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DEVELOPING A SHEPHERD CARE APPROACH FOR THE
PASTORAL LEADERSHIP OF HICKORY GROVE
BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE,
NORTH CAROLINA

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DEVELOPING A SHEPHERD CARE APPROACH FOR THE
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I dedicate this project to my precious wife, Candi—a gift from God
and a truly selfless partner in the gospel ministry.

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PREFACE

This project's completion required the help of many great and supportive individuals. First and certainly foremost, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who saved me from a life of selfishness and despair to a life of joy and hope. Without the grace of God, the means to think in these terms and serve the church would not be possible. I am now able to serve as an under-shepherd because of the love and grace of the Chief Shepherd.

Second, I want to thank my wife, Candi, for her loving and exuberant support in this task. She has taken on an extra load with our family while I have been absent to work on this project. Her sacrifice and love has made this project possible. Sincere thanks are due her for the hours of discussion and proofing this project. Candi loves not only me, but also the ministry of the gospel. She is a vital part of the way this project impacts the church.

Third, I am grateful for the immeasurable support and encouragement received from my parents, Harold and Jeanette Powers. Their constant influence in my life gave me a personal understanding of shepherding. I am certain that I would not have made it to this position in academics without their constant support in this endeavor.

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Finally, I am thankful for Hickory Grove Baptist Church. The twelve years we have spent serving this church have made it like family. I am grateful for their support in this project and their forgiveness for the hours spent that might have taken me away from my pastoral responsibilities. I pray that this effort in turn will bless the church with greater health and faithfulness.

Michael Powers

Charlotte, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the Bible, the Lord calls pastors to lead the local church by providing oversight of the flock by keeping watch over their beliefs, practices, and doctrine. This tremendous calling is not a suggestion but a task the Lord expects His under-shepherds to faithfully complete, regardless of the challenges present in a fallen world. This weighty and distinct task becomes more complex, difficult, and rare as the church grows numerically. Generally, larger churches make anonymity easier for the member, creating a greater distance between the member and the pastor. This relationship gap presents a challenge to the pastor as he attempts to accomplish his duty of giving oversight to the flock. This Hickory Grove Baptist Church's pastors desire to shrink this gap to rightly shepherd the members of the church.¹

Context

Hickory Grove Baptist Church (HGBC) was founded in November of 1955. From the very beginning, the Lord blessed the church and it experienced steady growth, struggling to fit into a facility. After an amazing and steady fifty years of growth, the church reached a plateau in its numbers averaging over 4,500 in Sunday school and reaching 17,100 members. During this time of growth, the church started a second English-speaking campus, recreation ministry, Christian school, Latin American campus, and Brazilian campus. To support these ministries, they acquired 172 acres of property

¹HGBC does not have an office titled "elder." HGBC has two offices: pastor and deacon. Each pastor at HGBC is a paid employee of the church. This project uses the term *elder* when speaking of the biblical text and the term *pastor* when speaking about HGBC.

and 592,000 square feet of facility. HGBC took the classic path of many of the modern megachurches and grew into a complex and sophisticated organization.

Keeping up with the rapid growth and supporting the ever-expanding ministry efforts occupied a large portion of the work hours of the pastoral staff. As numbers increased, the church was lured into the temptation of making numerical increase the definition for success. While seeing more disciples of Jesus is always a goal of the church, there was a real danger in having a building full of people with many who were not truly converted to Christ. As the staff focused on numerical growth, they were quietly building a large group of people that experienced very little shepherd care. As is common when a church experiences rapid growth, the staff expended its energy on managing the ever-expanding machine and its administrative needs while the spiritual shepherding of the members was reduced to a minimum. Pastoral care was focused primarily on visiting the sick or counseling those in a spiritual crisis. These responsibilities are necessary, but the overall spiritual health of the membership was receiving little personal attention. Therefore, the responsibilities of the staff have had very little to do with providing shepherd care for HGBC members.

The growing numbers created an exciting and vibrant atmosphere at HGBC. The church's right hearted desire to reach people for Christ caused them to continue to try and reduce any reason a person might not want to come to the church. In this case, the church fell into the temptation of reducing the membership requirements to dangerously low levels in order to see even more people join the church. To become a member of the church, a person walked the aisle in a service, engaged in a short counseling session, and was baptized by immersion. Once that process was complete, the church required little to retain membership. The results of the church's low standard for membership were an inflated number of members, a devaluing of the meaning of membership, and difficulty keeping an account for such a large group. Many of the people on the roll could not be found or had no intention of ever attending HGBC. The low bar for church membership

watered down the pool of church members at HGBC. While there were mature, doctrinally-sound believers in the congregation, they were not the only ones counted as members. Among the many active members were increasingly larger numbers that possessed little biblical and theological knowledge. These individuals would claim to be Christians and fulfilling their commitment to the church, but little evidence of true faith was found when pressed on matters of belief and affection for the Lord. A person could spend a lifetime as a member of the church and have little to no evidence of true regeneration.

In 2010, the senior pastor of twenty-five years retired, and Clint Pressley was called as the new senior pastor. Under his leadership, the church has seen a redirecting of this massive movement in church growth to a healthier and stronger church. Among this movement have been several efforts to lead the church to healthier membership practices. These energies have effectively turned the church in a new direction and will provide support for this project. First, an eight-week new member's class, known as Discover HG, was established to create a clearer and stronger membership process. Second, HGBC had a church covenant in the constitution and bylaws, but the clear majority of church members were unaware of its existence. When the new members' class was established, the church covenant was resurrected and became a clear part of the membership process. The curriculum for the class teaches the value of church membership, theology, and the vision for the church. Third, the pastors personally took on membership interviews with children, teenagers, and adults, supplementing the lesser trained decision counselors of the past. Fourth, as the value of membership has grown, the staff has engaged more with members that need church discipline. However, it is proving difficult to practice church discipline without an overall sense of accountability. The church's Sunday school provides strong teaching but lacks the structure to hold members accountable for their life and doctrine. This results in few people feeling the firm but loving hand of the church body pressing godly discipline into their lives. Formal church discipline is alien to HGBC

members because they view the church as a group that serves their needs. Fifth, the staff meeting agendas have shifted from an event or planning focus to a people and shepherd focus. These efforts have served to raise the value of membership for those entering the church and create a greater sense of accountability to the church body. The need for additional efforts and resources is apparent if the pastoral staff are going to shepherd the flock faithfully.

Rationale

The role of pastor as shepherd of the flock of God is a theme found throughout the pages of Scripture. The factors listed in the previous section drove the pastoral leadership of HGBC to seek a tool to provide shepherd care that corrects errant doctrine. The initial reason for this effort was to normalize accountability to the church body for a church member. The consumeristic sinful tendencies of man promulgate the mentality that the church exists to serve the member or consumer. As this idea expanded, it left less room for members to see themselves as serving the church. HGBC was no exception as many of the members had consumer mindsets. Church discipline in this culture caught members off guard and surprised them. Pastors and church leaders were met with confusion and resistance when they confronted wrong doctrine or sinful behavior. The discussion tool applied to the membership helped to build a sense of accountability for the church.

Second, this shift in mindset served in the church's move toward formal church discipline. Without a culture of accountability, church discipline seemed unfair, unwarranted, and out of place. A tool to provide shepherd care for the church membership helped to lay a foundation of accountability.

Third, there was a need to redefine pastoral responsibilities considering the shift in emphasis toward shepherd care. A discussion tool provided a structured task assigned to the pastoral staff that allowed for accountability for a task that involved direct shepherding. This trackable method helped in the effort to retrain a staff that had become

comfortable performing a different set of responsibilities. Also, the definition for pastoral care expanded beyond crisis care to a genuine shepherd care of the entire flock.

Fourth, church members needed to have a stronger grasp on theology and correction around errant doctrines. The church had been entrusted with the great treasure of the gospel and all the doctrines that stand to uphold its existence. It was important that there are tools to teach right truth, but also to provide correction to those in error. Given past church standards, it was likely that many members were not completely aligned with the core doctrines of the church.

Fifth and finally, since the Lord will hold the pastors accountable for the condition of the flock, a shepherd discussion tool brought greater faithfulness in this task. Megachurches are large and provide plenty of opportunities for anonymity. Smaller churches can rely on the natural flow of relationships, but in larger churches a more structured approach is required. This shepherd discussion tool provided a means for the pastoral staff to have an answer for the spiritual condition of their flock.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a shepherd discussion tool for the pastoral staff of Hickory Grove Baptist Church.

Goals

Four goals guided this project and determined its completion. The New Testament responsibilities of a pastor, particularly in the Pastoral Epistles, provided the parameters for the Shepherd Discussion Tool (ST). The goals for this project were as follows.

1. The first goal was to assess the theological knowledge of HGBC members.
2. The second goal was to develop a ST, with the help of the pastoral staff, that was used by HGBC leadership to address theological issues with HGBC members.
3. The third goal was to develop strategic priorities for implementing the ST.

4. The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of the HGBC membership by using the shepherd discussion tool.

These goals were completed when the means of measurement were met to the defined level of success. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current weaknesses in the theological knowledge of HGBC members. This goal was measured by administering a Theological Knowledge Inventory (TKI) to the active membership of HGBC. The inventory covered a basic list of theological areas, informed by the divisions given in several of the major works on systematic theology.² Each question on the survey provided four different statements of belief on that topic. At minimum one true answer and one false answer were among the choices. The participant marked all that were true about that topic. The survey served as information to the pastoral staff on the current makeup of the congregation. The goal was met with the completion of the survey by at least 25 percent of active church members who received the survey via email.

The second goal was to develop an ST with the help of the pastoral staff, to be used by HGBC leadership in addressing the chosen theological issues with members. The staff read and discussed the results of the TKI. The survey informed the pastors as they discussed issues facing the church body, but it did not determine the contents of the ST as God gave pastors the wisdom to discern the needs of the church body. Steps in the process included a discussion of the survey, perceived theological issues facing the body, and the priority of issues that needed to be addressed. After a list of the main issues was

²Wayne Grudem and Elliot Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013); Albert Mohler et al., *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2014).

generated, the process concluded with a vote choosing the top five issues. The highest rated issues defined the content of the ST. This goal was met when the pastoral staff completed the process and the ST was written.

The third goal was to develop strategic priorities for implementing the ST. A key part of the effectiveness of a tool is the way it is used. Based on the large numbers in a megachurch, a tiered model was used in implementing the ST. Using the Sunday School structure of the church, pastors administered the ST with Sunday school teachers. The teachers were then trained in the use of the tool and administered it to members of their class. Since the church membership had many individuals that no longer have any affiliation with the church, the tool was administered to every church member with a minimum Sunday school attendance of once in the past year. The goal was measured by the adult education division of the pastoral team utilizing a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan. The goal was met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation was sufficient. If the evaluation had been below 90 percent, the plan would have been revised until it met these requirements.

The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of HGBC membership using the ST. After training Sunday school teachers in the process, they administered the ST to church members in their respective classes. After each discussion, the teacher filled out a survey rating the levels they discovered errors in a member's theology or application of theology and if possible, if they confronted these errors. Then, the administrator was asked if they believed the ST was beneficial to the participant. This goal was measured by the number of positive responses given by the administrators in believing the survey was effective. The goal was met when a sampling of at minimum 30 surveys were recorded and at minimum 50 percent of the administrators believed the ST corrected at least some error.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Key terms were used throughout this project, and they are defined here.

Shepherd care. The term *shepherd care* is defined as the accountability and ministry done by the pastors and elders to the church members. Often this is referred to as *member care*. It is also a nuanced definition of the term *pastoral care*, which is often thought of as ministry to the sick or hurting. The pastor is called to provide oversight for the entire flock and *shepherd care* is intended to show the full responsibilities of a pastor.

Pastors. Pastors are the men that serve in the office of teaching, leading, and overseeing the church. The term for pastor is synonymous with the terms for overseer or elder in the New Testament.³ HGBC does not have an office defined as elder; however, the pastoral staff serves in the role of overseeing the church. In the Bible study portion of this project, the term *elder* will be used as it is most commonly in the New Testament. However, when referring to HGBC leadership, the term *pastor* will be used since it is the biblical term used at HGBC. Therefore, the interchanging of these words will be done to serve the biblical text and HGBC's terminology.

This project had delimitations in a few areas to provide focus and clarity. Everyone participating in this project is an active adult member of HGBC. Beyond the basic requirements to be a church member, a person must have Sunday school attendance of a minimum of once in the past year to be considered active and must be 18 years of age or older. A second delimitation was the project was done at a megachurch. HGBC currently averages 3,975 in weekly worship attendance. This unique challenge of caring for large numbers of people is a distinguishing mark of this project. A third delimitation was the project focused on the elder's duty to give doctrinal correction. The Bible calls for elders to provide leadership in many different areas, this project was not meant to

³Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 22-24.

create a comprehensive tool but one that helps the elder serve in the area of doctrinal correction. Finally, this project was limited to a period of sixteen weeks.

Conclusion

The Lord holds the pastoral leadership accountable for the ways they provide oversight for His church. In a world that loves sin and hates the truth, shepherds are challenged by a culture that rejects the truth claims made in the Bible. This challenge presses the church and its leaders to not only have clear doctrinal standards but also a robust and meaningful membership. Churches find these challenges difficult as they attempt to balance this weighty task with many other meaningful matters like administration, programming, and staffing issues. While these issues are important to the life of the church, they are not the essential duties of a pastor. As the effects of this project have taken root at HGBC, the hopeful outcome is a healthier church with members who know, believe, and live out correct doctrine.

CHAPTER 2

ELDERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK OF GOD, WHICH INCLUDES TEACHING AND CORRECTING DOCTRINE

In the New Testament, Christ enters the scene of biblical history and changes the world with his life, death, and resurrection. As He ascends to the Father, He launches the church into existence. Christ's work on earth did not end with his departure but continues through the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. By God's design, as the church era was launched, Jesus' small group of disciples began to organize themselves in a pattern. This in turn resulted in the universal or global church being organized through the means of smaller local congregations. The New Testament provides a blueprint for the ways these local congregations organize themselves. The book of Acts and the epistles are full of instruction dealing with the many different aspects of the local church.¹ As should be expected, the Bible places great emphasis on the character of leaders and their responsibilities in the church, because they will set the tone and direction. The Lord is building a structure of hierarchy where He has ultimate authority which is passed down from Himself to the church or the congregation, then to the church leaders, and finally the individual church member. In this structure, the church leaders bear the responsibility for the flock they oversee. The Lord looks to these leaders as supervisors that are responsible for a group of people. Several key passages in the New Testament speak to the roles and responsibilities of an elder or church leader: 1 Peter 5, Hebrews 13, the pastoral epistles, and Acts 20 provide clear instructions for elders who lead and are held accountable for the body of believers organized as the local church.

¹ Acts 1:8, 2:41-47, 4:32-34, 8:1, 20:28-32, Rom 12, and 1 Cor 12

This study will clarify who leads the church, areas for which they will be held accountable, and areas in which they must hold church members accountable. In particular the emphasis will be on the elder's responsibility to provide doctrinal correction. While there are many different roles of the shepherd, this study will work from the broad list of responsibilities and then zone into the, sometimes-neglected, role of providing doctrinal correction. There are many different responsibilities placed on an elder, this project is aimed at providing a tool to help in just this one area.

In answering the question of who shepherds the church, one should consider the title given to church leaders. First Peter 5 introduces the term elder, which is synonymous with overseer or pastor in the New Testament. Before the specifications of accountability can be delineated, it must be clear who is being held accountable. First Peter 5:1-4 and Hebrews 13:7, 17 show the intensity and importance of the elder's responsibility in the church. The weight of these texts drives the seriousness of this project. These verses also highlight the urgency for elders to properly understand what the Lord expects of them as they shepherd the church. Much of the reason elders provide accountability to church members is because of the accountability they themselves have to the Lord. Considering a second group of passages relating to this topic, the pastoral epistles will show the areas in which a pastor is to hold the body of believers accountable. These epistles were Paul's instructions to two church leaders teaching them how to shepherd the flock. The study focuses on the areas that he emphasized for Timothy and Titus to pay attention to in shepherding the flock. Finally, the study concludes with a look at the charge given in Acts 20:28-31 to the Ephesian elders. This charge highlights the need for doctrinal correction from elders as there are savage wolves ready to devour the church with their false doctrine. In these passages, doctrinal correction is highlighted as a main responsibility of the elder. This information then provides the direction for the ST. Considering all this, elders will be more faithful to their calling with a tool that can help shepherd the church in this key area of doctrinal accountability.

An Elder Is Responsible for Shepherding the Flock: 1 Peter 5:1-4

Oftentimes in the New Testament, elders are referenced but direct exhortation is rarely given like in 1 Peter 5. This text gives personal instruction and serves as training for elders as they lead the local church. Other texts such as 1 Timothy 3 provide the personal qualifications for elders, but here the Bible gives a clear outline of the responsibilities of an elder. In an age of pragmatism, materialism, and liberalism the modern day church has lost this job description for elders. These worldly ideologies have rewritten the expectations placed on elders. Slowly elders have become more concerned with numbers and pleasing the congregation than faithfully serving the Lord. There is very little thought to how they might answer the Lord for their service and much thought given to how they might answer the demands of the world. It is significant that verses 1-4 deal with those in leadership and then the following verses speak of those who submit to that leadership. Elders are first held accountable for their leadership among the flock.² Since the Lord deals with the elders first, and it seems they are the ones to initiate this healthy relationship with the flock, this project will take the natural first step and focus on the role of elder.

