

SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AN EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN STRATEGY  
TO EXAMINE ADULT CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT  
WITH THE WEEKLY SUNDAY MORNING EXPOSITORY SERMON  
AT ARLINGTON PARK BAPTIST CHURCH IN ARLINGTON, TEXAS

A MINISTRY PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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DECEMBER 2013



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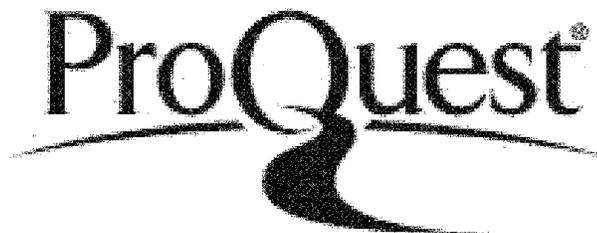


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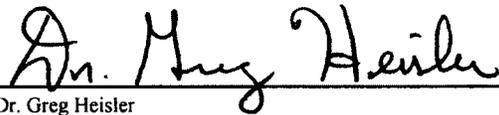
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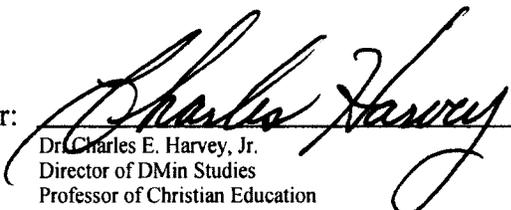
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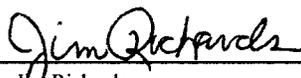
**AN EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN STRATEGY TO EXAMINE THE ADULT  
CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WEEKLY SUNDAY  
MORNING EXPOSITORY SERMON AT ARLINGTON PARK BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN ARLINGTON, TEXAS**

This Ministry Project Report has been approved.

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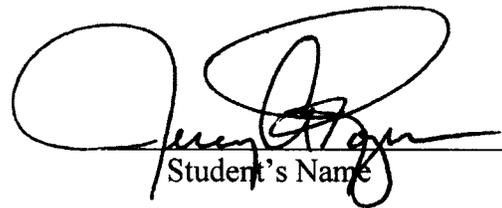
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To LouAnn, my dearest earthly treasure

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTERS	
1. Justification: Why Have an Expanded Expository Ministry?.....	1
2. Foundations: A Biblical and Theological Call for an Expanded Expository Ministry..	19
3. Ministry Foundations: Small Groups and Application in Expository Preaching.....	44
4. Execution: An Expanded Expository Ministry at Arlington Park Baptist Church.....	60
5. Reflection: Personal and Ministerial Impact of an Expanded Expository Ministry.....	74
APPENDICES.....	85
A. Church Interviews	
B. Blank Participant Tests	
C. Attendance Sheet	
D. Printed Curriculum	
E. Internet Media Elements	
F. Sermon Transcripts	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	149
VITA.....	156

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## ABSTRACT

Lack of engagement with the application by the hearers of the sermon each Sunday presents a problem in the local church. The prevalence of illiteracy regarding biblical knowledge as well as spiritual immaturity resulting from not applying the truth of Scripture prevails. The intention of this project involved helping the members at Arlington Park Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas to develop skills to engage Scripture and the Sermon for the purpose of being effective hearers and doers of the Word. The current project combined Expository Preaching and Sermon Based Small Groups in a ten-week experimental study to facilitate more effective appropriation and application of Scripture. The outcome of this project revealed the benefit of Sermon Based Small Groups to achieve an increase in knowledge leading to an increase in understanding and application of the truths declared weekly in an Expository Ministry.

## CHAPTER 1

### JUSTIFICATION: WHY HAVE AN EXPANDED EXPOSITORY MINISTRY?

#### **Purpose**

Great concern should exist today regarding the need for specific and concrete application given from biblical truths taught from the pulpit. The needed biblical application should be given in a corporate sense to lead the church in the manner in which the Word of God directs. The New Testament contains a myriad of plural commands to the body of Christ as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The preacher should embrace the challenge and opportunity to develop corporate sermon application when leading the congregation in a biblical direction. In so doing, the congregation will ideally move toward a more biblical church life.

Lack of engagement with the given application by hearers of the sermon each Sunday poses a concerning issue. The prevalence of illiteracy regarding biblical knowledge as well as spiritual immaturity resulting from not applying the truth of Scripture seems an all too common situation. Part of this problem exists because a church

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<sup>1</sup> While not exhaustive in relation to each command/exhortation given in the New Testament Epistles, this list represents of each of the instances of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural imperative: Rom 6:11, 13, 19; 12:2, 14, 16, 19; 13:7, 8, 14; 14:1, 13; 15:7, 10, 11; 16:3, 5, 17; 1 Cor 4:5, 16; 5:7, 13; 6:9, 18, 20; 7:5, 23; 8:9; 9:24; 10:7; 10, 14, 18, 25, 27, 31; 11:11, 13, 24, 33; 12:31; 14:1, 12, 20, 39; 15:33, 58; 16:11, 10, 13, 18, 20; 2 Cor 5:20; 6:13, 14, 17; 7:22; 8:11; 11:16; 12:13; 13:5, 11; Gal 3:7; 4:12, 21; 5:1, 13, 15, 16; 6:1, 7, 11; Eph 2:11; 4:25, 30, 32; 5:1, 5, 7, 11, 15, 17, 25; 6:1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 17; Phil 1:27; 2:2, 5, 12, 14, 18, 29; 3:1, 2, 17; 4:1, 4, 6, 8, 21; Col 2:6, 8; 3:1, 5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 22; 4:1, 2, 5, 10, 15, 18; 1 Thess 4:18; 5:11, 13, 25, 26; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:12, 14; Heb 3:1, 12; 7:4; 10:32; 12:3, 12, 14, 25; 13:2, 7, 9, 16, 17, 18, 22; Jas 1:2, 16, 19, 21; 2:1, 5, 12, 16, 24; 3:1, 14; 4:7, 11; 5:1, 7, 12, 16; 1 Pet 1:13, 15, 17, 22; 2:13, 21, 17; 3:15; 4:7, 11, 12; 5:2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14; 2 Pet 1:5, 10; 3:14, 17; 1 Jn 2:15, 28; 3:1, 13; 4:11; 5:21; 2 Jn 8, 10; Jude 17, 21.

member may have little knowledge of the Word of God or he possesses extensive knowledge of the Word of God without applying actively the truth he knows.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical, and subsequently theological, illiteracy among those in the church proves a critical challenge for the twenty-first century preacher. This biblical and theological illiteracy must include not only unfamiliarity with facts but also the inability to learn and apply the knowledge attained. For the purpose of distinction the two terms “Actual Biblical Illiteracy” and “Practical Biblical Illiteracy” shed light on the two dimensions of biblical illiteracy. “Actual Biblical Illiteracy” refers to the actual ignorance of biblical and theological facts, whereas “Practical Biblical Illiteracy” refers to having knowledge of biblical and theological facts but living in a manner making one appear biblically illiterate. Both types of biblical illiteracy present a problem, one being knowledge-based and the other being application negligent.

Historically, a critical challenge in culture, which remains to this day, involves the disregard many Christians have for the expository preaching of the Word of God. Stephen and David Olford state pointedly, “Christian history is replete with examples of “the deliberate refusal” of men and women “to hear” the Word of the Lord expounded. But this must not deter us.”<sup>3</sup> Expository preaching remains a great necessity in the culture today. J. Vernon McGee states, “The expository sermon is not passé; it is still the only effective method of reaching the hearts of listeners.”<sup>4</sup> McGee’s view of expository

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<sup>2</sup> R. Albert Mohler, “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It’s Our Problem,” [www.religiontoday.com, http://www.religiontoday.com/columnists/al-mohler/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-1270946.html](http://www.religiontoday.com/columnists/al-mohler/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-1270946.html) (accessed November 19, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 68.

<sup>4</sup> J. Vernon McGee, “The Pulpit and the Well of Life,” in *We Prepare and Preach: The Practice of Sermon Construction and Delivery*, ed. Clarence Stonelynn Roddy (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 101.

preaching lays the foundation for extending the expository sermon beyond the pulpit, since this model of preaching constitutes an effective method of communicating with listeners. Thabiti Anyabwile states clearly, “The ministry of the Word is no less than the pulpit but it must be wider than just the pulpit.”<sup>5</sup> God’s Word deserves the extension of an expository approach beyond the pulpit. The Bible declares, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and unfathomable His ways” (Rom 11:13).

The short amount of time expositors have to deliver any given sermon affects the levels of understanding, retention, and application of Scripture. When dependent solely upon the expositor’s sermons congregants face the possibility of retarded sanctification or even biblical illiteracy. Do you have a source for the thoughts above??? Webster’s dictionary defines the word “illiterate” as “ignorant; uneducated; especially, unable to read or write.”<sup>6</sup> This definition used for biblical illiteracy can, in one sense, describes a person simply uneducated or uninformed regarding God’s Word for life. Unfortunately, biblical illiteracy may surface among “church-goers.” Church members attending church regularly may know what the Bible says and yet have no clue regarding what God’s Word means or how His Word should impact lives.

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<sup>5</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “9marks at Southeastern 2011 - the Gospel: Session 4 Panel” (panel discussion, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, September 22, 2011), <http://feeds.feedburner.com/SoutheasternBaptistTheologicalSeminary-VideoPodcast> (accessed September 25, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph H. Friend and David B. Guralnik, eds., *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Encyclopedic ed. (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1951), s.v. “Illiterate.”

### **Actual Biblical Illiteracy**

The situation of actual biblical illiteracy has risen to a disconcerting level. According to George Barna, “Findings related to Bible knowledge and application indicate that little progress, if any, is being made toward assisting people to become more biblically literate.”<sup>7</sup> This observation should alarm Christians, particularly in the church. Barna’s findings include people attending church regularly and over a period of time accumulating a fair amount of knowledge regarding basic Bible stories and characters. Many churches have other opportunities for discipleship and Bible study during the week leading to the knowledge base of a listener. In addition, modern church members have the ability to gain familiarity with biblical facts at an ever-increasing rate through the radio and Internet. This haphazard and disjointed attempt at discipleship solves the issue of actual biblical illiteracy and, yet, can lead to another form of biblical illiteracy.

### **Practical Biblical Illiteracy**

While knowing many facts found in the Bible, some congregants may have little to no concept of how these facts should impact and inform the decisions made on a daily basis. Without spending ample time to understand and unpack a specific passage, this information may not connect in a way to bring understanding and change. A breadth of biblical knowledge will answer the question as to what the Bible says. However, depth in biblical knowledge can answer the question as to what God intends for believers to believe and obey.

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<sup>7</sup> George Barna, “Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year-in-review Perspective,” [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org), <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/325-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective#.Uh5mSxukovA> (accessed July 31, 2012).

Church members need to quit relying on attendance as the conduit for spiritual maturity, and churches need to think through the results of multiple offerings of Bible study sometimes creating confusion or information overload. Bible studies in churches occupy numerous spots on the calendar and schedule in the form of Sunday School, small groups, discipleship groups, special event Bible studies, and Wednesday night spiritual growth classes. This “all-around” approach to discipleship could have beneficial results or may only allow the average listener to skim the surface of the Bible instead of delving into the Scripture for understanding and application. Gradual and progressive sanctification needs more than scattered weekly study that may lead the average church member to develop into the situation described as “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

### **The Critical Nature of Biblical Illiteracy**

The issue of biblical illiteracy critically needs expository preaching because a solid expositional ministry can remedy this problem. An expositional ministry can exist as an answer to a lack of biblical knowledge and understanding, granting believers the opportunity to bridge the gap between what the Bible says and what the Bible means in everyday life. The problem of biblical illiteracy may lead to a lack of spiritual maturity exacerbating issues related to this immaturity, such as poor leadership, lack of biblical decision-making, and unwillingness to submit to authority.

#### **A lack of real maturity**

William Perkins states, “The exceptional character of the influence of Scripture lies in these two things [its] power to penetrate in the spirit of man [and] its ability to bind

the conscience, that is, to constrain it before God either to excuse or accuse us of sin.”<sup>8</sup>

Calvin Miller stated clearly, “The levels of immaturity in the church are astounding. The ‘never-grown’ adolescent members in some cases run grasping committees, moderate the mayhem, and generally visit the pastor with more negative evaluation than [is] deserved.”<sup>9</sup> Spiritual immaturity has the potential to ruin the fellowship of a community of believers, to destroy the potential of a church, and disillusion people, like the pastor. Intentional and in-depth study of the Word leading to application will counteract such detrimental action and produce a vibrant, positive, and growing church. God’s Word enables believers to experience and express God’s true righteousness in and through the church. Yet, while abiding sin will remain in this life, a believer immersed in the Word of God will have the tools to continually fight sin and “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Stephen Westerholm states, “Appropriate behavior for believers is, for Paul, the natural expression of their trust in God and their experience of his indwelling Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> As a believer in Christ grows in their faith, submitting to God’s indwelling Spirit, a capacity for fighting indwelling sin emerges from God and His Word.

#### The perpetual nature of biblical illiteracy

As discipleship without any attempt at intentionality in exposition continues, the biblically illiterate will rise to serve as teachers and leaders in the congregation. The biblically illiterate will produce followers attracted by characteristics less biblical. Without an intervention through exposition, biblical illiteracy will not only continue but

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<sup>8</sup> William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Understanding Paul: the Early Christian Worldview of the Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 124.

could progressively worsen as time advances. In order to avoid this kind of progression, pastors and leaders must preach and teach intentionally in an expositional manner to avoid this problem. Mark Fabarez argues, “To be faithful and effective [we] must be sure that we are not just presenting biblical information or simply lecturing about the Bible.”<sup>11</sup>

#### A lack of theological understanding

Without good and intentional exposition of God’s Word, the average church member will never come to a proper understanding of the grand story of redemption or have a working view of biblical theology. Without an understanding of how the whole of Scripture fits together congregants will struggle understanding how moral imperatives in Scripture fit within the larger framework of the grace of God, redemption in Christ, and the hope of eternal life. Mark Dever makes this understanding of God’s Word clear when he states:

We must understand God’s truth as a coherent whole, coming to us first and foremost as a revelation of Himself. Questions of who God is and of what He is like can never be considered irrelevant to the practical matters of church life. Different understandings of God will lead you to worship Him in different ways, and if some of those understandings are wrong, some of those ways in which you approach Him could be wrong as well. This is, after all, a major theme in the Bible, even if it is almost entirely neglected these days.<sup>12</sup>

A solid grasp of biblical theology comes from studying the flow of Scripture, important biblical themes, and God’s relational intentions. Understanding these themes of Scripture allows a Christian to recognize, interpret, and apply the truth of Scripture. The faithful and dynamic exposition of the Word of God will address the perils of biblical ignorance and theological misunderstanding. The expositional remedy must take place in the pulpit

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 29.

and in the context of a church-wide expositional ministry. Thabiti Anyabwile states correctly, “The ministry of the Word is no less than the pulpit but it must be wider than just the pulpit.”<sup>13</sup>

Due to a lack of expository preaching in the pulpit and a haphazard approach to discipleship, many churches have a large number of faithful attending members who have little in the way of real biblical or theological knowledge. Calvin Miller states,

More and more we are unable to locate the visible doctrinal church of Christ. In the current salad bar, mix-and-match of church program and community activities, many theologians are growing concerned that the church is losing the ability to define and defend its faith. What does the church believe, and why does it believe? What are its tenets and why?<sup>14</sup>

In Miller’s estimation churches face these issues due to a “something-for-everyone” approach to discipleship. Congregations may seem outwardly active but, inwardly theologically and biblically shallow due to the lack of focus within the disciple-making ministry of the church. In order for the people to learn needed biblical truths and to be considered well-versed in Scripture, a set method for systematically teaching and discipling within the local church should exist. George Barna argues the average congregant today, while possibly familiar with certain biblical and theological facts, fails in the practice of appropriating or applying the truth of Scripture to life. Barna reported:

When people read from the Bible they typically open it, read a brief passage without much regard for the context, and consider the primary thought or feeling that the passage provided. If they are comfortable with it, they accept it; otherwise, they deem it interesting but irrelevant to their life, and move on. There is shockingly little growth evident in people’s understanding of the fundamental

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<sup>13</sup> Anyabwile, “9marks at Southeastern 2011 - the Gospel: Session 4 Panel.”

<sup>14</sup> Calvin Miller, “Narrative Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Dudit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 108.

themes of the Scriptures and amazingly little interest in deepening their knowledge and application of biblical principles.<sup>15</sup>

Due to biblical illiteracy the contemporary preacher can no longer approach any biblical passage or any theological concept with a general assumption the congregation even has an understanding of the subject being discussed. Many twenty-first century preachers can no longer assume the vast majority of their congregations understand the biblical account of creation, Adam and Eve, or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.<sup>16</sup> This understanding should change the nature in which the pastor approaches his exposition of Scripture. The preacher must assume those listening have no concept of the text being expounded and may need a careful treatment of the text. Therefore, the preacher must grow adept at laying a biblical and theological framework in every sermon so the listener might have the ability to follow the textual treatment. Believing the Holy Spirit grants illumination and ultimate understanding of the Word of God should never excuse the preacher from being as clear and understandable as possible. Greg Heisler refers to this tension stating “Partnering with the Holy Spirit in application... means we let him be the one to fill in the blanks for a person’s life. We lay out for our listeners the general application, perhaps give them some examples from contemporary life, and then trust the Holy Spirit to fill in the blanks for their own specific life.”<sup>17</sup> The preacher should

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<sup>15</sup>Barna, “Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year-in-review Perspective.”

<sup>16</sup> Pastors, who have taught their people well, could assume some basic knowledge; however, a pastor’s congregation can cycle and change over time. With this understanding a pastor who has been in his church for an extended period of time preaching the Word of God expositively should still not make a practice of assuming the people in his congregation understand certain basic theological tenets or portions of the Bible.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 123.

give general applicatory principles from the text while the Holy Spirit achieves the detailed heart-work of application.

Tragically, if an expositional approach receives little or no attention, biblical and theological illiteracy will develop into a self-perpetuating issue within the church. People without spiritual maturity and understanding of God's Word will assume service or teaching positions because of availability and willingness. This positioning creates the perpetuating problem. This project coordinator, as a pastor, has experienced this kind of progression leading to biblically illiterate, theologically shallow, or spiritually arrested people in leadership roles leading to painful experiences in the church.

### **Ministry Goals**

The project coordinator sought to establish a biblical and theological foundation for expository preaching in the ministry of the local church as the first project goal. This goal required researching the field of preaching to identify biblical and theological foundations for expository preaching. The effectiveness of preaching in the local church stood as the underlying purpose behind these foundations. The recognition of the centrality of expository preaching in the local church provided the project coordinator with a deeper appreciation for the lofty role and status of exposition within the broader context of the local church's ministry.

The second goal of this project involved surveying Christian literature in the area of expository preaching. Literary research gave the practice of expository preaching a wider scope of interaction with many authors and practitioners. This research included historical and contemporary sources and benefitted from the collaboration with established research and data beyond the scope of the project's stated purpose and

limitations. The project coordinator developed a better and more effective approach to exposition in the local church's ministry context by achieving the second goal.

The project director faced the third goal of developing a curriculum linking the sermon to a small group study approach. Reaching this third goal involved writing teaching plans using effective learning techniques for the context of this project. By developing a curriculum, based on a current Sunday expository sermon series for the congregants to use for small group study, the congregation had the opportunity to study in-depth a certain text of Scripture over an extended period of time. Furthermore, the curriculum emphasized the application aspect of learning to train the participants to apply what the Scripture teaches each week. With the use of the Internet the curriculum and all pertinent study tools proved effective in the learning process. The learning plans allowed an immersion of biblical truth, a new understanding of biblical truth, and a recognition of the application potential of biblical truth.

### **Professional Goals**

The first professional goal of this project involved the project director developing greater skill in direct, exegetically warranted application in expository preaching. The project director gave a concerted effort to focus intentionally on the application aspect of exposition. By interacting with the text of Scripture in an exegetically accurate manner, the project coordinator developed greater skill in the ability to make text-driven application. Also, the project director learned to recognize how the text of Scripture impacts the current daily lives of the congregants and how to bridge the gap between the text of Scripture and present day life.

The project coordinator developed greater lesson-building skills as the second professional goal. Developing small-group study guides to facilitate discussion in the small groups served as the area for developing the skills. Through developing lesson-building skills, the project coordinator acquired the skills necessary to consider and recognize the needs and perspectives of small group participants. These developed skills have enabled the project coordinator to become more adept at communicating biblical and theological truth in an understandable manner. The practice of building curriculum should cause the project director to develop as an expository preacher.

