

**Learning Experience 7:**

**Integrative Paper**

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DML 814: Effective Ministry in Today's Globalized Environment

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Part A:

One commitment and one clarifying sentence. For the last fifteen years these two things influenced how I chose to invest my unallocated time in the Kingdom. My commitment: God, you have my yes to every invitation I am available to speak at unless you clearly tell me no. My clarifying sentence: When speaking, I will endeavor to communicate the truth of God's Word in clear, memorable, and life changing ways. As I look ahead at the next five years and what it may look like for me to engage others with the gospel message as a semi-retired, empty-nester, the options seem endless. I want to ensure that I make wise choices. So in this process of forward dreaming, I am careful to rein in any rogue, self-indulgent plans by framing future ministry in terms of *why* and *where* before *what* and *with whom*.

*Why?* The Father sent Jesus, and Jesus is sending me – in the same way He was sent. I am to be fully incarnate and lovingly obedient. My life is not my own. I am part of a kingdom of priests sent to bless and bring God's shalom to those not yet part of the kingdom (a continuation of Genesis 22:18).

*Where?* The Pentateuch shows me movement from and direction towards. As I understand it, the former covenant moved people away from the common and unclean fringes of day-to-day life towards the tabernacle, arriving at the holiest of holy places on one day of the year. In the new covenant, the movement is reversed. Israel's former high priest, the one sent on behalf of all, has been replaced. The *one* has now become the *ones* who are sent out on behalf of the Priest-King Jesus. The curtain is torn. The tide has changed. Movement is now flowing out from the holiest of holies—from the sacred to the secular, from the Father toward the fringes. This movement is no longer limited to one day a year, but all day, everyday. Jesus sends us as his

royal priesthood, his Spirit-filled fishermen, to be about the work of catching, embracing, discipling and releasing newborn Spirit-filled sent ones until Jesus returns.

But where do I fit in this movement? Good question. Especially since the phrase, “I don’t fit in, I don’t belong,” has occupied a lot of mental space since I was in elementary school. We moved from Edmonton to Toronto the summer after grade four and the restlessness of not quite fitting in has stayed with me. So perhaps an easier and more significant question is, where do I find myself most restless?

I feel most restless when I am in slack water. The ocean has both a flood current (incoming) and an ebb current (outgoing). Slack water is the standing of the tide. When tidal waters stand, there is no movement either way. The water is completely *unstressed*. Slack water occurs right before the direction of the tidal stream reverses. I believe slack water can occur within the church, both corporately and individually.

I understand the need for flood currents that draw us toward a shared communion life on the shore. And I believe in the necessity of ebb currents to take us out into the uncertainty and uncharted waters to reach others. But too often we get caught in between the two currents and become content to wallow in stagnant water. Unstressed water tends to stress me out. I am a doer, and change and growth are high values, but I cannot simply blame my discontent on my desire to do. This is not only about my preferences. Slack water is just standing there – motionless. It is not abiding and it is not out-and-abouting. Slack water is indifferent and does not decide, so it does nothing. Life and vitality suffer. I know that stagnant water stifles growth because I have lived (personally) and served (corporately) in slack water places. And if I am honest, most of my service during those times was not sincere. I was impatient with the lack of direction and ineffectiveness of time spent and resources given. Restlessness made me want to

implement change, or force growth, or create excitement to relieve the lethargy of unmoving waters. Not surprising, this has not always ended well. So...

For the next five years, I will choose to invest my time in a purposeful, directional, moving current – a running tide. Any speaking and service requests can be filtered with: Will this opportunity move me/others further up and further in as we pursue God through intentional, authentic community? Will this opportunity move me/others further outwards towards the fringes and engage the broken ones with the gospel? My grandpa was a great fisherman. He always said, “fishing is better when the tide is running.” I am in the second half of my life; it makes sense to seize the day and plan every fishing excursion to coincide with a running tide.

This will mean that I will disappoint some who ask me to do busy-work for the kingdom. And it will require that I be truthful about why I am saying no (which will require courage to speak truth in love). This new resolve will mean that I must not pre-decide what missional outreach will look like, nor attempt to manufacture opportunities. I will cultivate the meekness of a follower and wait on God’s impression within me, His Word without and His Providence around (Payne, *Listening Prayer*, 248). This will also mean that my communication will have to be increasingly strategic and specific. I will pay attention to the direction of the tidal current, exegeting both the biblical text and the cultural context of each specific group. Which means that I will have to continue to be incarnational in my local community and increasingly so within my church family. (This will be the greatest of my mid-course adjustment to make. While I am an ENTJ, my E is low and my Lego block life of relationships already feels more than full).

So that covers the why and where, leaving the *what* and *with whom* questions. Jesus is the example I am to follow. John tells us Jesus knows his identity, his authority, his past, and his future (John 13:3). From this knowledge, Jesus chooses obedient service and selfless sacrifice.

