.”²³

While congregations are “free” regarding the form and sequence, Campbell writes, “what we ought to do is not left to our own option.” He specifies the obligation through the lens of Acts

²⁰ Alexander Campbell, “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things. No. V. Order of Worship,” *Christian Baptist* 2, no. 12 (4 July 1825): 164-65. The order is essentially this: “From the Acts of the Apostles and from their Epistles, we clearly learn that the first Christians consecrated this day to the Lord in all their communities by assembling in one place, by breaking and partaking of the monumental loaf and cup, by songs of praise and hymns triumphant, by public speeches, exhortations, and addresses of every sort, by prayers for one another and for all mankind, and by donations for the poor, the ignorant, or the afflicted” (Alexander Campbell, “Reformation—No. XII. The Lord’s Day,” *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 9 [September 1836]: 419).

²¹ Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles, Translated from the Greek on the Basis of the Common English Version, with Notes by Alexander Campbell* (New York: American Bible Union, 1858), 18.

²² Alexander Campbell, “Elder Jones and the Baptist Apostacy,” *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 4 (April 1836): 190.

²³ Alexander Campbell, “Acts of the Apostles. Section III—Chapter II,” *Millennial Harbinger*, Third Series, 3, no. 3 (March 1846): 165.

2:42: “we are to continue steadfast [*sic*] in the Apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of the loaf, prayers and praise.”²⁴ Indeed, a first day of the week assembly “is not regarded to the Lord when these things are not done.” In other words, if the Sunday assembly does not contain the acts of teaching, sharing resources (contribution), Lord’s supper, prayer and praise (singing)—five acts of worship—then it is not an apostolic assembly.²⁵

According to H. Turner, Acts 2:42 is “decisive” for “four out of the five acts of public worship.” They are (1) teaching, (2) fellowship (or monetary contribution), (3) breaking of bread, and (4) prayers. The fifth act—praise—is “necessarily implied in the other items present” and is further clarified elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Eph 5:19-20; Col 3:16). Since this praise is specified as congregational singing, congregational vocal music is the only “proper expression” of praise and this can be conducted in “no other way.”²⁶ As a result, Turner—the first that we have been able to discover—explicitly identifies the elements or acts of worship in what came to be a common pedagogical device among Churches of Christ (no doubt paralleling the five steps of salvation). The “five acts of the public worship” include teaching, singing, praying, contributing, and communing at the table.

James A. Harding: Acts 2:42 as Means of Grace

Scot McKnight, in his recent book *Open to the Spirit*, identified four streams of Evangelicalism: Reformed (“theology, preaching, and social engagement at the cultural level”), Anabaptist (“local church, discipleship, justice, and peace”), Restorationist (“courage to return to the Bible

²⁴ Alexander Campbell, “The Order of Worship,” *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 2, no. 6 (June 1838): 247.

²⁵ Alexander Campbell, “Address to the Readers of the Christian Baptist. No. III,” *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 7 (2 February 1824): 45.

²⁶ H. Turner, “Does the New Testament Determine the Elements of the Public Worship?” *Christian Quarterly* 2 (January 1870): 254-255, 257.

and start all over”), and Holiness (“surrender, turning from worldliness, and deepening one’s spiritual life”).²⁷ I suggest that James A. Harding represents an intersection of these values, though I do not think he is necessarily unique. Moreover, he often used Acts 2:42 as a touchstone for authentic discipleship that encapsulated these values. Here is one example:

Our greatest trouble now is, it seems to me, a vast unconverted membership. A very large percent of the church members among us seems to have very poor conception of what a Christian ought to be. They are brought into the church during these high-pressure protracted meetings, and they prove to be a curse instead of a blessing. They neglect prayer, the reading of the Bible, and the Lord’s day meetings, and, of course, they fail to do good day by day as they should. Twelve years of continuous travel among the churches have forced me to the sad conclusion that a very small number of the nominal Christians are worthy of the name.²⁸

James A. Harding was born in Winchester, Kentucky in 1848, graduated from Bethany College in 1869, and taught school for six years. Beginning in 1876, he became a fulltime itinerant evangelist, conducting over 300 protracted meetings and 50 religious debates from Canada to Florida, from New York to New Mexico until 1891 when he became the co-founder of the Nashville Bible School (now Lipscomb University). He contributed to and edited some of the leading journals among Churches of Christ in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the *Gospel Advocate*, *The Way*, and the *Christian Leader and the Way*. He is legitimately regarded as the father of the Bible School movement among Churches of Christ and arguably its theological mentor as his students founded ten schools within twenty years of the beginning of the Nashville Bible School (including the ancestors of Abilene Christian University and Harding University).