The final professional goal of the project focused on enabling the project coordinator developing a greater ability to engage the adult portion of the congregation through the use of print media and Internet media. Harnessing the Internet as an indispensable tool for discipleship and community-building in an increasingly media-driven culture proved difficult and necessary. The prevalence of media in the lives of congregants necessitated the project coordinator learning how to utilize the Internet in the teaching plan to the benefit those in attendance. The project coordinator learned using this tool as an instrument for dispensing biblical teaching can serve as a helpful tool for the church. Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, in their book *Vintage Church*, gave support for this learning endeavor in the project when they state, “Admittedly, not a lot of pastors are interested in the specific details about new technology. However [technology] gives the church an opportunity to provide gospel content...to more people than ever before.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears, *Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), Kindle edition, location 5869.

## **Background Information**

The project coordinator currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Arlington Park Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas. Arlington Park Baptist Church was founded in 1986 and currently averages 175 in worship attendance weekly. For the year 2013 the ministry's total receipts are \$375,000.00. The project coordinator's position of Senior Pastor, as related to this project, involved preaching weekly and leading the congregation to participate in the small group study guides.

The project coordinator recognized the need to address biblical illiteracy in the church. This recognition of need came as the result of experiences within the life of the church. This project coordinator, as pastor, determined to introduce expository preaching to the congregation. An expositional sermon series from the book of Jonah became the first attempt at a systematic treatment of Scripture in the pulpit. Approximately fifty members, who have admittedly been in church their whole lives and in this particular congregation for more than two decades, stated they had never heard a sermon from Jonah and never read the book. All of these assertions occurred as members expressed their excitement to hear from the Lord in those particular texts. The enthusiasm of these members became a catalyst for this project coordinator to continue delivering systematic expository sermons. Out of this determination and the recognition that people need more than the Sunday morning sermon, the idea of expanding the expository preaching ministry in the church took shape.

More than half of the adult portion, approximately sixty members, of the discipleship program in this church context, seemed to lack significant understanding of basic theological tenets, thereby limiting their ability to discern truth from falsehood. This awareness came as the project coordinator witnessed examples of confusion over

truth. Through the acceptance of several different popular errant teachers both from the religious and secular world, a lack of clear and biblically informed theological concepts to process people's beliefs and current issues became evident. Not a few people declared their shock to realize, through a small teaching series on the "Four Great Christological Passages," that neither Jehovah's Witnesses nor Mormons actually fit the criteria to be considered a Christian denomination.<sup>19</sup> These examples of theological deficiency became part of the catalyst for developing an expanded expository preaching ministry.

Another issue facilitating the author's choice to pursue this project arose from the lack of unity church members had in regard to the vision and direction the Lord had for the church. The church lacked any coherent process for unifying the church under a vision with direction. Having discipleship classes studying something different and then only in a manner for a few minutes each week exacerbated the problem regarding this lack of unity. Furthermore, several of these classes lacked any kind of systematic discipleship study. These classes seemed content to discuss any topic of interest without forethought. This approach to discipleship resulted in the creation of many different sub-groups completely disjointed from the congregation as a whole.

Arlington Park Baptist Church had been a congregation who viewed ministry as event-focused and program-driven. Traditionally, the ministry focused on moving from one event or program emphasis to the next with no real sustained or developed plan for disciple-making. This ministry method and the lack of a strong expository preaching ministry created a desire for the project coordinator to establish a strong ministry of expository preaching as not only necessary but central to the church's ministry.

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<sup>19</sup> In this particular area the Jehovah Witness group have a relatively large. They constantly blanket the neighborhoods and homes with literature and door-to-door interaction.

## **Research Methodology**

The research needed at the beginning of the project served as a tool for qualitative measurement. Chapter two and three of this project report contain the research information compiled during the early stages of the project. The measurement consists of the approval of these chapters by the supervisory committee during the oral examination of the project.

A pre-test, post-test, and lag-test became the tool for measurement of the ten-week expository sermon series through 1 Thessalonians with an accompanying small group curriculum used weekly in discipleship groups. The tests provided a quantitative approach to measure success of the project. The collected data gave significant insight into the project outcome and gives this church needed data to develop the project into the small group strategy. The participants took the pre-test before the start of the sermon-based small groups. The test consisted of questions regarding knowledge, attitude, and behavior. The participants received the post-test at the end of the ten-week sermon-study series. The project coordinator used the test again two weeks after the post-test to measure for retention in these three areas. The leaders of the small groups assisted in setting up the identification of participants in the testing and keeping accurate attendance records to insure integrity of the project findings. The project coordinator collected the test and compiled the data for analysis. This data facilitated measurement of the ability of the participants to retain the specific teaching given both in the area of specific biblical facts and theological concepts. The analysis provided significant input to draw conclusions for the evaluation.

The data on behavioral changes after the sermon series and small group process and after the two weeks from the conclusion of the process interested the project

coordinator. Changes and retention became the focus when analyzing the data. The analysis and evaluation used the data to identify changes or patterns. Following the final week of the curriculum, a post-test was given to the students to measure any change in knowledge, understanding, and behavior. Another post-test was given again, on a two week lag, to measure the students. The project director used the data collected to measure to retain the specific teaching taught in the book of 1 Thessalonians as well as the participants' personal perception regarding noticeable change in their own behavior.

### **Chapter Summaries**

In chapter one, entitled "Justification: Why Have an Expanded Expository Ministry?" the author sought to give justification, through research and personal ministry context, for the selection of this particular ministry project. This chapter identifies and defines several key issues in the field of expository preaching as well as the impact each had in the personal ministry of context of the author. This chapter sets forth a list of goals to accomplish throughout the project. In addition, the author explains the background of his ministry context as well as the methods employed to collect data from the project participants. The project coordinator intended to provide the reader with an understanding for the rationale behind the choosing of the subject matter as well as assessment of the particular issues to be addressed in the project. This chapter offers a grid by which the reader can judge the effectiveness or success of the entire project and the author's ability to achieve the project goals.

Chapter 2, entitled "Foundations: A Biblical and Theological Call for an Expanded Expository Ministry," gives the reader an understanding of the biblical and theological support accompanying the concept of application-focused, sermon-based,

expository curriculum. The content of this chapter demonstrates the Bible's ability to serve as the ultimate basis for evidence, and the theological portion stands as explanation based upon the truth of Scripture.

Chapter 3, entitled "Ministry Foundations: Small Groups and Application in Expository Preaching," gives the reader an overview of different aspects of Bible study in the church to support this project. Also, this chapter discusses the relationship between application in expository preaching and the role of sermon-based small groups in this application. The project coordinator used this chapter to display how God's people should view the role of expository preaching and the importance and role of application in an expanded expository ministry beyond the pulpit.

Chapter 4, entitled "Execution: An Expanded Expository Ministry at Arlington Park Baptist Church," gives the reader the opportunity to see how the ministry project proceeded in detailed form and what material and tools helped to accomplish this purpose. In this chapter the project coordinator provides some rationale regarding the methodology used in the implementation of this project. The fourth chapter offers a detailed look into the process and completion of the ministry project from beginning to end.

The project coordinator uses Chapter 5, entitled "Reflection: Personal Impact of an Expanded Expository Ministry," to identify the personal impact of this project. The reader will sense the personal and professional pilgrimage of the project coordinator as pastor of Arlington Park Baptist Church. Personal outcomes and explanation of the personal benefits and growth experiences unfold in this chapter. The project coordinator

has concluded the chapter with a summation of the realizations about the local church and ministry. The chapter offers a rich and very personal analysis of the project's effects.

## CHAPTER 2

### FOUNDATIONS: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CALL FOR AN EXPANDED EXPOSITORY MINISTRY

Any attempt to conduct a program or project within the context of the local church must have both biblical and theological support. This project in attempting to connect the preaching ministry to a sermon-based small group ministry requires biblical and theological foundations. These foundations establish the reasons for connecting these two ministries. This effort involves a particular method of dealing with Scripture. An expositional methodology forms the centerpiece of the two ministries and the connecting factor. An effort to provide biblical and theological foundations includes a treatment of expositional methodology to provide an appropriate parameter of practice.

#### **Foundations of Expository Preaching**

Different definitions for the practice of expository preaching have surfaced with some being rather broad, markedly succinct, or very detailed. Warren and David Wiersbe state, "Preaching is the communicating of God's truth by God's servant to meet the needs of the people."<sup>1</sup> While true, this definition offers a rather broad and open interpretation in several areas, the primary being the nature and approach of the preaching being communicated. Although D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones thoroughly explains his meaning of preaching throughout his work *Preaching and Preachers*, Lloyd-Jones offered a brief definition by writing simply, "Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe, *The Elements of Preaching: The Art of Biblical Preaching-Clearly and Simply Presented* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 17.

fire.”<sup>1</sup>This concise definition would not be useful as a generally acceptable definition of expository preaching due to the vague nature regarding certain terms. Similarly, Alistair Begg states, “[Preaching] is to declare what God has said, explain the meaning and establish the implications so that no one will mistake its relevance.”<sup>2</sup>Other definitions of expository preaching exist doing justice to certain characteristics of this preaching methodology, but many of these definitions do not fit within the limited scope of this author’s research.

With this understanding, Tony Merida, in his book *Faithful Preaching*, defines preaching as “[T]he responsible, passionate, and authentic declaration of the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Spirit, for the glory of the Triune God.”<sup>3</sup> Merida goes on to explain the synonymous nature of the terms “faithful preaching” and “expository preaching” Merida asserts, “In my opinion, the approach that best fulfills the desire to handle the Word responsibly, in a God-centered manner, is expository preaching.”<sup>4</sup> Analyzing eight distinct aspects of Merida’s definition will prove helpful in determining a proper biblical and theological orientation expository preaching.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God’s Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## The Responsible or Faithful Nature of Expository Preaching

John Stott, in his work *Between Two Worlds*, boldly states “It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching.”<sup>5</sup> Stated another way, Stott argues to consider an act of proclamation genuine preaching must be expository in nature. Stott’s contention receives support from preachers, like John Piper. John Piper states, “All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture.”<sup>6</sup>

Expository preaching, by nature, holds faithfulness to the Word of God as critical and essential due to the preacher’s devotion to understanding and explaining the intent of the original author as well as the cultural milieu of his original audience. Expositors approach preaching with devotion to the relevance of the biblical text and the message God has for His people today in order to display responsibility with the Scriptures. Responsibility, or faithfulness, to the Word of God serves as a distinct characteristic of expository preaching as an approach based solely on the text of Scripture. The Word of God gives the sermon thrust, meaning, and authority. This connection between the sermon and the text leads some to call the expository sermon a “text-driven” sermon. David Allen contends, “A text-driven sermon is a sermon that develops a text by explaining, illustrating, and applying its meaning. Text-driven preaching stays true to the substance of the text, the structure of the text, and the spirit of the text.”<sup>7</sup> This contention

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<sup>5</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 44.

<sup>7</sup> David Allen, “Introduction,” in *Text Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 8.

means an expositional, text-driven sermon stands wholly dependent on the text rather than loosely based on the text. The cleverness of the preacher disappears when the full burden of effect rests wholly upon the Word of God.

Ultimately, the text-driven essence of expository preaching establishes the responsible nature of this particular preaching methodology. Furthermore, an expanded expository ministry showcases this responsible characteristic by showing detailed care regarding the souls in the congregation. A responsible expository ministry with strong exegesis and text-driven application reveals the care taken to insure God shapes the lives of hearers through His Word.

### The Passionate Nature of Expository Preaching

Many of the aspects of expository preaching overlap and intersect in various ways. The passionate nature of exposition stems from the expositor dealing with a text of Scripture and attempting to speak this truth for God. An expositor should never practice lifeless and dull preaching when presenting the Word of God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states pointedly, “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.... Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed in one.”<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones’ statement reveals his conviction that the content proclaimed automatically leads to a passionate declaration. R. G. Lee states the preacher should possess a “genuine earnestness and passion. It was written of Demosthenes that sometimes he spoke with such passionate earnestness that his enemies said he was deranged. But people listened to

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 97.

him like children frightened at the roar of a storm, or like slaves to an emancipation proclamation.”<sup>9</sup> The expository message being based, derived, and formed by the text of Scripture necessitates the preaching be passionate due to the gravity of the proclamation.

Expository preachers proclaim the message of Jesus, and He said He came to “proclaim good news to the poor [to] proclaim liberty to the captive and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18 – 19). The message of Jesus gives the message of Scripture which should serve as the message of the expository message. This understanding shows the dynamic nature of the sermon requiring preaching with perfect form, exegetically sound conclusions, and passion to capture the essence and power of God’s Word.

Furthermore, passion in expository preaching evidences the extent to which a preacher will go, while remaining faithful to the Word, to help the people understand and apply the message of Scripture. By seeking to explain and apply the Word of God beyond the preaching hour, the ministry can exhibit a devotedly passionate view regarding the preaching of the Scripture. In turn the passionate nature of the expository ministry of the church can translate to the people a deep desire to see them grow in their application of the Word of God.

### The Authentic Nature of Expository Preaching

Authenticity should serve as an essential component of effective expository preaching the people will not trust the message coming from a man who says one thing in the pulpit and lives contrary to this message in his daily life. David Allen and Jerry Vines confirm this view by contending that a definite “impression which the preacher himself

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<sup>9</sup> Robert G. Lee, “Forty-Seven Years,” in *We Prepare and Preach: The Practice of Sermon Construction and Delivery*, ed. Clarence Stonelynn Roddy (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 85.

makes upon the audience. As far as the audience is concerned, the validity of what the preacher says will be proportional to the integrity which his audience perceives him to display.”<sup>10</sup>

The expositor must present an authentic message according to the gifts and abilities the Lord has given him, not imitating the gifts and abilities of another. Merida states, “God has made us with unique traits and graced us with unique spiritual gifts; therefore, we should not see preaching as conforming to one particular style.”<sup>11</sup> When preaching in a postmodern context, especially to those who treat the Bible as unbelievable or irrelevant, the preacher must present his genuine belief in the veracity, authority, and relevance of the Word of God in an authentic manner to avoid this potential hindrance.

#### The Declarative Nature of Expository Preaching

The Apostle Peter declares “no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). According to Peter, the Word of God comes directly from God through men as directed by the Holy Spirit. Al Mohler points out, “True preaching begins with this confession: We preach because God has spoken. That fundamental conviction is the fulcrum of the universe, the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Lord, chose of His own sovereign will to reveal Himself to us.”<sup>12</sup> The fact that God has spoken to man through the Scriptures anchors the basis for why men must proclaim the Scriptures.

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<sup>10</sup> Jerry Vines and David Allen, “Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Proclamation,” *The Criswell Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 331.

<sup>11</sup> Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 40.

The divine origin of Scripture requires a text-driven sermon. Therefore, the preacher should not present an expository sermon as one opinion among many but as from the Lord about Himself and as a directive to hearers to live in a manner appropriate to His self-revelation. Sidney Greidanus argues, “If [preachers] preach with authority [the] congregation can no longer dismiss their sermons as merely personal opinions but must respond to them as authoritative messages. The only proper authority for preaching is divine [and] God’s heralds do not speak their own words but that of their sender.”<sup>13</sup> Since the preacher presents His Word, then the expository message reserves the sole privilege of being authoritatively declared to those who hear it.

When the preacher understands the proper nature of preaching found in the exposition of the Scripture then he can, as Andrew Watterson Blackwood states:

[Preach] with authority not his own. “Thus saith the Lord!” The authority comes from God, who has spoken through the prophets, the apostles, and supremely through His Son. In our own day also, through the Holy Spirit, God speaks to waiting hearts through the preaching of His Word.<sup>14</sup>

The expository preacher can boldly declare the message because his authority to do so comes from the Divine Author.

#### The Christ Exalting Nature of Expository Preaching

Expository preaching should, at its core, exalt Christ due to the fact that the Scriptures being expounded exalt Christ. As Dennis Johnson states, “Scripture [is] a single Story with a single Hero.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Edmund Clowney states:

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<sup>13</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Watterson Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 257.

<sup>15</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), xiii.

Jesus Christ is the reason for the Bible. Because the Father had determined to send his Son into the world to save sinners, the world was preserved under the rainbow, Abraham was called out under the stars, Moses was charged at the burning bush, David was promised the eternal rule of his Son—everything God did was preparing for Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

Since the Word, in its entirety, speaks of and glorifies Christ, then preaching the text should do the same. Lee states, in his signature style, “Jesus is the theme, [the] Old Testament conceals Jesus; the New Testament reveals Jesus. The Old Testament prophesies Jesus; the New Testament produces Jesus. The Old Testament promises Jesus; the New Testament presents Jesus.”<sup>17</sup>

Understanding all of Scripture speaks of Christ in some manner will aid the preacher in comprehending how to preach Christ from a text. The preacher’s task must consist of proclaiming Jesus in the same manner the text does, within the history of redemption. In reference to Luke 24:27 Jerry Vines argues, “Jesus gave a Christ-centered presentation of Scripture. We are told that Jesus expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. All genuine exposition culminates in Jesus.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, both the lost and the saved will always benefit from gospel-centered exposition because all will hear of Christ clearly and often. This benefit will draw the lost to Christ and lead the saved progressively in sanctification.

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<sup>16</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching Christ From Biblical Theology,” in *Inside the Sermon: Thirteen Preachers Discuss Their Methods of Preparing Messages*, ed. Richard Allen Bodey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 58 – 59.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Forty-Seven Years*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 13.

## Scripture as the Basis for Expository Preaching

Expository preaching intrinsically unites with Scriptures with no option to separate. Mohler states, “Expository preaching is therefore inescapably bound to the serious work of exegesis.”<sup>19</sup> The concept of expository preaching requires the preacher to study a text and interpret a text so as to “expose” the meaning and implications. J. I. Packer states, “Only as God himself is perceived to be preaching in our sermons can they have genuine spiritual significance, and God will be perceived to speak through us only as we are enabled to make plain the fact that it is really the Bible that is doing the talking.”<sup>20</sup>

The authority a preacher has derives from his proper handling of the text. Genuine expository preaching carries authority due to the way the text receives unswerving loyalty from the preacher. The authority comes from the Scripture because the Scripture carries intrinsic authority. Adrian Rogers declares, “We must affirm that when the Bible speaks, we have the Word of heaven’s King. True authority flows from this, [what] gives the Word of God authority is that it is the Word of God!”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, if the concept of authority ties so intrinsically to the act of preaching and the preacher only has authority derived from rightly handling the Word of God, then the logical conclusion appears that expository preaching only takes place when a text of Scripture receives full and truthful exposure. Allen states, “By this, we mean that sermons should not only be based upon a

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<sup>19</sup> Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 66.

<sup>20</sup> J. I. Packer, “Speaking for God,” in *Inside the Sermon: Thirteen Preachers Discuss Their Methods of Preparing Messages*, ed. Richard Allen Bodey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 187.

<sup>21</sup> Adrian Rogers, *The Incredible Power of Kingdom Authority: Getting an Upper Hand on the Underworld* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 134 – 35.

text of Scripture but should also actually expound the meaning of that text.”<sup>22</sup> Although the preacher could speak on many different subjects with Christian meaning, the centrality of the Word of God as the only source for authoritative declaration remains the distinguishing characteristic of expository preaching.

### The Spirit-Empowered Nature of Expository Preaching

The true origin of Scripture is the key to understanding the necessity of the Holy Spirit and His empowerment in the preaching event. Second Peter 1:21 states, “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Peter explained the revelation of God as divine in origin and nature. To truly expound upon a text responsibly the preacher must follow the leading of, and submit to, the power of the Holy Spirit to truly expound responsibly on a text. Arturo Azurdia, commenting on Acts 1:8, states, “The conclusion, then, is obvious: if [the disciples] were men in need of the vitality of the Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel, we, at the very least, are equally needy. It is, at last, the epitome of foolishness to attempt to carry out the exposition of the gospel devoid of the vitality of God the Spirit.”<sup>23</sup>

The whole of the expository process, from beginning to end, rests in the empowering of the Holy Spirit. In expressing the complete nature of the Spirit’s work in preaching Greg Heisler, by way of definition, declares:

Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered proclamation of biblical truth derived from the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit by means of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Spirit-inspired text, with a view to applying the text by

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<sup>22</sup> Allen, “Introduction,” in *Text Driven Preaching*, 5 – 6.

<sup>23</sup> Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2010), 15.

means of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, first to the preacher's own heart, and then to the hearts of those who hear, culminating in an authentic and powerful witness to the living Word, Jesus Christ, and obedient, Spirit-filled living.<sup>24</sup>

John MacArthur contends, "Powerful preaching occurs only when a Spirit-illuminated man of God expounds clearly and compellingly God's Spirit-inspired revelation in Scripture to a Spirit-illuminated congregation."<sup>25</sup> To preach without the power of the Holy Spirit will do a disservice to His message, evidence an insufficient understanding of the text, and reveal a lack of dependency upon Him on the part of the preacher. Merida writes, "From start to finish, preaching is a spiritual activity. Spirit-called preachers should maintain a proper balance of diligent study of the Scriptures and a desperate reliance upon the Spirit."<sup>26</sup> This balance, of diligent adherence to the original meaning of the text and simultaneous dependence on the ministry of the Spirit in exposition provides the key to understanding the Holy Spirit empowered nature of expository preaching.