As 1 Peter 5 begins, the focus is narrowed to a specific group of leaders called elders. Verse one clarifies that these instructions are not for the whole church but for a particular group of the church. This group is defined as elders. The *πρεσβυτερος* or elders can refer to someone who is advanced in age, older or old. It also refers to an elder or presbyter, which denotes someone who is a member of a local council.³ Peter Davids points out that the primary audience is the “elders among you.” The term elder is not just

²J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 277.

³Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 862.

referring to older individuals but to the leaders of the community and in this case, the leaders of the church. Elder is used often to describe leaders in the church. The title of elder is mentioned 12 other times in the New Testament⁴ and serves as a clear reference to those who hold a church office of leadership.⁵ There is a tie from the obvious definition of the term elder and one's age, as Calvin points out that these men are called elders because they were "principally chosen from the aged."⁶ Peter also sees himself as a part of the group when he refers to himself as a "fellow elder." The fact that Peter uses this term is surprising and nowhere in the New Testament does he take on this title other than in this text. Peter wants to identify with them in their plight as elders.⁷ He even clarifies that these elders are among the church. It is expected that those who are leading and shepherding the church be part of the fabric of relationships in the local church. This will serve as a necessary component of properly knowing, overseeing, and shepherding the local body. The directives and responsibilities of this text are intended for elders that serve as leaders of the local church.

In verse 1, Peter stated that his purpose was to exhort the elders and the content of his exhortation is found in verses 2-4. The opening phrase of verse 2 reaches back into the imagery of the Old Testament shepherd language.⁸ Shepherding was a common practice and something the ancient biblical audience could relate to as an analogy. Many of the Old Testament patriarchs such as Moses and David were shepherds by trade and

⁴Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2-6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5.

⁵Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 174.

⁶John Calvin, *Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, James, and Jude, Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 143.

⁷Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 143.

⁸Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 177.

also served to shepherd Israel.⁹ The leaders in Israel were thought of as shepherds to the people of God. Ezekiel 34:2 indicts the shepherds of Israel for “feeding themselves” and not the sheep. The shepherds failed to search for the lost, strengthen the weak, or take care of the sick or injured. The Lord judges them and declares Himself to be “against the shepherds” in Ezekiel 34:10. As Peter can look back and see the failed shepherds of Israel, he can now see these elders and the great task ahead of them. Therefore, Peter places the great responsibility and much needed task of shepherding on these elders. The verb “to shepherd” or ποιμαίνε is in the aorist imperative which implies the elder should continue this action until the end of the age. This same command echoes the calling of Jesus to Peter in John 21:16 to “shepherd my sheep.”¹⁰ This calling to shepherd and care for the flock is a final piece of a long history where God has been shepherding and caring for His people. His desire to see them cared for is now fulfilled through the elders of the church. This is seen in the way the word for shepherd is translated as pastor in Ephesians 4:12. Some translations will render it as pastors and some as shepherds. The idea of shepherding a flock is rooted in the meaning of the word for pastor. As the title of elder and pastor are synonymous with one another, the job description for the elder/pastor is to shepherd as defined by their name.

As the shepherd analogy expands, the boundaries of the flock are further defined. Elders are responsible for the sheep that are “among them” and “in your care.” Since Paul sees them as “in your care,” these would naturally be people that are “near you” or “with you.”¹¹ Therefore, the elder is not responsible for the global church but the local body that is near enough to shepherd. First Peter 5:3 echoes this call with the phrase

⁹ Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Leicester, England : Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 77–108.

¹⁰Michaels, *1 Peter*, 282.

¹¹Ibid., 283.

“των κληρων” or “your congregations” or literally “your shares.” The local congregation is the elder’s share of a larger global church. Oversight requires an elder to be in close proximity to the sheep. As this nearness is played out, they are to serve as examples to the flock as verse 3 describes. To do this, they must be near enough for them to see their life. This verse proves to be one of the great challenges facing the megachurch. As the church grows, the sheep live further from the church, and the sheer numbers make it more common for church members to live a life completely outside of the church body. The distance and social separation are real challenges for the elders that are called to be “among them.”

Verse 3 warns against lording the power given by God over those in their care. It provides a limit to the oversight and authority given to an elder. Any use of their power is not to be for their own gain or against those who have entrusted them with the power, the congregation.¹² This call to provide oversight and care for the sheep gives the elder a level of authority over the flock, but it does come with limits. The shepherds are limited to exercise only authority that is beneficial to the sheep. Any oversight motivated by selfishness, greed, or wrongful gain is not an acceptable form of leadership in the church and is outside the bounds of the authority granted by the Lord. The limits are there because they are the Lord’s congregations and not the elders’. Another limitation is the accountability the elders have to the congregation. The authority is originally granted to the church as the entire congregation is the final authority in the church. The elders must have the church’s approval in formal discipline, as in Matthew 18 the church is the final authority. Therefore, any oversight given to the elders is under the authority of the congregation. Even though the idea of “your congregations” gives ownership, they are described to be “of God” or “του θεου.”¹³ Ultimately, the elder serves as an under-

¹²Michaels, *1 Peter*, 285.

¹³John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 37 (New York: Anchor Bible, 2001), 834.

shepherd under the authority of the congregation and in the end under the Chief Shepherd who is the true owner of the sheep. Rightly the sheep are all owned by the Chief Shepherd and any responsibility laid on the under-shepherds should not lead to ungodly leadership but humble shepherding.

The shepherd's authority is under the authority of the Chief Shepherd. Verse 4 points to a day when the Chief Shepherd will appear to give a crown of glory. This is the moment the sheep will be judged and the shepherd will be held accountable. Peter is reminding the elders that there will be a day that the Chief Shepherd will appear and they will give an account to Him for what they have done. Elders must feel the weight of accountability to the Chief Shepherd as they attempt to rightly shepherd the flock. As Augustine thought of this text, he reflected on the weight that Cyprian felt as he faced his martyrdom. His anxiety over the account he would give for his sheep was greater than the anxiety over his answer to the proconsul.¹⁴ There is a deep need for pastors to experience a renewed weightiness in their ministry as they look forward to the day the Chief Shepherd will examine their efforts. In a culture with pressure to grow churches numerically and for pastors to capitulate to keep their jobs, this call of accountability to the Chief Shepherd provides an anchor for the heart of an elder.

Elders Will Give an Account for the Souls in Their Care: Hebrews 13:7, 17

Church members with a consumeristic mentality do not see the church as an organization to submit their lives to but as a service provided for them and their families. As churches renew their vision for church discipline they are finding this mindset to be antagonistic to their efforts. When discipline is administered, members are offended that the church and its leadership would claim any authority over their private affairs since

¹⁴Gerald L. Bray, ed., *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 121.

they see the church as an organization that meets their needs. This unbiblical mindset makes it difficult, if not impossible, for pastors to provide proper and faithful oversight of the church. The Bible gives a clear picture of submission to the leadership of the church. As seen in 1 Peter 5, the elders are called to shepherd the souls of men and in Hebrews 13, the members of the church are expected to obey and submit to these elders.

The foundation for the elder's authority is rooted in verse 7 of Hebrews 13. It does not explicitly reference elders, but there are a few reasons to believe these leaders are elders in the body of Christ. First, their main descriptor is teaching the word of God, which is a qualification for an elder. Preaching is denoted in this phrase as well.¹⁵ The authority of the word serves as the source of the authority of these elders and as a backdrop for the call to obey and submit in verse 17. Without standing on the truth of the word, an elder has no special place to speak in authority over another believer's life. The word does not place them in this position, the congregation chooses them as modeled with deacons in Acts 6:3, and the Holy Spirit is responsible for making one an overseer as described in Acts 20:28. Therefore, the congregation chooses, the Holy Spirit makes elders, and the Bible is the ground on which they stand. Second, just like elders are called to be examples, these leaders are called to be models for Christian behavior. In this passage, the believers are called to "imitate their faith." First Timothy 4:12 calls for Timothy to serve as an example for the flock, so must the leaders serve in that manner. The task prescribed for an elder and these leaders are parallel and therefore, we can assume verse 7 is speaking about elders. Verse 7 introduces the idea of an elder being placed in authority over the body as they teach the truth of the word of God. This authority is limited to what the word teaches and would prevent them from overstepping the bounds of the authority granted by God to the elder.

The strongest and clearest statement on the authority of, and submission to, the

¹⁵William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 526.

elder is found in verse 17. It contains three main ideas: submission to the elders, responsibility of the elders, and accountability for the elders. Along with 1 Peter 5, this verse serves as a one sentence job description that defines what the Lord expects from an elder. Authority is passed down from the Lord to the elders and then to the church to hold each member accountable.

First, the Lord expects members of a church to obey and submit to their elders. Lane refers to the authority granted to the leaders in verse 17 as “consequence” of the word they teach back in verse 7.¹⁶ Here the text calls for obedience (πειθεσθαι) which has a nuance of “being won through persuasive conversation.”¹⁷ This does not take away from the demands to obey but adds a shepherding quality to the leaders. The second command to submit (υπεικειν) denotes submission in a military sense and ensures these are not mere suggestions. The two combined create a firm command attached to a shepherd style of leading the flock. The authority must be accompanied with winsome conversation that helps guide the flock to obedience. This type of leadership does not lord it over individuals for selfish gain as 1 Peter 5 warns against, but kindly leads the sheep. As the Lord gives out this authority there is always a safety valve built in to keep these leaders from abusing their power. In this case, they are not given absolute authority, but are called to lead with a higher shepherd-hearted type of authority.

Second, it is the elder’s responsibility to keep watch over the souls of the sheep. The verb used here for “keep watch” or “αγρυπνεν” calls the elders “to be vigilant.” This same word is used in the challenge given to the elders in Acts 20:28-31 and carries the metaphor of shepherding the flock.¹⁸ Just as the church member is expected to submit, so also the elder is required to have intense and steady care for the

¹⁶Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 554.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 555.

flock. Expectations are placed on both parties in this relationship. This kind of job description from the Lord must cause the modern megachurch to examine the tasks and responsibilities of their pastors. Pastors are not administrative event planners but shepherds watching over souls. In a well-intentioned effort to grow the kingdom of God, large churches have slowly changed the role of the elders and pastors in the church. Much of the work for an elder in the body of Christ can be based on nonbiblical roles so that the task of shepherd care in the life of believers is either forgotten or given very little effort. This seems to be a far cry from the vigilant and sleepless elder that Hebrews describes. The elder's main effort should be spent watching over the souls under their care. This clear call for a vigilant watch over souls is an indictment on the modern church.

Finally, the Lord will hold the elders accountable for the sheep under their care and one day He will require these church leaders to give an account. The weightiness of this phrase is one of the primary motivators for this project. To “give account” (Λογὸν ἀποδοσοντες) looks directly to the Lord as the one who takes the account. As an elder serves the church they must do it with the thought the Lord will ask for an account of their service to Him.¹⁹ It is a tragedy for well-meaning elders to be working hard at all the wrong things. After they have served the church, the Lord will not approve of their efforts in the final judgment. The text alludes to the moment where the Lord will ask about each one of these sheep and the elder will be asked to speak on the state of that person's soul.

**An Elder Leads by Modeling Personal Holiness, Teaching
Correct Doctrine, and Correcting Errant
Doctrine: Pastoral Epistles**

Of Paul's epistles, only three were written to individual church leaders instead of churches. These books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus provide pastoral instruction to

¹⁹Paul Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 723.

Timothy and Titus, giving them the title of the pastoral epistles. The apostle Paul saw Timothy and Titus as one of the primary means of keeping their churches pure in doctrine. As he gives them instruction to lead the church, there are three main areas of leadership required of elders. The pastoral epistles show pastors fulfilling their ministry by modeling personal holiness, teaching correct doctrine, and correcting errant doctrine.

There is some debate over whether Timothy and Titus served as elders or apostolic delegates in their respective cities of Ephesus and Crete. Mounce says any claims that Timothy and Titus were elders is not founded in Scripture and is read into the biblical account. They are to be thought of as apostolic delegates sent by Paul to establish the leadership of the church.²⁰ Merkle agrees that it would be a mistake to assume they are pastors. Paul appointed elders in Acts 14:23 and therefore Titus appoints elders in Titus 1:5-9 and Timothy teaches about their qualifications in 1 Timothy 1-13. It does seem they act in elder-like fashion and therefore Merkle does add a helpful distinction which brings them back in the elder conversation. He says the elders' "duties overlap with what Timothy and Titus are instructed to do." Their activities overlap with elders regarding godliness, orthodox teaching, and warnings against false teachers. Even though they may not be elders, one can take the charges in these areas and apply them to the position of elder.²¹

At the end of a list of qualifications for elders in Titus 1:9, Paul gives a summary of the three categories of leadership. He first calls for them to "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught." The elder grasps the word in this way through personal holiness. Second, they must "be able to give instruction in sound doctrine." The elder is able to teach the Bible in a clear and accurate manner. Finally, there is a call to "rebuke

²⁰William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 387.

²¹Benjamin Merkle and Thomas Schreiner, eds., *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 90.

those who contradict it.” Here is the corrective element done after truth is taught. The second and third areas of leadership are similar in that they serve as two sides of the same coin. Teaching is the proactive giving of right doctrine and rebuking is the reactive correction done against error.²² As Hebrews 13:17 describes, the elders are called to give an account of the sheep. Although they will give an account for their own personal holiness, Paul seems to have one thing in mind when he speaks of the sheep. The elder is to focus in on the doctrine of the sheep which includes both teaching it and correcting it. These three areas found in Titus 1:9 will serve as a guide for the ways elders shepherd the church.

Modeling Personal Holiness

The Bible is concerned with the character of elders because of the position of leadership they hold in the church. The tasks and duties assigned to elders are rooted in their personal faith. Their spiritual pacing and walk with the Lord will set the example for the church. Mappes suggests “elders and deacons are to set the standard for ethical behavior to which all believers should aspire.”²³ If all believers are to look to elders as examples, then the elders’ teaching must match their own lives. Before they stand up to teach God’s Word, they must first have godly character to give credibility to their leadership.

Right at the beginning of 1 Timothy, Paul starts by challenging Timothy to charge the church to accept right doctrine. He ties the ability of making the charge to a leader’s personal character when he says, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5).” This charge needs to come from his heart, conscience, and faith. These personal characteristics serve like a

²²Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002): 326.

²³D. A. Mappes, “Moral Virtues Associated with Eldership,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 638 (2003): 215.

well that Timothy would draw from to charge the flock of God. He repeats this connection between the charge he is to give the church and Timothy's own faith and conscience later in 1 Timothy 1:18-19.

The call for personal holiness is most highlighted in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 in the lists given for the requirements to become an elder. These lists are almost exclusively made up of personal character traits with one exception, being able to teach. These qualities were needed as a prerequisite to perform the task of teaching. Merkle sees this as proactive when he says "Instead, some of the qualifications stand, not as reactions against the false teachers, but as proactive qualities that were needed because of the nature of the task that overseers performed."²⁴ The list of 15 qualities in 1 Timothy has much in common with the 13 qualities in Titus. Of the combined 28 listed, there are only four that are distinct to just one list. Marshall points out that many of the qualities stem directly from being above reproach. In Titus 1, the meaning of being above reproach is clarified by describing the five vices to avoid in verse 7 and the seven virtues to maintain in verses 8 and 9.²⁵

Paul also made this call for personal holiness clear through several challenges issued to Timothy and Titus. First Timothy 4:16 instructs Timothy to "keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching." One chapter later in 5:22, Paul tells him to "keep yourself pure," and in 6:11, Paul gives Timothy a personal list of godly attributes to pursue. In 2 Timothy 2:15, he must be prepared to present his own self to God. These personal examples are not just about holy living, they are about right belief. Part of Timothy's personal watch is on his teaching. The personal call on the pastor is not just a holy example but to personally have right and clear doctrines. The importance of the

²⁴Benjamin L. Merkle, "Are the Qualifications for Elders or Overseers Negotiable?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171, no. 682 (April 2014): 178.

²⁵I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 686-87.

personal life is highlighted by the example it will serve for the church. Even though Timothy is young, he must still serve as an example according to 1 Timothy 4:12. Oftentimes more powerful than words, an exemplar of these attributes will teach and lead the church without ever needing to say a word. An elder must be persistent in keeping watch so that at any moment his life may be presented to the Lord for examination and to the church as a model.

Not all the areas of personal holiness mentioned involve disciplines to be added. Some call for areas to avoid. First Timothy 4:6 calls elders to avoid “irreverent, silly myths” and in 2 Timothy 3:5 the people associated with those myths should be avoided as well. They are “religious charlatans” and “religious frauds.”²⁶ Elders who lead in the church of God must be careful to avoid mythical teachings and even the people who push these ideas. Titus 3:9-10 repeats this warning with more instruction on dealing with people who teach myths. The four areas to avoid from verse 9 are “foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law.” Verse 10 encourages shunning a person after they have been given two warnings.²⁷ Elder leadership requires more than adding areas of godliness but also avoiding the myths that so easily deceive.