Within this framework, how has God gifted and equipped me to serve and where is he asking me to sacrifice? I believe that God has given me the ability to communicate biblical truth in ways that can be easily understood and used to bring about change and growth in soul-soil the Spirit has made ready. I know this ability does not impress God since he gave it to me to use for his glory. So he still has my whole-hearted yes to any invitation (as per the new tidal current questions above), unless he tells me no. [The ability to teach will never exclude, nor excuse, me from stacking chairs, helping shove a driveway, or filling in when an usher is sick, etc. I will continue to live with a “how can I help?” disposition while I serve in my gift-specific ways.]

I am willing to serve, but am I equally as willing to sacrifice? What are the things and when are the times I am least willing to die to self? In class we talked about the attributes of a Kingdom Life: absolute allegiance, abandonment of my opinions and right to negotiate, authority and actively demonstrating attributes of the Kingdom. As much as I think radical, relational hospitality is a game changer in advancing the gospel, I am not sure how much more I am willing to sacrifice. Having people in for meals is often expected (in my context) to be a couple activity. So when my husband wants to have a couple or a group of people over, it involves me. And when I want to have people over, it also involves me. I find that if we have a larger group, with several new people over at the same time, it is easier for me to connect them with each other so I am not adding to my intentional relationships. But often there are multi-cultural expectations that come with having someone over for a meal. This is a work in progress as I figure out how to serve Steve as he hosts people in our home without taking on the added responsibility of his new relationships. This is the challenge of co-labouring together and being hospitable in our home.

This morning there were seven ladies who spent two hours in my living room reading, discussing, crying, praying, laughing and eating while meeting Jesus and his Spirit in John 14.

Steve came in just after the last one drove out of the yard and asked how it went. I told Steve how a lady hesitantly came for the first time today and how we all amoeba-ed her in and pointed her to our nucleus, Jesus. She experienced love and acceptance among the craziest assortment of hurts, hang-ups and habits you'd find anywhere. But Jesus is among us and he is the Teacher we are all, at our pace, learning to trust and follow.

I think small circles in homes, like the one that happened today, is the future of the church in Canada. We have a generation that proves row-sitting in big buildings, listening to Sunday morning one-way sermons, is not great at making disciples. So, what does that mean for me, one who is energized by public teaching and preaching, when it comes to making decisions regarding future service? I am tempted to decline all future Sunday pulpit supply invitations. Because, truthfully, I am still learning if I fit in on a Sunday morning with the gifts and abilities God has given me. Is there a way for my public communication to be effective (against the statistics that tell us otherwise) and meaningful in my Sunday morning context?

Phillips Brooks said, "Preaching is the communicating of divine truth through human personality." At 52 years of age, I now understand that my human personality is an integral part of the process—that God can use me because of me, not only in spite of me. My journal entry from last month:

Today is Bonnie's birthday. She would have been 55 years old today. If she was still in Ontario, I would have booked a detour flight to her place on my way home from ATS to vigorously discuss all things incarnational, and I would have wished her the happiest of birthdays. She would have been 55, but I will always remember her as she was the Christmas she died at 21.

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I took the subway and walked a few blocks to get to one of Keller's Presbyterian churches that (to my surprise) met in a Salvation Army building. I smiled. My great-grandfather was a Salvation Army band master. His conductor's baton has a place of honour on the mantle. Maybe God would speak to me through the music that morning?

The folk band played a song called, “The Lights of Home.” I had never heard it before, but I was captured by the stringed instruments and the melody. It was the offertory at Redeemer Downtown. And I knew it was played just for me.

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Yesterday was mom’s birthday dinner in White Rock. As we ate, we had a conversation about the art of conversing and communication. We decided that reclaiming the art of conversation requires that we become students and relearn how to ask good questions. One of dad’s favourite questions to ask a stranger is, “Where do you call home?” On my drive back to PG, I asked myself the same question. Where do I call home? Listening to the folksong again, I asked, what lights look like home for me?

I think those lights – a sense of home – are what I’ve been running towards. And the direction I am running looks a lot like make me an offer, spontaneity. I don’t think it is a physical place. Or a person. Or a role. Or a paycheck. Been there; tried those. But I think (prayerfully hope) when the opportunity comes and the time is right, I will know where I fit in—what is home.

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I know what home is for Bonnie. But her absence from the body and presence with the Lord is easier for me to sort out than what is home for me in the here and now. I know I belong to Christ, but this sense of home is the outworking of my life being hidden in Christ. It’s his life showing up through mine and my life showing up through his. It’s the where and how the Spirit works in and through me as a royal priest in his Kingdom. *It is the feeling of being at home in my own spiritual skin lived out through my physicality and personality—the Spirit incarnated through me, Carole Elizabeth.* As I go ... listening, talking, interacting, serving, relating, laughing, teaching, inspiring, stumbling, repenting, dancing. All of me. Fully present, entirely for his glory.