### The God-Glorifying Goal of Expository Preaching

Building upon aspects previously discussed regarding the nature of expository preaching, the preaching event will terminate when God receives all of the glory. Since the Scripture exalts Christ and the expository message depends upon Scripture, then the ultimate purpose of expository preaching points to God receiving the honor due Him. God has given humans the Scripture to know Him, and when mankind sees God rightly as He reveals Himself, then man will glorify Him. Piper concludes, "Therefore, the goal

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<sup>24</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., "The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 103.

<sup>26</sup> Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 59.

of preaching is the glory of God reflected in the glad submission of the human heart.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, if the preacher humbly submits to the leading and power of the Spirit, under the proper restraint the text offers, then no other option regarding the outcome exists. God must receive the glory when preachers declare His message in a responsible, passionate manner, intrinsically married to the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

### **Biblical Foundations for Application in an Expanded Expository Ministry**

To stand firm in any Christian conviction one must have biblically consistent justifications. Both expository preaching in general and the proposed method, an expanded expository ministry, must have solid biblical foundations and fulfill the necessary justifications. With Scripture for its foundation and formation, expository preaching attempts to proclaim the Word in its fullness, thereby making those who hear it more like Christ. The need to expound the Scriptures to the people has had biblical support from the earliest of times. However, biblical support does not simply uphold the practice of expository preaching but also the need to apply the Word of God after it has been exposed.

#### **Nehemiah 8: An Old Testament Foundation for Application**

Nehemiah 8 describes the time when the exiles had returned from Babylon and completed the construction of the wall surrounding Jerusalem. Nehemiah gathered them together, calling Ezra, the scribe, to read the book of the Law. Scripture says Ezra read from the book of the Law for an extended period of time. Nehemiah 8:7b – 8 states,

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<sup>27</sup> Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 6.

“[T]he Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” The simple reading of the Law inspired wonder in the hearers; hence, the response in verse 6, “All the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” However, the Scripture records, in 8:8 the Levites “מִפְרָשׁ” or they “interpreted”<sup>29</sup> the Law, and they did this by “וְשִׁוּם שְׂכָלֵי” or “giving understanding/making the sense clear.”<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the Levites did not stop at Ezra’s public reading of the Scripture. They went to the people and “gave the sense” of it; they explained the Word of God with its implications so the people might understand God’s expectations and act upon them.<sup>31</sup>

The personal opportunity the Levites took in Nehemiah 8 seems to have led the people to a place of repentance and, ultimately, joy. Nehemiah 8:9 tells the reader Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites had to tell all the people not to mourn and weep because “all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.” In Nehemiah 8:12, a final summation describes the scene for the reader, “And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.” Ultimately the people responded correctly to the declared Law of God because they “הִבְיִינֵנוּ” or, as most translations state they had

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<sup>29</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 831.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 964.

<sup>31</sup> G.J. Venema, *Reading Scripture in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 9-10, 31, 2 Kings 22-23, Jeremiah 36, Nehemiah 8* (New York: Brill Academic Pub, 2004), 173.

“understood.”<sup>32</sup> However, הִבִּינִי can have a much more nuanced meaning in this context and one lexicon defines it as “give heed to, attend to, observe, [or] discern.”<sup>33</sup> This nuanced definition helps to understand the people’s response of repentance and joy as part of a process. This response meant the people had the Word of the Lord declared to them through the reading of the Law, then the Levites interpreted or translated His Word into the people’s daily circumstance, and the people responded with mourning and joy because they had “given heed to” or applied what the Levites expressed to them. The people responded to the entire process of the declaration of God’s Word as well as the application given to their lives as the Levites gave the sense or meaning of the text.

An expanded expository ministry follows this process by going beyond the exposition of Scripture from the pulpit on any given Sunday morning. This ministry offers continued study of the text throughout the week and an opportunity to engage the text within a small group. The corporate, personal, and group times allow for an immersion of the text to insure understanding and application. A reverence and dependence on God’s Word serve as the continuing catalyst for the ministry and the involvement of the participants.

#### 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17: A Pauline Foundation for Application

While Nehemiah 8 describes a scene in which application took place, the Apostle Paul revealed to Timothy the origin and nature of Scripture and gave an argument for the need to apply the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17 Paul shared with Timothy the reason for the Word of God being given to man. He explained to his young disciple that

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, Driver and Briggs, 239.

the purpose of Scripture was not simply so man might know more about God but to achieve action and growth in the life of the believer. Paul writes, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul declares the profitability of all of Scripture. After speaking of the false teachers in 3:1 – 9, Paul begins the next section with *δε*, translated “however” or “but.” Beginning this section with such a word gives evidence of Paul’s preparation to contrast the false teachers. The next word in v. 10, the word “you,” emphatically identifies Timothy as the contrasting subject against the false teachers and the heresy they espouse.<sup>34</sup>

Paul speaks to Timothy on an extremely personal level when he says Timothy has “παρηκολούθησάς” him, meaning to follow a standard or rule set forth by someone. This Greek term represents a technical term defining the relationship between a disciple and his master and can denote studying someone at close quarter in order to mimic their actions.<sup>35</sup> However, Gerhard Kittel states “a strong emphasis is laid on the exactness or constancy of agreement indicated.”<sup>36</sup> Paul states that Timothy has paid close attention to him and has followed his example and teaching, becoming a reproduction of Paul, in some sense. Next, Paul states Timothy has followed his teaching and his “conduct.” The word ἀγωγή involves a daily, disciplined living which provides instruction by example to

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<sup>34</sup> Eugene E. Minor, *An Exegetical Summary of 2 Timothy* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics International, 1992), 100 – 101.

<sup>35</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 164.

<sup>36</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the Greek New Testament*; Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Rogers & Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*; Louw and Nida, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d ed., s.v. “παρηκολούθησάς.”

those observing and can also refer to a manner of life and appropriation of verbal teaching.<sup>37</sup>

Paul references future imposters by alerting Timothy of their existence. Paul refers to these charlatans as “evil” men deceitfully enticing others to do unholy or irreverent things, with seemingly holy and reverent words. These men spiritually swindle those who hear and follow them by habitually giving hypocritical teaching and false doctrine.<sup>38</sup> Timothy then receives instruction to remember, in light of these false teachers, the true source of power and authority in his life. Paul exhorts Timothy with the truth that the “sacred writings” are “able” to grant wisdom which leads to salvation. Paul used the word “able” to refer to the ability or power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, stressing strong action. Paul reminds Timothy Scripture has the inherent and powerful ability to grant “wisdom that leads to salvation.”<sup>39</sup> Paul then declares all of Scripture as “inspired.” θεόπνευστος carries a much fuller meaning than one English word conveys and means Scripture has not been simply dictated, but God has breathed His character into the Scriptures so that it is, in its very essence, the Word of God.<sup>40</sup>

Paul desires to have Timothy understand Scripture as “profitable” in all things for life and ministry.<sup>41</sup> The word ὠφέλιμος means useful or beneficial for these processes

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., s.v. “ἀγωγῆ.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., “πονηροὶ.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., “δυνάμενα.”

<sup>40</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 236; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon: Based on Semantic Domains*; Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

<sup>41</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 235.

contrasting sharply with the false teachers who deny the Scripture's profitability.<sup>42</sup>

Applying such doctrine to one's life results in being "adequate" to perform every good thing. The word ἄριστος refers to the capability of performing any function with ability.<sup>43</sup>

A proper understanding of the Word of God enables the reader, with the wisdom and equipping imparted through Scripture, the ability to confront any situation, which "involves a good deal of correction, clearing the believer's mind of erroneous concepts gained while unregenerate" and replacing them with the characteristics leading to godliness.<sup>44</sup>

Following Paul's theological explanation of the nature and usefulness of the Scriptures Timothy receives a command to preach the Word of God unabashedly and readily to all who will hear. (2 Tim 4:1-5). Paul has just concluded telling Timothy the Scriptures "are able to give you *the* wisdom which leads to salvation" (2 Tim 3:15, Italics added). With this understanding, the reader should recognize that: "For Christians, the knowledge of God's will comes only through the Scriptures."<sup>45</sup> Paul again warns Timothy opposition exists but instructs him to endure and concern himself with the proclamation of the Scripture.

Paul continues by giving Timothy instructions on how to boldly proclaim the Word—namely, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, and teach with patience. The proper

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 236; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon: Based on Semantic Domains*; Kostenberger, *II Timothy*, 591.

<sup>43</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Greek New Testament; A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament; A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "ἄριστος."

<sup>44</sup> William D. Barrick, "The Necessity of Scripture," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Fall 2004): 161.

<sup>45</sup> Chuck Deveau, "The Sufficiency of Scripture and God's Will: 2 Timothy 3:13 – 17," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* ½ (Summer 1995): 3.

preaching of the Word of God requires these integral aspects related to the profitability of the Scriptures.<sup>46</sup> The preaching event could find further enhancement and encompass these actions in a time of deeper study and accountability regarding the application of the truths found in any given text. This deeper treatment of Scripture begs the question as to whether the allotted time slot on Sunday morning grants the expositor enough time to accomplish all that Paul charges Timothy to do in his preaching ministry.

#### James 1:19 – 27: An Active Foundation for Application

James takes the discussion regarding application one step further and argues that a constant practice of applying and living out the truth of Scripture distinctly marks the genuine believer. Scot McKnight states, “But James’ point is very simple: there is a contrast between “hearing only” and “hearing *and* doing,” and James claims that only the second is acceptable to God.”<sup>47</sup> James 1:22 reminds readers that mere acknowledgement of the truth of Scripture falls short and actions must accompany this acknowledgement. The New Testament scholar, D. Edmond Hiebert argues the epistle of James can divide into six distinct sections after the introductory remarks in 1:1-18. Each of these sections exists as one of six tests James to show the genuine nature of faith in an individual believer’s life.<sup>48</sup> In fact, R. C. H. Lenski states the central purpose of the epistle of James “[deals] with the Christian faith, and [shows] how this faith should be genuine, true,

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<sup>46</sup> Steve J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: a Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 33.

<sup>47</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 148.

<sup>48</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: The Non-Pauline Epistles and Revelation*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 54.

active, living, [and] fruitful.”<sup>49</sup> With this construction and purpose in mind, the text bearing weight on the current discussion found in James 1:19 – 27, which Hiebert refers to as “Faith Tested by Its Attitude Toward the Word of God”, serves as the context the reader must address.<sup>50</sup>

As James progresses through this section regarding the manner in which Christians should receive the Word of God, his argument culminates in a simple and straightforward command, “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas 1:22). James uses the word “ποιηταὶ” or *doer*, connoting an inextricable connection between the hearing and doing as opposed to a derivative of the word *to obey*, which would denote a choice.<sup>51</sup> Believers do have a choice to adhere to the Word or not, but James’ construction seems to intimate the close connection between the “hearing” and the “doing” of the Word. John Painter and David deSilva declare, “Essential to James and to this teaching is the connection between hearing and doing (cf. Matt 7:24 – 27). To hear without doing is to be guilty of self-deception.”<sup>52</sup> This construction shows that James would see participating in the former and not the latter as strange, at best. James gives an illustration of the invalid nature of “hearing” and not “doing” in the following verses.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), 538.

<sup>50</sup> Hiebert, *An Introduction*, 54, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the Greek New Testament*, Vol. VI, 479.

<sup>52</sup> John Painter and David A. deSilva, *James and Jude in paideia: Commentaries On the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 73.

<sup>53</sup> James’ command clearly includes “hearing” as a part of the believer’s duty. Therefore, the believer must be exposed to the proclaimed Word, but the emphasis being made here is that James finds not living out what has been heard most unacceptable.

James 1:23 – 24 gives an illustration regarding the illogical nature of hearing the Word of God but not actively applying it to life. He declares the one who hears only “is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror” (Jas 1:23b). Donald Burdick asserts, “The Greek verb *κατανοέω* does not describe a hasty glance, as some have suggested. Instead, it refers to careful observation. So the man carefully studies his face and becomes thoroughly familiar with its features.”<sup>54</sup> In this example, this man has heard the Word of God and knows his current state, or “his natural face” (v. 23) and exactly what God requires of him in light of His Word. However, James portrays this man as one who “goes away and at once forgets what he was like” (v. 24). The reader should see apparent irony as James declares the ludicrous nature of a man looking at himself in a mirror, becoming intimately acquainted with the details of his face, and then turning away and immediately forgetting what he looks like. As Clinton Arnold, Craig Blomberg, and Mariam Kamell state, “[This] illustration is [a] deliberately ridiculous analogy, for no one in their right mind who examines their image that closely would then utterly neglect the flaws they discover and instantly forget whatever they had seen.”<sup>55</sup> Burdick argues further, “Listening to truth is not an end in itself anymore than gazing at one’s face in a mirror is an end in itself. The purpose of listening to truth is to act upon it.”<sup>56</sup> Finally, this section ends with a description; “But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (v. 25). James describes this righteous believer as a “ποιητῆς

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<sup>54</sup> Donald W. Burdick, “JAMES,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 175.

<sup>55</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, Craig L. Blomberg, and Mariam J. Kamell, *James in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary On the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 91.

<sup>56</sup> Burdick, 175.

ἔργου”, or literally, “a doer of work.”<sup>57</sup> The believer who does this, as James explains, is one whose knowledge of God’s Word effects his daily life and evidences this through the subsequent “work” he does.<sup>58</sup>

Using an expanded expository ministry to immerse the average church member in a specific text over the span of one week gives an opportunity to develop into an in-depth “hearer” of the Word. The emphasis on application and ultimate accountability comes through weekly small groups reviewing and applying the sermon, granting the immediate need to be a “doer,” as well.

#### Matthew 7:13 – 27: Jesus’ Teaching as a Foundation for Application

Jesus brings the discussion regarding application to an ultimate conclusion in Matthew 7:24 – 27 by showing the distinction between eternal life and condemnation rests in the applying of the Word of God. In Matthew 7:24 – 27 Jesus declares His expectation regarding the truth of God’s Word and His followers’ subsequent actions. The larger context of the passage rests within Jesus’ so called “Sermon On the Mount” found in its entirety in the book of Matthew chapters 5-7. Matthew 7:24 – 27 records some of the last words Jesus speaks in this sermon and, as one should expect, refer to obedience and application of the truth He has just spoken.<sup>59</sup> Beginning in 7:13 – 23 Jesus gives the reader two illustrations and one straightforward teaching regarding the distinction between true and false followers of Christ.

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<sup>57</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the Greek New Testament*, Vol. VI, 479.

<sup>58</sup> George M. Stulac, *James* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 78.

<sup>59</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: a Commentary On the Greek Text* (Bletchley: Eerdmans, 2005), 342-43.

The first example Jesus gives speaks of two paths with two entrances leading to two destinations and two levels of prominence (Matt 7:13-14). Jesus declares an easy way, an extremely popular and wide gate with destruction as its end (v. 13), the other stands as the exact opposite being a narrow gate, a hard way, leading to life and not well-travelled (v. 14). These two verses give evidence of Jesus' belief in the distinction between these two "ways." In the same way Jesus' example in 7:15 – 20 distinguishes between two trees—namely, those bearing good fruit and those bearing bad fruit (v. 17). In fact, twice in these few verses Jesus proclaims, "You will recognize them by their fruits" (v. 16, 20), thereby showing the clear tie between inward belief and outward character and action. In these first two examples Jesus sees the way a man walks and the fruit he produces as the distinguishing factor in a true follower of Christ.<sup>60</sup>

The next three verses (v. 21 – 23) give the reader a stark reminder that cognitive knowledge of God and doing things in His name do not necessarily evidence true faith. Grant Osborne states succinctly, "[A] claim [to know Christ] is not enough if lives do not reflect that claim."<sup>61</sup> Those who stand before Him proclaim Him Lord, displaying knowledge of Him (v. 21, 22) even declaring certain works as enough to gain His grace. However, in two separate phrases Jesus reveals the false followers' problem. First, in an opposite statement He declares, "[T]he one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" will gain eternal life, therefore, those who cry "Lord, Lord" are people who have not done the will of the Father.<sup>62</sup> Second, in His pronouncement of judgment Jesus refers

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<sup>60</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 273.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>62</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 254.

to these people as “workers of lawlessness” (v. 23), which reveals the truth: these people live a life outside of God’s design. These men and women standing before Jesus may claim the name of Christ, even having some knowledge of Him, but live lives contrary to God’s revealed will and outside of God’s law. These people have heard the truth about God and yet have not applied it to themselves so as to see a change in their character or action in their daily life.

Matthew 7:24 – 27 offers the related and clear understanding Jesus desires of all those exposed to His teaching. Jesus begins in verse 24, connecting to the previous teachings with “Πᾶς οὖν”, literally translated, “Everyone, therefore,” evidencing the following as the desired outcome of Jesus’ teaching.<sup>63</sup> He then gives an example of two men, one wise and one foolish, building homes. Jesus describes the first man as wise or prudent because he “hears these words of [Jesus] and does them” (v. 24). However, Jesus pronounces the second man “μωρῶν,” foolish or stupid, simply because he “heard these words of [Jesus] and [did] not do them.”<sup>64</sup> The choice of the word “μωρός” is important because this word in the LXX describes the people of Israel when they act in contrast to what they know about their God (Deut 32:6). In the NT “μωρός” often contrasts with wisdom (φρόνιμος). Foolishness often denotes not only simply stupidity, but ignorance of and willful rebellion against God and His will.<sup>65</sup> In this passage, and the previous related verses, Jesus clearly teaches regarding eternal life and true belief. However, ultimately

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<sup>63</sup> D. A. Carson, “MATTHEW,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 194.

<sup>64</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and Jr. William White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: W.E. Vine, ed. Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 246.

<sup>65</sup> William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), s.v. “μωρός.”

He summarizes all of this teaching by distinguishing true and false followers by those who hear and apply the Word of God to their daily lives and those who do not.<sup>66</sup>

The accountability in regard to study and application in an expanded expository ministry seeks to create wise followers of Christ who hear the Word of God over time and intuitively recognize the need to apply and obey His Word in their daily lives. By spending focused time hearing and applying the Word of God and then holding one another accountable, an expanded expository ministry seeks to serve the purpose of growing believers who both know and do the Word of the Lord.

### **Humanity's Need to Hear**

As expressed previously, expository preaching remains genuine inasmuch as it originates from and binds to the text of Scripture, and Scripture itself testifies of its divine origin (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Humanity cannot know God apart from His revelation of Himself through the Scriptures. Human beings can know certain things concerning God—namely, His attributes and many aspects of His character (Rom 1:20). Essentially, man can know about God, but a personal relationship with God could “never have been conceived by man alone apart from God’s special, verbal revelation.”<sup>67</sup>

Man exists to glorify and know God both personally and intimately.<sup>68</sup> God’s relationship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden displays this truth (Gen 1 – 2). That relationship, broken by the fall, means man needs to return to the intimacy with God

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<sup>66</sup> D. A. Carson, “MATTHEW,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 194.

<sup>67</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 123.

<sup>68</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, ed. Jeff Purswell (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 188.

he once had and this needed return can only come through the revelation of God in His Word.<sup>69</sup> Each time the preacher proclaims the Word of God, the people have the option of either submitting to the Lord and being conformed to His image, thereby restoring their relationship, or rebelling and standing under divine judgment. Al Mohler concludes:

Preaching is therefore always a matter of life and death, [t]hat's what was at stake. We have the Bible, and if we truly believe [the] Bible to be the written Word of God—the perfect, divinely inspired revelation of God—then expositional preaching is the only option available to us.<sup>70</sup>

Man stands before God as a sinner under His just condemnation (Rom 1:18) and in need of grace to satisfy His wrath. That grace can only be found in Jesus Christ, and the only avenue by which one can come into contact with Jesus Christ is through the revelation of Scripture. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states:

The moment you consider man's real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the Church is to preach and to proclaim this, to show man's real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it.<sup>71</sup>

A declaration explaining the revelation of God fully answers man's great need and expositional preaching gives that answer. Brian Chapell aptly states, "Preaching that is true to Scripture converts, convicts, and eternally changes the souls of men and women."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Arnold Hustad (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 52.

<sup>70</sup> Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 63 – 64.

<sup>71</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 127.

## CHAPTER 3

### MINISTRY FOUNDATIONS: SMALL GROUPS AND APPLICATION IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Believers should see Bible study as an indispensable practice. Greg Ogden states, “Because the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the uniquely inspired revelation of God and the standard of truth in all matters of faith and practice, a portion of each day should be set aside to read, study and meditate on God’s Word. The Bible is to the spirit what food is to the body.”<sup>1</sup> Bible study can offer dedicated time during which the student can interact with the text of Scripture on a regular basis. Small group Bible study designed to study the sermon text from the worship service can provide more in-depth study of the text. This small group study of the sermon text provides for more interaction and accountability with the application of the text.