For a leader to possess personal holiness he must put forth effort. Paul called for this effort in 1 Timothy 4:7 when he asked for him to “train yourself in godliness.” The Greek words have athletic training in mind.²⁸ Just as an athlete would practice and put their body through the rigors of training, so also an elder must train and prepare for personal holiness and right doctrine. A leader does not stumble into personal holiness, but by God’s grace they will train for it. This training produces godliness that will give the credibility and ability for ministry, especially teaching. With that in mind, the second area

²⁶Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 548.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 452.

²⁸Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 249.

of elder leadership is teaching truth.

Teaching Correct Doctrine

Part of an elder's calling is to ensure the church stays on course with its doctrine. The proactive component of this effort is teaching the church correct doctrine from the Bible. Paul sees this as part of his personal identity when he refers to himself as a preacher and teacher in 1 Timothy 2:7. As a preacher he is to act as a "herald" to proclaim a message to teach the church.²⁹ He passes along this calling in 2 Timothy 4:2 when he challenges Timothy to "preach the word" by doing it "with complete patience and teaching." The elder is required to act with "complete patience." This is related to the qualification of gentleness mentioned in 1 Timothy 3.³⁰ So, the same calling on the apostle Paul's life is passed down to the elder Timothy to preach and teach the word. It is also passed to elders that lead the church today. Their primary task is to preach or proclaim the Word of God to the Lord's church.

As Paul is teaching Timothy truths from the Bible, he expects him to pass those things along to the church. He calls for him to "put these things before the brothers" and to "command and teach these things" (1 Tim 4:6, 11). So, as Paul teaches Timothy, he is to teach the church. Elders are called to pass along and teach the doctrines from the Bible that have been taught to them. This is highlighted in the classic passage on discipleship found in 2 Timothy 2:2. There are four generations of church leaders passing it: from Paul, to Timothy, to faithful men who will eventually teach others. As church leaders they are passing down a gospel that has been entrusted to them. The way Timothy learned the Bible from his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5) is another example of this multigenerational model. An elder's leadership is not done in isolation but is part of a chain of elders teaching elders.

²⁹Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 55.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 268.

A major component of an elder's teaching is the public reading of the Bible and an expectation that obedience will follow. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Timothy is challenged to read the Scriptures publicly to the church and part of that reading will involve exhorting the church. One of the simplest but most profound methods of teaching for an elder is reading the Bible. After reading, Timothy is expected to summon the hearers to respond to what they have heard.³¹ As the Bible is read aloud there is great power for the listener as they hear the very words of God. As that power moves, change is expected in the lives of those who hear. In 1 Timothy 6:2 Paul challenges Timothy to urge the church toward obedience as he is teaching. Paul exhorts with the expectation they will respond.³² Since change does not always come quickly, Paul encourages Titus to insist on the things he is teaching (Titus 3:8). The simple reading of the Bible is a powerful means of teaching correct doctrine to the body of Christ.

The list of the elder qualifications was mentioned earlier in this paper, but it is important to note that the only area of competence required is the ability to teach (2 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:9). Part of the leadership skillset required of an elder is the true gift of teaching. This is more about the ability to speak clearly and rightly from the Bible than one's ability to be engaging or draw a crowd. There are many elements that are part of the teaching of the Bible but two stand out in these epistles. First, an elder's teaching will serve as a reminder for many of the truths they have already heard (2 Tim 2:14, Titus 3:1). Second, the dominating theme of a message will be the gospel as an elder does the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5).

Teaching also provides direction for the ordering of the local church. Titus was left in Crete for the main purpose of putting things in order by appointing elders (Titus 1:5). When teaching becomes practical through the ordering of the church, true leadership

³¹George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 208.

³²*Ibid.*, 248.

is evident. Paul instructed Timothy on the roles of men, women, and widows in the church (1 Tim 2:11-15, 5:9-16). It is the elder's job to make sure people understand and are operating in their God-given and biblically directed roles. This ordering is rooted in a divinely given position of authority and rule in the church. Paul assumes elders will be ruling when he calls for them to be given double honor (1 Tim 5:17). This ruling is part of their teaching but is also part of our third and final area where elders exhibit leadership in the church, correcting doctrine.

Correcting Errant Doctrine

Personal holiness and teaching biblical truth is not enough for an elder to keep the church clear of false doctrine. The elder must prune and confront false teachings and teachers. The church needs this conflict and confrontation in order to keep things clear and right. Paul's main purpose in leaving Timothy in Ephesus was for him to confront false doctrine. He uses a military and legal term when he says, "charge certain persons" (1 Tim 1:3). Word Biblical Commentary says it is like a general standing in front of his army commanding them to stop teaching different doctrine.³³ This same word is used in 1 Timothy 6:13 charging him to "keep the commandment unstained and free." This charge comes from his commissioning and laying on of hands referenced in the previous verse and 1 Timothy 4:14.³⁴ The authority rooted in his commissioning gives him the right to stand as a general in authority. Here is a clear picture of the elder as leader in the church providing direction and rule.

An elder corrects anything that veers from correct doctrine or as Paul describes it "different doctrine." This conditional clause calls for correction to those who "teach

³³Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 18.

³⁴Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 165.

otherwise.”³⁵ This different and false doctrine is defined in the following verse as “myth and endless genealogies.” Confronting myths is a common theme as is mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:4, Titus 1:14 and even outside of the pastoral epistles in 2 Peter 1:16. Myth is defined as a tale, legend, fable, or an untruth.³⁶ One of the elder’s roles in leadership is to confront those who are teaching myths.

In keeping with military themes, Timothy is commanded to guard the deposit entrusted to him (1 Tim 6:20). The deposit of clear doctrine and gospel is to be a preserved treasure.³⁷ He is to stand guard like a soldier keeping watch over those who might attack. As he stands guard he must do it by keeping a “close watch” not only on himself, but on what he teaches others (1 Tim 4:16).³⁸ In study and preparation there must be great diligence and care taken so that truth is taught without error. This is done through the power of the Holy Spirit working within the leader (2 Tim 1:14). John Calvin points out that entrusting also involves accountability. One day the elder will give an account for what he has done with the truth.³⁹ The elder must guard against external attacks and false teachers, but also must be careful to examine himself to see if he may have internal error. Titus is encouraged to guard against these false truths by silencing the people who are purporting those errors (Titus 1:11). The church needs elders that will keep a close watch on the treasure of the gospel.

As an elder leads the church, he also reproveth and rebukes as a part of his corrective actions. Timothy and Titus are challenged to *ελεγχω* or reprove or correct

³⁵Ibid., 155.

³⁶Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, 27.

³⁷Ibid., 173.

³⁸Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 571.

³⁹John Calvin, *I and 2 Timothy, Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 203.

those in sin and those who oppose them. This is a common theme in the pastoral epistles since this word is used in 1 Timothy 5:20, 2 Timothy 4:2, and Titus 1:9, 13, 2:15. In Titus 2:15 it is to be done with all authority. An elder is also challenged to rebuke or επιτιμησον those in error (2 Tim 4:2). Reproving is speaking to those who are in error and rebuking is a stronger version that calls for those in error to stop.⁴⁰ Both corrective actions involve confrontation and conflict for the elder. There is one instance in which a sharp rebuke is not encouraged. In 1 Timothy 5:1 an elder is warned against rebuking an older man in a sharp manner. Paul forbids elders to “rebuke sharply” or “strike at” an older man.⁴¹ This is the one stipulation to the overall expectation that the elder will provide this corrective action.

Finally, as an elder corrects those in error, his personal holiness ensures it is done properly. The list of qualifications given for an elder focus on character traits that would help in dealing with conflict. For example, 2 Timothy 2:24-26 calls for an elder to not be quarrelsome but kind, patient, and gentle as they provide correction. In verse 22 the Lord’s servant strives for peace with others, but it is very possible that it will not be achieved.⁴² Even without peace, the elder can always be kind and gentle in the face of conflict. This pastoral heart is essential for people to hear the reproof and rebuke offered by a church leader.

An Elder’s Call Is to Protect against Those Who Teach False Doctrine: Acts 20:28-31

The charge to administer doctrinal correction given to Timothy and Titus is given directly to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. Providing oversight that protects the sheep from wolves is the major theme of this charge. Of the entire speech given, verse 28

⁴⁰Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 454.

⁴¹Ibid., 213.

⁴²Ibid., 424.

is its practical and theological center and thus is the main charge given to these elders.⁴³ As we have seen in the previous passages examined, the ideas presented here are very similar in nature and wording. However, in Acts 20 the main application is for protection against wolves teaching false doctrine. This passage, more than any other, highlights the elder's responsibility to provide correction over false doctrine.

The command to keep watch or oversee, coming from *επισκοπος*, calls for the elders to serve as a guardian for the people of God (Acts 20:28).⁴⁴ The elder is challenged here to guard in a more corrective posture than a teaching posture. The job of the elder is to find the issues and root them out of the life of the church. This challenge breaks into the two branches of self and the church. First, the elder must keep a close watch on himself and his own doctrine (Acts 20:28). This personal care runs in the same veins as the demands placed in 1 Timothy 4:16 for him to keep a close watch on himself. Timothy and Titus were called to live personally holy lives with clear and correct doctrine. The other branch is a care for the entire congregation of the church or "entire flock of God" (Acts 20:28). The elder is not called to certain parts of the church but to make sure the entire congregation is rightly shepherded.⁴⁵ Therefore, the elder will give an account for all the sheep and he must cover the entire church membership.

This oversight is required since there are threats coming against the church. Facing these threats, Paul knows he must commission these elders to serve as guardians for the people of God. These threats come from two different directions, both inside and

⁴³C. K. Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 974.

⁴⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 629.

⁴⁵David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 569.

outside of the church.⁴⁶ From outside the church will come savage wolves who intend to corrupt the doctrine of the church (Acts 20:29). The terms flock and wolves allude to John 10 and the shepherd that protects against the thieves.⁴⁷ The elders are called to provide protective care from wolves that come in from outside the church. Doctrinal threats come from the world and its influences and there will be those who are in the church as false teachers that require correction. Threats will come from a second direction, within the church. The men that will “arise among their own selves” shows that dangers come from within the church membership. These inside threats could come from the elders themselves or out of the church body.⁴⁸ This proves the need for doctrinal correction to be done within the membership of the church. The elder is there to protect the sheep from the wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt 7:15). The ST developed in this project is designed to find those who might be holding on to false teaching while acting among the sheep. These discussions will help to expose the wolves that have hidden in the body of believers. Therefore, the threats of doctrinal heresy can come from the outside and at any level on the inside. The elders are there to serve as watchdogs protecting the sheep from doctrinal errors that will so easily bring destruction to the body of Christ.

Finally, these errors were of a deeply destructive nature. Luke chooses to refer to the outside heretics as fierce wolves, drawing out the imagery of a savage animal that is only out to devour and destroy (Acts 20:28).⁴⁹ In biblical and Jewish traditions, the wolf serves as a fierce predator that tears its prey to pieces. This graphic language shows the severity of the problem and there is a fight involved in taking on these wolves. The seriousness of the problem is highlighted as the wolves endanger the church that was

⁴⁶Ibid., 570-71.

⁴⁷Bock, *Acts*, 630.

⁴⁸Ibid., 631.

⁴⁹Ibid., 630.

bought with the very blood of Christ (Acts 20:28)⁵⁰. This warning is not just reserved for the outside threats but also those coming from the inside. The teachings of these fierce wolves are described as “twisted things” or perversions to the truth (Acts 20:30). The text illustrates this as it speaks of someone being drawn away from a path.⁵¹ The danger here is the truth of the gospel will now be lost and people will divert from the way of truth. So, the shepherds must oversee and correct any deviation from true doctrine.

There are different reasons that church members hold to errant beliefs. First, some are wolves, intentionally meaning to do harm with their destructive doctrine. They not only believe the heresy but want to spread it through the church. This type of error requires the strongest and swiftest action from the church and its leaders. Second, some individuals are consciously theologically illiterate and have adopted heterodox doctrine. These individuals know they hold these differing beliefs but are content to stay in this state of dissonance with the church. Third, and possibly most common, there are theologically illiterate members of churches who are unaware of their doctrinal error. These believers unknowingly hold to heretical beliefs and would likely change if taught correctly. Part of guarding the truth is protecting against each of these different ways in which false doctrine manifests itself in the church.

Paul concludes his challenge to the elders when he directly calls them to “be alert” (Acts 20:31), which uses the same Greek word *γρηγορεῖτε* as the command issued in verse 28.⁵² This alertness to false doctrines is the focused and ready mindset that should be in the elders of the church. As seen in this chapter, the elder is charged to provide shepherding for the local church in their care. This oversight is in several areas but in particular they are charged with guarding the church from doctrinal error.

⁵⁰Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 847.

⁵¹Bock, *Acts*, 631.

⁵²Schnabel, *Acts*, 849.

Therefore, as this text calls for the elder to be alert they must be watching out for wolves sneaking in with false doctrine. If this is truly the charge placed on those who steward the church, then one would expect to see it woven throughout church history and to be popular practice among modern church leaders. Chapter 3 will look at these questions and more concerning how this command to be alert has played out in the churches of the past, present, and specifically at Hickory Grove Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 3
ANSWERING THE CALL TO PROVIDE DOCTRINAL
CORRECTION IN THE MEGACHURCH

The weight of the biblical call for shepherding has rested on church leaders for centuries and today still resonates in many churches around the world. Tragically, the cultural tides and the pull of worldly influences dilute the view of the church's authority in the life of its members and press individuals to see themselves as autonomous spiritual consumers. In this hostile culture, the Bible compels the church and its leaders to faithfully shepherd its members. In order to be effective in executing this call much thought must be put into the systems that carry out this command, especially in a megachurch. In the theater of church history megachurches are relatively new on the scene and provide a different and unique set of challenges for shepherd care. Among megachurches that desire to provide healthy member care, the large numbers and corresponding logistics often prove to be too great a barrier to faithfully shepherding. This chapter will examine the different voices of the past and present that call for faithful shepherding in the local church, and then the biblical call to shepherd the flock by providing doctrinal correction will be filtered through the advantages and challenges of the megachurch.

**Historical and Current Voices Call for Elders to
Shepherd the Flock by Providing
Doctrinal Correction**

Both past and present church leaders have had a burden for elders to provide doctrinal correction and protection for the body of Christ. Historically there have been times of great emphasis and also times of great neglect. The modern landscape is no different as some churches are faithfully protecting their sheep while many are putting

little to no effort into tracking and caring for their flocks. These past and present voices provide the application for the ways faithful shepherding should occur in the local church.

Past Voices

Throughout church history leaders have not always faithfully shepherded the flock. As seen in the exegesis of the texts in chapter 2, at the beginning of the church elders were present and actively shepherding the body. These elders were the Lord's main plan to provide leadership to the church and were His way of safeguarding the church. Considering this, it is surprising to see how elders are not a common practice and at times are completely missing from church history. With so many clear biblical texts on this role, the church would have to drift from the Bible's practices in order to drift from providing oversight. In history, the church's treatment of the Bible is a key indicator for shepherding faithfulness. Strangely enough the two are symbiotic as the practice of elder oversight was put in place to keep the church focused on the word and the word keeps the practice of having elders in place. Since the two are related it should not be surprising that as the church drifted from its commitment to the Bible, elders were forgotten as well. It would be hard to read all the New Testament without seeing the way elders were woven into the life of these early churches. As this aspect of the history of eldership was dealt with in chapter 2, this section will begin with the early church.

In A.D. 96, Clement gives the first extra-biblical resource that supports elders in the life of the church. The plurality of elders began to erode by the second century, when the church shifted to a single bishop or elder. Finally, by the third century, Cyprian elevated the bishop over the church and the other offices.¹ At this point eldership and their oversight of the people began to fade into history. Strauch points out that the

¹Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 46-50.

eldership decline followed the church's drifting from Scripture, which meant the "eldership was lost for nearly fourteen centuries."²

After a long and tragic drought, as the Reformation dawned in the sixteenth century, it brought about a resurrection to the practice of elders shepherding the church. This significant change in the polity of the church occurred as the Pope's importance was declining.³ Witmer points to John Calvin and his significant role in the resurgence of eldership with the Reformation. Calvin played the largest role in this effort as in the *Institutes* he outlines in detail the offices and their roles in the church. His teachings saw the role of the elder as correcting doctrine to prevent errors from taking over the church. One can see how the context of the Reformation would lead Calvin to put a high value on correct doctrine. His work revived the interest in what the Bible teaches about the roles of elders in the church.⁴ Strauch says that even though Calvin "promoted its restoration," the efforts were not completed because of "clerical traditions."⁵ Catechesis was another practice that was revived with the Reformation. With the renewed emphasis on doctrine had to come a renewed emphasis on teaching it. Luther restored the office of catechist and using the printing press, small handbooks for catechism were printed as a means of teaching the people.⁶ The relational nature of catechizing is a major part of the resurgence of shepherding God's people in the area of right doctrine.

²Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, ed. Stephen Sorenson and Amanda Sorenson, rev. exp. ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 2003), 10-11.