²⁷ Scot Mcknight, *Open to the Spirit: God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us* (New York: Waterbrook, 2019), 151.

²⁸ James A. Harding, “Scraps,” *Gospel Advocate* 27, no. 6 (9 February 1887): 88.

He held a high view of preaching, was committed to the exposition of Scripture, and sought to follow the apostolic pattern for the New Testament church. He stressed the importance of discipleship and peacemaking through the local church as he opposed the promotion of the kingdom of God through political and/or military action. He devoutly believed in the transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the dynamic work of special providence in the lives of believers. Harding embodied the best elements of Anabaptist, Restorationist, and Holiness streams of nineteenth century evangelicalism.

Using Acts 2:42 as a template of sorts, Harding identified four “means of grace.”²⁹ These are (1) reading and studying the Bible as a function of listening to apostolic teaching, (2) ministering to others, especially the poor, as we share our resources in fellowship with one another; (3) participating in the Lord’s day meetings at the table of the Lord as a community, and (4) habitual prayer and praise before God. Often Harding identified these functions with the Lord’s day assembly, but he also understood Bible study, missional engagement with the poor, and prayer as daily spiritual disciplines. According to Harding, believers should adopt a rule of life which involves daily Bible reading, doing good daily as they have opportunity, and praying every morning, noon, afternoon, and evening.

But these were no mere duties. Rather, in good Holiness fashion we might say, they are “four great means of grace”—appointed means by which God dynamically acts among, in, and through the people of God.³⁰ They are not modes of human self-reliance but means of divine

²⁹ This section on Harding is dependent upon John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of David Lipscomb and James A. Harding* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2006), 75-141.

³⁰ Harding, “Questions and Answers,” *The Way* 4, no. 7 (17 July 1902): 123.

transformation by which God graciously sanctifies believers. They are spiritual disciplines through which God conforms believers to the image of Christ.

Harding stressed how “the life of a successful Christian is a continual growth in purity, a constant changing into a complete likeness to Christ.”³¹ To “grow more and more into the likeness of Christ” should be the Christian’s “greatest” desire.³² In other words, Harding believed discipleship was the central dimension of practicing the kingdom of God. Consequently, one of the dangers of revivalism (“protracted meetings”) was the immediate interest in a larger number of conversions where the main concern was “escaping hell and getting into heaven” as opposed to discipling people to lead “lives of absolute consecration to the Lord.” As a result, these “converts are much more anxious to be saved than they are to follow Christ.”³³

Harding’s antidote recommended the “four habits” of Acts 2:42 as expressions of both communal and personal piety. Whoever neglects them will falter, and their “falling away is sure.”³⁴ But if one will pursue these spiritual practices, “he will surely abide in Christ. These four are God’s means of grace to transform a poor, frail, sinful human being into the likeness of Christ.” Whoever “faithfully uses these means unto the end of life can not [sic] be lost.” Specifically, in response to the question, “Will God hold us responsible for little mistakes?” Harding answered, God “holds nothing against us” whether we sinned “in ignorance, weakness or willfulness” if we live in Christ as people who faithfully practice these spiritual disciplines with a heart that seeks God.³⁵

³¹ Harding, “Scraps,” *The Way* 5, no. 7 (23 July 1903): 735.

³² Harding, “Scraps,” *The Way* 5, no. 10 (15 October 1903): 945.

³³ Harding, “About Protracted Meetings,” *Gospel Advocate* 27, no. 37 (14 Sept 1887): 588.

³⁴ Harding, “Ira C. Moore on the Validity of Baptism,” *Christian Leader & the Way* 23, no. 20 (18 May 1909): 8.

³⁵ Harding, “Scraps,” *The Way* 4, no. 2 (26 February 1903): 401-2.

God in Christ through the Spirit is graciously active through these communal and personal faith practices. God actively transforms believers into God's own image, and believers who pursue these gifts of grace will experience transformation by divine power rather than by human effort.

A Contemporary Invitation

Reading Acts 2:42, it is important to remember Luke describes a baptized community. Three thousand were added, through baptism in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38-41), to the original community of one hundred and twenty praying in the upper room. They constituted the beginnings of renewed Israel or the restoration of Israel. This community would spread the message about Jesus the Messiah from Jerusalem to Samaria, and from Samaria to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8).