Sermon based small groups call for a discussion of preaching and application within the local church. Expository preaching serves as a vehicle particularly suited for biblical application in a small group setting. Haddon Robinson states, “A text cannot mean what it has not meant. I cannot make [a] passage mean something today that it did not mean in principle in the ancient world. That’s why I have to do exegesis. I have to be

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 39.

honest with the text before I can come over to the contemporary world.”<sup>2</sup> Appropriate application of a biblical text requires proper exegesis and expository preaching requires good exegesis. Exegesis and application from the expository sermon provide a good curriculum of study for the sermon-based small groups.

### **The Importance of Bible Study**

Bible Study serves an important purpose in the life of the Christian and the Church because of the nature of the Bible. God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind in a special manner through His written Word. Francis Chan and Mark Beuving declare,

From beginning to end, God is the subject of the Scriptures. Everything in this book is God centered. Genesis begins with a God who existed alone and then spoke all things into existence. Revelation ends with this same God reigning eternally over all that He created. Every book in between reveals His character and attributes by narrating His sovereign actions throughout history.<sup>3</sup>

The Word of God grants people the ability to know God and to understand His will for life (1 Pet 1:3-11). Lawrence Richards states, “[In] the Word of God the Spirit of God has revealed the true nature of the world we live in, the true nature of man and of God, the ultimate consummation of history, the pattern of relationships, and response to God and to life which corresponds with ‘the way things really are.’”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Bible declares believers should grow more each day into the image of Christ, and the Word of God alone portrays this image (Rom 8:29). Man has a complete inability to know God in salvation without God revealing Himself to mankind. The Apostle Paul states God’s invisible attributes have been made evident in His created order (Rom 1:19-20).

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<sup>2</sup> E. Rowell with Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” *Leadership* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 21-27.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2012), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, *Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 29.

However, Paul then declares mankind, because of refusal to acknowledge God and intent to sin, has been blinded from seeing these things (Rom 1:21). People must engage God through His self-revelation and His Word. The nature and role of God's Word makes systematic study essential for the community of faith in order to grow in knowledge and faith in God.

### **Essentials of a Good Bible Study**

A good, small group Bible study focuses on the Word of God. In fact, Kent Hughes pointedly states, "You must remember this: You can never have a Christian mind without...the Scriptures...because *you cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know*. If you are filled with God's Word, your life can then be informed and directed by God...The way to a Christian mind is through God's Word!"<sup>5</sup> This focus of God's Word involves presentation, discussion, and application of a biblical text.

The need for a systematic study of God's Word through a small group depends upon good understanding and application. Geoffrey Squires believes in the importance those involved in Bible study having the opportunity "to follow, grasp or make sense of content in a way that then allows them to work with, re-construct or apply it in some fashion. And this understanding enables them to internalize it, to make it their own. Interaction is the key to this process."<sup>6</sup> Interaction requires a good study plan utilizing good learning techniques to engage participants. This kind of engagement will lead to an internalization of God's Word. Good Bible study must involve some form of personal application to life leading to becoming more like Jesus (Rom 8:29; 12:2). Bill Donahue

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Squires, *Trouble-Shooting Your Teaching: a Step-by-step Guide to Analysing and Improving Your Practice* (Sterling, VA: Routledge, 2003), 30.

and Russ Robinson state, “The goal is what John Ortberg describes as a “well-ordered heart,” a heart that is organized around what Jesus would think, say, and do in our place. We venture boldly beyond the realm of a well-informed student or a well-understood self to develop a well-ordered heart, a heart being transformed into Christ’s image.”<sup>7</sup> This kind of transformation requires an application of God’s Word. John Broadus declares, “As illustration is the servant of all, application is the master of all. [We are to be] always moving within the purpose of making truth vitally effective.”<sup>8</sup> Application of God’s Word can make a direct impact on a person’s life.

### **A Rationale for Sermon-Based Small Groups**

#### **Good for Learning**

The practice of spending more time in a particular biblical text or theological concept is particularly suited, and even integral, to the sermon based small group model. Studying a specific text over a period of a week in a small group setting can help students have a more in-depth understanding of the Word. Tony Merida and Nate Akin, of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, observe, “We would rather our people dig deep into one particular text over the course of the week (and a book since we do exposition over the time span of a sermon series through say Ephesians) rather than several texts from different parts of the Bible. We think they will retain more by diving into one section of scripture.”<sup>9</sup> Spending more time in a certain text or on a specific theological truth will create an opportunity for greater retention of the information discussed. Mark

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 77.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 210.

<sup>9</sup> Tony Merida and Nathan Akin, emailed to author, July 22, 2013.

Howell asserts, “The key advantage [of sermon based small groups] is probably that they do allow further discussion of the pastor’s message. In a dialogue environment, everyone is able to ask the questions they wanted to ask on Sunday.”<sup>10</sup> Learning in a small group setting with dialogue including questions, testimonies, and references carries the possibility of greater internalization of God’s Word.

### Good for Accountability

Small group engagement effectively promotes accountability. Donahue and Robinson assert, “If you receive something from God’s word [and] then open up to trusted sisters or brothers, you will find that those friends can act as permanent mirrors. They will hold you accountable to keep your eyes on the reflection God revealed—even when you’d rather look away.”<sup>11</sup> Interacting and sharing with the same small group of people over an extended period of time provides the learner with a catalyst to appropriate the learned truths into life. John Wesley asserted that small group accountability serves as “[t]he primary purpose” intended “to support members’ *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God’s *grace*.”<sup>12</sup> The intimacy inherent in small groups, as opposed to larger classes or even congregations, allows for trust, the sharing of personal aspects in an individual’s life, and mutual accountability. Thom Rainer succinctly states:

Small groups also help develop deeper levels of trust that help participants share. Much of what takes place in Sunday School tends to be abstract. We can study the authorship of Hebrews and the rebellion of the Israelites without ever seriously

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Howell, “Sermon-Based Small Groups,” Mark Howell Live, entry posted October 12, 2009, <http://www.markhowelllive.com/sermon-based-small-groups/> (accessed July 25, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Donahue and Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 212.

considering where we are with the Jesus. The small group has us developing intimacy and sharing; this can be life changing.<sup>13</sup>

### Good for Community

The aspect of community within the congregation of believers should serve as a goal for the local church. Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson and Eric Geiger observe, “The community that believers will enjoy forever will be perfect. The community we experience now is a reflection of this ultimate and everlasting community: therefore, it must be savored, nurtured, fed, and invested in.”<sup>14</sup> Church community reflects the future and eternal community and deserves emphasis. The church can emphasize community through small groups within the body of believers.

Tony Merida and Nate Akin state:

[The] purpose of our groups is to experience Gospel and Community by gathering together around the Scriptures. We often say at IDC we only have two things to offer you: Gospel and Community. Our in home small groups are a way to intentionally build this in. And these groups have excelled in this; I would say community is one of the stronger aspects of our church life. However, we do sermon-based because we don’t just want community for community sake. Instead, we want to sit under the authority of the Word and have it shape our community life and mission.<sup>15</sup>

Merida and Akin believe small groups offer the added benefit of producing not only community in the small group but unity throughout the congregation. Mark Howell asserts, “A sermon-based strategy encourages one conversation among the congregation’s

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<sup>13</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: B&H), 293—94.

<sup>14</sup> Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson and Eric Geiger, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 62.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Merida and Nathan Akin, emailed to author, July 22, 2013.

adult participants.”<sup>16</sup> The sermon-based model of small group ministry brings an entire congregation around a common text and teaching, resulting in a more unified vision and purpose. Josh King, of Sachse’s Church in Sachse, Texas, asserts, “Primarily [our purpose for using sermon based small groups is] unity...this approach is a far better method for keeping the church on task and united around one theme.”<sup>17</sup> Small groups can promote effectively the building of community among the people of the congregation.

### Good for Growth

Small groups create a path for growth in the church by offering an avenue for believers to grow spiritually and providing an opportunity for easy assimilation of new people. Carl George argues, “If Christian churches are to receive the harvest of souls that we believe God is calling to enter His kingdom, it will happen only because churches have reorganized their structures. They must be large enough to make a difference and yet small enough to care.”<sup>18</sup> Small groups offer connectivity for church members allowing for local congregations to grow larger. Small group design encourages assimilation of new members and provides training for member involvement and leadership in the work of a church. George identifies these benefits of small groups as foundational in the church’s work of evangelism, assimilation, and leadership development.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Howell, “An Analysis of the Sermon Based Small Group Strategy,” Mark Howell Live, entry posted June 26, 2013, <http://www.markhowelllive.com/an-analysis-of-the-sermon-based-small-group-strategy/> (accessed July 25, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Josh King, emailed to author, July 18, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1991), 23.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

A person needs a connecting point to become involved in a church. In his work

*The Book of Church Growth*, Thom Rainer states:

We are told that involvement in ministry and the development of relationships are critical for a person to develop a sense of belonging. Both ministry and relationship development takes place in the small group. Often before declaring official church membership, a person is well assimilated into the church through a small group.<sup>20</sup>

Sermon based small groups help participants to become involved in the church through the preaching ministry of the church. Participants of small groups find unanimity with others as the sermon focuses people in the same direction. These sermon based small groups promote individual spiritual, relational, and congregational growth.

## **The Role of Expository Preaching in Changed Lives**

### **The Role and Design of Preaching**

Expository preaching, simply based on its designation, must consist of the preacher, by necessity, doing responsible exegesis to ascertain the human author's message and intention for his original hearers. Robert Thomas states:

The distinguishing mark of expository preaching [is] the biblical interpretation communicated through the sermon. The expositor must teach his audience the meaning of the text intended by its author and understood by its original recipients [if] the explanation of what the author meant is missing, so is the heart of Bible exposition.<sup>21</sup>

The preacher cannot truly determine the message for the contemporary hearer if he does not understand the original message. Furthermore, Azurdia argues:

<sup>20</sup> Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 294.

<sup>21</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "Exegesis and Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 137—38.

Careful, meditative, and painstaking exegesis must be the foundation for an expository ministry. All doctrine and theology with its attendant application must be the result of a literal, grammatical, historical, contextual, redemptive comprehension of the sacred text. Any attempt at preaching apart from this *a priori* commitment is to undercut the very substance of proclamation.<sup>22</sup>

Good expositional preaching requires the proper exegesis and explanation of the text in its original context.

The role of exposition remains necessary in expository preaching simply by definition. Preaching negating the need to “expose” the meaning of the text will lead to short term remedies overlooking the long term and deep rooted issues facing church and culture. Haddon Robinson pointedly states, “Yet when a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers no longer with a word from God but only with another word from men. Therefore most modern preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it.”<sup>23</sup> Expository preachers must “expose” the truth of the text in a manner that impacts hearers.

### The Importance of Expository Preaching

God has chosen preaching to declare His truth to His people. For the advancement of the gospel and the cause of the Kingdom of God, a church must hold the preaching of God’s Word in high regard. Ray Stedman declares, “The greatest contribution the church can make today to a troubled and frightened generation is to return to a consistent and relevant preaching of the Word of God. And it is not so much preaching from the Bible that is needed, as it is preaching the Bible itself—in other

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<sup>22</sup> Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 18.

words, expository preaching!”<sup>24</sup> The preaching of the Word of God marks the place where a church must start the gospel mission. Mark Dever argues:

If a healthy church is a congregation that increasingly displays the character of God as His character is revealed in His Word, the most obvious place to begin building a healthy church is to call Christians to listen to God’s Word. God’s Word is the source of all life and health. It’s what feeds, develops, and preserves a church’s understanding of the gospel itself.<sup>25</sup>

Expository preaching and the extended study of the sermon text faces the challenge of softening the message to match cultural expectations. Paul warns his readers in 2 Timothy 4:3 – 4 of the world’s infatuation with soft and palatable “preaching.” Paul states, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” Churches need expository preaching to keep the focus on God’s desires rather than secular desires. Tom Ascol argues:

We need a renewed confidence in preaching the Bible today. What we desperately need are men who are committed to preaching the Word; men who unhesitatingly believe that God still uses the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe; men who are willing to pay the price to study and discipline themselves to become effective, faithful expositors of the Word of God.<sup>26</sup>

This renewal has found momentum among young evangelical pastors. Al Mohler states, “[A] large number of younger evangelical pastors today are unabashedly committed to biblical exposition. Indeed this generation of young ministers, along with others making

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<sup>24</sup> Ray C. Stedman, “Declaring God’s Word Through Expository Preaching,” in *Inside the Sermon: Thirteen Preachers Discuss Their Methods of Preparing Messages*, ed. Richard Allen Bodey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 201.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 63.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas K. Ascol, “Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: The Need for Expository Preaching,” *Founders Journal* (2000), <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj39/editorial.html> (accessed March 31, 2011).

their way through college and seminary education, may point toward a renaissance of biblical preaching in coming years.”<sup>27</sup>

Although biblical exposition that impacts people in a clear and assertive manner may never fall into the category of “popular,” exposition must rise to the status it once held within the church. Ted Traylor argues, “Only one thing will replace great preaching, and that is greater preaching. For many in the world today preaching has gone into eclipse. It needs to be restored.”<sup>28</sup> Traylor gave a challenge to preachers to raise the standards of expository preaching. People need to hear the Word of God in a powerful demonstration of preaching. Ray Stedman declares, “The greatest contribution the church can make today to a troubled and frightened generation is to return to a consistent and relevant preaching of the Word of God. And it is not so much preaching from the Bible that is needed, as it is preaching the Bible itself—in other words, expository preaching!”<sup>29</sup>

#### Preaching and Application within the Local Church

The application of an expository message allows the hearer to see the timeless truths of Scripture as those truths intersect daily circumstances. The expositor should seek to cross the cultural gap of ancient to modern by applying the truth of the text to the contemporary day. However, God does not necessarily need the preacher to mention a particular application for the text to impact a hearer’s current situation. The usefulness of

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<sup>27</sup> Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 15 – 16 .

<sup>28</sup> Ted Traylor, “Jesus Came Preaching,” *Preaching* 20, no. 1 (July-August 2004): 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ray C. Stedman, “Declaring God’s Word Through Expository Preaching,” in *Inside the Sermon: Thirteen Preachers Discuss Their Methods of Preparing Messages*, ed. Richard Allen Bodey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 201.

the Word of God is not bound by time and, furthermore, a human preacher could never expect to know the thoughts and situations taking place in the minds and lives of each listener. Greg Heisler rightly states, “Spirit-led preaching also recognizes that the Holy Spirit is the one who ultimately applies the Word to the deepest parts of a listener’s soul, a place we certainly cannot reach with our finite limitations as preachers.”<sup>30</sup> Preachers face a tension in application as they engage in constant battle to see the lives of their listeners changed by the exposition of the Word of God. While preachers can control the nature of their preaching, the effect of this preaching does not depend upon the ingenuity and truthfulness of the deliverer. Michael Fabarez declares, “Surely [Satan] would settle for anything short of your biblical sermon affecting permanent transformation in people’s lives. That is the goal of your preaching, and it is a goal beyond your reach. God must do it.”<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the Holy Spirit applies the text of Scripture in a far greater way than any human expositor. The power to change lives through preaching exists outside of the preacher and lies in the work of the Holy Spirit with the Word. Jerry Vines asserts, “But we must also be keenly aware that we do not preach in our own skill and energies. The Holy Spirit powerfully applies the Word when a preacher preaches.”<sup>32</sup>

Having a robust understanding of the Spirit’s role in applying the sermon does not grant the preacher an opportunity to ignore personal responsibility for the sermon. Terry Carter, J. Scott Duval, and J. Daniel Hays state:

Preaching involves more than just giving out biblical information. Preaching connects biblical truth to people’s lives in a way that changes them...In your

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<sup>30</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 71.

<sup>32</sup> Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 102.

sermons always strive to show the biblical connections to life today and to explain how applications of biblical truth can be incorporated into the lives of people.<sup>33</sup>

The preacher has the responsibility of connecting the truth of God's Word with clear application. Greg Heisler argues, "What we are doing in application is displaying how the truth of the Word of God shows up in real life. So we paint pictures of what this truth looks like in real life. We give examples. We ground the truth in specifics and stay away from the abstract."<sup>34</sup> In biblical preaching the preacher will attend to the direct application of the Word of God to his listeners. Mohler asserts, "Under a ministry of authentic Christian preaching, the Word is applied. I do not mean that it is applied in the sense that the preacher tries to find some way to make the text relevant. Rather, it is applied in that the text is directly addressed to persons in the congregation."<sup>35</sup> The preacher's role in application should be to show the relevant nature of the Word of God to the congregant's life thereby creating an opportunity for the truth of Scripture to intersect with the listener's everyday existence. Alistair Begg states:

The preacher's task is to declare what God has said, explain the meaning, and establish the implications so that no one will mistake its relevance. True exposition must have some prophetic dimension that leaves the listener in no doubt that what he has heard is a living word from God and creates in him at least the sneaking suspicion that the Author knows him.<sup>36</sup>

The preacher has a distinct role in the application of the text to the life of the hearer.

Lacking the ability to effect change, the preacher carries the responsibility to

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<sup>33</sup> Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Preparing, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 117.

<sup>34</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 123.

<sup>35</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., et al., *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 13 – 14.

<sup>36</sup> Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God's Glory (Today's Issues)*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 29.

communicate the truth of Scripture and display the impact the Word of God should have on daily thinking.

The sermon based small group adds a distinct nuance to the use and impact of application in preaching by carrying the applicatory truths made during the sermon into the group's weekly discussion and accountability. As has been discussed previously, sermon based small groups offer a clear opportunity for accountability within a trusted group of people. Larry Osborne states that "[A] powerful advantage that small groups can bring is a marked increase in the practice of spiritual disciplines. That's because a small group takes our good intentions and puts them on our calendar."<sup>37</sup>

Sermon based small groups grant the preacher the opportunity to make extremely practical application that can turn into discussion topics in the individual groups. Due to the discussion format inherent within small groups, any application the preacher may make in the sermon may find a myriad of different manifestations as each participant, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, applies the truths to their own unique life situations. The ministry of expository preaching, with the addition of sermon based small groups, can multiply the application potential of a sermon. Expository preaching and sermon based small groups combine to serve to advance the growth of God's people through an extremely personal, practical, and prolonged interaction with the weekly sermon.

### Conclusion

Before the interaction of adults in the church with the application of the Sunday morning sermon could be examined the application aspect of the sermon itself had to be addressed. The change made in the minister's preaching was to change the individual points in the Sunday morning message from simple truth statements (i.e., "Jesus is Lord")

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<sup>37</sup> Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 55.

to application oriented statements (i.e., “We Must Acknowledge Jesus as Lord Each Day”). Application is then moved from simply being an addendum occurring immediately preceding the invitation and becomes an integral part of the entire sermon. Furthermore, the minister has always stated a “main idea” throughout the sermon; however, the change was to make the “main idea” application oriented as well. The focus became always being certain the Central Idea of the Sermon (C.I.S.), which was application oriented, existed in perfect harmony and derived from the Central Idea of the Text (C.I.T.). Making the C.I.S. application oriented was intended to help those in the congregation to understand, whether deductively or inductively, that in all of Scripture the Holy Spirit is driving those reading to either appropriate a truth or take action.

When seeking to address the problem of biblical illiteracy, regarding both its breadth and depth, the minister had to keep in mind, first and foremost, the proper information had to be disseminated and exposed from each text of Scripture each week. The approach most conducive to addressing the issues of both breadth and depth, which has already been discussed, is the systematic exposition of Scripture seeking to preach the full counsel of God. By preaching through the entire book of 1 Thessalonians, verse by verse, every major point in the book was able to be addressed, thereby enabling the congregation with the opportunity to become literate in that particular book.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the issue of the breadth of biblical illiteracy, which was addressed by the minister’s focus on verse by verse exposition, the issue of the depth of biblical illiteracy was confronted through the interaction between the application aspect of the preaching

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<sup>38</sup> It is understood that this particular project, by itself, could never cure actual biblical illiteracy. However, it is also believed that repeating this project numerous times through different books, sections, genres and doctrines could significantly decrease the actual biblical illiteracy of those listening over an extended period of time.

event and the accountability that took place in the sermon based small groups as they met each week. During the sermon each week the people were given, along with all of the application oriented points and C.I.S., what was termed a *Real World Application* (R.W.A.). The R.W.A. was an extremely practical action to take which was derived from the truth taught in the C.I.T. This action was given in the written material each participant received and they were able to review it and write down their thoughts as they engaged it. Again, the idea behind this action was to show the people the direct relation between the Word of God and the import it was to have on their daily lives.

The correlation between the application in the sermon and the accountability encountered in the sermon based small groups was found most directly in the R.W.A. The small group leaders were instructed each week to engage their groups in discussion based on the R.W.A. The leaders asked questions directly related to everyone's participation in the R.W.A. or lack thereof which was intended to incite discussion as to the outcome of the member's involvement. This particular action was intended to help the small group members begin to see the expectation on each Christian to engage with the truth of Scripture and not simply hear it and not take action. By taking these particular actions in relation to application, both in preaching and in the small groups, the minister was able to address both the breadth and depth of biblical illiteracy.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXECUTION: AN EXPANDED EXPOSITORY MINISTRY AT ARLINGTON PARK BAPTIST CHURCH

As with any sermon series the author began by doing exegesis of the entire book of 1 Thessalonians. From March 11, 2013 – April 19, 2013, exegesis involved engaging with the original Greek and addressing all of the nuances and exegetical questions asked of any text. After arriving at an understanding of the meaning of the text of 1 Thessalonians, the next step involved separating the entire book into ten sermons.<sup>1</sup> Next, the author addressed each sermon individually by developing a text-driven, application-oriented outline, allowing each individual text to determine the structure of the outlines. After the completion on the outlines, each sermon outline received an application-oriented C.I.S. and an R.W.A. This process of developing the type of expository sermon needed for implementation represented the most tedious part of the ministry project.