I have been afraid to be me. Looking back, I have often suppressed my personality (and way of communicating) in fear of preaching myself and not Christ. Preaching at church once every four months feels like starting and stopping, never really hitting my stride. [Teaching bible classes at school was different, I taught the same kids each week, from elementary until they graduated. I knew my audience and their siblings.] I have been told that there is an art and a science of preaching. I believe it to be true for musicians, painters, architects and gardeners. The resulting success and beauty in those spheres are because both science and art were employed. So why would preaching and public communication be any different? So I will grow in

becoming more “at home” in my own spiritual skin as I preach and teach in this next season. I will listen and agree when my Father say he made me, knows me, and still chooses to use me. And I will learn to embrace who God uniquely made me to be. Imago Dei applies to me, too. Crazy, but true.

#### Part B:

*With whom* will the Holy Spirit potentially partner me for a greater sphere of influence? Another great question. I am currently serving with Arrow Leadership as a leadership partner which has already expanded my influence. I have a high regard for the people, humility, organizational culture, and core values at Arrow and would gladly continue to serve with them. I also have relationships with a bible college in the Philippines and I look forward to traveling and teaching there again in the next year or so. Last February I taught students in a college setting in Davao. I found the 30 hours over five days with the same 24 students life-giving and fruitful. Such joy!! God spoke and students responded and at the end of the week, both the teacher (me) and students were better for having spent the week learning together. One of the most invigorating aspects of that week was the ongoing adaptation of my teaching style and the contextualization of subject matter and assignments so they would be both informational and transformational for students in a collective, warm culture context. It was so good.

I am not anxious and I do not feel the need to work my connections on LinkedIn or name drop to get a foot in the door somewhere to expand my sphere of influence. I am content to follow Jesus where he leads me—at home and (hopefully) abroad. I was tag-team preaching with a friend of mine at a church, a four-hour drive north of my home. My friend was to speak first on

Sunday morning. I sat in the front pew awaiting my turn. Out of the blue, I thought, “I would like to speak to this church at a retreat! But it is not up to me. I cannot ask them to plan a retreat and invite me to speak. Who does that?!” So I focused on my friend and waited for my part of the sermon. Well, she went on and on and on—showed no sign of transitioning over to me.

Eventually I turned to the pastor behind me and whispered, “Don’t worry, as soon as she calls me up, I will do a quick three sentence summary and conclude.” Discouraged, I thought, “Lord, if I don’t have any time to speak, how will they even think to invite me to a retreat?” When I finally made it onto the platform, I kept my words few and promptly ended the morning service.

We stayed for the church lunch in the foyer and were planning to drive back to my house right after lunch. It was during dessert that one of the ladies pulled me aside and said, “I know this will sound a bit out of the blue, but would you be willing to be the speaker at our ladies retreat?” Laughing I asked, “Why are you asking me?” She said that during the morning service she saw me in the front row and she believed God told her to ask me. She sheepishly confessed that she sent a text to the planning committee (while my friend was preaching) to see if they agreed. It was unanimous. They had decided to invite me to speak at their retreat before I said a word from the platform. And the delightful grace of it all is that God allowed me to see how he was working while I could not see how it could work. I will not soon forget God’s ability to manage my bookings. Consequently, I have added the following to my weekly prayers:

Lord, thank you that first and foremost, I am called to you – not to something or to somewhere. Above all else, help me to enjoy a deep intimate relationship with you. Thank you for calling me – regardless of vocation or position – to be part of your body and in your service. *For every role you choose to give me, I choose to have deep gratitude.* Help me to hear your voice and to be faithful in whatever I do know of your call. By your presence, power, Word and protection, help me to stand firm and to let nothing – other than you – move me. I choose to be “all in” and I ask for a fresh anointing to give myself fully to your work. Whether in my strengths or weaknesses, may

only you be glorified. By your grace and power may you do more than I can ask or imagine. I pray these things in Jesus' name. (written by Steve Brown)

#### Part C:

During the week at ATS I heard a great idea that I have already implemented (not sure if it was Jeff or you, but it was SO good). When I am asked to speak, I am asking a few others to spend time in the passage/s and then meeting with them individually to discuss what God said to them about the texts. Then, as one sent out from the collective wisdom of a hermeneutic community, I am preparing and speaking. Such a GREAT idea! I love it!! It is helping me be intentionally relational with people with whom I may not have done so before. I am asking a variety of people who are often overlooked – young adults, seniors, middle-aged singles, etc.

