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ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF INTIMATE SPIRITUAL
CARE AT BURTONSVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN BURTONSVILLE, MARYLAND

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ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF INTIMATE SPIRITUAL
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IN BURTONSVILLE, MARYLAND

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To my wife, Lauren Runyan

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PREFACE

As I reflect upon my doctoral studies, I want to extend sincerest thanks to several people. First, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Joe Harrod, for his regular reminders, gracious encouragements, and wise counsel. These last two years nearly defeated me. Several times I almost gave up. Yet, as I sputtered along, he displayed patience and kindness to me. Thank you.

I also want to thank my church, Burtonsville Baptist Church, for their many prayers and steady support. Thank you for enabling me to pursue my doctorate. I am blessed to lead you and to be loved by you.

Finally, thank you to my wife, Lauren, and our children: Luke, Audra, Caleb, and Malia. I want to say something profound, but cannot seem to track down the right words. I am unable to encapsulate how much I love you and how greatly I praise God for you. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, Timothy Keller cautions against a church expecting the ministry of God’s Word to come strictly through preaching. He writes, “We must be aware of thinking the Sunday sermon can carry all the freight of any church’s ministry of the Word.”¹ While the ministry of the Word must be centered on the pulpit, he counsels, it cannot be restricted to it. Instead, the ministry of God’s Word must reverberate through the relationships and conversations of church members living life together in covenant-community.

As pastor of Burtonsville Baptist Church, I fear that God’s Word, while being proclaimed from the pulpit, is not echoing throughout personal relationships. We are not opening ourselves to the informal ministry of the Word—ordinary Christians utilizing the Scriptures to encourage, admonish, and instruct one another—and our growth in Christlikeness is stunted as a result. The aim of this project is to remedy this malady by seeking to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care.

Context

The need within Burtonsville Baptist Church (BBC) for a culture of intimate spiritual care is the result of three interrelated causes. A historical dimension has made intimate spiritual care difficult. On a technical level, the church simply does not know how to cultivate a culture of spiritual care. However, most fundamentally, the church

¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 5, Kindle.

resists a culture of personal care because church members have kept several great truths of the gospel at a distance.

Historical

Prior to my arrival as pastor of BBC in 2009, the church had sat under the leadership of a single pastor since 1982. During that time, the former pastor's teaching and example shaped the church in countless ways. While I was blessed to reap many benefits from his ministry, he left lasting scars upon the church. One of the most crippling consequences of his tenure was that I inherited a hurting, divided church characterized by mistrust.

In his preaching, the former pastor routinely called out people from the pulpit in humiliating ways. Any Sunday, depending upon the pastor's mood, one could become the target of the sermon. As a result, it became unsafe for church members to confess their sins and seek spiritual care from the pastor. In addition, he would often share his frustrations about a member or family with other church members. Those hearing the pastor's complaints would feel like they were his confidants, his trusted inner-circle. But unbeknown to them, he was voicing similar complaints about them to other church members. As a result, the church divided against itself. Instead of being united in love and support, it was fragmented in resentment and frustration.

These practices cast a long shadow in my ministry context. I entered a church with a double trust deficit: they did not trust me to care for their spiritual needs, and they did not trust each other. While God has graciously worked to rebuild trust on both fronts, my pastoral insecurities have allowed some roots of mistrust to persist. I have been timid about interjecting myself into members' private struggles without their permission—which rarely comes. I have failed to seize informal opportunities to press the message of the gospel into their personal and private lives. Essentially, I have failed to shepherd the church outside the pulpit. As a result, a culture of intimate spiritual care—opening lives

to one another in honesty so that we may look together to the healing found in God's Word—has never flourished within the church.

Technical

While the lack of informal spiritual care is the product of past abuses and enduring mistrust, it is also the result of sincere ignorance. Most of the members simply do not know how to care for one another. Many of the members have never been intimately cared for; therefore, they have no experiential framework for doing so with others. Pursuing a culture of spiritual care feels like embarking on an untraveled journey without a map.

Instead of personal spiritual care, fear and mistrust resulted in primarily formal, large-group discipleship. In larger, less intimate discipleship settings, the church could talk generically about the Bible without being required to open up about their personal struggles. As a result, discipleship was primarily viewed as a course taken or a class attended.

Though spiritually wounded, the people yearn for greater transparency and honesty. In His kindness, God is cracking the walls of mistrust and intensifying an ache for deeper relationships of spiritual intimacy and care. Yet, even those who want this are not doing it; they do not know how. For an intimate culture of spiritual care to take root, the church must be trained in cultivating it.

Theological

At the most fundamental level, BBC lacks a culture of intimate spiritual care because it has missed several wonderful implications of the gospel. While affirming the gospel of unmerited grace, the church seemingly lives afraid that someone will discover they actually need grace. We have yet to know inwardly the height and depth, breadth and width of God's unwavering love for us in Christ. Theoretically, theologically, and

abstractly we grasp the gospel message. But personally, practically, and powerfully we do not.