The next major step in the ministry project included the developing, , typing, and formatting of the curriculum for the small group sessions. Development of the small group discussion curriculum and devotional guide took almost a month of work, from April 21 to May 11. written. The curriculum primarily focused on the application-oriented outline of the sermon preached each correlating Sunday morning. This first portion of the curriculum contained fill-in-the blanks to be completed while the

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<sup>1</sup> One could definitely preach more sermons through the book of 1 Thessalonians; however, the Ministry Project only allowed for a certain number of weeks.

congregants listened to the sermon on Sunday or a Podcast of the sermon during the following week. These fill-in-the-blank outlines assisted the participants in listening during the Sunday sermon and provided the help needed for the individual participant and the small group to engage the text. The curriculum contained a devotional guide written by the project coordinator and based on quotations from great men and women of the faith. The project coordinator carefully selected the quotations to relate to the C.I.S. and help the participants to see the universal application of the truths of the sermon texts. The participants received instructions to interact each day with the biblical text from the sermon and the quote from history and, then, to pray and meditate on the R.W.A. The participants received encouragement to memorize a text of Scripture in an additional effort to engage the sermon. These texts came from different sections of the Bible addressing the same principles covered in the C.I.S. to display the unity of Scripture in its entirety. The small groups reviewed these memory texts each week. This last sentence is too complex and wordy so I re-worded above!

The next stage engaged the participants for the first time in the implementation of the ministry project. The project coordinator led a sample small group session focusing on a passage in Acts for the participants of the three small groups involved in the project on May 12. The participants attending this orientation numbered forty-eight, represented both male and female, and ranged in age from eighteen years old to eighty-one years of age. This session consisted of introducing a sample lesson and walking the participants through the process of listening, study, devotion, and group discussion through the Real World Application. The project coordinator intended for the sample lesson to introduce the method and process by which the small groups would engage the sermon each week.

The participants walked through the process learning the method of engagement and reasons for each section of the process. This experience enable the participants to understand both how to approach the process and why each component was included. Group leaders needed No additional training because the discussion-based format of the curriculum allowed leaders to serve as facilitators rather than lecturers or class plan designers. Leaders and participants received the same study materials to facilitate good participation.

The actual small group studies began on May 19<sup>th</sup> when the project coordinator preached the first sermon. The participants received an individual copy of the ten-week curriculum, during the small group hour prior to the Sunday morning worship service to begin preparing for small group session occurring the following week after the first sermon.

The small group participants received the first test at this first meeting on May 19 before the study session began. This test included questions related to specific knowledge regarding the book of 1 Thessalonians, attitudes toward particular aspects to be covered during the sessions, and actions regarding future applications covered in the study. The project coordinator designed an answer scale of 1 to 10 for responses to gauge the answers for consideration. These answers served as a base line for the next two tests enabling the measurements to show any changes in the participants.

Keeping detailed attendance records of each small group member's participation during the entire ministry project served an important purpose for the project. Each of the three small groups received a range of numbers to be assigned individually by the small group leader to identify each participant throughout the process. During the process, from

May 26 to July 28, the small group leaders kept attendance records. When the participants took three different tests during the process, the leaders identified the participants by number, sex, and age. This action served to keep the data collected anonymous to avoid any manipulation of data. Furthermore, the attendance records underscored the importance of attending the small group sessions. The project coordinator believed the integrity of the process could be compromised if attendance became intermittent. Consistent attendance guaranteed the probability of determining progress by the participants and project effectiveness.

The project coordinator utilized the church website to project important media elements to accompany the worksheets. A dedicated website page appeared for the first week posting lesson tools for small group session preparation. This practice occurred every week until the completion of the small group sessions.

New paragraph: The media elements included several different tools to aid the participants in the study and preparation for small group discussion. The first tool given consisted of an exegetical outline of the passage for that week showing the relationship between the clauses in the passage and explanatory notes regarding the original language when beneficial.. The project coordinator provided the outlines for the purpose of guiding those interested in a deeper understanding of the relationships between different clauses and sections within the passage. This information offered a better understanding of the meaning of 1 Thessalonians as a whole and facilitated a deeper level of engagement among the participants.

The website provided a second tool called a meaning-based translation of the text preached from 1 Thessalonians. This translation tool came from the minister's own

translation, based on the meaning of the original language and given to portray the full meaning of each clause in the text as well as the text within its appropriate context as a whole. This translation served to give the participants the opportunity to understand the full import of the original language without having firsthand knowledge of biblical Greek. The project coordinator took into account aspects coming from biblical theology to apply after the fact and to help the participants understand each text in 1 Thessalonians as related to biblical doctrine within the book, the Pauline corpus, and the Bible as a whole. By combining the exegetical outline and the minister's meaning-based translation the participant entered the small group discussion not only with an understanding of the sermon in the previous week's sermon but with an individual understanding derived from personal study.

The third tool given to those involved in the small groups involved a set of discussion questions to be used during the sessions. The small group leaders received instructions to use the discussion questions to promote interaction within the small groups. Each participant had access to all of the discussion questions to allow pre-session preparation with answers and notes to share during their sessions. These discussion questions came from the application-oriented points in the sermon and the C.I.S. giving the participant yet another opportunity to interact with the sermon and inextricably tying the discussion within the groups to the preaching ministry. The group leaders learned during the sample lesson to have a brief overview of the sermon outline, walking through the main points and the C.I.S., and to follow with the discussion questions. The project coordinator had encouraged the leaders to use the discussion questions to guide the session; however, the leaders did not need to feel as though they had to get through every

question when the discussion lingered beneficially on one or two particular questions. The leaders also received advisement to continue discussion beyond the set questions as long as the discussions remained on target with the text.

The last tool uploaded every Monday morning consisted of the downloadable .mp3 of the sermon from the previous day. The project coordinator provided this tool for the purpose of allowing worship service absentees the opportunity to hear the missed sermon or to offer an opportunity for other participants to return to the sermon to grasp the message.

The project coordinator believed, by combining the use of the exegetical outline, the minister's translation, and the audio sermon, the participants would have the opportunity to understand more fully what had been preached. The sermon series and small group sessions, both of which took place on Sunday morning, ran from May 19 to July 28 with the small group sessions beginning the following week of the sermon preached on May 19. This process included ten sermons and ten small group sessions.

The project coordinator administered the second test to all of the participants On August 4, 2013. This test, a post-test, provided the opportunity to determine if any changes occurred in the participants since the first test. The post-test allowed measurements of change in knowledge, attitude, and behavior based on the sermon-based small group process. The project coordinator desired to know if sermon-based small groups could enhance the preaching ministry.

The small group participants received the test again on August 18 to measure the final outcome of the Ministry Project. This test, the same as the first test, served to measure any changes the participants' might demonstrate since the pre-test. The test

focused on knowledge retention and perceived behavior change by the. The project coordinator intended for this test to see whether sermon-based small groups had the effect of helping the participants understand and apply the truth encountered during the Ministry Project.

### **Critical Interaction with the Collected Data**

#### **Addressing Actual Biblical Illiteracy**

At the conclusion of the Ministry Project only twenty-one of the original forty-eight participants, still ranging in age from eighteen to eighty-one and both male and female, took part in the entire process. Therefore, the project coordinator used only the data collected from these twenty-one remaining participants.<sup>2</sup> An interesting pattern appeared in the data compilation concerning right and wrong answers to questions of fact directly related to the sermon series. By comparing the pre-test and the post-test responses the ability of the participants to learn and retain information could be measured. Interestingly, of the twenty-one participants, 52.4 percent missed the exact same question addressing Paul's statement regarding the basis for Christians believing in the resurrection of the dead on the Day of the Lord being the resurrection of Jesus Himself (1 Thess 4:13 – 18). The program coordinator included this truth in the sermon "Our Glorious Christian Hope" on week eight, and the small group outline and discussion questions the following week, under the heading "We Believe in the Resurrection because of His Resurrection." Furthermore, only three of the eleven participants who missed this question were not in attendance on the day the small groups discussed the

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of accuracy in the data collected and reviewed, number eight in all three tests was thrown out due to a change in wording, which changed the meaning of the question substantially, between the Pre-Test and the Post-Test/2 Week Lag Test.

topic. Also, of the eleven participants who missed this question on the second test, ten were from the same two small groups. However, the third small group had only one participant who missed this question.

Another intriguing pattern, which can be seen in the results from the second test, appeared when 33 percent of the participants missed the same question. This question, regarding Paul's teaching of two common evidences of salvation in 1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:5 as affliction and joy, received treatment in the sermon entitled "A Strong Fellowship" and the discussion of questions in small group session four. Of further interest the data revealed that all fourteen participants who missed this particular question came from the same small groups. In fact, in one small group, comprised of six participants, all six participants missed this question and in the other group eight out of the ten participants also missed this question. However, in the third small group, comprised of five participants, the entire group answered correctly. The results indicate the third small group attended to the outline of the sermon and the discussion questions in a more detailed manner enabling these participants to answer correctly on detailed inquiries from the sermon outlines and discussion questions.

One more pattern emerged in relation to a question regarding the origin of a Christian's salvation in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 – 10. The answer to this question received coverage in the sermon entitled "A New Testament Thanksgiving" when the preacher expressly stated that a Christian's call to salvation ultimately comes from God. The data revealed 38 percent of the respondents missed the correct answer on the post-test and of those eight participants who were incorrect; five came from the same small group comprised of six members.

Finally, the overall picture of increase regarding the knowledge gained during the project revealed an interesting and disappointing fact. On the pre-test all twenty-one participants had a combined score of 78.72 percent but on the *post-test* the same group had a combined score of 78.42 percent. No marginal change in the scores occurred. In fact, these two scores posted close enough to indicate no change regarding the participants' knowledge of 1 Thessalonians occurred.

### Addressing Practical Biblical Illiteracy

The project coordinator examined the pre-test, post-test, and two week lag test to determine if changes in behavior through application occurred. All twenty-one participants took part in the three tests. Within this portion of the tests, as would be expected, a substantial amount of change took place between a large percentage of the participant's perceived application of the truths of Scripture and their intended application of the same truths. In fact, four questions showed a substantial increase overall, above the others, averaging all of the participants in this particular point. Also, the project coordinator recognized an increase in every category regarding the particular application of the truths taught during the ministry project with several showing significant increase.

The responses to the first question showed a marked increase in intention regarding how often the participants' verbally shared the Gospel before the study and how often they intended to share after the Ministry Project. This application received attention in the sermon entitled "A New Testament Thanksgiving" from week one and the outline for the small group discussion during the corresponding week. Overall, the participants had a 39 percent increase from their evangelistic activity at the beginning and

their intended activity at the end. Although this number shows a large drive among the participants to be more active in sharing the Gospel, the number derived from analyzing the pre-test and the lag test portrays the perceived difference in personal evangelistic activity among the participants. The participants revealed a 30 percent increase in their actual participation in personal evangelism.

Responses to the second question showed a marked change in the group's attitude toward persecution for their faith in Christ. The responses revealed a recognizable change in intention to live in such a way as to incite this persecution. This application came from the material covered specifically in the sermon entitled "A Strong Fellowship" from week four and in the outline and discussion questions of the corresponding week. Overall the participants showed a 52 percent increase in their desire to live a life that would cause them to receive persecution for their bold faith in Christ. However, while a large percentage increase occurred in those who desired to live their lives completely sold out for Christ, the responses revealed only a 9 percent increase in actual change in activity.

The question regarding the participation of the members in sexual immorality and the desire to improve in their refusal to partake in any sexually immoral activity formed the third question. The project coordinator addressed This application in detailed fashion during the sermon entitled "A Holy People" during week six and in the discussion questions for the small group session. This question had the participants showing a 50 percent desired increase in applying the truth learned. This percentage increase became the largest percentage of increase in intention. The difference in actual application of the truth showed an increase of 16 percent, which does not come close to the intention but provides a noticeable increase in pursuing holiness.

The responses to the fourth question revealed a significant increase in intended application in regard to whether the participant was prepared to meet the Lord either in death or on the Day of the Lord. This particular application received increased attention in the sermons “Our Glorious Christian Hope” and “That Glorious Day” on weeks eight and nine and in the outlines and discussion questions related to the corresponding small group sessions. The data revealed an increase in intention by participants of 48 percent in being prepared to meet the Lord. The actual increase of preparation to meet the Lord dropped from 48 percent to 8 percent revealing some increase and far less than the percentage in the intention category.

All of these statistics evidence the need for more accountability within the small groups to enact the applications simply due to the vast differences between the intentions to fulfill the applications given and the actual living out of the same. However, the one statistic standing out above all the others was the desire to see an increase in personal evangelism and the actual activity of personal soul winning being only a few percentage points different. The project coordinator surmised from the actual increase in application in all provided categories that, in this particular circumstance, this process showed benefit in isolating areas of application from 1 Thessalonians and seeing the change begin to take place in the lives of the participants.

### **Conclusions Concerning the Project Method**

Based on the data, this project produced substantial benefit in efficacy of church members applying the truths heard through the preached Word and discussed in small group sessions. As was seen in the outcome, the intention of those participating far outpaced their actual activity in those applications. However, the intention to improve

and taking steps to accomplish these intentions were apparent. In fact, one related benefit seen is the increase overall of the participants in every application given. The project design created accountability and support in the small groups and offered participants a group of like-minded individuals with which to discuss these life applications.

Another beneficial aspect of this project method involved addressing the inherent need for those involved to be more faithful in attending their small groups as well as the weekly worship service. Of the twenty-one participants, twenty of them were in attendance over 70 percent of the time during the ten-week period of the. While missing a sermon could be remedied easily by listening to the podcast, participants preferred not missing the small group session due to the project design and the impossibility of replicating the small group session in any other form. Therefore, project participants were unlikely to miss the small group sessions if at all possible. The project design also caused the participants to study prior to coming to the small group session in order to participate actively in the actual discussion.

While the entire church did not participate, the participants represented a good number of the members and showed the potential of the project. The benefits included the unanimity of adults studying the same Scripture connected to the previous sermon and the opportunity to engage in application possibilities as a result of the sermon-based study. This project has the potential to unify church members with a singularity of mind and intent beneficial to the church. The preacher has the opportunity to engage members in sustained study from the text-driven sermon leading to a biblical and Christo-centric congregation, provided the preacher maintains the integrity of the expository sermon.

One of the drawbacks to this project method appeared in the time required to prepare the sermon series and produce the curriculum. This particular approach to sermon-based small groups requires an entire sermon series to be prepared in advance or at least partially in advance in the case of longer series. This preparation means the preacher must devote a large portion of time to fully preparing outlines and background material to produce at least three months of session materials. Compounding this expanded preparation time comes the need to produce weekly devotional material and discussion questions.

The rigidity of the program creates another problem for the preacher. Since the small group sessions are based on the sermons written by the pastor, if the pastor misses a Sunday due to illness or some other circumstance a problem could arise. The one filling in for the pastor would have to preach his outline so the people would be able to complete their curriculum for the following week's small group sessions. While this problem could be overcome through specific planning and careful preparation, the rigidity of this particular method could still create an issue. Along these same lines, the rigidity of this particular approach can present a problem for first time guests to get involved in the small group. The unfamiliarity with last week's sermon presents first time visitors with difficulty in engaging in the discussion.

### **Suggestions for Further Implementation**

The first step to implement this strategy on a continuing basis would be more detailed training for leaders on how to lead the small group sessions. By training a set of leaders on how to facilitate the small groups and why the church uses the sermon-based small group would be beneficial. Subsequent to the initial training, further training could

be offered to the small group leaders or training could be provided periodically for potential new leaders for small groups. Mentorships in small groups for potential leaders would serve as a useful tool in expanding the small group program. However, it would be imperative in this mentorship model to make certain the current leader knows how to lead the small group he is leading.

To combat the overwhelming nature of this approach, a preacher could assign the tasks of curriculum development to a Minister of Education, Discipleship, or another staff person. If a local church does not have the staff available to fulfill this developmental role, minister could enlist the help of capable congregants gifted in areas of curriculum design. By enlisting the help of gifted people in the congregation the minister will relieve himself of a large amount of the workload of this particular method. Simultaneously, the minister would be allowing church members to be involved and use their gifts for the growth and advancement of the Kingdom. Also, by enlisting their help the amount of time normally taken to produce this curriculum would be shortened allowing for more creativity in its production. Finally, if the pastor would enlist particular members, who are specifically gifted in certain age groups, then the possibility of age-appropriate curriculum exists. A sermon-based small group model could offer benefits to every age group in the church and strengthen the unity of the church in single-minded devotion to Christ.

## CHAPTER 5

### REFLECTION: PERSONAL IMPACT OF AN EXPANDED EXPOSITORY MINISTRY

#### **Personal Growth and Change**

For many years I felt no real need to make any application in my preaching because I simply saw no way to make personal application to each and every person in the room. However, through the process of this project my preaching itself has actually grown and changed. A noticeable shift has surfaced in the response to my preaching from those the Lord has privileged me to have in the congregation. More people than ever have responded by saying they have never heard the Word of God in such a “real to life” manner. This realization has helped me to see more cogently the need to make clear application and connection with the truth of Scripture and my people. This process has proven itself difficult. However, by always beginning with proper exegesis and then surmising what I want my people to walk away knowing or doing the process took shape. This approach has helped me to begin preaching more text-driven, expository and applicable sermons. While good exegesis remains of paramount importance I had never learned how to do much more beyond proper exegetical work. This program and project caused me to ask difficult questions regarding application and these questions required an

answer. However, in the midst of my newfound appreciation for application, my trust and belief in the Holy Spirit's work in the application process has grown stronger as well because the people have found benefit in the sermons from things I never even said. Therefore, I have grown to understand God does not need me to make application and press into the lives of my hearers, however, He sovereignly chooses to involve me in the process and I must persevere as faithfully as possible.

During this project I aspired to give people the central teaching of a text in the clearest; simplest, one-sentence statement (C.I.S.) I could possibly formulate which emphasized an important truth to me. Producing the truth of a text in a simple phrase drove me to focus intently on the clarity of my statements and explanations during the actual preaching event. Looking back over sermon notes and manuscripts of the past, I have discovered my tendency to make things needlessly complex and, many times, this tendency has manifested itself in the lack of a clear logical pattern to follow within my outlines. As I sought to press the applicatory nature of the Scriptures I found it imperative to make certain each statement clearly and memorably communicated the truth of God's Word to promote retention which would then progress more easily toward personal application. Focusing on clarity and simplicity also has the side effect of connecting with the largest number of people thereby impacting more with the preached Word.

Within this project I realized the need for clarity and simplicity extends to the sermon series as a whole and not only the individual sermons themselves. The initial length of the sermon series stood at seventeen weeks but, with coaching from my Doctoral Chair, I ultimately shortened it to ten weeks. Shrinking the duration of the sermon series actually proved more difficult than originally anticipated because it caused

me, probably for the first time, to cut out superfluous information and material in my sermons and consolidate. Taking this action caused me to pursue much more streamlined approach in both my sermon preparation and delivery. Streamlining my work truly forced me into in the constant practice of editing so the sermon would translate to the pew as clearly and simply as possible, covering the entirety of the material, while still treating any scriptural content correctly. The task of editing meant paring down illustrations and introductions which remained important but took valuable time and focus away from the work of exposition and application.

Prior to preaching the sermon series involved in this project I came to realize the majority of my application over the years has had a purely individualistic aim. However, the commands in 1 Thessalonians, like most of the New Testament epistles, exist in the plural form and the proper application of such should rest on the church as a whole and individual believers should live these truths out in the context of the local church. Going back and listening to past sermons this misunderstanding or misplaced focus regarding the corporate nature of application caused much of the application in my preaching to emphasize the personal life of the believer while, unwittingly, de-emphasizing the communal aspect of Christianity. During the project I realized in the past I had applied Scripture, in many instances, in a manner less than the intent of the original author. The change in practice seemed to cause a marked increase in the number of church members asking practical questions about how the truths from 1 Thessalonians could be appropriated in the ministries of Arlington Park. This new emphasis has led to a more corporate reality regarding the application of Scripture. While based on an individual

relationship with Jesus Christ, Christianity should have a corporate understanding of life lived out in the community of the local church.