³Thomas White, "The Why, How, and When of Church Discipline," in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 223.

⁴Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 51-54.

⁵Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 11.

⁶Gary Parrett and J. I. Packer, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*, Spire Books ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 23.

Two observations can be made about this resurgence of eldership that parallels the Reformation. First, as the Bible is elevated, eldership returns because it has its origins in the Scriptures. It is encouraging to see that historically the men that have placed a high value on the study and direction of the word, have also practiced eldership. Second, the need for elders became more significant as the importance of doctrine arose. As the people began to interact with the word and the church began to guard the truth of the Bible, the need for elders to police those doctrinal boundaries was a natural conclusion. The Reformation's paralleling resurgence with eldership shows a natural connection between the Bible and elders.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Puritans in England picked up on this rising movement for elders and pressed it further. While the Westminster Assembly addressed forms of elder leadership, a leader emerged that serves as the most "exemplary model" of pastoral care since the Reformation, Richard Baxter.⁷ Baxter saw his responsibility to his sheep as something for which he must personally take ownership. He made a point to visit everyone under his care with the goal of ensuring he had rightly shepherded the flock given to him by God. Baxter felt that meeting with each person would "help our people better to understand the nature of their duty toward their overseers, and, consequently, to discharge it better."⁸ Baxter's thinking on this area has shaped one particular aspect of this project. Simply the act of sitting down and asking someone questions about their doctrine is effective in creating a culture of accountability. The people learn the nature of their relationship with the elders and the church as they are asked about their doctrine. Here Baxter knows that just by having the meeting, the people will learn they have a duty toward their overseer that they did not think of before. The same is true of the exercise of administering the ST. As people have questions posed to

⁷Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 60.

⁸Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656; repr., London: CreateSpace Independent, 2011), 180.

them about their doctrine, they will automatically begin to learn two things. First, they will feel the immediate accountability to know and believe correct doctrine. Second, they will begin to see the authority of those in leadership over them by the act of answering the questions they pose. Just like Baxter's visits to his church members created a culture of accountability, so will the conversations had through the ST among HGBC members.

Baxter also felt the weight of the task of eldership. The account elders will give to the Lord described in Hebrews 13:17 places a burden so great that some men might have been better off having never entered the ministry. Baxter describes this burden in his famous work *The Reformed Pastor* when he said,

Oh what a dreadful thing is it to answer for the neglect of such a charge! And what sin more heinous than the betraying of souls? Doth not that threatening make you tremble—'If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand?' I am afraid, nay, I have no doubt, that the day is near when unfaithful ministers will wish that they had never known the charge of souls; but that they had rather been colliers, or sweeps, or tinkers, than pastors of Christ's flock, when, besides all the rest of their sins, they shall have the blood of so many souls to answer for.⁹

He will later say that one should labor so that their works would not “prove your terror in the review.”¹⁰ If men spent much time considering this additional burden, the numbers entering the ministry would be reduced. Baxter deeply felt this burden and it is what drove him to such a laborious ministerial task of meeting with all of his flock. This kind of burden is what should drive the elder to seek out the sheep and provide accountability for their life and doctrine.

The closest historical precedent to the ST developed in this project is Thomas Chalmers' tool he would use as he visited the homes of those in his parish. These were brief visits, with no prayer, in which he would ask a “series of brief but pointed questions as to the state of church attendance and education in the family.”¹¹ Chalmers interacted

⁹Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 199.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 200.

¹¹Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 66.

with two areas that would be pertinent to a megachurch. First, he started an early form of dividing up the people and assigning them an elder and a deacon. He would still go with the elders as they visited the people, but Chalmers assigned a portion of the flock to each elder so they would care for them. In a megachurch, or any church over 200 members, this kind of division and assigning must happen to ensure that all the members are rightly covered. The second area comes from an observation made by one of these assigned elders. He rightly said they were “putting the butter very thinly upon the bread.”¹² This also proves to be one of the greatest challenges in this effort and this apprentice elder notices the weakness in Chalmers’ system. If the numbers are so large, then the time is spread out among many people, which in turn makes the shepherd’s contact and oversight minimal. The challenge from 1 Peter 5 for the elders “among them” is more difficult to complete if you are only able to have thin short contact. That is why for this project’s test sample, Sunday school teachers were chosen to administer the ST. The weekly contact and close relationships should prove to be a strong foundation to ensure the ST is not simply a thin conversation, but a serious positive step in an already thriving discipleship relationship.

Current Voices

Much has been written in response to some of the unhealthy trends happening in the modern church. As churches rightly desire to see growth in numbers as more people place their faith in Christ, it is tempting to avoid any limiting doctrinal statements and draw the net as wide as possible around Jesus. Much of this comes from the twentieth century, where evangelicalism fell into the temptation of reducing the faith down to just a few essentials. At its core, Christianity became a commitment to the Bible and an understanding that Christ saves individuals.¹³ This minimization of doctrine allowed for

¹²Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 66.

¹³David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today’s*

more people to gather around fewer beliefs: simply shorten the list of required beliefs and the number of people able to affirm them will grow. Even amidst this culture of church growth, there are church leaders who are calling for church health over size. In Mark Dever's influential work on the marks of a healthy church, he says theology is "not merely an abstruse, abstract, academic affair" but is a critical part of a healthy church.¹⁴ This healthy church movement is reviving the call for elders rightly shepherding the flock. If right theology is necessary for a healthy church then false teaching is not something to be corrected by professors in the halls of the university but rather elders in the halls of the church.¹⁵ Robert Thune echoes this when he claims if there is "one thing that kills the spiritual vitality of a church, it's false doctrine."¹⁶ For these men, false doctrine is the church-attacking plague that is cured by the ministry of the elders. It must be addressed and corrected to have a body of believers that is pleasing to the Lord. A few observations can be made about the move towards faithful shepherding happening in the modern church.

First, the key writings on elders give varying levels of importance to doctrinal correction. Alexander Strauch's seminal work, *Biblical Eldership*, highlights this task as part of his list when he says elders "protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, ... and judge doctrinal issues."¹⁷ This key work rightly reflects the emphasis in the Bible for providing doctrinal correction in the church.

World, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 14.

¹⁴Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 69.

¹⁵Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 112.

¹⁶Robert H. Thune, *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 82.

¹⁷Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 16.

Strauch sees protection from false teachers as a “major part” of duties assigned to an elder.¹⁸

In contrast, Witmer lists the elder’s roles as knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting but nothing really pressing toward doctrinal correction. In his chapter on protecting, Witmer deals with Acts 20 and other passages that deal with false teachers, but the practical application is focused on staying in close contact so that the sheep will not leave the church. He zones in on church attendance as something to be monitored. While this is a right effort, it does not seem to be the main effort that should be emphasized. There is little emphasis on doctrinal correction as a part of protecting the sheep. Merkle says that the elder is a shepherd and teacher, but these tasks do not address the elder’s role in correcting false teaching.¹⁹ Rinne, writing on the topic of church elders and under the Nine Marks publishing banner, says the five species of sheep in the church are sinning, wandering, limping, fighting, and biting.²⁰ Even with the strong emphasis on biblical doctrine in the Nine Marks movement, none of the sheep listed by Rinne are in need of doctrinal correction from the elders. Finally, when speaking of the lack of doctrinal correction, even Richard Baxter’s efforts were more focused on teaching than doctrinal correction. When he spoke of correction it was for those who were straying in sin or were not believers. He was not visiting homes to detect error and in turn provide doctrinal correction. The danger in some of these approaches is the overemphasis on behavior and under-emphasis on doctrine.

It is crucial that the elder addresses the doctrine and the behavior of the individual. Church leaders have warned against focusing in on behavior apart from

¹⁸Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 17.

¹⁹Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 89-90.

²⁰Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 62-68.

doctrine. Os Guinness warns against the culture's effort to try and separate what people believe from how they behave or, as he calls it, the "hollowing out of beliefs."²¹ It is impossible to separate the behavior from the belief. The New Testament epistles exemplify this as they almost always begin by teaching right doctrine and then challenging the churches to right living. Start with doctrine first and then move on to practice. The ST is doctrinally heavy because of this biblical pattern. It is expected that the order for dealing with a whole person, is first with their orthodoxy, right belief, then their orthopraxy, right action.

Second, there is a clear distinction between teaching right doctrine and correcting errant doctrine. Chapter 2 showed the places the Bible gives this distinction but many of the voices in the conversation on elders today see it as well. Richard Mayhue points out the two ways an elder provides discipline to the flock. First by providing "truthful positive direction" and then second, to "warn of spiritual dangers such as sin, false teaching, and false teachers." In short, the elder is both "watching and warning" the sheep.²² Dever describes church discipline, his seventh mark of a healthy church, as both positive or formative and corrective.²³ Jonathan Leeman expounds on this saying, "teachers teach and teachers correct" because "that's how students grow."²⁴ Traditionally writings on the office of elder include teaching as a part of their ministry but this second corrective effort gets less emphasis, if any at all. To be clear, the issue is not the emphasis

²¹Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 18.

²²Richard L. Mayhue, "Watching and Warning," in John F. MacArthur and Master's Seminary Faculty, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 275.

²³Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 182.

²⁴Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 220.

given to formative discipline but rather the lack of teaching on corrective discipline in doctrinal areas.

Third, the elder's responsibilities are best thought of in the two categories of micro-shepherding and macro-shepherding. Witmer uses Acts 20:20 to distinguish these two categories as the elders were operating in public (macro) and from house to house (micro). Macro-shepherding is for the "functions that relate to the entire church" and micro-shepherding is for the "elder's personal ministry." He warns that most of the functions of the elders deal with the macro levels and not the micro.²⁵ *The Elder's Handbook* does not neglect this idea but calls for the elders to operate in a micro-shepherding fashion when correcting doctrine. Elders are to "investigate signs of defection and to bring about correction in discipline."²⁶ When calling for investigation it must be done on the personal micro level. The correction is done by speaking to a person individually about their false beliefs. This kind of micro-shepherding over doctrine is missing in many of the elder models today.

This project is particularly focused on one of the many roles of a shepherd: providing doctrinal correction on a micro-shepherding level. It zones in on the role of an elder that provides pastoral care to the church body on a micro level. It is meant to serve as a counterbalance to the many models that speak only of an elder teaching. The ST is designed to aid the elder in micro doctrinal correction. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive tool for the elder's shepherding needs. First, it helps provide doctrinal correction and aids the elder in fulfilling their primary duties.²⁷ Second, it serves to identify and aid in correcting the errant doctrine of church members. Finally, it operates

²⁵Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 103-4.

²⁶Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library, 2012), 241.

²⁷Donald J. Macnair and Esther Lightcap Meek, *The Practices of a Healthy Church: Biblical Strategies for Vibrant Church Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1999), 140.

on a personal micro level with each church member. The ST is intended to help fill a shepherding void in the life of the modern day elder movement.

Shepherd Care in the Megachurch

The next section will take the biblical mandate to shepherd the flock and press it through the filter of the megachurch. As a church changes in size, it also changes in its dynamics, leadership, and structures. This means parts of large churches or megachurches are different from smaller churches.²⁸ These changes bring a unique set of advantages and challenges to churches as they strive to be faithful to Christ. The changes in the megachurch are examined specifically in the area of shepherding the members through doctrinal correction.

Advantages

The megachurch may pose challenges to keeping watch over the large number of members, but that does not mean it is a wrong church model. Even as Os Guinness issues warnings to the modern megachurch, he does not eliminate it as a viable option. To the contrary, he warns against the danger of not accepting a new movement because of its newness. He warns that when one is “dining with the devil” they must be careful to do it with a “long spoon.”²⁹ In this analogy, he does not forbid dining with the devil or interacting with the world, but rather, warns against getting too close to the world. Other authors, such as Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, write to show the many values of the megachurch.³⁰ Knowing some have attacked the megachurch, they want others to see the

²⁸Tim Keller, “Preaching Article: Leadership and Church Size Dynamics,” accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/tim-keller-leadership-and-church-size-dynamics-737>.

²⁹Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 30-31.

³⁰Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America’s Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), xvii.

advantages. Although this paper speaks candidly of some of the challenges of megachurch shepherd care, there are advantages to shepherding in a megachurch.

The first advantage a megachurch has in shepherding is a value for excellence in everything. Tim Keller says the megachurch is excellent in “arts, teaching, children’s programs, and so on.”³¹ This same excellence should also carry over to an excellence in membership. In a country club with excellent amenities one would expect to have challenging membership requirements. As a megachurch has excellence in many areas, the natural expectation would be for the membership process to be clear and meaningful as well. Providing this excellent level of shepherding also requires significant administrative processes to maintain a true and healthy membership. A megachurch has the staffing and skills to innovate and implement these processes into the life of the church.

A second advantage is the agility and openness to change found in the megachurch.³² Typically, large churches are some of the most innovative. Even if healthy membership and accountability have not been prevalent in the past, the leaders are used to, and oftentimes looking for, change that will improve the organization. Also, small groups of opposition possess diminished power in the large church. In a small church, it is simple for a few individuals to cause a roadblock, but in the large numbers of a megachurch the individual has much less power. These factors make it easier for the megachurch to shift its methods of member care.

A third and final advantage of the megachurch comes from the resources and staffing available to shepherd the body of believers. In a large church, it is possible to devote an entire staff position to shepherd over smaller portions of the congregation. There is also a greater ability to hire someone who is able to specialize in a particular

³¹Keller, “Preaching Article,” 11.

³²Ibid.

area of ministry. A position could be created that primarily tracks and manages the membership rolls of the church. Having an individual to monitor these roles on a full-time basis would be a tremendous advantage to maintaining accurate records. Large churches also have considerable pools of volunteers that can help. This could possibly be lay elders or other trained and qualified lay leaders that could assist in the shepherding process. These resources are advantages generally found in larger churches.

Challenges

Even though there are advantages found in megachurches, there are also disadvantages or challenges. To ensure success, these challenges must be identified and overcome. Following are common challenges megachurches face in caring for their members and promoting healthy membership.

The first challenge comes from the very makeup of a megachurch.³³ As a church grows in size, the systems and structures of the church must change in order to continue to function properly. Minimal planning goes into having one or two couples over for dinner, but when you throw a party for 40 people, the planning becomes more involved. In the same way, churches must change how they operate as they grow from hundreds to thousands. As this occurs there will be changes in “organization structure, staffing, and leadership patterns; programmatic offerings; worship forms; and physical plant.”³⁴ As a part of this change, the models for shepherding must change. Tim Keller list 10 principles of “size dynamics” that change as the church grows. A few of them have an impact on the shepherding of the membership. First, the church grows in “increasing complexity,” which means the care for members must grow in the same

³³A megachurch is defined as a church that averages two thousand weekly attendees. Attendance is a better indicator than membership as churches track membership in different ways. Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, xviii.

³⁴*Ibid.*, xxi.

complexity. Second, the “shifting role in the ministers” creates a greater challenge for the pastors to stay close to the flock. Third, the church must “structure smaller groups” since the church is no longer one small group.³⁵ These three in particular create some hurdles in providing oversight for the members of a megachurch.

Much of the modern effort to generate a healthy membership is not occurring in the megachurch community. Among the writings on this category little attention is given to methods that work in megachurches. Even the examples given for large churches in Witmer’s work, would barely reach the megachurch mark of at least 2,000 in regular worship attendees.³⁶ In the long history of the church, this challenge is a relatively new phenomenon. Throughout history there were large crowds who gathered to hear preaching, but only in the past 50 years did the megachurch become a common phenomenon. Since the size of the megachurch changes the dynamic, it can no longer rely on past methods of member care. Many of the key elements that supported faithful member care are not a part of the megachurch. Therefore, keeping track of such a large group of people will require new systems and structures to replace what naturally occurs in smaller congregations. This project is designed as a step in that journey.

The second challenge in holding members accountable for their doctrine is an unwillingness to submit to authority and a lack of understanding on their part. As culture presses against any type of authority placed in the lives of people, it will surely influence the church as well. Witmer links this lack of submission to the “failure to respect the sovereign lordship of the ultimate authority.”³⁷ If an individual will not follow the Chief Shepherd, there is no reason to believe they will want to submit to any other authority. Church members’ ignorance of the call to submit to the church and its leaders will allow

³⁵Keller, “Preaching Article,” 2-5.

³⁶Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 205.

³⁷Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader*, 77.

them to follow the currents of the culture and misunderstand the level of oversight the elders should provide. One of the more telling responses on the TKI given to the church for this project was the statement on the doctrine of the church. Only 16.87 percent marked “The church is an organization Christians submit to” as a true statement.³⁸ One teacher remarked they “thought of cults” when they thought of submission to the church. In many ways authority and submission have negative connotations in the culture at large. Leeman identifies this as a false view of love. Modern church members see love as self-expression and self-fulfillment and therefore love has nothing to do with acts of discipline. This heightened individualism plays out in the three subcategories of consumerism, commitment phobia, and skepticism, which ultimately ends in anti-authoritarianism.³⁹ Any effort to hold members accountable in this environment will be misunderstood at best and despised at worst. It should be of no surprise when church members press back against any efforts to hold them accountable, especially for what they believe. This culture of anti-authoritarianism stands against the church’s efforts to guard the deposit of the gospel.