This fundamental error has a cascading effect of spiritual consequences observed in the numerous weaknesses that plague the church. The church members do not open their lives to intimate spiritual care because they are afraid of being found out as sinners. They do not engage in one-on-one discipleship because their private lives are closed off to one another. Church members do not see transformative life change because they do not engage in personal discipleship. They do not marvel at the power of the gospel because they do not see one another's lives being changed. In turn, the church does not share the gospel because they are not convinced of its pervasive power.

All these devastating shortcomings find their common source in the church's limited comprehension of God's love for the church. The church's flimsy grasp of the gospel has resulted in insipid discipleship, muted affections, and tepid passions to introduce Christ to others.

Rationale

In view of the preceding historical, practical, and theological factors, and the hindrances they pose to vigorous discipleship, it is clear the absence of a culture of intimate spiritual care will continue to impede the growth and maturity of the church. The church's reticence to engage in honest, intimate spiritual care will continue to force the pulpit to carry the full weight of the Word's ministry, a load it was never meant to bear alone. Like an engine running on only two cylinders, the transformation produced by God's Word will continue to sputter forward as a result.

Desperate effort and earnest attention are required if a biblical culture of spiritual care is going to take root in BBC. This project began to provide the pointed attention this problem requires. In it, I stressed that spiritual care is the biblical responsibility of every Christian by exegeting significant biblical texts that call upon church members to exhort, admonish, and encourage one another with God's Word.

Biblical passages such as Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Hebrews 3:12-14, and Hebrews 10:19 emphasize that the significant ministry of spiritual care is assigned by God to every believer, not just church leaders. In fact, in Romans 15:14, Paul expresses his satisfaction with the church members of Rome because they “are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.” I desire for BBC to be marked by the same qualities Paul commends in the Roman church.

For the commendable culture of intimate spiritual care to characterize the church, however, critical hindrances must be addressed. My project did this by pressing home the theological ramifications of the gospel into the messiness of sinful lives. In addition, this project attempted to address some practical hindrances that inhibited a culture of spiritual care at BBC. By God’s grace, then, this project helped equip the church to begin tearing down the walls of fear and mistrust that restricted the informal ministry of the Word.

This new passion for intimate spiritual care also resulted in a more biblical understanding of discipleship. Instead of limiting discipleship to a course taken or a program attended, it was rightly seen as pursuing Christ together in the struggles of life through the grace and guidance of His Word. In addition, the church began to see that caring for one another is not the responsibility of the pastor alone, but that every member is called to care for each other. Instead of perceiving themselves merely as recipients of the Word through the sermon, church members began to properly see their essential ministry of the Word in instructing, encouraging, and counseling one another. When a culture of intimate spiritual care characterizes a congregation, the members will realize that they are not merely donors, committee members, consumers, or cheap labor to prop up weary programs. Instead, God has entrusted to them the sacred privilege of doing the work of ministry themselves by building up one another in Christ (Eph 4:12). In these ways, cultivating a culture of spiritual care has helped further the effort of biblical revitalization.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to begin a culture of intimate spiritual care among the members of Burtonsville Baptist Church.

Goals

To accomplish the prior stated purpose, several goals were necessary to achieve. These goals enabled me to begin cultivating a culture of spiritual care and counsel among the members of Burtonsville Baptist Church.

1. The first goal was to assess the church's current knowledge and practices of spiritual care among a select group of members of Burtonsville Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to provide theological and practical training in intimate spiritual care to the select group of members.
3. The third goal was to train the select group of members on intimate spiritual care by teaching the curriculum.

The research methodology necessary to evaluate the accomplishment of these goals is stated next. This research methodology includes a means of measurement, a benchmark of success, and a description of instruments used to measure success.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the church's current knowledge and practices of spiritual care among a select group of members of BBC.² This assessment captured the current strengths and weakness of the church concerning its understanding and practice of intimate spiritual care. This goal was measured by creating a survey to measure an individual's theological understanding of spiritual care, personal practices regarding spiritual care, and personal struggles regarding intimate spiritual care.³ This survey was administered to a group of adult members who committed to complete the entire spiritual

² All the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

³ See appendix 1.

care curriculum. The first twenty adult members who responded to the curriculum advertisement and return the survey were chosen for this select group. Group members were identified by a unique pin number to preserve their anonymity. This goal was considered accomplished once this group had completed the survey and the data was analyzed to provide a clear picture of the church's understanding and practice of intimate spiritual care.

The second goal of this project was to develop a five-week curriculum to provide theological and practical training in intimate spiritual care to the select group of members. This curriculum covered the biblical emphasis upon intimate spiritual care. In addition, the curriculum provided a practical framework for doing so by drawing upon biblical texts and other additional resources. This goal was measured by an expert panel, consisting of my church's elders and a seminary-trained biblical educator, who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If this minimum requirement was not initially met, then the curriculum was revised until it was met.