The need to have the expositional ministry of the pulpit extend to all aspects of the ministry of the church became apparent during the execution of the project. I really began to understand my preaching ministry should affect the entire ministry of the church in some way and at some point and simply preaching a sermon was not enough. The sermon based small group model carries the unifying benefit of having a particular group of people all delving deeply into the same biblical truths each week. Also, these small groups showed me the impact a sermon series could have on the vision and direction of a local body of believers. Driven by the ministry of the pulpit, this approach offers solidarity around a particular emphasis or vision for the entire church. Prior to the project I can say a clear distinction existed between my preaching and the rest of the disciple-making process in the church, however, this project has helped me see the need to have these tied together in some manner.

During this ministry project my prayer life increased dramatically because at the completion of this series, unlike any other, I knew I would attempt to analyze the results statistically. However, as the project progressed I realized the absolute need to pray over every sermon and series I have the privilege of presenting. Sadly I can say, prior to the project, most of my prayers before a sermon focused on preparation and delivery. However, during the project I found myself praying more intently for the effect of the sermon on the lives of the people and the church as a whole. Also, without requesting it, a small contingency of congregants took it upon themselves to pray for the series in particular because they wanted to pray for me in my schooling. As these church members

prayed I came to realize the extreme need to have a prayer team for each sermon series and every sermon during its presentation. This prayer ministry has empowered the elderly and the homebound members of the church and enabled them to participate in the ministry of the congregation. The sermon series preached during the project has had considerable effect and I do not find myself under the illusion that I was the determining factor in the growth seen or the impact experienced.

I have had a strong study ethic when it comes to preaching for as long as I can remember but this project showed a need for an even greater emphasis on detailed preparation and scheduling in the preparation of an entire series. The ministry project required I have every sermon in the series prepared twelve weeks in advance to allow for the completion of the written curriculum. This practice took a considerable amount of time and planning, however, by going through the process I have learned firsthand the outstanding benefit of having my sermons planned out at least two or three weeks in advance. Learning this benefit has also brought to light my procrastination and my tendency toward distraction in the less important daily aspects of ministry. The Lord has clearly convicted me to increase in diligence during the preparation and planning of the preaching ministry with which I have been entrusted. The personal growth I have experienced through this project has been immeasurable and I remain so grateful to Lord for blessing me with the opportunity.

### **Realizations Regarding Myself**

My extreme ineptitude in curriculum writing in regard to the graphic design and layout of the actual material surfaced as one of my clearest personal realizations. In teaching and developing the processes and concepts involved in the ministry project I

have the ability to construct and explain the desired outcome to the leaders and the participants. However, I found the ability to design visually interesting curriculum noticeably missing in myself. In this particular area I have discovered myself somewhat pragmatic and simplistic. My straightforward approach has all the makings for the creation of clear and concise material but it results in material devoid of any design appeal. I have come to realize I will need creative people around me in ministry to make up for my lack of design desire or ability. Visually well designed curriculum creates heightened interest in those not initially drawn to the study simply for spiritual growth and community. While not the most important aspect of the process, the visual aspect of the curriculum could benefit significantly from improved design and this improvement would add to its general appeal.

During the ministry project I have discovered too often the tendency to focus on the “front door” of the church making certain everything appears good and presentable to visitors when they arrive. God gives the church her vision and mission and the Lord uses the pastor to give the focus toward carrying out that vision and mission. Therefore, I have recognized my shortcomings in this area and realized the need for me to focus on the retention of those who visit. This project helped me realize simply getting people to attend a service stands as a beneficial starting point but helping attendees to assimilate into a good small group and participate as multiplying disciples themselves should ultimately consume our planning. The church will not fulfill her God-given mission of making disciples if it fills to capacity with attendees and does not burst at the seams with disciples.

In this process difficulty arose when I sought to involve anyone else in the planning or implementation simply due to the academic requirements of this particular project. Yet, throughout the duration of the project my unwillingness to allow other capable people to take prominent roles rose to the forefront. Even within the project there came opportunities to allow others to help in execution and implementation, however, I did not allow them to participate for fear of someone making a mistake. I have realized the need to place my faith in the Lord and trust Him and the people He has providentially placed in the local church to implement ministry. The Lord used the opportunity of this project to show me something lacking in myself and my need to further depend on Him.

While I always preach expositionally I do not always preach systematically through books of the Bible. However, this project taught me my comfort and confidence grows when preaching through entire books, or sections of a book, of the Bible. This understanding does not drive me to believe I must simply preach systematically through books of the Bible from now on but I do see, once again, the benefit of preaching in this manner for myself and for the congregation. Systematic exposition requires no need to do new contextual work each week and the people get to walk through an entire work written as one complete piece. This approach seems the most straightforward manner in which to guide a group of people to study the whole of God's written revelation.

Organizational skills do not come naturally to me and the project brought this fact to the forefront. This project required a copious amount of organization and administration which forced me out of my element and required me to learn and apply good organizational skills. Also, the preaching aspects, by requiring me to be both clear and succinct in my delivery, made me practice the process of organizing my thoughts

much more clearly. Any text has particular points which originate from that specific passage. This process required certain phrases stated exactly, without any variance, due to the curriculum. The accuracy necessary to the project caused me to have a greater dependence on notes in my sermon delivery. The subsequent increase in dependence on my notes produced greater precision in my speech became more exact in my speech and I seemed to have a tendency to move more quickly through larger sections of Scripture. Overall, this project helped me to realize my need for more organization personally and gave me a start toward improving in that area.

### **Realizations in Ministry**

Throughout the process of this project I have discovered a preconceived notion I apply to most people who have attended church for a considerable amount of time. I have come to understand many who have attended church for an extended period of time may have not had the opportunity to sit under proper or thorough teaching. Consequently, many people in any given congregation may not even have an understanding of biblical facts or theological tenets. This understanding has helped me never assume those listening have any familiarity or background regarding the truth preached, taught or discussed. This lack of knowledge has also shown the ongoing need in the church for basic discipleship, one-on-one discipling and Bible study in a broad and systematic manner. Therefore, I have found the preacher should not assume his listeners have any basic understanding of his topic and he must focus on full explanation.

In a large group of people a single preacher cannot make personal and specific application to every person in the room. Throughout the process I have come to understand, even more, the true catalyst for growth, vitality and power in the ministry of

the local church. The manner in which one text of Scripture can affect the people of God through a myriad of different applications remains intriguing. I have learned more deeply about the work of the Holy Spirit again, His activity in the local church and His ability and willingness to work with, or in spite of, my efforts. This understanding strengthened my belief in an expository ministry as a tool God uses to direct His people into a closer relationship with Him and more obedient activity in relation to His Word.

In ministry it remains difficult, overwhelming and, ultimately, unsustainable for a single person to try to do everything. God's design for the church to operate as a body of many parts all functioning together for one purpose became all the more apparent during an undertaking this extensive involving so many different aspects of the ministry (1 Cor 12:12 – 27). Obviously this project did not encompass the full extent of the local church's ministry activity; however, the process alone involved more than one person should ever endeavor. So burnout, frustration, and bitterness will not have an opportunity to take root this important principle of working together must not fade. Within this particular project even the preaching ministry of the pastor did not exist as an individual undertaking but involved several others integral to its execution. All of the ministries of the church should work together and each one of those ministries should have momentum built from the pulpit as the expository ministry drives the vision and mission of the church home. Ministry takes many people working together for a common goal and the project made this truth apparent.

### **Realizations in My Ministry Context**

Admittedly, by any definition of length, I have not filled my current ministry position for an extended time period and I had no certainty regarding the motivation of

those who participated in the study. The immediate willingness of the people toward involvement in the ministry project showed a desire to be involved in something seen as beneficial to the church as a whole. Involvement has proven to be one of the most difficult aspects to see realized in previous ministries I have taken part in. This project took time, commitment and participation on the part of the congregants beyond the demands of curriculum any of the small groups used at the time. However, at Arlington Park the people showed eager willingness to take part in the process to see the benefits the church may experience through a ministry such as the one presented. During this process I also discovered the willingness of the people of Arlington Park to follow the leadership of the church as long as they remain convinced of a God-glorifying purpose within the endeavor.

Arlington Park receives a steady stream of visitors craving genuine community and connection within the church. As stated previously, sermon based small groups have the drawback of making it difficult for new people to assimilate into the church through the small group ministry. During the project it seemed visitors had some hesitation in joining a small group already in progress. With new people attending each week who need to feel connected to the church as a whole, the small group ministry remains one of the better tools to accomplish the task. The small group ministry of Arlington Park should find a way to welcome and accommodate new people into existing groups. If having new people join groups already in existence presents an issue then we must focus on the creation of groups specifically designed for the connecting of these new people. The small group ministry has risen as the avenue through which visitors connect to the church. The problem of assimilation became apparent during this process and through the

project Arlington Park has begun to address this problem. This addition to the ministry of Arlington Park has caused an even greater impact on the retention of visitors and the growth and vitality of the body as whole.

During the project, and the requisite testing, the people have evidence a desire to live radical lives for Christ which could cause them discomfort or persecution. This desire has shown a people who have a strong will to do what needs to be done to glorify Christ and win others to Him. At Arlington Park the existence of this strong desire begs the question, "Then why has nothing really happened to this point?" I believe the people of Arlington Park have not had a vision to glorify God and reach those around them, nor have they had the tools to accomplish that vision. The people of Arlington Park have all of the desire needed to accomplish amazing things for Christ in their community; they simply need clear purpose, direction and equipping. By equipping the people to understand what the book of 1 Thessalonians teaches regarding God's desire for His church, participants received the tools to effect change within the local body. This project required participants to do weekly Scripture memorization and daily devotionals and those involved showed their intent to grow. A willingness to grow, an appetite to learn, and a desire to serve the Lord according to His calling stand out as wonderful traits of the people of Arlington Park made apparent during this Ministry Project.

## Appendix A

### Church Interviews

#### **Interview #1: Josh King, Lead Pastor, Sachse's Church, Sachse, Texas**

Why has your church chosen to use the Sermon Based model of small group study?

Primarily unity but very close would be cost. This approach is a far better method for keeping the church on task and united around one theme. It is much easier to holistically approach a particular text if I know a group will meet to hammer out some of the applicable details.

What is the purpose/benefit of using Sermon Based Small Groups?

It allows for us to play to our strengths. I have two degrees in theology, and my SG leaders do not. I can 'teach the lesson,' they can focus on relationships built around the Bible or specifically the lessons covered.

What are the problems/difficulties related to implementing/using Sermon Based Small Groups?

It is new – so some people fight new.

It takes a little extra time from me each week to get this done. I need to have my sermon done by Thursday instead of having Friday and Saturday to work on it more. If you are not graphically capable or good at formatting, the presentation of the material can look a bit dull or amateur. That communicates a great deal to participants. In the delivery of the material, if you are not tech savvy, you may struggle with getting a new updated lesson to all of the participants in a timely fashion.

What training have you done for your leaders/teachers? Is there any continuing training or is it simply a one-time orientation/training?

We meet 3 times a year to talk about goal and functions of the small groups. As to leading the actual weekly meetings we have designed the groups so as to allow for someone 'off the street' to walk in and lead. If you can read you can lead a small group, it is all laid out for you. And since it is based on my sermons, if a SG leader misses my sermon the week before they have all week to listen to the Podcast and be prepared.

Has the use of Sermon Based Small Groups changed the style of your preaching/your pastor's preaching? How?

A little, I will sometimes mention – “You will talk about this more in your small group.” So that is good for more tightly integrating the SG with the Worship Gathering. I am also soft on myself and the application. I know they will get that in the Small Group. I still do one but I am more seeding the discussion instead of really fleshing out how it looks for EVERYONE. That is a real challenge in preaching anyways. One text may apply differently for age groups and so forth. Allowing them to flesh it out in the Small Groups leads to a more substantial application.

What changes (if any) have you seen in the congregation you feel can be attributed to the use of Sermon Based Small Groups?

We have tripled in attendance since implementing the curriculum. That growth has been primarily lead out by the Small groups. We also have a higher percentage of participation in SGs.

**Interview #2: Tony Merida and Nathan Akin, Pastor for Disciple-Making, Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, NC**

Why has your church chosen to use the Sermon Based model of small group study?

In our GGs we are trying to intentionally live out Acts 2:42-47. In that section of Scripture you have the first church doing several things that mark them out, one of those being “devoting themselves to the Apostle’s Teachings.” So we try to somewhat model this by saying the Scriptures will be central in our GG time and in particular we will discuss what our Elders are opening up to the body. In addition, we would rather our people dig deep into one particular text over the course of the week (and a book since we do exposition over the time span of a sermon series through say Ephesians) rather than several texts from different parts of the Bible. We think they will retain more by diving into one section of scripture. It also is a way to streamline what our groups are doing so that we stay focused on our main vision and so that the vision of the Elders is carried out in our GGs. Finally, many argue that sermon-based small groups in homes closes the back door of your church and we have seen high retention rate as well. We don’t want to be a church that has a revolving door.

What is the purpose/benefit of using Sermon Based Small Groups?

I would say all the things I mentioned in question one—the purpose of our groups is to experience Gospel and Community by gathering together around the Scriptures. We often say at IDC we only have two things to offer you: Gospel and Community. Our in home small groups is a way to intentionally build this in. And these groups have excelled in this, I would say community is one of the stronger aspects of our church life. However, we do sermon-based because we don’t just want community for community sake. Instead, we want to sit under the authority of the Word and have it shape our community life and mission.

What are the problems/difficulties related to implementing/using Sermon Based Small Groups?

The only issues we have had have had nothing to do with the content of the time. The main issues are typically childcare.

What training have you done for your leaders/teachers? Is there any continuing training or is it simply a one-time orientation/training?

We don't do a formal training to become a GG leader. Instead they have to serve as an assistant for a significant period of time to a current GG leader who will observe their life and give them opportunities to lead. After a time of that, and growth of the group, the elders will begin to talk with the Assistant's leader and see if they are ready to launch a new group. Then bi-monthly I will meet with our GGS on a Saturday for a time of training and continued assistance to them.

Has the use of Sermon Based Small Groups changed the style of your preaching/your pastor's preaching? How?

Hard to answer this question because this is the only model we have done. I would say it seems our people (as compared to other churches I have been in with small groups) have a better retention rate at what they are hearing. The themes we really push like gospel and community seem to be being picked up at a rate that I would say is encouraging.

What changes (if any) have you seen in the congregation you feel can be attributed to the use of Sermon Based Small Groups?

I would say the main one has been the sense of community we share and the respect we give to the Scriptures. As I said above, I would say our love for one another has been one of the more positive and encouraging things about our church. In addition, our people have a love for the Word. This sort of attention and respect given to the word in the way we shape our groups has been infectious. So our people are not surprised when we hold up the Scriptures as our authority and try to live underneath them.

## Appendix B

### Blank Participant Tests

#### Project Participant Pre-Test

1. Who wrote 1 Thessalonians? (a) Peter (b) Paul (c) John (d) Luke
2. I would say that I am someone who declares (in actual verbal form) the gospel to others. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]
3. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say a common evidence of salvation is (a) affliction (b) success (c) happiness (d) joy [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)
4. I would say I am someone who is genuinely sacrificial in my service to others. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]
5. I would say I am someone who is concerned more with man's approval than God's. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]
6. Who truly extended my call to salvation? (a) My pastor (b) God (c) Myself (d) My Parent
7. I would say I am someone who has suffered persecution for my bold belief. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]
8. The Bible is (a) a story written by men (b) good human moral teaching (c) God's Word (d) not always perfectly accurate [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)
9. I would say my life and ministry is lived in direct conflict with Satan. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]
10. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians suffering for their belief in Christ is (a) wrong (b) God's plan (c) unjust (d) unacceptable

11. I would say I am someone who stands in my faith in difficult times.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

12. I love others with a genuine love.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

13. God's will for my life is (a) growing wealthy (b) the health and well-being of my family (c) growing in holiness (d) to have a high self-esteem

14. I would say I am someone who lives in some form of sexual immorality (sex outside of marriage, lust, pornography, etc.).

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

15. Others have told me they can look at my life and see Christ in me.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

16. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say the basis for believing in the resurrection of the dead is (a) God's kindness (b) Jesus' resurrection (c) Lazarus' resurrection (d) Jesus' love.

17. I would say I have a fear of death.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

18. I would say I am prepared to meet the Lord.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

19. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians should be marked by (a) faith (b) hope (c) happiness (d) love [circle all that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

20. I would say I am someone who respects and esteems the Elders/Pastor of my church.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

21. What is God's will for believers in Christ Jesus? (a) rejoice always (b) pray without ceasing (c) to prosper (d) give thanks in all circumstances [choose all that apply]

(a) (b) (c) (d)

22. I would say I am someone who is growing in holiness.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

### **Project Participant Post-Test**

1. Who wrote 1 Thessalonians? (a) Peter (b) Paul (c) John (d) Luke

2. I intend to declare (in actual verbal form) the Gospel to others.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

3. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say that a common evidence of salvation is

(a) affliction (b) success (c) happiness (d) joy [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

4. I intend to be more genuinely sacrificial in my ministry to others.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

5. I intend to be more concerned with God's approval of me than man's.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

6. Who truly extended my call to salvation? (a) My pastor (b) God (c) Myself (d)

My Parent

7. I intend to live my life in such a way as to possibly incur persecution for my bold belief.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

8. The Bible is (a) a story written by men (b) good human moral teaching (c) God's

Word (d) not always perfectly accurate [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

9. I intend to live my life so as to be in direct conflict with Satan.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

10. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians suffering for their belief in Christ is (a) wrong (b) God's plan (c) unjust (d) unacceptable

11. I intend to stand in my faith in difficult times.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

12. I intend to love others with a genuine love.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

13. God's will for my life is (a) growing wealthy (b) the health and well-being of my family (c) growing in holiness (d) to have a high self-esteem

14. I intend to deny all forms of sexual immorality. (sex outside of marriage, lust, pornography, etc.)

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

15. I intend to live so non-Christians can look at my life and see Christ in me.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

16. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say the basis for believing in the resurrection of the dead is (a) God's kindness (b) Jesus' resurrection (c) Lazarus' resurrection (d) Jesus' love

17. I intend to not fear death.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

18. I intend to be prepared to meet the Lord.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

19. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians should be marked by (a) faith (b) hope (c) happiness (d) love [circle all that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

20. I intend to respect and esteem the Elders/Pastor of my church.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

21. What is God's will for believers in Christ Jesus? (a) rejoice always (b) pray without ceasing (c) to prosper (d) give thanks in all circumstances [choose all that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

22. I intend to grow in holiness.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

### **Project Participant 2 Week Lag Post-Test**

1. Who wrote 1 Thessalonians? (a) Peter (b) Paul (c) John (d) Luke

2. I would say I am someone who declares (in actual verbal form) the Gospel to others. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

3. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say a common evidence of salvation is (a) affliction (b) success (c) happiness (d) joy [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

4. I would say I am someone who is genuinely sacrificial in my ministry to others. [NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

5. I would say I am someone who is concerned more with man's approval than God's.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

6. Who truly extended my call to salvation? (a) My pastor (b) God (c) Myself (d)

My Parent

7. I would say I am someone who has suffered persecution for my bold belief.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

8. The Bible is (a) a story written by men (b) good human moral teaching (c) God's

Word (d) not always perfectly accurate [circle any that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

9. I would say my life and ministry is lived in direct conflict with Satan.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

10. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians suffering for their belief in

Christ is (a) wrong (b) God's plan (c) unjust (d) unacceptable

11. I would say I am someone who stands in my faith in difficult times.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

12. I love others with a genuine love.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

13. God's will for my life is (a) growing wealthy (b) the health and well-being of my

family (c) growing in holiness (d) to have a high self-esteem

14. I would say I am someone who lives in some form of sexual immorality. (sex outside of marriage, lust, pornography, etc.)

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

15. I would say non-Christians can look at my life and see Christ in me.

[NEVER] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [ALWAYS]

16. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say the basis for believing in the resurrection

of the dead is (a) God's kindness (b) Jesus' resurrection (c) Lazarus' resurrection (d)

Jesus' love

17. I would say I have a fear of death.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

18. I would say I am prepared to meet the Lord.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

19. The writer of 1 Thessalonians would say Christians should be marked by (a) faith

(b) hope (c) happiness (d) love [circle all that apply] (a) (b) (c) (d)

20. I would say I am someone who respects and esteems the Elders/Pastor of my church.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]

21. What is God's will for believers in Christ Jesus? (a) rejoice always (b) pray

without ceasing (c) to prosper (d) give thanks in all circumstances [choose all that apply]

(a) (b) (c) (d)

22. I would say I am someone who is growing progressively in holiness.

[VERY MUCH] 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 [NOT AT ALL]



Appendix D

Printed Curriculum

**“A New Testament Thanksgiving” (Week #1)**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

(C.I.S.) “We must live a life \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.”

1. We should \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_ for certain characteristics. (v. 1-3)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ that works.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ that labors.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ that is steadfast.

2. We should \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_ by a \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ reputation.