Acts 2:42 describes the practices to which this new community was devoted. Like ancient Israel, they listened to the teaching of God's representatives, shared their monetary resources with the poor, ate and drink at thanksgiving tables, and addressed God with prayer and praise. In fact, this is what Jesus himself did in the Gospel of Luke: he was the teacher as God's representative, offered the poor good news, ate and drink at the festivals of Israel, and was committed to a life of prayer and praise. This new community, then, continued the arc of how God's people respond to and enjoy God, whether at Israel's temple or in the ministry of Jesus. This new community continued the historic practices that gave the people of God their identity. They devoted themselves to these practices.

Acts 2:42, then, primarily envisions a communal reality. This does not exclude their individual appropriation as a daily rule of life, but the emphasis in Acts 2 is a common life. They are communal practices that form a community rather than faith boosters that serve isolated

individuals. Though I would not limit these practices to public communal activities, or even liturgy, the original context was surely the assembled people of God. In Acts 2, these practices are communal and public. And everyone noticed! Their communal life was the cause of public acceptance and openness to the message of this revival.

In the narrative of the early church in Jerusalem, Acts 2:42 functions like a summary of the activity that is described in the first six chapters of Luke's history. Luke's succinct statement is played out in the context of a larger narrative. This includes not only Acts but also the Gospel of Luke, which anticipates the practices of the Jerusalem church. I would add that it includes the whole history of Israel as well. In brief, we may summarize these four practices in this way:

- *Devotion to the teaching of the apostles.* Jesus taught in the temple every day (Luke 19:47), and so did the apostles (Acts 5:42). We might suppose they taught what Jesus taught, and they also told the story of Jesus as we see in the sermons of Acts 2:14-37 and Acts 3:12-26 or narrated in the stories of the early disciples in Jerusalem. The apostolic doctrine is the good news that the Messiah was anointed to declare and enact.
- *Devotion to the fellowship (koinonia).* This could be understood broadly (encompassing all possible referents for fellowship within the community) or more narrowly (specifying the next two items, breaking bread and prayers). Contextually, it seems to include the sharing of resources such that the community held everything "in common" (*koina*) with the consequence that there were no needy among them (Acts 2:44-45; 4:35; 6:1). This fellowship, however, may have been specifically about the sharing of food and prayers.

- *Devotion to the breaking of the bread.* This is the language of Luke 22:19 and 24:30-35. It seems Luke wants us to understand his cryptic reference here against the background of his first volume. He elaborates on the phrase in Acts 2:46 and 20:7-12. The church gathered for a meal where they shared food. They gathered in the presence of Jesus who breaks the bread and hosts the table. It is where resurrection life is experienced, embodied, and shared.
- *Devotion to the prayers.* The specificity (“the prayers”) may refer to regular times of prayer in the temple (see the example of Peter and John in Acts 3:1) but also to other occasions when the community gathered for prayer (Acts 4:24-30; 12:12).

These historic practices—rooted in Israel’s history and present in the ministry of Jesus—were part of the inaugural community of renewed Israel upon which God had poured the Spirit. The emphatic nature of these practices (“the” prefaces each of them), their constant participation in them (imperfect Greek tense, for example), and their commitment to participate (devotion) suggest that Luke highlights them for more than historical interest.

From a restorationist point of view, the Jerusalem church models practices that are important for the life of the church. Restorationists seek to at least embody the original function of these practices though not necessarily their original form. We seek to restore the functional intent of these practices as we bear witness to Jesus the Messiah through these public faith markers. That functional intent means we take into account the whole of Scripture, the mystery of Christ revealed through the Scriptures, and the divine goal and intent for community for the sake of transformation into the image of Christ. We want to restore the practices that are embedded in the story of Israel, Jesus, and the early church.

From a communal point of view, these practices disciple a community as believers participate in the community. The disciples gathered to share life: to hear teaching, share resources, eat together, and pray together. These practices nurtured their discipleship, formed the nature of their community, and bore a public witness to the sort of life God intends for humanity. Early Christianity was a social reality where people gathered in spaces to be formed in community and by community. There were no “lone ranger” believers in the early church.

From a sacramental point of view, these practices are means of grace. While there is a horizontal dimension to each of them, there is an important theological reference point for each as well. God actually does something when apostolic teaching is heard, when disciples share their resources, when disciples sit at the table hosted by Jesus, and when disciples pray together. These are sacramental practices. God is present and active to transform disciples from glory to glory through these practices. Ultimately, God is at work through the community and its practices. The practices do not stand alone but only have meaning and transforming power by the work of God in Christ through the Spirit.

The contemporary invitation is simple: devote yourself to these communal practices for the sake of transformation, discipleship, and public community.