The megachurch culture also plays into the culture of low expectations. The goal of attracting large numbers drives many churches to lower the standards of entry. Oftentimes “good participants” are given very few expectations and as they rise in leadership the expectations rise.⁴⁰ The emphasis on obligation to a congregation is replaced with a message of helping members “progress from skeptic or seeker to believer to learner to disciple to apostle.”⁴¹ While some part of this is helpful, the nature of Christ’s call is for total sacrifice. The call to join the church and the movement of

³⁸See appendix 2.

³⁹Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense*, 45-67.

⁴⁰Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 109.

⁴¹Lyle E. Schaller, *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 22.

Christianity is comprised of taking up one's cross and denying oneself. These members cannot be held accountable for information they have never been exposed to or don't understand, or in other words, their theological illiteracy.

The third challenge is the undervaluing of doctrine and right belief. Some churches see close adherence to right doctrine as a gospel barrier. In this mindset, doctrine is reserved for seminaries and super Christians, but not for the church.⁴² In some churches, they claim to highly value doctrine but their attempts to contextualize the gospel cause it to be minimized.⁴³ The church's website may give strong and clear doctrinal lines in their statements of belief, but in their preaching and teaching, they will be virtually forgotten. This movement has influenced the member care and discipleship in the church so much so that most of their efforts are spent on behavior and not beliefs. However, doctrine or orthodoxy should lead to practice or orthopraxy. The pursuit of right doctrine is not a gospel barrier but a means of protecting the gospel. The end goal is to see doctrine change the heart. Thune captures this when he says the "goal is not doctrinal conformity but treasuring Christ."⁴⁴ As will be discussed later in this chapter, the elders' efforts of overseeing the flock are commonly focused heavily on practice over doctrine. This does not seem to be the New Testament epistolical pattern of doctrine leading to practice. The megachurch movement has created a shallow end for unbelievers to wade into, while inadvertently watering down the gospel.⁴⁵ There is great danger in the destination of those who trust in a watered-down gospel. Without clear doctrinal lines, an individual ends up worshipping a different god and in turn has a different eternal

⁴²Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 76.

⁴³Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 109.

⁴⁴Thune, *Gospel Eldership*, 87.

⁴⁵Thumma and Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, 115.

destination.⁴⁶

The fourth challenge of leading change in many megachurches is the long history of expectations built up from past successes. If a person came to the church through a recreation program, then their heart is tied to that program. Whatever attracted the large numbers of people to make it a megachurch, creates this connection between the church members and current church structures. Church culture is a river of different streams of thought that carve out ruts and canyons in the worldviews of church members. The church has a natural built-in means of carving these ruts through the teaching ministries of the church. Naturally, and rightly so, the people begin to absorb the teaching and then they become passionate for the goals espoused by the church. In new church plants or revitalizations, there is a sense of a fresh start and changes in vision are expected. In an established church, the challenges of change are greater. The long-standing members and those who have recently joined the church do so because they like the current culture and are not looking for change.

Consumerism is one cultural influence evident in some megachurches. The programs are enjoyable for the kids, the friendships in Sunday school classes are satisfying, and the church's various ministries meet many of the members' personal needs. The megachurch model was designed to attract people by meeting their needs. In this mindset, the authority is the member/consumer and then the church serves the member/consumer. Therefore, any effort to show the church in authority over the member will be contrary to their consumerism. Evangelism, with little concern for any meaningful membership, is another cultural mindset. Every program and effort are built with the main goal of reaching people with the gospel. Clearly this is an important goal for the church but is not the only goal. Ultimately the church exists to bring glory to God. When evangelism is primary, other things get pushed aside in the name of reaching

⁴⁶Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 99.

people for Christ. When evangelism trumps doctrine, confrontation is avoided as it will push people away. The evangelistic focus can also bring about a lack of emphasis on discipleship. Without discipleship, members can lead private lives that are separate from the surface level engagement required at church. With these two separate lives, church members will then resist the efforts to bring their private lives under the jurisdiction of the church. Fourth, the change in culture will be slow. Any time individuals uproot what they believe and then plant in new beliefs, it takes time. Each person must admit that some of the things they were passionate about are no longer accurate. This change can only be done slowly, in small segments.

A fifth challenge is the change required for the pastors and their mindset. In the same way the church is learning a new mindset, the pastors must learn to do ministry in a new way. First, the pastors must stop planning programs that take all of their time. Administrative tasks should not dominate the workload of a pastor. The tasks regarding the shepherding of the flock must increase while administrative programmatic tasks must decrease. The classic attractional megachurch has produced program planners and not pastors. Jared Wilson observes this as he sees “the gap between congregant and congregation grows because the staff is too busy keeping the machine running.”⁴⁷ This change would go beyond reallocating tasks, even to the level of reorganizing the staff structure and budgets. For example, if the church puts on a large community fall festival, the resources required to successfully execute the event would need to be reallocated. The pastor’s time and church’s budget would be spent on shepherding individuals and not executing the event. Second, the pastors must change the methods they have used for Bible studies and other ministry activities. This means the programs must be restructured to support more significant discipleship efforts. If the pastors are attempting to hold members accountable for their doctrine, then the programs should support this culture of

⁴⁷Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 62.

accountability. From discipleship groups to Bible studies, any time people feel accountability they will build a tolerance to hearing questions like those in the ST. If this is not the case, when asked about their doctrine they will feel singled out and uncomfortable. Third, the pastors must be comfortable operating in two worlds. They must press toward the change to a culture of accountability while still allowing for much of the old culture to exist. Many of the young idealistic pastors tend to desire instant change and want to quickly do away with the old culture. Some of the older pastors are comfortable in the old culture and are not always pushing for change. HGBC seems to have a balanced mix with two pastors in their twenty-fourth and twenty-ninth year of ministry and two in their first year of ministry. The mix stabilizes the changing culture as the church makes the journey to a new and healthier place.

The sixth challenge is the difficulty facing each pastor who tries to shepherd the large number of members. As a church grows in size it can become difficult, if not impossible, to assign members to pastors.⁴⁸ In attempting to break the membership up and assign every member to a pastor, the ratio of member to pastor is overwhelming. HGBC has experienced this firsthand. Even though there have been efforts to clean up the membership roll from its highest point of 17,100, the pastor to church member ratio is still daunting. There are 18 paid pastors to care for the 12,123 people that are church members.⁴⁹ This means for every pastor there are 674 members. The potential fix of this problem is to increase the shepherds and decrease the number of sheep. There are continuing plans to clean up the rolls.⁵⁰ In the meantime, this project has used a list of church members that have been to Sunday school at least once in the past year. That

⁴⁸Macnair and Meek, *The Practices of a Healthy Church*, 135.

⁴⁹As of September 28, 2017. This ratio does include lay elders.

⁵⁰Matt Schmucker, "Cleaning Up the Rolls," *9Marks*, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.9marks.org/article/cleaning-rolls/>.

brings the numbers down to 2,900 “active” church members, 161 members per pastor. It is possible to do minimal member care at these numbers, but not at the same level as some churches that are successfully providing member care, such as Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. They have 27 elders caring for 1,006 members giving them a 1:37 ratio.⁵¹ To get HGBC’s ratio down even more, this project brought Sunday school teachers into the shepherding efforts. This makes the task more manageable but is not a long-term solution. HGBC faces a unique set of challenges and without lay elders and clean member roles, other efforts will have to be employed.

Conclusion

Rightly shepherding the church has been a theme throughout the history of the church. Of all the effort and writing done on the responsibilities of an elder, very little has dealt with the task of providing doctrinal correction. This task for the elder is especially critical as the American landscape has abandoned any sense of biblical authority or pursuit of truth. These cultural trends have minimized doctrine and the need to provide any correction. Church members do not expect to be held accountable and the church leadership oftentimes is focused on other areas of the church. This mindset causes the leaders of the church to neglect this biblical mandate to provide doctrinal accountability and correction. In the midst of all this the megachurch has entered the scene with its unique set of advantages and challenges. This project is intended to help the church rise to this call of faithfully shepherding and provide a tool for church leaders to give doctrinal correction to individual church members. The next chapter will outline the details of the project and the ways in which it helped the church leadership faithfully guard the deposit entrusted to them.

⁵¹Mark Dever, 9 Marks weekender conference, Washington, DC, March 16-20, 2017.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING THE SHEPHERD DISCUSSION TOOL

Over 12 weeks, I studied the theological knowledge of HGBC, developed the ST, established a plan to test the ST, and then tested the ST. The project was simple and linear. It started with active church members taking the TKI then worked down to the pastors to the lay leadership to the church member. The project began when the church received the TKI on August 10, 2017 and concluded with the teachers turning in their evaluations of the ST by November 1, 2017. Throughout the process the church staff, Sunday school teachers, and members were supportive and eager to help in every aspect.

Theological Knowledge Inventory

On August 10, 2017, the Theological Knowledge Inventory was sent out in an email survey to the active church members of Hickory Grove Baptist Church. The email list was made up of church members who had attended Sunday school at least once in the past 12 months and were 18 years of age or older. August 27, 2017, was the deadline for completion of the survey, giving church members over two weeks to complete it. The people who met the criteria totaled over 2,900 members, but the survey was emailed to the 2,657 members who had active email addresses. The survey was completed by 836 people or 32 percent of those who received the email. This large response rate provided a strong sample for the survey.

As mentioned in chapter 1, there were different sources used in developing the TKI. First, Wayne Grudem's *Twenty Basic Beliefs* divisions provided a great starting point for key theological categories. This was then compared with the divisions for the larger systematic works from Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, and Danny Akin. Categories were added for trending cultural issues such as marriage and gender, and for

denominational distinctives such as the Lord's Supper and baptism. The State of Theology survey from Lifeway and Ligonier ministries provided helpful input to clarify the statements to write in each doctrinal category.¹ The results of the survey can be found in appendix 2. Also, some of the observations to be made about the survey will come out in the next section describing the conversation in the pastors' meeting.

The survey had several effects on the church. First, it created a sense of accountability for each church member. Many members took it very seriously and were contacting me to make sure I understood what they meant by an answer, to ask me for clarification on a statement, or in a few cases to provide further explanation for their answers. Some asked how they did on the test and wanted me to grade theirs and tell them where they had missed something. Second, it created discussion on these theological areas. One family said it was the talk of their dinner table that night as they went back and forth on what they answered for each question. This was typical, as for several weeks I did not go more than a couple of days without someone bringing up the survey. Finally, it created a sense of curiosity and desire to learn more theology. Sunday school teachers, pastors, and other church members have wanted to know the results of the survey. As people began to discuss theology it created a hunger in our church for the answers to some of these questions. These benefits were surprising to me as none of them were the primary purpose of the survey. They were all additional benefits to the church taking it. The survey was not an end in itself but a means to inform pastors of the doctrinal state of the church.

Pastors' Meeting

On Thursday, August 31, 2017, the pastoral staff of Hickory Grove Baptist Church met for two hours to determine the areas most in need of theological correction.

¹"The State of Theology," accessed November 14, 2017, <http://thestateoftheology.com>.

The meeting proved to be an eye opening and challenging discussion as we brought all of the church's pastors together to think on these issues. The meeting followed the flow of this project, as many of the pastors were not aware of the details of this endeavor. The meeting consisted of the following:

1. Biblical basis for the project
2. Challenges
3. Project overview
4. Discussion analyzing the survey
5. Discussion of theological areas in need of correction
6. Ballot vote
7. Brainstorming questions for areas chosen by vote²

This meeting consisted of the ordained pastoral staff of the church of which all attended except the Latin American Campus Pastor. This group represented all the significant departments of the church including age graded ministries, worship, K-12 school, administration, and preaching.

The biblical basis for the project followed the same reasoning as outlined in chapter 2 of this project. I led them through the key passages that were the impetus for the project. First Peter 5 and Hebrews 13 provided the framework for the shepherding task. Hebrews 13 calls for elders to vigilantly watch over the souls of those in the body of Christ. I challenged the pastors to embody this sleepless and intense watchcare over souls described in this passage, so they will be ready when they are examined and give an account to the Lord Jesus. I challenged the group to take this biblical expectation placed on us by God and see if our job descriptions and our schedules matched this intense watchcare called for in the Bible. If we are called to shepherd the church, be among the people, watch over their souls, and give an account for them, then we must examine in

²A detailed agenda can be found in appendix 3.

what areas the Bible expects us to keep watch. The pastoral epistles outline Paul's expectations, elders are expected to model personal holiness, teach correct doctrine, and correct errant doctrine. I explained this project's focus was on the third of those expectations. I asked the pastors how often they corrected errant doctrine. Most times we are teaching but rarely do we inspect and correct doctrine. The opening of the first letter to Timothy in verse 3 states that Paul's intention for Timothy as he was present with the church was to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." The shepherd's job is to correct error. All of this Scripture called for the pastors at HGBC to prepare for the day the Chief Shepherd will hold us accountable for correcting the errant doctrine in the church.

This biblical basis sets up the need for a tool to help the pastors of the church rightly shepherd the body of believers. This desire to be faithful to the Lord's expectations of the shepherding call is the main thrust driving this project. I wanted the staff to be aware of three challenges that might prevent or inhibit them from faithfully executing this task. First, it is difficult for the staff to live among the sheep. Hickory Grove Baptist Church is a megachurch with large numbers of people that live long distances from each other. The volume of people and the distance they travel to come to church make it difficult to know them through the natural rhythms of life. Second, the church has not historically valued member care that focuses on correcting doctrine. This history has created structures that do not support this effort and has not trained the members to expect it. Finally, the pastoral staff has spent years developing ministry habits that will need to be changed. Once a person learns a job a certain way, learning new habits may be a challenge. These challenges, while formidable, cannot prevent the staff from taking a step toward greater faithfulness in this area.

After providing the biblical basis for the project, the pastoral staff needed to understand the goals of the project in order to help them understand their role in this crucial step. The project's four goals were explained and there was discussion about the

TKI, the pastoral staff's role concerning input, developing the ST, and how some of the staff would give further input on the plan.

The results of the TKI were presented in this meeting and provided valuable information. First, the decisions about which doctrine to address were not based solely on their personal experiences. The pastors' analysis of the congregation was aided by the tool that had analyzed the theological areas of the church. Second, the tool informed the pastors, but it did not dictate the areas to address. The Lord has called the pastors to shepherd and a survey does not dictate what the Holy Spirit has empowered the pastors to accomplish. Third, the survey kept the focus of the conversation on theology and particularly the categories given. It safeguarded against the tendency to skip over doctrine and focus solely on the behavior of church members. The categories of the survey served well for the discussion.

As the staff discussed the survey, some interesting observations were made. First, knowing how much we repeatedly speak about certain doctrines, many of the pastors were surprised that some of the easier questions were not as strongly affirmed as they expected. For example, only 85 percent of the responders checked "Christ's death and resurrection is a non-negotiable for the Christian faith." There is a great emphasis on Christ and the cross in our worship songs and preaching. It seemed surprising that the repetition in this area was still not clearly getting through to the people. Second, it became clear that some doctrines are weak because we assume people understand them. As Baptists, there is an assumption that everyone would understand baptism by immersion, but that was not the case. Baptism is something we regularly do, but not something regularly defined. Also, just because a person is baptized by immersion does not mean they hold a conviction for that to be the only true biblical mode of baptism. The survey was a good reminder to teach on some of our core doctrines that often are assumed to be held by church members. Third, the survey revealed church members' inability to speak with theological precision. For example, of the responders who

incorrectly marked that the trinity was three forms of God, not all of them realized they were choosing the heretical belief of modalism. If pressed in a conversation, some would deny modalism, but they missed the question because of a lack of theological precision. Therefore, false answers did not always equate to false belief, but rather an inability to clearly speak on the issue. Either way, missing some of the questions deemed most clear equated to a lack of knowledge in those areas, and a need for further instruction to guard against false teaching. Fourth, though the positive markings stood out, sometimes the small percentage that did not mark a seemingly obvious answer should also be noticed. For example, “Christ is God” received 94 percent positive markings, which leaves 6 percent or 50 people that did not mark it. It may have been missed for various reasons, but it is still worth noting the 50 who missed it.

After discussing the survey, I opened the discussion up for any other areas the pastors felt were of concern. Again, the survey was a guide but if a pastor felt the church had a theological issue that should be considered that was the time for discussion. Several comments were made but they were just subcategories of the general headings in the TKI. For example, one pastor suggested that the way people approached the Bible was of major concern. This was a wrinkle on the doctrine of the Bible that was not mentioned in the survey but still came up under the general heading.

The discussion culminated in the team of pastors deciding on the top areas that were in need of doctrinal correction. Using a ballot ensured that each pastor had an equal voice during the choosing of the top areas needed for theological correction.³ After the survey was reviewed, each of the pastors was given this ballot to vote. The options on the ballot were the twenty-one different areas of theology used in the survey. The ballot was chosen rather than picking them in the group discussion to avoid the danger of having some voices override others. The ballot gave each pastor the ability to say exactly what

³See appendix 4.

he wanted with an equal voice at the table. An opportunity was given for anyone to add a category if he felt like something was missing, but none were added. As they were filling out the ballots, several of the pastors offered alternative viewpoints to the survey. One of the student pastors mentioned that the answers on gender would be different between the older and younger participants. Several of the pastors mentioned the importance of Christology as a doctrine and the need for that be of higher importance than some of the other doctrines. The discussions and the ballot vote provided a good balance in which everyone had a voice as a part of the team.