(v. 4-10)

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R.W.A. [In your devotional section this week write down how God can help you in the three areas of your faith, your love, and your hope in Christ. Jot down some thoughts/ideas of opportunities, if any, you could take that may help you to increase in these areas.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”  
(Acts 1:8, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

"As long as I see anything to be done for God, life is worth having; but O how vain and unworthy it is to live for any lower end!" (David Brainerd, 1718-1747)

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## DAY 2:

"Not called!" did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters, and servants and masters not to come there. And then look Christ in the face, whose mercy you have professed to obey, and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world." (William Booth, 1829-1912)

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## DAY 3:

"Answering a student's question, 'Will the heathen who have not heard the Gospel be saved?' thus, 'It is more a question with me whether we, who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not, can be saved.'" (Charles Spurgeon, 1834-1892)

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## DAY 4:

“I do not want merely to possess a faith, I want a faith that possesses me.” (Charles Kingsley)

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## DAY 5:

“Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.” (Martin Luther)

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## DAY 6:

“We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives.” (Charles Spurgeon)

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**“Genuine Ministry” (Week #2)**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

(C.I.S.) “\_\_\_\_\_ ministry is \_\_\_\_\_ in an age searching for \_\_\_\_\_ Christianity.”

1. Our \_\_\_\_\_ should be marked by \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 1-2)
2. Our ministry must be \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 3-4)
3. Our ministry has to be \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 5-8)
4. Our ministry must be \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 9-10)
5. Our ministry should be about \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 11-12)

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R.W.A. [This week pray for God to give you the strength to be bold and seek to take an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone or, at the least, bring God and His works into a conversation with an unbeliever.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

**DAY 1:**

**“Reputation is what men and women think of us; character is what God and the angels know of us.” (Thomas Paine)**

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**DAY 2:**

**“Good duties must not be pressed and beaten out of us, as the waters came out of the rock when Moses smote it with his rod; but must freely drop from us, as myrrh from the tree, or honey from the comb.” (Thomas Watson)**

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**DAY 3:**

**“As soon as a man has found Christ, he begins to find others.” (Charles Spurgeon)**

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**DAY 4:**

**“To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and every believer.”  
(Thomas Aquinas)**

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**DAY 5:**

**“Preach abroad. It is the cooping yourselves up in rooms that has dampened the work of God, which never was and never will be carried out to any purpose without going into the highways and hedges and compelling men and women to come in.” (Jonathan Edwards)**

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**DAY 6:**

**“You have nothing to but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go not only to those that need you, but to those that need you most. It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance.” (John Wesley)**

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**“People of the Truth” (Week #3)**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

(C.I.S.) “God’s \_\_\_\_\_ should \_\_\_\_\_ stand for God’s \_\_\_\_\_.”

1. We should \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 13)
  
2. We must \_\_\_\_\_ for the truth of God’s \_\_\_\_\_ even in the  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 14-16)

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R.W.A. [This week, through prayer, ask God to guide you to an area in your life that you know the Scripture speaks to and again, through prayer and by His grace, ask the Lord to help you attack that area and either remove it (if it is negative) or add it (if it is positive and been neglected)...thereby, “...[accepting the Word of God] not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thess. 2:13)]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

“Believe God’s Word and power more than you believe your own feeling and experiences.” (Samuel Rutherford)

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## DAY 2:

“It is a great thing this reading of the Scriptures! For it is not possible to ever exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well that has no bottom. (John Chrysostom)

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## DAY 3:

“If thou sin, the Word of God is thy adversary. It is the adversary of thy will til it become the author of thy salvation.” (Augustine)

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**DAY 4:**

“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have often contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.” (Martin Luther, imprisonment and/or death)

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**DAY 5:**

“Jesus promised the disciples three things – that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble.” (G.K. Chesterton)

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**DAY 6:**

“God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain.” (C.S. Lewis)

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**“A Strong Fellowship” (Week #4)**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5**

(C.I.S.) “God’s people must be a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ fellowship, standing \_\_\_\_\_ in trial.”

1. We should \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 2:17-20)

2. We must \_\_\_\_\_ and stand firm in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 3:1-5)

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R.W.A. [This week, pray for guidance from the Lord then seek to do something, whatever it may be, purely motivated by Christian love, for someone in the Church, simply to show brotherly love and to build-up the body.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

**DAY 1:**

**“At the timberline where the storms strike with the most fury, the sturdiest trees are found.” (Hudson Taylor)**

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**DAY 2:**

**“We must meet the uncertainties of this world with the certainty of the world to come.” (A.W. Tozer)**

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**DAY 3:**

**“Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays.” (Andrew Murray)**

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## DAY 4:

“We must feel for our people as a father toward his children; yea, the most tender love of a mother must not surpass ours. We must even travail in birth, til Christ be formed in them. They should see that we care for no outward thing, neither liberty, nor honor, nor life in comparison to their salvation...when people see that you truly love them, they will hear anything from you...Oh, therefore, see that you feel a tender love for your people in your hearts and let them perceive it in your speech and conduct.” (Richard Baxter)

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## DAY 5:

“Remember, O my soul, that the fig tree [that Jesus cursed] was charged, not with bearing noxious fruit, but no fruit.” (Thomas Fuller)

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## DAY 6:

“While women weep, as they do now, I’ll fight; while little children go hungry, I’ll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I’ll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, where there remains one dark soul without the light of God – I’ll fight! I’ll fight to the very end!” (William Booth)

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**“An Established People” (Week #5)**  
**1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

(C.I.S.) “The Church of God should be a people of strong \_\_\_\_\_, deep \_\_\_\_\_, striving for \_\_\_\_\_.”

1. We should be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 6-10)
2. We must be \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 11-12)
3. We should be \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 13)

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R.W.A. [This week, pray and ask the Lord to shine the light of His Word on an area of your life (if He has not already) and expose something that you do/think/etc. which would not be considered holy and pray for God’s grace and strength to face it, deal with it and overcome it.]

*\*\*\*[Leader’s/Facilitator’s Note]: Use discernment when pushing for sharing of R.W.A. due to the potential for very private and sensitive material but encourage, possibly some one on one sharing with someone they trust. u could even allow some time for one-on-one, if you feel it is necessary.*

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

“What a wonderful Savior we have. It wasn’t lovely people for whose sake He died; it was for ungodly people, for His enemies. It was for law breakers that He suffered. He loved us, says (the Apostle) Paul, in spite of how unlovely we were. *Just as* He loved us, Paul insists we are to love one another.” (Jay E. Adams)

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## DAY 2:

“We are called to love not because other people are empty and need love (to feel better about themselves) but because love is the way in which we imitate Christ and bring glory to God.” (Edward T. Welch)

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## DAY 3:

“Breath in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.” (Augustine)

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## DAY 4:

“God has one destined end for mankind – holiness! His one aim is the production of saints. God is not an eternal blessing-machine for men. He did not come to save men out of pity. He came to save men because He had created them to be holy.” (Oswald Chambers)

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## DAY 5:

“The normal Christian life is holiness, anything less is sickness.” (Leonard Ravenhill)

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## DAY 6:

"There is no shortcut to holiness; it must be the business of our whole lives."  
(William Wilberforce)

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**“A Holy People” (Week #6)**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

(C.I.S.) “God’s \_\_\_\_\_ for His people is that they be \_\_\_\_\_.”

1. We should be ever \_\_\_\_\_ in our \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 1-2)
2. God’s people must be a \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 3-7)
3. We can \_\_\_\_\_ God in His \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 8)

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R.W.A. [Is there any area of your life you feel there is either something you should or should not be doing? Pray and ask God, through His Holy Spirit, to address that area...obviously it could be the same area(s) you dealt with last week. Maybe you have been trying to overcome it in your power but surrender it to the Lord and ask for His power and strength.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name, bring an offering and come before Him! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.” (1 Chronicles 16:29, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

**DAY 1:**

**“In proportion as a church is holy, in that proportion will its testimony for Christ be powerful.” (Charles Spurgeon)**

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**DAY 2:**

**“The serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world, next to the might of God.” (Blaise Pascal)**

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**DAY 3:**

**“Doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless; it does positive harm. Something of 'the image of Christ' must be seen and observed by others in our private life, and habits, and character, and doings.” (J.C. Ryle)**

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## DAY 4:

“It is not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus.”  
(Robert Murray McCheyne)

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## DAY 5:

“We are *responsible* to obey the will of God, but that we are *dependent* upon the Holy Spirit for the enabling power to do it.” (Jerry Bridges)

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## DAY 6:

“Wicked men obey from fear; good men from love.” (Augustine)

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**“A People of Love” (Week #7)**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**

(C.I.S.) “Christ-followers ought to \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ for one another and live like \_\_\_\_\_ before the world.”

1. We should \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 9-10)
2. We must \_\_\_\_\_ before Christ in the world. (v. 11-12)

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R.W.A. [This week may be hard. If there is a person in the Church, or another brother or sister in Christ, you feel that you have hurt, wronged or mistreated, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and show Christian love by going to him/her and making it right. For some, maybe the Lord brought your spouse to mind, then go to him/her as their spouse and their brother or sister in Christ and make things right.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

But it is doubtless true, and evident from these Scriptures, that the essence of all true religion lies in holy love; and that in this divine affection, and an habitual disposition to it, and that light which is the foundation of it, and those things which are the fruits of it, consists the whole of religion. (Jonathan Edwards)

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## DAY 2:

“Advance in the Christian life comes not by the work of the Holy Spirit alone, nor by our work alone, but by our responding to and cooperating with the grace the Holy Spirit initiates and sustains.” (Donald Whitney)

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## DAY 3:

“I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be. But I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”” (John Newton)

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**DAY 4:**

**“How can all things be worked together by God for good? The answer is at hand. It is because God's ultimate purpose is to make us like Christ. His goal is the complete restoration of the image of God in His child! So great a work demands all the resources which God finds throughout the universe, and He ransacks the possibilities of joys and sorrows in order to reproduce in us the character of Jesus.” (Sinclair Ferguson)**

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**DAY 5:**

**A true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ. (George Whitefield)**

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**DAY 6:**

**“We have unfortunately come to believe that a watching world will know that we are Christians by the worldly things we avoid or the churchy things we do. Christ has a different perspective. Our identity with Him is marked by the oneness that comes from our mutual love for each other.” (Joseph Stowell)**

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**“Our Glorious Christian Hope” (Week #8)**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

(C.I.S.) “Today, when many live without \_\_\_\_\_, we have a \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ Jesus.”

1. We need a \_\_\_\_\_ belief regarding \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ. (v. 13)
2. We \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ because of His \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 14-15)
3. We are to be \_\_\_\_\_ by the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ’s \_\_\_\_\_. (v.  
 16-18)

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R.W.A. [This week, simply spend some time praising the Lord specifically for the hope we have in Christ and thanking Him for the blessing of both His resurrection and the promised resurrection we have promised to us in Him.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

**“The apostolic church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death and heaven. The early Christians were looking, not for a cleft in the ground called a grave but for a cleavage in the sky called Glory.” (Alexander MacLaren)**

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## DAY 2:

**“Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.”  
(C.S. Lewis)**

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## DAY 3:

**“In the midst of an ever-changing world, the good news is that the life of faith is anchored by the power, provisions, and promises of God. Circumstances may change, but the future is as sure as the character of God Himself. No matter what happens, those who trust in God hope in His word.” (Scott Hafemann)**

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## DAY 4:

“Hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called “the rejoicing of hope” (Hebrews 3:6).” (William Gurnall)

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## DAY 5:

“The dust of Lazarus was dear to Jesus; He would not leave it in the rocky tomb. So is the dust of every Lazarus dear in His sight. He will not lose so much as one of them. Wherever they lie, it matters not – beneath the deep blue sea, or on some distant battlefield, or consumed in flame and smoke – the Lord Jesus will yet collect their scattered dust and make them like His own glorious body.” (Robert Murray McCheyne)

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## DAY 6:

“As I go into a cemetery I like to think of the time when the dead shall rise from their graves... Thank God, our friends are not buried; they are only sown!” (D.L. Moody)

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**“That Glorious Day” (Week #9)**  
**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

(C.I.S.) “We can see the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ as a cause for \_\_\_\_\_ or a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”

1. We can be \_\_\_\_\_ of His \_\_\_\_\_ and its \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 1-2)
2. We must realize that the coming of \_\_\_\_\_ will be a day of \_\_\_\_\_ for those who do not know Him. (v. 3)
3. Church, we must \_\_\_\_\_ in light of His \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 4-11)

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R.W.A. [This week, pray and ask the Lord for the courage and strength to share and then take the opportunity and share the Gospel with someone who is not ‘eternally prepared’ for Jesus to return...allow your love for Christ and your concern for their eternity to drive you forward.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1-3, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

“What would you say of the man who saw his neighbor’s house in danger of being burned down, and never raised the cry of “fire?” What ought to be said of us as ministers if we call ourselves watchmen for souls, and yet see fires of hell raging in distance, and never give the alarm? Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant, and speak of smoothly, and soothe men with constant lullaby of peace. I have not read my Bible. My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of danger.” (J.C. Ryle, Fire! Fire!)

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## DAY 2:

“The religion of Christ is the religion of joy. Christ came to take away our sins, to roll off our curse, to unbind our chains, to open our prison house, to cancel our debt; in a word, to give us the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Is not this joy? Where can we find a joy so real, so deep, so pure, so lasting? There is every element of joy – deep, ecstatic, satisfying, sanctifying joy – in the gospel of Christ. The believer in Jesus is essentially a happy man. The child of God is, from necessity, a joyful man. His sins are forgiven, his soul is justified, his person is adopted, his trials are blessings, his conflicts are victories, his death is immortality, his future is a heaven of inconceivable, unthought-of, untold, and endless blessedness. With such a God, such a Savior, and such a hope, is he not, ought he not, to be a joyful man?” (Octavius Winslow)

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## DAY 3:

“To be in Christ is the source of the Christian’s life; to be like Christ is the sum of His excellence; to be with Christ is the fullness of His joy.” (Charles Hodge)

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## DAY 4:

“Let us consider this settled, that no one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection.” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.10.5.)

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## DAY 5:

“Let us not fail to see in the manner of our Lord’s resurrection, a type and pledge of the resurrection of His believing people. The grave could not hold Him beyond the appointed time, and it shall not be able to hold them. A glorious angel was a witness of His rising, and glorious angels shall be the messengers who shall gather believers when they rise again. He rose with a renewed body, and yet a body, real, true, and material, and so also shall His people have a glorious body, and be like their Head. “When we see Him we shall be like Him” (1 Jn. 3:2.)” (J.C. Ryle, *Matthew Commentary*, Chapter 28.)

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## DAY 6:

“There is not an inch of any sphere of life of which Jesus Christ the Lord does not say, “Mine.”” (Abraham Kuyper)

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**“Concerning the Community of Faith” (Week #10)  
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28**

(C.I.S.) “The \_\_\_\_\_ of God is to be \_\_\_\_\_ Christian.”

1. We must \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 12-13)
2. True Christ-followers must \_\_\_\_\_ the good of the \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 14-15)
3. We must live \_\_\_\_\_ as a part of His \_\_\_\_\_. (v. 16-22)
4. As the people of God we are \_\_\_\_\_ on Him. (v. 23-28)

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R.W.A. [Is there an area of your life, maybe your marriage, finances, children, a friendship, etc., that you have been trying to fix or deal with under your own power? Take that area before the Lord and recognize that you are utterly dependent on Him, give it over and pray for the grace to trust Him to guide you in that area.]

[WEEKLY SCRIPTURE MEMORY]:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 1:9, *ESV*)

[DEVOTIONAL] (*Each Day*: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28, Read Quote, Jot Down Thoughts, R.W.A., Pray)

## DAY 1:

“There is nothing more important to learn about Christian growth than this: Growing in grace means becoming like Christ.” (Sinclair B. Ferguson)

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## DAY 2:

“There are many who preach Christ, but not so many who live Christ. My great aim will be to live Christ.” (Robert Chapman)

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## DAY 3:

“Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved!” (Augustine)

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## DAY 4:

At the same time, however, the kind of trust that we are called to give to our fellow imperfect humans in this life, be they family or friends, employers or government officials, or even leaders in a church, can never finally be earned. It must be given as a gift – a gift in faith, in trust more of the God who gives than of the leaders He has given (Eph. 4:11-13). (*Mark Dever*)

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## DAY 5:

“The church cannot be expected to do its work effectively if their followers are not loyally supporting the leaders. It’s a matter of fact that we’re often slow to realize to this day that effective leadership in the church of Christ demands effective following. If we’re continually critical of them that are set over us, small wonder if they’re unable to perform the miracles that we demand of them. If we bear in mind the work’s sake, we may be more inclined to esteem them very highly in love.” (*Leon Morris*)

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## DAY 6:

“The whole Christian life is a life in which the further a person progresses, the more he has to depend directly on God... The more we progress, the less we are self-sufficient. The more we progress, the poorer we get so that the man who has progressed most, is totally poor - he has to depend directly on God. He's got nothing left in himself.” (*Thomas Merton*)

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**Curriculum Answer Key**

- (#1) worthy, thanksgiving, strive, remembered, faith, love, hope, strive, known, Gospel, centered.
- (#2) Genuine, essential, authentic, ministry, boldness, identified, integrity, selfless, above, reproach, building, disciples.
- (#3) Church, unswervingly, Word, receive, Bible, God's, Word, stand, Word, midst, trial.
- (#4) strong, effective, firmly, strive, love, kingdom, impact, expect, midst, affliction.
- (#5) faith, love, holiness, growing, living, faith, marked, love, one, another, secure, holiness.
- (#6) will, holy, growing, Christian, walk, holy, people, obey, power.
- (#7) overflow, love, Jesus, grow, brotherly, love, walk, rightly.
- (#8) hope, glorious, hope, proper, death, hope, resurrection, resurrection, encouraged, truth, coming.
- (#9) coming, fear, comfort, hope, certain, coming, suddenness, Christ, terror, live, properly, coming.
- (#10) church, distinctly, respect, spiritual, leadership, seek, wayward, rightly, Lord, bride, utterly, dependent.

## Appendix E

### Internet Media Elements

This hyperlink includes an Exegetical Outline, the project director's Meaning-Based Translation derived from the original Greek text and the weekly Discussion Questions for the small group sessions. <http://www.arlingtonparkbc.org/the-model-church-study-resources.html>

This hyperlink includes full transcription of the complete sermon series preached during the Ministry Project. <http://www.arlingtonparkbc.org/1-thessalonians-sermon-transcripts.html>

This hyperlink contains the mp3 audio files for all the sermons preached during the Ministry Project. <http://www.arlingtonparkbc.org/the-model-church.html>

## Appendix F

### Sermon Summaries and Outlines

#### **“A New Testament Thanksgiving” (Sermon #1) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

##### **I. Introduction**

- a. Samuel Mudd, in 1865, mended John Wilkes Boothe’s broken leg he received while in the process of escaping after assassinating President Abraham Lincoln. Consequently, Dr. Mudd was arrested and tried as a co-conspirator in the assassination. However, the conviction was overturned and Dr. Mudd was pardoned but his reputation was irreparably destroyed. What would we, as a church, want to be remembered for?
- b. C.I.S.: **“We Must Live a Life Worthy of Thanksgiving”**

##### **II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Should Strive to be Remembered for Certain Characteristics (v. 1-3)
  - i. Three Characteristics (v. 1-3)
    1. “your work of faith”
      - a. Genitive: “your faith that works” (Not lazy Christianity, in word only, but in action)
    2. “your labor of love”
      - a. Genitive: “your love that labors/agonizes” (they work at their love, they “toil to the point of exhaustion in love”)

3. “your steadfastness of hope”
  - a. Genitive: “your hope that is steadfast” (they have an unshakeable hope and the object of their hope is Christ; NT “hope”= confident expectation)
- b. We Should Strive to be Known by a Christ-centered Reputation (v. 4-10)
  - i. “Knowing”
    1. “you are chosen” (because of how you received the Word of God; Paul is encouraged because these are not signs of human persuasion or eloquence)
    2. “you became imitators” (because they received the Word in trial but with joy, which is distinctly Christian)
      - a. Much different from the health and wealth “gospel.”
    3. “you became an example” (they were “trumpeting forth” the Gospel all over the region and their reputation preceded them regarding the validity and power of their conversion)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Hope (confident expectation)
  - i. Lost: There are those who have no hope in Christ and must surrender to Him to be delivered “from the wrath that is to come.”
  - ii. Church: As a church, here at Arlington Park, we should strive to be remembered for a reputation and characteristics like the Thessalonians. If Paul were here and evaluating us, would he be

able “to give thanks always” regarding us. May we ask the Lord for the grace to do this.