My son, Jonathan, played five years of varsity soccer for his university. He was the keeper. Penalty kicks were nerve racking for him. Until one game they weren't. As the fullbacks were lining up for form a wall, my son told his teammate at the end of the wall to make the call which way the shooter would go. Jon's teammate, with his hand behind his back, signaled left; and Jonathan dove left and stopped the shot. And every penalty kick after that, his teammate would watch the shooter's approach and point which direction Jon should go. Sometimes Jon stopped the shot and sometimes they scored. But there was a new confidence in Jonathan. He was still the last man back, but he was not on his own. The teammate took the pressure of the final decision and shared it with Jonathan. So Jon was free to commit and dive in the pre-decided direction. And I think that is a great visual of how my newly formed hermeneutic community works—takes the guess work out and I go in doing my best and the team is with me, heart and soul (1 Samuel 14:7 – it's funny, but we named Jonathan because of this story in Samuel).

It may be easier for me to see some areas that my local church can adjust to make a greater impact in our community since I do not have a vocational leadership role in the local church. I am outside eyes looking in. However the force with which I communicate and compulsion with which I act may do more damage than good:

This error is the tendency of the young [at heart]. We can be so self-confident in the rightness of the shift that we barrel ahead without sensitivity to the institutional realities and stakeholders (particularly financial) that will need to be convinced to join us. Paradigm shifts are tricky and fraught with institutional challenges. Many have lost their ministry or have been metaphorically burned at the stake for less. Galileo's house arrest is a historically instructive reminder. Wisdom is beneficial. Addressing these challenges will take patience (Seel, 213).

Becoming a voice of wisdom and change in my context will require that I listen to what is currently being said at the decision tables, then deconstruct the decisions to see what are the core values and sacred cows that determine which direction the dollars are flowing. Then patiently listen and create opportunities for generation-inclusive dialogue and discussion. One of my favourite quotes from Seel is,

The church becomes a self-reinforcing echo chamber. [Mad wordsmith skills!] This is the pattern of slow demise and decline. This is the most likely scenario for the evangelical church. ... And for those who wander and are spiritually frustrated [and restless in the slack water] and homeless, you are needed by the church now more than ever (215).

Needed yes, but lasting change will require truth spoken in love. I must demonstrate that I am for the church, not against her. I think communicating and inspiring and collectively dreaming of how we can shape the future rather than reacting to the present will be key to our success and future growth.

I think my understanding of the next generation fairly accurate because I am willing to seek them out and learn from them because I realize that I do not know everything about them. I

can continue to leverage my age and influence on their behalf—creating space for them to contribute, invest, and help shape the future of the local church and how we engage the city with the gospel.

Regarding specific strategies and how I teach and preach, my big take away from the course was Imago Dei does not mean a photocopied image bearer. No two people are alike and likewise, no two students/disciples are the same. Teachers who focus on their students, know their students. Similarly teachers who focus on their students know their students' strengths and needs. So any of my disciple-making efforts cannot be of the cookie-cutter, cut-and-paste variety. I commit to providing quality learning environments and experiences in accessible and meaningful ways.

Part D:

My prayer and fasting has led me to pursue several options for my DMin electives. The options are still in the initial discussion stage so nothing is decided yet, but I sense that as I continue to walk out the DMin requirement process God will continue to guide and direct my steps. For now I am staying the DMin course—which is huge considering after processing my leadership crisis in Module 2, I was going to withdraw as I believed that my time at ATS had served its purpose and there was no need to continue my studies at ATS.

While finishing my schooling, I will continue to formally mentor young adult women through Arrow for the remaining two On Site weeks. I am also continuing to individually mentor four ladies in my region. I meet twice a month with a smaller group of ladies for confession and prayer. I am committed to asking open-ended questions of the next generation and taking

advantage of opportunities to do so. I will continue to host and lead a weekly group of community ladies as we seek to know God more. I will teach God's word in clear, memorable and life changing ways as God gives me opportunity, including the ladies retreat with the church up north. I will develop and rely on a hermeneutic community to give direction to my teaching and preaching. I am speaking at an outreach dinner this month and I am prayerfully considering what culture says is good news to those who will be attending and how to communicate the truth that the Good News is a better way. And I will live intentionally present (phone away, actively listening, etc.) with my family, my church, and my community. I will heed the exhortation to, "Be good and true, be patient; be undaunted. Leave your usefulness for God to estimate. He will see to it that you do not live in vain" (George Morrison).

And while I do not have a timeline with specifics of how all this will look in the next five years, I have added another weekly prayer. It is adapted from Os Guinness,' *Impossible People*,

O Lord, you have been our dwelling place from generation to generation, forgive me when I fall for the selfishness and short-sightedness of my preferences and ways of doing things. Grant that I may see both my smallness and my significance before you. Grant that I may appreciate my dependence on all who have gone before me, both in my family and in your church, and at the same time live with a renewed sense of responsibility for those who will come after me. *Above all, may I so live out my calling before you in these next years that, like King David, it may be said of me that I served your purposes in my generation* (194).

Amen.