The last few minutes of the meeting served as a brainstorm session on the questions that would be on the ST. In the order of votes cast, the top doctrines chosen were the church, trinity, Christ, Bible, sanctification, Lord's Supper, and baptism. For each topic, the pastors proposed four to nine questions that could be asked on each topic. These questions were designed to determine if the person rightly believed these doctrines and were aimed right at the flashpoints of doctrinal error.

The topics and questions chosen from them were the rough draft of the ST. The feedback from the church and the pastoral staff identified areas of errant doctrine that need correction. In less than two hours, the staff processed the survey and as a collective group, chose the areas where the church needed greater doctrinal clarity. At this point I served as an editor to streamline the questions into a workable format. I edited these questions by combining questions, wordsmithing the language, and creating open-ended questions. Even with the editing, the ST heavily reflected the questions proposed from the pastors.

Developing a Plan to Test the Shepherd Discussion Tool

After reworking the questions, I began the process of building a plan to test the ST with a small sample of church members. An effective plan was crucial for the ST to receive a fair testing, as the final goal of the project would be tested by the ratings of the teachers administering the ST. The feedback would be collected in the form of a survey

done by the teacher that gave the ST and the church member that answered the questions. The questions were designed to rate the levels of doctrinal correction given, perceived benefit, and the participant's enjoyment of the discussion.⁴

After finalizing the questions, the first step was to try it out with a Sunday school teacher over lunch. We reworded a few questions after I noticed that some of them did not convey their intended meaning. I also discovered that the list of questions needed an introduction to help give context for the conversation. If done incorrectly, the discussion runs the risk of feeling like an interrogation. The introduction was necessary to ensure that the process was helpful and not discouraging to the participants. After this meeting, I summarized the plan for the project in the ST plan proposal document.⁵

The next step was presenting the plan to some of the key staff leaders of the Sunday school ministry. The four-person group consisted of John Harrill (Main Campus Adult Discipleship Pastor), Matt Phipps (Main Campus Adult Discipleship Pastor), Justin Paslay (North Campus Pastor), and Kyler Smith (North Campus Children's Pastor). This group represented both Main and North Campuses. These pastors have the best knowledge of the culture and structures in education. They offered several suggestions that made the process better. Based on these suggestions, I expanded the introduction on the ST to continue to show participants the purpose for the conversation. Also, there were concerns about the long-term viability of the plan using Sunday school teachers in the place of elders. This is a valid concern, but until the church structures change, this is the best option for HGBC. If one day the church does adopt lay elders, they will take over administering the ST. Finally, there has been some concern about not having answers to all of the questions. I can understand the reason for this concern, but since the pastor goes through the questions with each person administering the tool, they should have an

⁴See appendices 9 and 10.

⁵See appendix 5.

accurate understanding of the answers to the questions after this conversation. Overall the plan was well received with 100 percent of the evaluation receiving at least sufficient marks.⁶ Therefore, it successfully met the third goal of the project.

Testing the Shepherd Discussion Tool

After the proposed plan was approved by the selected group of pastors and I edited the document to its final version, I began to meet with various leaders to initiate conversations with the ST.⁷ I met with eight Sunday school teachers who represented the different age groups in the adult membership at HGBC. The youngest was college age and the oldest was in their eighties, with the different ages represented in between. Table 1 shows the different ages and demographics of the classes.

Table 1. Sunday school classes

Teacher	Brian Davis	Jimmie Quesinberry	John Stegemerten	Donna Fugarino	Steve Guinn	Kevin Chaney	Mike Powers	Dave Simpson	Joe Swann
Age Group	College	Engaged or Newly Married	YMA	Single Mothers	Median Adults	Median Adults	Median Adults	Median Adults	Senior Adults
Average Age of Class	18-22	20-30	20-30	30-50	35-50	40-55	45-60	55-65	75-85

I did have concerns about how different age groups and generations might respond to answering questions about their theology. Overall, there seemed to be no issue with any age group or demographic.

The meetings with the teachers brought about some interesting comments. One teacher remarked that he was “stunned” by some of the answers given on the TKI. He thought the people in our church would have a better grasp on theology. Another teacher

⁶The project goal was that at least 90 percent of the ratings would be at least “sufficient.”

⁷See appendix 6.

did express some concern on the way his class might respond to his request to have these discussions. He later reported that he had no trouble getting individuals to have these meetings. As I met with the teachers I found that the correction I was providing came in subtle forms. I never had to directly say to any of the teachers that something they said was wrong. However, I found myself saying “I would say it like this” or “have you ever thought about this?” Sometimes they would express an inability to clearly answer a question and then ask me how I would answer it. Either way the correction was always friendly and well received.

At this point, over a period of 4 to 6 weeks the teachers then began to meet with individuals from their classes. After a teacher met with a church member they would fill out an evaluation form.⁸ The member also received an evaluation form rating their experience.⁹ All of the discussions and evaluation forms were completed by November 1, 2017. These meetings were a testing ground to see how the ST was received and how effective it was in providing doctrinal correction. The main method of evaluating the effectiveness of the ST was to have the teacher evaluate the level of correction given and the member evaluate the amount they learned. Out of the 31 ST’s administered, 27 reported they provided doctrinal correction during the discussion.¹⁰ Of the four forms that were marked “no correction” by the teacher, the respective members reported they learned something in the conversation. This shows that even when the teacher did not perceive they corrected any misconceptions, the members were at a minimum learning something. Ultimately, 87 percent of the teachers who administered the ST felt they gave at least some doctrinal correction. This well exceeded the 50 percent goal set for this

⁸See appendix 9.

⁹See appendix 10.

¹⁰Of the 27, 25 reported some correction, and 2 reported significant correction.

project. Given these results, the ST was effective in finding areas of doctrinal error and providing a format for church leaders to correct those errors.¹¹

Overall the ST was received in a positive light by teachers and members. All the teachers reported they saw them as beneficial. Every member who filled out the follow up survey marked they learned something, it was beneficial, and enjoyable. They described the process as “helpful, valuable, great, confidence building, and important.” One of the teachers had expressed concern about the reception his class would give to having these discussions. In spite of this concern, the feedback from the members showed that people were not just willing to have these conversations but enjoyed the exercise. The ST not only provided a venue to correct doctrine but worked in such a way that the correction was given in an enjoyable and encouraging manner. Even though these were planned conversations with a specific agenda, they did not come off as cold or harsh. The nature of the relationships and the flow of the conversations provided a shepherd feel to the interaction.

Conclusion

This project was successful in meeting all four of the goals outlined in chapter 1. The TKI has helped shape the pastor’s and leader’s mindset on the doctrinal healthiness of the congregation. The discussions and formation of the ST was a healthy and strong process for the staff at HGBC. Finally, the ST was well received and effective in providing a tool for the pastors and church leaders to have shepherding conversations with church members. No major challenges or issues caused the project to deviate or change from the proposed goals. The ST was successfully developed and tested at HGBC, proving it is a viable method of providing doctrinal correction for a megachurch. Prayerfully, this effort will lead to more faithful shepherding of the body of believers at HGBC.

¹¹The detailed results for the evaluations are in appendices 11 and 12.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

“Oh, what a dreadful thing is it to answer for the neglect of such a charge!”¹

These haunting words from Richard Baxter on the responsibility given to a pastor rightly sum up the motivation for this project. Prayerfully, this project is a part of helping the pastors at HGBC to bear this weighty burden as they fulfill their calling and responsibility. For much of HGBC’s history, little effort and emphasis was placed on the pastor’s role in monitoring the spiritual health of the church membership. This project is part of an overall cultural change that is occurring among the staff and the church body to bring back meaningful membership. Ultimately, the hope is for pastors of HGBC to be found faithful in their calling as they shepherd the people of God.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a shepherd discussion tool for the pastoral staff of Hickory Grove Baptist Church. This purpose found its genesis in the larger effort to create a healthier HGBC. As the senior pastor, Clint Pressley, led the church to health, he also pressed toward have a more meaningful membership. This desire to give a weightiness to membership brought about changes in the church on many different levels. Church culture changed with the establishment of a membership class and the cleaning up of outdated rolls. Most of the effort has dealt with those entering and exiting church membership, but little was done for the care of current church members. This was most evident as the staff became more aware of matters of church discipline. As

¹Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: CreateSpace Independent, 2011), 199.

the issues would arise, any efforts to confront sin were seen as foreign and incongruent with the rest of the culture. The pastoral staff team not only lacked the experience and processes to effectively handle these situations, but also the church structures that would support such an effort. One of these lacking church structures was a consistent and clear way to hold the membership accountable for their life and doctrine. This project's purpose was derived from the need to provide greater shepherd care for the church membership. Therefore, the goal was to bring a helpful device to the church leadership that would better equip them to oversee the sheep.

One of the primary aims of this project was to ensure this was a shepherding process that was done in a kind, Christlike manner. This was set by the metaphor and mandate exegeted from the Bible in chapter 2 of this project. The term shepherding brings a good balance of a leader who is both tender and affectionate but still corrective and disciplinary with the sheep. The ST attempted to balance this kindhearted but still firm discipline. A kind heart is especially needed when providing doctrinal correction to individuals, which can quickly fall into the temptation of coldly correcting those in error. This balance was fulfilled in a couple of ways. First, the correction was done personally in private meetings, ensuring the individuals faced the dynamics of personal conversation. It is much more difficult to be rude or mean-spirited in a face-to-face meeting than over an email, phone, or other less personal medium. Second, the shepherd feeling was kept through the nature of the relationships with those administering the ST to those receiving the ST. These were Sunday school teachers that saw their class members on a weekly basis, at a minimum. Therefore, the meetings were building off of relationships that already existed and would continue after the conversation. This correction done in relationship will almost always feel more like a caring shepherd than an unkind commander. Finally, this shepherd feel was kept as the participants were ensured they would not face automatic repercussions for incorrectly answering. Since the goal was not to hurt the sheep but to bring about correction, any incorrect answers were

met with soft, kind correction. All these pieces of the project ensured there was a shepherd's heart behind everything done.

Another purpose of the project was to use a conversation or a discussion to engage in oversight of the sheep. The ST posed open-ended questions to foster these dialogues between church leaders and church members. This method worked in a Socratic manner even similar to how Jesus reasoned with individuals. The tool used open-ended questions to create discussions on life and doctrine for church members. One of the key reasons for using this method was the need for detecting error before providing correction. The questions served as a way to know what they believed and where they were in error. If church leaders are not engaging in something like this, then many times errors go undetected and unaddressed. Rightly, the church is full of teachers standing at a pulpit and in a monologue fashion teaching the Bible. However, the need to hold the sheep accountable for their life and doctrine must come up under the teaching of the word. That means the church is required to teach and then inspect what is being absorbed from its teaching. That is where the discussion from the ST is crucial to monitoring the health of the members of the church. Churches often ask varying degrees of questions to candidates for membership but from that point on, they ask very little about their life and doctrine. The ST provides a means for church leaders to use discussion to inspect the life and doctrine of their church members in an ongoing manner.

Another purpose of the project was for this to be a tool or an aide for church leaders that desire to engage in the life and doctrine of church members. As mentioned in chapter 2 of this project, there is a cultural push back from authority that impacts the church. In light of this cultural trend, church members rarely seek out counsel, advice, permission, or wisdom from their church leaders. As elders and pastors engage church members in this manner, a tool can be helpful to reshape the culture inside the church. This project helped to provide this useful tool in four ways. First, the church-wide TKI served as an ice breaker that set up church members for further conversations. As they

approached individuals to discuss the ST, the survey was a natural starting point that served to introduce a discussion over doctrine. The teachers would tell them the results of the TKI led church leaders to press further on some of the topics. As a part of that they were sent to ask a few predetermined questions. This let them know they were part of a larger effort with the entire church and not being singled out. Second, the uniform set of questions proved to be a useful tool to give formality and consistency to the conversations. Part of raising the level of accountability is bringing a fair system that deals with individuals in an impartial manner. Using the same questions for the entire church gives equal treatment to each individual. Third, the tool gave leaders a reason to initiate a conversation with members. Asking many of these questions in a normal conversation would seem strange or odd, but with the ST it sets the expectation for a different kind of conversation. Fourth, the project drew on the resources of surveys and the expertise and calling of the church staff to write a detailed list of theological questions that would be difficult for an individual to create. With the many voices of input, it created a versatile document that was effective in addressing doctrinal issues for the most mature believers while still dealing with issues facing immature believers. Overall the project was successful in creating a useful tool for the church.²

The final part of the project's purpose was to meet the specific needs of the pastoral staff in the context of HGBC. Even though this project, or portions of the project, may be useful to other churches, there were several ways that it was uniquely designed to work for the pastoral staff at HGBC. First, the idea for this project came from discussions among the staff on faithful shepherding. Therefore, it was a natural fit to attempt to solve a problem the staff already felt existed. Second, since the TKI results were from active members at HGBC, the data the staff used was custom tailored for the church. They were

²Some of the critiques of the tool have come from an overestimation of its purpose. Some see it as a comprehensive shepherding system, but this is not the intent. It should be thought of as one of many tools available to the leadership of the church.

not looking at larger survey results that might be impacted by other influences but were seeing the actual data from HGBC. Third, the project was done for the staff by the staff. In the large meeting where the key areas of theological weakness were defined, the staff of the church was the main decider of what was on the ST. The staff gave input, even down the very questions that were on the ST. This meant that there was ownership and buy-in to the process. In many ways, the same process applied to another church would create a different result based on how that church would answer the TKI and in turn what that staff choose to put on the ST. Fourth, the main testing ground for the ST was with the leadership at HGBC. The pastoral staff helped to determine the plan to administer in the church, and Sunday school teachers helped to test the ST with church members. The project from start to finish involved the entire church body at HGBC. This comprehensive approach ensured the project was for the pastoral staff of HGBC.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The goals for this project were set in a simple linear fashion that followed the project's flow. As each one was met, the project moved on to fulfill the next goal. Based on the preset measurements defined at the outset of the project, all the goals were successfully met.

The first goal was to assess the theological knowledge of HGBC members. This was met through administering the TKI to the active church membership. The TKI was effective in assessing theological knowledge for several reasons. First, the statements were all basic theological statements on the core list of topics. Drawing from systematic theologies ensured the TKI operated in the fundamental doctrines of the faith. From those main topics, the questions were simple true and false statements. Second, the TKI was effective as it did elicit a diverse range of answers. The TKI rightly balanced having statements that were challenging up against easier statements that most marked correctly. These were statements that were easy to answer for most mixed in with more difficult ones. Third, the TKI was effective as the staff discovered areas of theological

weaknesses.³ As the results were examined by the staff, they were able to determine which areas needed more doctrinal clarity. For example, the struggles in the area of baptism revealed that the church did not hold as many baptistic convictions as might be assumed at a Baptist church. This type of information drawn from the survey was helpful in identifying theological areas of error and served as a good sampling of the active church membership. The first goal of the project was successfully met when over 30 percent of the active church membership completed the TKI.⁴ This strong response ensured the TKI was able to give a proper assessment of the theological knowledge of the HGBC membership.

The second goal of this project was to develop a ST, with the help of the pastoral staff, to be used by HGBC leadership to address theological issues with HGBC members. The pastoral staff played a key role in this step of the process as they chose the areas of theological error found in the church. This goal was met through a successful two-hour meeting with 16 members of HGBC's pastoral team. The document produced from that meeting only needed minor refinements and edits to reach its final copy.⁵ Several factors contributed to the successful development of this key document. First, the pastors played a primary role in the development of the document, as most of the document was developed in the meeting. Only the theological categories and the information from the survey were brought into the meeting. From that point on, the team of pastors chose the key theological areas in need of correction and the questions that would be asked on the survey. The voting ballots ensured that each person had an equal voice and the top seven topics were chosen to make up the survey. After the top seven

³It is of note that none of the staff questioned whether the TKI was accurately reflecting our church body. It was helpful to the staff, but nothing seemed out of line from what was known of the congregation.

⁴See appendix 2.

⁵See appendix 6.

were chosen, the staff then brainstormed the questions that were asked on each of the topics in the survey. Throughout the meeting the staff played the primary role in the development of the ST. Second, the ST was designed to be used by the church's leadership for these specific conversations. The ST must be a document that could be passed along and used by the various leaders and members at HGBC. The questions were tested and refined through a personal meeting with a Sunday school teacher. This ensured that the questions would be taken the way they were intended. From that meeting some minor edits on wording were done, as it was clear some questions did not convey their intended meaning. At this point the ST was in its final version and would work for the leaders and members of HGBC and the second goal of the project was successfully completed.