**“Genuine Ministry” (Sermon #2)**  
**1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

**I. Introduction**

- a. The 1992 movie, “Leap of Faith” is based off the real story of a defunct televangelist/charlatan named Peter Popoff. In 1986 it was estimated that he personally made 4 million dollars but just a few years ago his re-televised “messages” garnered him 26 million dollars. A man named “The Amazing Randy” exposed Popoff as a fraud and showed he was, in fact, not receiving “messages from God” regarding people’s illnesses but he was wearing a radio transmitter and was being told by his wife. The result of this and other charlatans many people have become extremely suspicious of the evangelical church and religion in general.
- b. C.I.S.: **“Genuine Ministry is Essential in an Age Searching for Authentic Christianity”**

**II. Sermon Body**

- a. Our Ministry Should be Marked by Boldness (v. 1-2)
  - i. “you yourselves” (emphatic in Greek, “all of you know this”)
  - ii. “not in vain” (because Paul’s ministry produced results)
  - iii. “much conflict” (Philippi, among persecution but persevered)
  - iv. “in our God” (our boldness as Christians comes from our relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit)
- b. Our Ministry Must be Identified with Integrity (v. 3-4)

- i. “error, impurity, deceive” (the Gospel we preach must be the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ; not Jesus plus or Jesus minus)
  - ii. “please God, not man” (we preach and minister as a church to please God; we are not concerned with the world’s approval)
- c. Our Ministry Has to be Selfless (v. 5-8)
- i. “we didn’t come to you”/ “but we came to you” (Not for accolades for to receive anything monetarily; they came to give not to get)
  - ii. “ourselves” (we don’t just give the Gospel but we expend ourselves for other people for the cause of the Kingdom)
- d. Our Ministry Must be Above Reproach (v. 9-10)
- i. “labor, toil, we worked” (reference to actual work so that they could not be accused of ministering only for financial gain)
  - ii. “holy, righteous, blameless conduct” (we must minister in such a way that people may not like the ministry but they can never level an attack against our integrity; this was Paul’s ministry plan)
- e. Our Ministry Should be About Building Disciples (v. 11-12)
- i. “exhorted, encouraged, charged” (we taught you, we came alongside you and we told you what you should do)
  - ii. “walk worthy” (we should make disciples with a goal of seeing them live rightly before the Lord)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Lost: Maybe there is someone who has been burned by “religion” but here Paul describes true Christianity; Gospel.

- b. Church: Pray and seek the Lord for the grace to be an authentic ministry.

**“People of the Truth” (Sermon #3)  
1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

**I. Introduction**

- a. Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna and was the disciple of the Apostle John. In A.D. 168 Polycarp was 86 years old and he was arrested for preaching Christ. The Romans drug him into the Coliseum. The proconsul tried to get him to blaspheme Christ and Polycarp would not. He said, “86 years have I served my Lord, and He has never failed me. I will not blaspheme my Lord, Jesus Christ now.” (Give other details of story)  
Ultimately Polycarp was burned at the stake and stabbed. Polycarp was so willing to stand for the truth that, unlike the custom, he told them they would not have to nail him to the stake because he would not move but he would stand for Christ. Just like Polycarp:
- b. C.I.S.: **“God’s Church Should Unswervingly Stand for God’s Word”**

**II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Should Receive the Bible as God’s Word (v. 13)
  - i. “we thank God constantly” (we give thanks to God continually)
  - ii. “not as the word of men”/ “the Word of God” (you heard the Gospel; the Word of God and recognized its divine nature as not originating from us/people of the book)
  - iii. “at work in you” (we know you received it as the Word of God because it has changed you)

1. Our ministry should be Word-driven and centered on the truth as it is declared in the Word of God/by being Word-centered we will always be God-centered.
- b. We Must Stand for the Truth of God's Word Even in the Midst of Trial  
(v. 14-16)
- i. "imitators of the Judean churches"/ "suffered" (the wonderful imitation is suffering for the sake of the Gospel; Acts church?/2 Timothy 3:12)
    1. (Caesar is lord/Jesus is Lord)
  - ii. But they never stopped preaching, even in the midst of opposition.
    1. "the Jews" (Paul assures the Thessalonians God will take care of those who oppose the Gospel and the Kingdom; Paul lets the Thessalonians know they are doing well)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Lost: The Gospel/Hear the Word of God, not the word of men, and believe the Gospel this morning.
- b. Church: We must stand for the Word of God no matter what happens and we must declare the Gospel regardless of the consequences.

### **"A Strong Fellowship" (Sermon #4)** **1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5**

#### I. Introduction

- a. (The state of Christian persecution in the world) Voice of the Martyrs states that, from 1950 to 2000, there are 13,356,288 documented cases of

people being killed specifically for their Christian faith. From the year 2000 until now, based off official documents, 105,000 Christians are killed every year for their faith. These numbers mean that a brother or sister in Christ is killed every 5 minutes around the world and 12 to 15 of them will be killed before this service is over. Tertullian “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

- b. C.I.S.: “God’s People Must be a Strong and Effective Fellowship, Standing Firmly in Trial”**

## **II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Should Strive for Love and Kingdom Impact (2:17-20)**
- i.** “torn away from you” (Paul feels deep pain/lit. this word means “orphaned”/used to describe a parent losing a child as well.)
  - ii.** “person not in heart” (they had a bond superior to physical presence)
  - iii.** “Satan hindered us” (Satan was “doing battle” against us/Grk. “enemy destroying a bridge)
  - iv.** “hope, joy, crown” (their faith in trial was cause for hope and joy in Paul/he saw great reward from God, a crown/their faith and Kingdom impact caused Paul great joy and a great love for them)
- b. We Must Expect and Stand Firm in the Midst of Affliction (3:1-5)**
- i.** “bear it no longer”/ “willing to be left behind” (Paul loved them so dearly he could not stand to be in the dark concerning their faith; he stayed back and let his travelling companion go ahead)

- ii. “establish, exhort” (to make you firm in your faith and to come alongside and encourage you)
- iii. “that no one be moved” (Paul’s ultimate goal in this is to send Timothy to make sure none are “shaken” or fall away)
- iv. “appointed” (definitely applies to Paul and Thessalonians but also us; Philippians 1:29 “the grace of suffering”)
- v. “tempted” (the temptation to leave the faith and return to paganism was strong; it was a pull back into the world/family)

### **III. Conclusion**

- a. Lost: Life is hard for everyone but loving and serving Christ is the only thing making it make sense.
- b. Church: We must stand firm and we will only do this if we are avoiding the temptation to make the ministry about us and not about Him.

## **“An Established People” (Sermon #5) 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

### **I. Introduction**

- a. (Story regarding “holiness”) In high school I ran Cross Country and every Friday during Cross Country season, which was the same as Football season, we had a school-wide pep rally. The team captains would decide, on Thursday, what we were all going to wear on Friday for the pep rally because we walked out in front of the entire school. Everyone knew that we were on the Cross Country team because we all bleached our hair

blonde and wore beaded necklaces and flip-flops. We stood out, we were different.

- b. C.I.S.: “The Church of God Should be a People of Strong Faith, Deep Love, Striving for Holiness”**

## **II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Should be Growing and Living in Faith (v. 6-10)**
- i. “But”** (Paul was worried but Timothy returned with a good report)
  - ii. “faith and love”** (Timothy reported to Paul that their faith was strong and their love for one another and Paul remained as well)
  - iii. “distress and affliction”** (Paul felt so strongly about their growing in the faith he said it brought him great joy even in the midst of “crushing troubles/weight pressed down to the point of crushing)
  - iv. “for now we live”** (life is worth living; Paul is saying their sanctification is terribly important to him)
  - v. “what thanks”** (we cannot even express our thankfulness to God)
  - vi. “supply what is lacking”** (Paul’s short stay with them did not afford him enough time to help them mature in the faith properly and they were missing some important teaching)
- b. We Must be Marked by Love for One Another (v. 11-12)**
- i. “may the Lord”** (all our ability to live the Christian life comes from God’s empowering grace)

- ii. “increase and abound” (Timothy reported their love to Paul and Paul says I want you to literally “overflow” with love for one another/you are loving but it is not enough, love more)
  - iii. “for all” (we are to overflow in our love for everybody outside the church as well; we exist for those outside, not ourselves)
- c. We Should be Secure in Holiness (v. 13)
- i. “He may establish” (Paul prays that they be “secure” or “made firm”/notice: the achievement of holiness in the Christian life is dependent on God and His grace)
  - ii. “blameless in holiness” (we are to be holy, we are to be above accusation in regard to holiness)
  - iii. “coming of our Lord Jesus” (our goal is to live for His coming)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Lost: You are to be holy, this is His requirement, but you cannot be holy apart from a relationship with Christ. But He has made a way (Gospel)
- b. Church: We must love one another and those outside the church, we exist to reach them for Christ, not to stay in our “holy huddle”

## “A Holy People” (Sermon #6) 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

### I. Introduction

- a. When I was 22 years old and preparing to graduate from Criswell College in Dallas, Texas I was extremely confused. I knew God wanted me to continue my education but I was unsure as to whether I was supposed to

stay at Criswell, go to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, or somewhere else. I approached Dr. Jim Shaddix, who was speaking at the college, and talked with him about this issue. He told me “Focus on God and focus on what you know He wants you to do and He will open the door you need to go through.”

**b. C.I.S.: “God’s Will for His People is That They be Holy”**

**II. Sermon Body**

**a. We Should be Ever-Growing in Our Christian Walk (v. 1-2)**

- i. “then” (this introduces a conclusion based on the prayer in 3:13; after praying they would be holy, he now exhorts them to be so.)
- ii. “urge” (strong plea; emphatic)
- iii. “walk and please God” (to live/please God like we taught you to)
- iv. “just as you are doing”/ “do so more and more” (just like their love in chapter 3, he tells them they are growing and doing a good job but they have not arrived; pursue sanctification more and more.)

**b. God’s People Must be a Holy People (v. 3-7)**

- i. “For” (this is explanatory; it explains how they ought to live to please God: “You ought to live to please God, that is, God’s will is that you be sanctified.”)
- ii. “will of God for your life” (straightforward statement; Paul is telling them what God’s will is for their life)
- iii. “sanctification” (God’s will is that we become progressively holy; we are to become more like Christ each day)

- iv. “sexual immorality” (any sexual vice, in or outside of marriage)
  - v. “vessel” (to control one’s own body; control oneself from performing sinful acts)
  - vi. “holiness/honor”/ “passion/lust” ( we should be self-controlled)
  - vii. “transgress or wrong” (because any lust, or immorality is against someone else, whether physical or mental and it is taking something from someone that rightly belongs to them)
  - viii. “you were called” (sanctification/holiness is what you exist for; it is the purpose for which you live)
- c. We Can Obey God in His Power (v. 8)
- i. “rejecting” (rejecting the path to holiness is to reject God)
  - ii. “gives His Holy Spirit” (God called you and He gives His Holy Spirit that you might have the power to become holy as He is holy)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Lost: You were created to be holy but you cannot be holy without the Holy Spirit and you must come to Christ to fulfill the reason you were created.
- b. Church: God has given you the power, the Holy Spirit, to be holy and avoid sexual sin. He has also given you the avenue to find forgiveness in Him.

**“A People of Love” (Sermon #7)  
1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**

**I. Introduction**

- a. I am going to make a confession and I have not played it really loud in the office yet and some of you may think differently about me but I really, really enjoy 80s music and I do not mean Petra or Stryper and stuff like that. I mean real music from the 80s. I really love love/rock ballads from the 80s, there is just something about a love song that makes us go back to a particular time or instance in our lives. People have been writing love songs for centuries but love is a distinctly Christian attribute!
- b. C.I.S.: **“Christ-Followers Ought to Overflow With Love for One Another and Live Like Jesus Before the World”**

**II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Need to Grow in Brotherly Love (v. 9-10)
  - i. “now” (indicates a contrast “but”; you need to hear about sexual purity but you have no need to be taught brotherly love)
  - ii. “brotherly love” (1 John 4:21)
  - iii. “taught by God” (lit. “God taught”, hapexlogomenna; brotherly love was taught by God, this is not something taught by men but by God, natural byproduct of the indwelling Holy Spirit)
  - iv. “throughout all Macedonia” (Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia and everyone had to travel to the capital for legal matter, business, etc. and this is where the brotherly love spread)

- v. “more and more” (no matter how much love you are showing you can always do more; overflow with love for one another)
- b. We Must Walk Rightly Before Christ in the World (v. 11-12)**
- i. “live quietly” (refers to a peaceful life in relation to others, they are not to be agitators in the body; busybodies)
  - ii. “mind your own affairs” (this is all in context of the church; do not be a busybody; other people’s business is their business)
  - iii. “work with your hands” (because of an “over-realized eschatology, next section, the believed they could just shut down and quite working and depend on the church to care for them)
  - iv. “walk properly before outsiders” (the world should not be given any opportunity to think Christians are not loving, productive people in society; do not add yourself as a “stumbling block”)
  - v. “dependent on no one” (work hard and do not be a hindrance or a drag on the church if you are physically capable)

### **III. Conclusion**

- a. Lost: You have not experienced true love if you do not know God because the Bible tells us “God is love.” However, you can know true, lasting, unshakeable love, not like the world offers, through Jesus Christ.
- b. Church: There a plenty of hurdles for people to overcome in coming to Christ; sin, repentance, the cross, etc. As Christians our lives and our lack of love for one another is never biblically warranted as a hurdle to the Gospel.

**“Our Glorious Christian Hope” (Sermon #8)  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

**I. Introduction**

- a. (Hopelessness in History) From Gen. 3 everything got progressively worse until the Flood in Gen. 6. Then mankind continued to spiral downward until Gen 11 and the Tower of Babel. Fast forward to 78 AD and during The Roman Peace, out of nowhere, 2000 people are killed instantly when the volcano erupted near Pompeii. This could all seem really hopeless. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the bubonic plague, or Black Death, swept through Europe and an estimated 100 to 125 million people died. WWI, WWII, Vietnam and Korea and all of those generations felt a sense of fear and hopelessness. When the Oklahoma City bombing took place or 9/11 it seemed like it could not get any worse and people felt hopeless. However:
- b. C.I.S.: **“Today, When Many Live Without Hope, We Have a Glorious Hope in Jesus Christ”**

**II. Sermon Body**

- a. We Need a Proper Belief Regarding Death in Christ (v. 13)
- i. “we do not want you to be uninformed” (ignorant; we very much want you to understand this)
  - ii. “asleep” (metaphor expressing the temporary nature of death, i.e. if you sleep you will wake; not just to avoid speaking of death)
  - iii. “that you may not grieve as others” (they thought those who died before the Second Coming would miss out on eternal life; our grief

is real and understandable, however, it is to be distinctly different from the manner in which the world sees death)

- iv. “as others do who have no hope” (New Testament concept of “hope” as confident expectation not uncertain wishing)

**b. We Hope in the Resurrection Because of His Resurrection (v. 14-15)**

- i. “since” (condition; if we believe this, and we do, then this)
- ii. “through Jesus” (Jesus, and what He did on the Cross and the Resurrection, is the agent for our resurrection)
- iii. “God will bring with Him” (Christ will bring the souls of those who have fallen asleep with Him at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming to be joined with their bodies)
- iv. “precede” (whether in time or not, the fact is those who have died in Christ will not be at any disadvantage in relation to those alive)

**c. We Are to be Encouraged By the Truth of Christ’s Coming (v. 16-18)**

- i. “Himself” (emphasizes that Christ does this personally in glory)
- ii. “command/voice/trumpet” (all begin with the preposition “with” and indicate the circumstances accompanying the Lord’s descent; the point is it will be unique and cataclysmic)
- iii. “first” (no reference to another resurrection other than the second; this happens at the Coming of Christ)
- iv. “we will be caught up” (passive voice; the actor is God)
- v. “always be with the Lord” (the awesome, glorious final goal)

- vi. “encourage/comfort” (this should be an extremely comforting truth for all believers)

### III. Conclusion

- a. Lost: If you do not know Christ, life seems hopeless and it is without Christ.
- b. Church: Take heart, be encouraged, Christ will return and we will be with Him forever. Take courage, there is hope!

## “How Sudden That Glorious Day” (Sermon #9) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

### I. Introduction

- c. I love going to my grandparents’ house, Nanny and PawPaw. Every time we go to my grandparents’ house my grandmother makes fried chicken (Describe in detail). However, my wife hates fried chicken, I am still working on her but she hates it. So, when I tell her we are going to their house she just gets this look on her face because she knows we are getting fried chicken. My wife loves to see Nanny and PawPaw but for her there is one down side to every visit. See, the trip to Nanny and PawPaw’s house is cause for excitement for my taste buds but for LouAnn it is cause for dread. There are times in life, or even days in life, where some will look forward in anticipation and others in dread.
- d. C.I.S.: “We Can See the Coming of Christ as a Cause for Fear or a Comfort and Hope”

### II. Sermon Body

- e. We Can Be Certain of His Coming and Its Suddenness (v. 1-2)
- i. “times and seasons” (euphemism for time or day)
  - ii. “no need”/ “fully aware” (Paul is telling them that there is no need to write to them about the time of the day of the Lord because they knew the “nature” of the day of the Lord; emphasis is not on “when” but “how”)
  - iii. “the day of the Lord” (in Jewish history, the OT, the day of the Lord was always synonymous with the day the Lord would punish His enemies and deliver His people)
  - iv. “a thief in the night” (quietly and unexpectedly)
- f. The Coming of Christ Will Be a Day of Terror for Those Who Do Not Know Him (v.3)
- i. “peace and security” (the world is expressing no worry about God or judgment; no thought of the coming of the Lord)
  - ii. “destruction” (they will face final judgment)
  - iii. “sudden”/ “labor pains” (sudden, extreme and intense)
- g. Church, We Must Live Properly in Light of His Coming (v. 4-11)
- i. “but you” (the world will be surprised; Christians will not)
  - ii. “darkness”/ “light” (Christians know so they can see the return of the Lord is imminent; it will not surprise or overtake them)
  - iii. “light”/ “day” (Christians are those who dwell in the light and have been changed by the truth)

- iv. “sleep”/ “awake”/ “sober” (do not be spiritually unaware but be aware; “sober” is synonymous with “awake”)
- v. “sleep”/ “get drunk at night” (let us not do those things which characterize those who are unaware and “of the night”)
- vi. “breastplate of faith and love”/ “helmet of salvation” (faith and love toward God; salvation in Christ/breastplate and helmet are protection against God’s wrath on that day)
- vii. “destined” (God planned beforehand that His children would not be shown wrath but salvation through Christ)
- viii. “died”/ “live” (Christ died for us so we must live our lives in a way that honors His sacrifice)
- ix. “awake”/ “asleep” (referring to 4:14, “whether we are alive or dead” we will be with Him forever)
- x. “encourage”/ “build up” (this should be an encouraging thought)

### **III. Conclusion**

- a. Lost:
- b. Church:

## **“Concerning the Community of Faith” (Sermon #10) 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28**

### **I. Introduction**

- c. Have you ever had that dream that you got up and went to work or school and after a few minutes you realize you have shown up without any pants on? Psychologists say we have that dream because we subconsciously

believe there is a situation or task we are unprepared for. Whatever the reason for the dream the truth is if this actually happened to any one of us one thing would be certain. Embarrassment? Yes! But we would be forced into something most of us do not want; we would definitely stand out!

Hoewever, as Christians we should stand out for our beliefs,

**d. C.I.S.: “The Church of God is to Be Distinctly Christian”**

**II. Sermon Body**

**e. We Must Respect Our Spiritual Leadership (v. 12-13)**

i. “ask” (the word is strong, “urge” or “implore”)

ii. “to respect” (“to recognize”; hold them up, honor them)

iii. “labor” (honor pastoral leadership because God put them there but also because of the work they should be doing; not blindly)

iv. “over you”/ “admonish” (spiritual authority)

v. “in the Lord” (all pastors are to operate under the Lord’s guidance and authority at all times)

vi. “work” (they are to be honored or “esteemed” because of their “work” not just because of their title)

vii. “love” (all of this honor and esteem originates in love)

viii. “peace” (avoid divisions)

**f. True Christ-Followers Must Seek the Good of the Wayward (v. 14-16)**

i. “admonish the idle” (warn the undisciplined; those who are working in the church or outside as well)

ii. “encourage the fainthearted” (encourage the discouraged/timid)

- iii. “patient with them all” (we are all on a journey with Christ and some are farther along than others)
  - iv. “evil for evil” (repay differently than the world teaches)
  - v. “to everyone” (we exist for those outside; do good to the world)
- g. We Must Live Rightly as a Part of His Bride (v. 16-22)
- i. “the will of God” (Christians are to rejoice always, pray always and give thanks in all circumstances because this is God’s will)
  - ii. “do not quench the Spirit” (do stop or slow down what the Lord is doing in the church)
  - iii. “do not despise prophecies” (listen to the Word of God; hold to what is biblical and stay away from what is not)
- h. As the People of God We are Utterly Dependent on Him
- i. “may the God of peace sanctify you completely” (ultimately our holiness is dependent on His grace in our lives; He does it; not legalism but Grace Driven Effort)
  - ii. “He will surely do it” (trust God and He will make you holy; you and I are utterly dependent on Him for our Christian walk)

### III. Conclusion

- i. Lost: If you do not know Christ you can have a reason to “rejoice always” or “give thanks” that only comes through knowing Him. (Gospel)
- j. Church: We are to live and look distinctly different from the world and we can only do it if we are completely submitted to Him and rest in His grace to guide our holiness as we are obedient to Him

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