The third goal was to develop strategic priorities to implement the ST.⁶ Even though the ST was done, there was still a need to test its effectiveness and that required a plan. This plan was judged by a panel of HGBC's education pastors using a measuring rubric. It was considered successful when they marked at least 90 percent at minimum sufficient.⁷ After taking some feedback from the team and making minor modifications, 100 percent of their marks on the rubric were sufficient or better. This meant the plan successfully met the third goal's measurements. The issues with the plan can be summed up into two separate categories. First, the plan uses unqualified leaders to administer the ST. The plan did not exclusively use pastors but also used Sunday school teachers who may not be qualified to provide oversight of the sheep. This is a valid critique of the plan, but the entire panel agreed that under the current church structure and polity this was the best option for HGBC. The large numbers of people needing oversight require more shepherds and involving Sunday school teachers in the process was the best option.

⁶See appendix 5.

⁷See appendix 7.

Second, there was concern for how the plan would be presented so that church members would welcome the correction. Without a clear introduction, it was very possible church members would not understand or receive this form of questioning. In light of that, the introductory comments on the ST were written so that purpose of the ST would be clearly given. With the education pastors approving of the plan for the project, it was ready to be tested.

The fourth and final goal was to increase the knowledge of the HGBC membership by using the ST. As the project focused on doctrinal correction, the natural final measurement was an increase in knowledge or a correction of knowledge. The ST must be tested to see if it actually produced change in what church members were thinking about theology. The plan that was approved as part of the third goal was used to test the effectiveness of the survey. The teachers administering the survey rated the level of doctrinal correction they provided. With 87 percent of these teachers saying they provided at least some correction, the response well exceeded the minimum goal of the project set for 50 percent. In almost every instance, the ST fostered a conversation in which some correction could be given to errors in doctrine. Another subtler success of the tool was the cultural change that occurred by having a church leader sit and ask church members questions about their doctrine and life. Activities like this help to teach church members that they will be held accountable. All four goals of the project were successfully met, which led to the success of developing a ST that was useful to HGBC.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths of this project played a major role in its success. The first strength of this project was the wide influence it had on the church as a whole. The TKI created an interest in doctrinal matters across every level at HGBC. Shortly after the survey was released, the staff received a variety of strongly positive responses. Some church members were thankful they were a part of a church that cared so much about doctrine, while some took it so seriously they emailed explanations of their answers. A

few teachers asked for copies of the questions so they could address those areas in their Sunday school classes. Overall, it was remarkable the subsequent conversations that it generated as church members were discussing theology. The survey had such a positive impact on the church that the senior pastor, Clint Pressley, had the survey sent to every other email address the church had on record.⁸ Not only did the project impact the church as a whole, it also had particular impact on the staff as they processed the results of the TKI and helped to evaluate a plan to implement the ST. The results of the survey are still on the pastors' minds as they have been brought up in subsequent staff meetings. Finally, the Sunday school teachers that tested the ST were impacted by the survey results and the conversations they had with their class members. Many of them have brought up the results in subsequent conversations. This project had a comprehensive impact on HGBC as it influenced both the leadership and the church as a whole.

The second strength of this project was in reviving the church's interest in holding to right doctrine. Simply taking the TKI had an impact on the conversations and focus around the church. One family reported that all of dinner was spent talking about the questions from the TKI. Many other side conversations happened as a result of members interacting with these topics. The results of the TKI also had an impact on the staff and church leaders as they interacted with real data showing the church's beliefs. As they saw the different answers it provided an awakening to the state of the church's theology and the need for correction. Beyond these two areas, as the ST was administered it generated an hour-long conversation about theology with teachers and members. This significant amount of time elevated doctrine and brought it to the focus of both the teacher and the church member.

A third strength was the overall comprehensive doctrinal focus. Because the project began by looking at systematic theology, the categories covered the full span of

⁸Over 6,000 emails were sent.

core theological doctrines. There are many different beliefs in the Christian faith that could be tested, but the goal was to stay with the basics. Virtually every single doctrinal belief could come up under one of the theological categories. The goal was to ensure the key doctrines of the faith were protected and false teaching was confronted. The ST's seven topics were chosen out the larger list of 21 topics. Even though the ST did not deal with all 21 categories, it did find its source in a process that dealt with all 21 categories. Therefore, even in its limited list of questions it came from all 21 categories.

A fourth strength of the project was the manner in which it raised the level of accountability for the church. The TKI was a simple email survey that surprisingly created a sense of accountability in the church. Several church members asked for a report back grading their results from the TKI. As church members filled out the survey, they felt their answers mattered to church leadership. Later in the project, as the ST was administered, it also brought a sense of accountability. Particularly as teachers and class members interacted with the ST they felt a raised level of accountability. For the teachers, they had a pastor asking them about their doctrine and in turn, teachers were posing the same questions to their class members. This accountability comes from the need to actually inspect what a person believes. Few, if any, practices in the modern church inspect the doctrine of church members. The TKI and the ST helped to raise the level of accountability at HGBC.

A fifth strength was the education it provided for church leaders. The TKI and the ST gave the pastors and teachers a clearer idea of the ways the church body was thinking about theological issues. On the TKI some of the pastors were surprised that certain remarks were not higher since those topics are taught with such high frequency. The entire process gave an opportunity to teach the pastors their responsibility to give an account for the flock, and church members their obligation to the church. In many ways that was the most foreign concept of the whole project. Very few had a hard time understanding the importance of doctrine, but quite a few had a hard time seeing they

were to give an account to the church for that doctrine. This project was a wonderful opportunity to educate on the authority and responsibility of the church.

A sixth strength of the project was the possibility of multiplying the process in other contexts. The entire project would transfer, but the first two goals especially would easily transfer to another church. Pastors from other churches that have viewed the survey have expressed an interest in using it for their church. A pastoral staff could easily go through the process of evaluating the survey for the primary areas in need of doctrinal correction for their specific membership. Even though there are some parts of the project that were designed for HGBC, the process would still work in any context.

A seventh and final strength of the project was the heavy influence the pastors had on the process. In many ways, the pastors served as a plurality of elders surveying the landscape of the congregation and determining the needs. It is crucial that the pastors serve in this shepherding role where the Lord has given them sole responsibility. This project ensured they had the primary say on the areas of doctrinal correction.

Weaknesses of the Project

Even though the project met all of its goals and was executed as planned, there were some weak areas of the project. The first weakness was the narrow focus on doctrinal correction. In many ways, this restriction was meant to fill a particular void in the church and not to provide general oversight. Therefore, this weakness was expected as the project took on a tighter focus. However, it does make it a limited tool that should be part of the many tools that a pastor uses for shepherding. That means the ST is not a comprehensive tool for pastors but is one of the many helpful tools in their toolbox.

A second weakness was the heavy doctrinal focus, and, in turn, the lack of personal application found in the ST. The tool's primary goal was to correct areas of theological illiteracy with the hope of that having its effect on the practice of individuals. The wide scope of theological topics dominated the time for the discussions, which left little time to deal with any personal matters. Since the primary objective was on doctrine,

there were only two personal application follow-up questions written into the ST. In some of the post project work on the ST the staff has added in more application questions.

A third weakness of the project was the time intensive nature of implementing the ST. If properly done the ST takes one to two hours per church member to complete. In a megachurch setting, the number of people creates a significant workload for the staff and leaders. As with any task that involves a large group of people, there would need to be a system to track and monitor the completion of these conversations. This weakness is something that should not deter pastors from fulfilling their responsibility to shepherd the flock, but is something to plan for and simply overcome. The time intensive nature of this work also might be the single most reason it is rarely done well.

A fourth weakness is the lack of qualified pastors and elders to do the work of oversight. Without a plurality of elders, the workforce to accomplish the task lacks the needed manpower. In light of the current landscape of leadership at HGBC, the plan uses Sunday school teachers to serve in elder like functions. All the teachers are godly men that are able to teach the Bible with skill. Since these attributes are required of an elder, it is not a far stretch for these leaders to perform elder functions. These teachers also have the support of pastors that can help with any challenging questions or issues. The standards required for those serving as Sunday school teachers help to ensure they have most of the qualifications of an elder. This weakness is acknowledged early in the paper and the solution is the best possible plan for HGBC.

A fifth weakness would be the lack of resources provided to answer some of these theological questions. This was never in the purview of this project's goals, but it is nonetheless a weakness of the process. A few of the pastors that were part of the project observed the ST and would benefit by having resources to give answers to each of the questions. As one digs a little deeper, they can see it is not as necessary as it may seem on the surface. First, the pastors overseeing this project have all been theologically trained and each of the teachers can easily contact one of those pastors if they need assistance.

Second, the teachers administering the survey have already been over all the questions with a pastor. They have heard the right answers and have been corrected if they misunderstood a particular question. Third, these are HGBC's Bible teachers and many have significant education when it comes to theological matters. Fourth, there was the possibility if the answers were given it might stifle the discussion and limit the flow of the conversation. All these factors combine to minimize this weakness and decrease the necessity to have an answer or resource list.

A sixth weakness of the project is the potentially challenging ways people will respond to an interrogative conversation. Usually these occur in high pressure situations in which there are significant consequences to answers, such as a job interview. The aim of the ST is to make the conversation comfortable and natural while conveying that their answers do matter. Also, there is a danger with doctrinal questions that the interaction would feel cold and pressurized. The personal relationships and trust built between the teachers with their class members foster an environment in which these challenges are minimized. The teachers know the best ways to present the ST to each of their class members. They took the ST and instructions given and adapted it to their subcultures and preferences. For some, they met in a room at the church, others had them around their dining room table at home, and some were in a public market downtown over lunch. While some teachers were uncomfortable even showing the formal paper, others handed them the paper and a pen to write down their answers before they discussed the ST. Having the personal relationship that surrounded the conversation truly minimized this weakness. As the ST is used to have conversations with people further out from the core of the church this will be an interesting dynamic to monitor. If the relationships are not as strong, the chances of providing a harsh environment may be greater. Either way for the tests in this project this weakness was minimized.

A seventh weakness is the long-term usefulness for the ST in the life of HGBC. If this were correctly implemented and the church were to continue shifting to a

stronger discipleship and member care culture, then there could be a day when the ST was no longer needed. This project was meant for HGBC at this current time and at some future time the tool could become unnecessary or need significant update. However, the need for doctrinal correction by the pastors at HGBC will always be necessary.

An eighth and final weakness is the ST's complete dependence on a working plan to ensure its effectiveness. With the ST already developed, an entirely different project could be done by studying the various systems of member care, categorizing those efforts, and then creating a comprehensive plan for member care at HGBC. The ST needs this plan in order to rightly function and operate in the local church. It is simply a piece or a tool in the larger plan of the shepherds for the church.

Project Changes

Over the course of this project there have been a few modifications that would have improved the project. Although the project went as planned and was a success, these changes will serve for future use of the ST at HGBC. Below are a few of the changes that would improve the project.

First, some of the questions on the TKI need to be rewritten to provide a clearer meaning. Question nine said sin required "constant confession to stay caught up with God" but would be better stated "must be confessed upon every occurrence in order to maintain salvation." Question 16 spoke of the finality of death but it was not clear what was final in death. Those statements would have been better worded as death "leads to an eternally permanent place" and "leads to a point where people are given a second chance at heaven." Those were the only two questions that were unclear to those taking the TKI and this updated wording would have made their responses useful.

Second, the TKI may have benefited from not placing all of the statements about each topic together. The survey would then be 84 true or false questions randomly mixed together. There would still be four statements per theological category, but they would not be side by side. It would also still be analyzed by those categories, but just not

grouped in that manner on the survey. This would make the survey more time consuming but would ensure each question was approached individually. This method would ensure an even treatment of each statement.

Third, the project could have benefited from the usage of confessions and catechisms. There is already a resurgence of both of the usage of these at HGBC. The children are starting to learn the Apostles' Creed and the worship guide is receiving a makeover to allow for space to put in both confessions and catechisms. Alongside of the confessions, the church is now adopting a catechism and will be using it for memorization and discipleship. These clear and strong doctrinal statements will only serve to strengthen this effort for theological literacy.

Fourth, the project would benefit from using a catechism as a guide for the questions posed in the ST. As things were progressing with the ST, the correlation with catechizing started to show up. The question and answer method has been used to teach in the church for centuries through catechism. The intent was not so much to discover the thoughts of the people, but to teach right doctrine. Therefore, the ST is not a catechism but in many ways can be correlated with catechizing. It likely would have enriched the questions if a catechism were used to develop the ST.

Theological and Personal Reflections

This project revealed the lack of concern and emphasis in the modern day church's ecclesiology in the area of member care. For various reasons the church has become almost exclusively obsessed with evangelism and the desire to see as many people come to Christ as possible. This is a right goal but is dangerous when it begins to trump other purposes of the church. This obsession costs the church its health and dissolves the clear boundaries of Christianity. Then church no longer has a clear dividing line from the world, but instead many of the attributes of the world are now part of the church. This at its core is the breakdown of the church's ecclesiology. As the aim is more people coming to Christ, any form of meaningful membership, doctrinal lines, or member

accountability will be seen as a negative. This doctrine is a major dividing point among churches today and this area of member care is part of that division.

As I personally reflect over this project, the Lord used the project in two different ways to impact me personally. First, the exegesis in chapter 2 gave me a greater burden for ensuring the members of HGBC are rightly shepherded. So much of my training in the ministry has been to execute programs and teach in large settings. All of these are good, but my mentors did not teach me to feel the burden of monitoring the spiritual health of church. In the past few years at HGBC I have begun to see that burden, but through this project spending time in the Bible brought a new clarity to this serious responsibility.

A second personal reflection has been the lack of doctrine in my discipleship efforts. The biblical emphasis on guarding the deposit should drive my personal discipleship towards doctrinal teaching. In the past, my emphasis has been on the disciplines of the faith and personal holiness. While these are important, they do not teach clear and right doctrine. This is where the ST can play a helpful role by injecting doctrine into discipleship relationships.

Conclusion

As this project concludes, the hope of providing oversight for the people of HGBC is just beginning. The ST that was created in this project is already having an impact on the church in many different ways. The culture is shifting from the pastoral staff down to the church members. The end goal is the approval of the Chief Shepherd so that when He appears to take His bride, He would find a church that is filled with healthy sheep that have been rightly led by their shepherds. Prayerfully, the Lord Jesus will find HGBC to be one of those churches.

APPENDIX 1

THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE INVENTORY (TKI)

Agreement to Participate

Hickory Grove Baptist Church desires to see a healthy church that has a clear understanding of the doctrines of the Bible and how to live those out. Scripture teaches that correct theological knowledge is a requisite for a growing believer and growing believers make for healthy churches. Simply put, sound doctrine is essential in maintaining a faithful church. The following survey is to help the pastors get a better understanding of the current membership's theological areas of weakness and strength.

This is part of a research project conducted by Mike Powers. By completing the survey, you are consenting for this data to be used in the project.

It would be helpful to the pastoral staff if you add your name below, but it is optional. If your desire is to remain anonymous, please use the last four digits of your phone number to help with organization.

Name (4 digits) _____
Gender _____ Age _____

Mark all that you believe to be true (one or more answers can be marked).

8. The Bible . . .
 - a. is helpful but has some errors.
 - b. has authority over my life.
 - c. can be interpreted as one chooses.
 - d. has God as its author.

9. God . . .
 - a. was created in the beginning.
 - b. is a God of love who does not judge.
 - c. knows everything that occurs in the world.
 - d. can make mistakes.

10. The Trinity . . .
 - a. is three persons of God.
 - b. is three forms of God.
 - c. is one God.
 - d. is three Gods.

11. The Holy Spirit . . .
 - a. is a created spirit that serves God.
 - b. is God.
 - c. convicts believers of their sin.
 - d. is a non-personal force.

12. Creation . . .
- involves God creating everything from nothing.
 - is a good mythological story found in Genesis.
 - is compatible with evolution.
 - is God creating man distinctly different from the animals.
13. Prayer . . .
- is communication with God.
 - can be done for the dead.
 - can be done to people or saints other than God.
 - can be done silently or out loud.
14. Angels, Satan, and Demons . . .
- are Jesus' siblings.
 - are everywhere and know everything.
 - are created beings.
 - are allowed to roam the earth.
15. Man . . .
- struggles with sin but has a good nature.
 - is born with a sin nature.
 - attains entrance into heaven by living as much like Jesus as possible.
 - is made in the image of God.
16. Sin . . .
- deserves God's wrath and judgment.
 - separates man from God.
 - is something everyone will do until they die.
 - requires constant confession to stay caught up with God.
17. Christ . . .
- is half man and half God.
 - is the created son of God.
 - is one of many paths to God like Buddha and Muhammad.
 - is God.
18. Christ's death and resurrection . . .
- did not really happen.
 - is a non-negotiable for the Christian faith.
 - is the only way a person can be reconciled to God.
 - was witnessed by people in the Bible.
19. Becoming a Christian . . .
- requires repentance.
 - happens if I am an overall good person following Jesus' teachings.
 - is one of many ways to get to heaven.
 - is a free gift of God.
20. After one becomes a Christian . . .
- they will continue to grow closer to Christ.
 - they must keep striving in order keep their salvation.
 - one's life can stay relatively the same.
 - they will persevere to the end.

21. Baptism . . .
- is only done after one becomes a Christian.
 - washes away sins.
 - is Biblically done by sprinkling or immersion.
 - must be done for one to go to heaven.
22. Lord's Supper . . .
- forgives one's sins.
 - must be done for one to go to heaven.
 - has elements made of the actual of body of blood of Christ.
 - is only for Christians.
23. Death . . .
- is final.
 - was overcome by Christ.
 - is not final but people are given a second chance at heaven.
 - is a result of sin.
24. Marriage . . .
- is not required by God for a couple to have sexual relations.
 - is a covenant relationship created by God.
 - is best as a lifelong commitment but divorce for any significant reason is ok.
 - is approved by God for heterosexual and homosexual relationships.
25. Gender . . .
- can be changed.
 - is a God given characteristic.
 - is either male or female.
 - identity can be chosen by the individual.
26. The church . . .
- is the building where Christians meet.
 - was established by Christ.
 - is an organization Christians submit to.
 - is optional for a Christian.
27. Heaven . . .
- is a place to eternally glorify God.
 - is a where everyone goes when they die.
 - is a state of mind.
 - is a place all religions lead to.
28. Hell . . .
- is a real place.
 - is only for the worst of people.
 - is eternal.
 - is a place of torment and suffering.

Please choose five areas that you feel like you need to learn more about.

1. Bible
2. God
3. Trinity
4. Holy Spirit
5. Creation
6. Prayer
7. Angels, Satan, and Demons
8. Man
9. Sin
10. Christ
11. Christ's Death and Resurrection
12. Becoming a Christian
13. After one becomes a Christians
14. Baptism
15. Lord's Supper
16. Death
17. Marriage
18. Gender
19. Church
20. Heaven
21. Hell

APPENDIX 2

THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE INVENTORY (TKI) RESULTS

Hickory Grove Baptist Church
August 2017

Search Criteria

18 years or older
HGBC Church Member
Attended SS at least once in last 365 days

2657 Emails Sent
970 Total Responses
836 Complete Responses

Demographics

Gender

Male	44.74%	434
Female	55.26%	536

Age

18-29	12.06%	117
30-39	11.44%	111
40-49	18.87%	183
50-59	22.37%	217
60-69	21.03%	204
70+	14.23%	138

Marital Status

Married	79.59%	772
Single	10.72%	104
Separated	0.62%	6
Divorced	4.43%	43
Widowed	4.64%	45

Campus

Main	66.08%	641
North	31.96%	310
Latin Amer.	1.55%	15
LA – North	0.41%	4

Table A1. Survey results

Response options	% Selected	# Selected	% Not Selected	# Not Selected
1. The Bible...				
is helpful but has some errors	0.24	2	99.76	834
has authority over my life	89.59	749	10.41	87
can be interpreted as one chooses	1.20	10	98.80	826
has God as its author	94.62	791	5.38	45
2. God...				
was created in the beginning	7.66	64	92.34	772
is a God of love who does not judge	7.06	59	92.94	777
knows everything that occurs in the world	97.73	817	2.27	19
can make mistakes	0.24	2	99.76	834
3. The Trinity...				
is three persons of God	73.92	618	26.08	218
is three forms of God	19.86	166	80.14	670
is one God	54.55	456	45.45	380
is three Gods	0.48	4	99.52	832
4. The Holy Spirit...				
is a created spirit that serves God	3.83	32	96.17	804
is God	91.27	763	8.73	73
convicts believers of their sin	81.34	680	18.66	156
is a non-personal force	0.96	8	99.04	828
5. Creation...				
involves God creating everything from nothing	99.16	829	0.84	7
is a good mythological story found in Genesis	0.48	4	99.52	832
is compatible with evolution	2.39	20	97.61	816
is God creating man distinctly different from the animals	79.19	662	20.81	174
6. Prayer . . .				
is communication with God	99.40	831	0.60	5
can be done for the dead	1.67	14	98.33	822
can be done to people or saints other than God	0.96	8	99.04	828
can be done silently or out loud	93.54	782	6.46	54
7. Angels, Satan and Demons...				
are Jesus' siblings	0.36	3	99.64	833
are everywhere and know everything	4.90	41	95.10	795
are created beings	81.34	680	18.66	156
are allowed to roam the earth	80.38	672	19.62	164

Table A1 continued

8. Man...				
struggles with sin but has a good nature	2.39	20	97.61	816
is born with a sin nature	96.41	806	3.59	30
attains entrance into heaven by living as much like Jesus as possible	3.47	29	96.53	807
is made in the image of God	94.02	786	5.98	50
9. Sin...				
deserves God's wrath and judgment	88.64	741	11.36	95
separates man from God	97.61	816	2.39	20
is something everyone will do until they die	77.51	648	22.49	188
requires constant confession to stay caught up with God	23.21	194	76.79	642
10. Christ...				
is half man and half God	4.43	37	95.57	799
is the created son of God	26.67	223	73.33	613
is one of many paths to God like Buddha and Muhammed	0	0	100	836
is God	94.02	786	5.98	50
11. Christ's Death and Resurrection...				
did not really happen	0	0	100	836
is a non-negotiable for the Christian faith	84.81	709	15.19	127
is the only way a person can be reconciled to God	88.28	738	11.72	98
was witnessed by people in the Bible	91.75	767	8.25	69
12. Becoming a Christian...				
requires repentance	96.41	806	3.59	30
happens if I am an overall good person following Jesus' teachings	1.20	10	98.80	826
is one of many ways to get to heaven	1.32	11	98.68	825
is a free gift of God	85.29	713	14.71	123
13. After one becomes a Christian...				
they will continue to grow closer to Christ	91.27	763	8.73	73
they must keep striving in order to keep their salvation	5.62	47	94.38	789
one's life can stay relatively the same	1.79	15	98.21	821
they will persevere to the end	63.64	532	36.36	304
14. Baptism...				
is only done after one becomes a Christian	91.51	765	8.49	71
washes away sin	9.09	76	90.91	760
is biblically done by sprinkling or immersion	28.35	237	71.65	599
must be done for one to go to heaven	1.08	9	98.92	827

Table A1 continued

15. Lord's Supper...				
forgives one's sins	0.96	8	99.04	828
must be done for one to go to heaven	0.36	3	99.64	833
has elements made of the actual body and blood of Christ	16.75	140	83.25	696
is only for Christians	94.86	793	5.14	43
16. Death...				
is final	14.23	119	85.77	717
was overcome by Christ	96.65	808	3.35	28
is not final but people are given a second chance at heaven	4.07	34	95.93	802
is a result of sin	78.47	656	21.53	180
17. Marriage...				
is not required by God for a couple to have sexual relations	0.48	4	99.52	832
is a covenant relationship created by God	99.76	834	0.24	2
is best as a lifelong commitment but divorce for any significant reason is okay	3.83	32	96.17	804
is approved by God for heterosexual and homosexual relationships	0	0	100	836
18. Gender...				
can be changed	0.48	4	99.52	832
is a God-given characteristic	86.48	723	13.52	113
is either male or female	89.35	747	10.65	89
identity can be chosen by the individual	0.12	1	99.88	835
19. The Church...				
is the building where Christians meet	19.38	162	80.62	674
was established by Christ	96.29	805	3.71	31
is an organization Christians submit to	16.87	141	83.13	695
is optional for a Christian	0.60	5	99.40	831
20. Heaven...				
is a place to eternally glorify God	99.88	835	0.12	1
is where everyone goes when they die	0.48	4	99.52	832
is a state of mind	0	0	100	836
is a place all religions lead to	0.12	1	99.88	835
21. Hell...				
is a real place	92.70	775	7.3	61
is only for the worst of people	0.72	6	99.28	830
is eternal	89.23	746	10.77	90
is a place of torment and suffering	96.05	803	3.95	33

Table A2. Responses to “five areas that you feel like you need to learn more about”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Bible	66.78%	565
God	39.13%	331
Trinity	37.00%	313
Holy Spirit	42.08%	356
Creation	9.34%	79
Prayer	49.65%	420
Angels, Satan, and Demons	33.45%	283
Man	1.65%	14
Sin	6.26%	53
Christ	30.50%	258
Christ's Death and Resurrection	7.09%	60
Becoming A Christian	1.54%	13
After One Becomes A Christian	18.32%	155
Baptism	2.72%	23
Lord's Supper	3.43%	29
Death	11.47%	97
Marriage	21.75%	184
Gender	5.79%	49
Church	14.30%	121
Heaven	41.02%	347
Hell	15.72%	133
	Answered	846
	Skipped	135

APPENDIX 3

PASTORAL MEETING AGENDA

Theological Knowledge Inventory (HGBC Membership)
August 31, 2017

11:30 am	Lunch served
11:45 am	Biblical basis for project
12:00 pm	The plan
12:10 pm	Survey results
12:30 pm	Vote and discuss Major Areas of Correction
12:50 pm	Key questions for Main Areas
1:30 pm	Dismiss

APPENDIX 4

PASTORAL MEETING VOTING BALLOT

Top 5 Areas on which to Focus

- Bible
- God
- Trinity
- Holy Spirit
- Creation
- Prayer
- Angels, Satan, and Demons
- Man
- Sin
- Christ
- Christ's Death and Resurrection
- Becoming a Christian
- After One Becomes a Christian
- Baptism
- Lord's Supper
- Death
- Marriage
- Gender
- The Church
- Heaven
- Hell

APPENDIX 5

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION TOOL PRIORITIES PROPOSAL

Meeting Date: September 12, 2017

Attendees: Matt Phipps, John Harrill, Justin Paslay, Kyler Smith

³As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship^[6] from God that is by faith. - 1 Timothy 1:3-4

Goal – To conduct a personal conversation with active members of HGBC using the Shepherd Discussion Tool.

Plan

- Overview – Using the structure and leadership built into Sunday School the staff will administer the survey to each individual person.
- Steps
 - Pastor's meet individually with class leaders to administer the Shepherd Discussion Tool and then explain their role in administering it to their class. For the project, Mike Powers will be the only one doing this.
 - Teachers will then meet one on one with class member to discuss the tool.
 - These meetings will be:
 - No more than an hour
 - With same gender if one on one
 - Can be administered by a married couple to a married couple
 - Take the question sheet with you
 - Follow up Survey to be filled out by the teacher and participant.

APPENDIX 6

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION TOOL

²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” - 1 Timothy 6:20

As we live in a culture that is minimizing beliefs and increasingly becoming less Christian, we know it is important to keep clear doctrinal lines. We (the leadership) wanted to know where our church membership was in their beliefs. As part of Pastor Mike Powers’ doctoral project, we gave a survey to the active church body. You may have received that survey. The pastors of the church met, reviewed the survey, and chose a few key areas that would be good to discuss with our church members.

Here are a few things to know about our time together.

- We will try to keep it to an hour.
 - Introduction and Prayer – 10 mins
 - Questions (Don’t write anything down) – 40 mins
 - Close in Prayer – 10 mins
- We may not get through all the questions (try to get through the questions in bold).
- This is a time of learning. Give your honest answers and hopefully you will learn something as we discuss these areas of theology.

1. Bible

- **How would you explain to an unbeliever?**
 - Are there errors?
- How is the Bible relevant today?
- **Does it have authority in your life?**
 - **In what areas do you struggle to give it authority?**
- **Can God speak to you apart from the Bible?**

2. Christ/Christ’s Death & Resurrection

- What is the relationship between Christ and God?
 - Has Christ always existed?
- Is Christ’s death and resurrection an essential belief of the Christian faith? If so, why?
- **What did His death and resurrection accomplish?**

3. Trinity

- **What is the trinity?**
- What are the roles of the trinity?
 - Salvation
 - Prayer

4. After One Becomes a Christian

- How does your life change? What are your goals?
- What do you do about sin?
 - What is the purpose of repentance for a believer?
- **Where do you find your assurance of salvation?**
 - **How can you tell that you are personally saved?**
 - Can you lose your salvation?

5. The Church

- **What is the purpose of the church?**
- What does it take to become a church member?
- Are unbelievers included in the church?
- What is your responsibility to the church? What authority does it have in your life?
- What is the church's responsibility to you?

6. Baptism

- **What is the significance of baptism?**
- What are the limits to:
 - Who can baptize?
 - Who can get baptized?
 - What makes a person a candidate?
 - Is there an age limit?
 - **How a person is baptized? Sprinkling or Immersion?**
 - The number of times a person is baptized?
- Can a person be saved without being baptized? If so, why?
- What is the relationship between baptism and church membership?

7. Lord's Supper

- **What is the significance of the elements (grape juice and bread)?**
- What are the limits to:
 - Who can give it?
 - Who can take it?
 - Only baptized believers?
 - Where it should be done?

Thank you for taking the time to have this discussion.

You will be receiving a survey to rate your experience and give some feedback. Any responses will help make this a better process in the future.

Close in Prayer

APPENDIX 7

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

The markings below are the summary of the 4 adult education pastors responses.

Strategic Priorities Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The plan is relevant to the direction of the church				4	
The plan is theologically sound				4	
The plan is biblically accurate				4	
The plan is clear				4	
The plan is understandable for pastors				4	
The plan is understandable for lay leaders			2	2	
The plan is understandable for lay members			1	3	
The plan is sustainable long term			2	2	
The plan works well with current structures			2	2	
The plan is actionable				4	
The plan creates a reasonable workload			2	2	
The plan will create greater membership engagement				4	
The plan is complete				4	

APPENDIX 8

TEACHER INSTRUCTION EMAIL

Dear _____

Thank you, again, for your time and investment in Hickory Grove and specifically your Sunday School class. I respect your desire to see our people grow in their knowledge of correct doctrine.

Attached you will find the guide for your discussions. I will also provide you hard copies next week.

Below you will find a link to an evaluation form. I would appreciate your completing one of these for each discussion you have. It will help me get an understanding of how these conversations are going.

Please have all your discussions and evaluations completed in a timely manner as we will not send the follow up email to the participant until you have completed your part. The entire process needs to be finished by November 1.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TL63HZZ>

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions as you walk through this process.

APPENDIX 9

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION EVALUATION—TEACHER

1. Teacher's Name
2. Class Member's Name
3. Date of Discussion
4. Was the discussion beneficial?
 - a. Very Unbeneficial
 - b. Somewhat Unbeneficial
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Somewhat Beneficial
 - e. Very Beneficial
5. Did you provide any doctrinal correction?
 - a. No Correction
 - b. Some Correction
 - c. Significant Correction
6. How would you summarize your time together? (In what ways was it beneficial/unbeneficial, what doctrine did you correct, any additional comments.)

Thank you for your investment in Hickory Grove Baptist Church and your Sunday School class.

APPENDIX 10

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION EVALUATION—MEMBER

1. Class Member's Name
2. Sunday School Teacher's Name
3. Date of Discussion
4. Before you had the discussion, how did you expect your experience would be?
 - a. Very Unenjoyable
 - b. Somewhat Unenjoyable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Somewhat Enjoyable
 - e. Very Enjoyable
5. After the discussion, how would you rate your experience?
 - a. Very Unenjoyable
 - b. Somewhat Unenjoyable
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Somewhat Enjoyable
 - e. Very Enjoyable
6. Did you learn anything during your time together?
 - a. No
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Significantly
7. Was the discussion beneficial to you?
 - a. Very Unbeneficial
 - b. Somewhat Unbeneficial
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Somewhat Beneficial
 - e. Very Beneficial
8. Any comments?

Thank you for taking the time to give us feedback on this process and your experience.

APPENDIX 11

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION EVALUATION
RESULTS—TEACHER

Table A3. Shepherd discussion evaluation results—teacher

	% Selected	# Selected
Was the discussion beneficial?		
Very Unbeneficial		
Somewhat Unbeneficial		
Neutral	3.33	1
Somewhat Beneficial	46.67	14
Very Beneficial	50	15
Did you provide any doctrinal correction?		
No Correction	13.33	4
Some Correction	80	24
Significant Correction	6.67	2

APPENDIX 12

SHEPHERD DISCUSSION EVALUATION
RESULTS—MEMBER

Table A4. Shepherd discussion evaluation results—member

	% Selected	# Selected
Before you had the discussion, how did you expect your experience would be?		
Very Unenjoyable		
Somewhat Unenjoyable		
Neutral	33.33	5
Somewhat Enjoyable	13.33	2
Very Enjoyable	53.33	8
After the discussion, how would you rate your experience?		
Very Unenjoyable		
Somewhat Unenjoyable		
Neutral		
Somewhat Enjoyable	20	3
Very Enjoyable	80	12
Did you learn anything during your time together?		
No		
Somewhat	80	12
Significantly	20	3
Was the discussion beneficial to you?		
Very Unbeneficial		
Somewhat Unbeneficial		
Neutral		
Somewhat Beneficial	46.67	7
Very Beneficial	53.33	8

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A SHEPHERD CARE APPROACH FOR THE PASTORAL LEADERSHIP OF HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
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This project seeks to provide a Shepherd Care Approach for the pastoral leadership of Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Chapter 1 gives the context of ministry at Hickory Grove and the rationale and goals for this project. Chapter 2 shows the pastoral responsibilities given in the Pastoral Epistles and the need to provide doctrinal correction to the flock. Chapter 3 gives an overview of shepherd care and doctrinal correction from historical voices, present voices, and the challenges presented to the megachurch. Chapter 4 gives a detailed outline of the project, including a timeline. Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project and its goals. If successful, this project will provide the church with the means to faithfully shepherd the flock.

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