The third goal was to train the select group of members in intimate spiritual care by teaching the curriculum. At least 75 percent of participants needed to complete all five training sessions. This goal was measured by re-administering the pre-curriculum and comparing the results of both instruments. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test of dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

⁴ See appendix 2.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Spiritual care. *Spiritual care* is to be understood as the informal ministry of the Word in which ordinary members utilize the Scriptures to encourage, admonish, and instruct one another. In Colossians 3:16, Paul refers to this informal spiritual care when he calls all believers to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to do.” Keller explains, “Every Christian should be able to give both teaching (*didaskalia*, the ordinary word for instruction) and admonition (*noutheo*—a common word for strong, life-changing counsel) that convey to others the teaching of the Bible.”⁵ By extending the ministry of the word beyond teaching and admonishing to include singing, Paul is stressing an informal avenue of Word ministry. This informal ministry of teaching, admonition, and singing God’s word to one another is what I am defining as intimate spiritual care. It is not formal, structured, teacher-pupil instruction, but Christians informally using God’s Word to speak into one another’s lives. As such, throughout this project, I often utilize the term “counseling” in a non-technical manner as a synonym to *spiritual care*. I want to emphasize an important qualifier that often accompanies the term *spiritual care* throughout this project. I wish to cultivate *intimate* spiritual care. With this qualifier, I stress that the spiritual care I desire to establish is personal, often accomplished one-on-one or in small group settings. In addition, intimate spiritual care requires honest relationships marked by transparency.

Discipleship. *Discipleship* is the overarching, all-encompassing command of Christ to every church and every Christian. Jesus commissioned his followers to go “and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mark 28:19-20). Mark Dever defines *discipling*, the verb-form of *discipleship*, as

⁵ Keller, *Preaching*, 5.

simply “helping others to follow Jesus.”⁶ Therefore, every other Christian practice is rightly understood only when it is viewed under the umbrella of discipleship. Spiritual care is a critical component of biblical discipleship.

Two limitations apply to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of deacon characteristics and leadership style. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents were promised that their answers would remain nameless. Second, the project was limited to evaluating short-term results regarding cultivating a culture of spiritual care.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project only focused upon cultivating a culture of intimate spiritual care in the lives of adult members of the select group of Burtonsville Baptist Church. While there were significant overlap concerning providing spiritual care within the home, the primary focus was on life within the church. Second, the project was confined to an eighteen-week timeframe, which included curriculum development, pre-assessment, seminar instruction, and post-assessment.

Conclusion

God has designed the discipleship process to flourish when ordinary Christians use God’s Word to care for one another in honest intimacy. Sadly, however, a culture of intimate spiritual care does not exist within Burtonsville Baptist Church, and spiritual transformation was hampered as a result. This project rectified this significant problem by focusing attention on this critical component of discipleship. Chapter 2 provides a biblical foundation for regular practice of intimate spiritual care. Chapter 3 identifies key

⁶ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13.

hindrances concerning intimate spiritual care while also identify important principles that must permeate the ministry of spiritual care.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE

The Bible demonstrates that spiritual care is the responsibility of every Christian by repeatedly calling upon church members to exhort, admonish, and encourage one another with God’s Word. A careful study of several New Testament texts demonstrates this point.

Ephesians 4:11-16

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul demonstrates that all believers are to be equipped for the work of ministry, which includes speaking the truth to one another in love. Thus, this responsibility for intimately caring for fellow Christian’s spiritual needs is not simply the assignment of gifted ministers. Instead, intimate spiritual care is the privileged responsibility of every church member.

Harold Hoehner succinctly summarizes the primary thrust of Paul’s teaching throughout this section of Ephesians 4: “The central point of this section is the distribution of gifts to the church which are given to unify the church.”¹ Here the reader discovers a beautiful juxtaposition of the church’s unity and its purposeful diversity. Paul emphatically states that there is “one” body, “one” Spirit, “one” hope, “one” Lord, “one” faith, “one” baptism, and “one God who is over all and through all and in all” (4:4-6). Having underscored the church’s unity, Paul turns in verse 7 to highlight its diversity: “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 538.

Paul then elaborates on how the resurrected Christ has poured out the spoils of his triumphant victory by providing gifted individuals to the church from verses 8 through 11. Peter O’Brien says, “Christ now sets out to accomplish the goal of filling all things by supplying his people with everything necessary to foster the growth and perfection of the body.”² Christ accomplishes his purpose of filling all things by supplying the church with gifted ministers.

In verse 11, Paul announces that Christ has given five groups of gifted individuals to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The apostles and the prophets refer to the foundational recipients and proclaimers of God’s Word.³ Evangelists are individuals who travel far and wide to proclaim the message of the gospel.⁴ While the categories of pastors and teachers are closely related, they are not identical.⁵ Pastors are a special subset of teachers. While all pastors are necessarily teachers, not all teachers are also pastors.

The reason Paul emphasizes these five categories of gifted ministers is because their ministry centers upon the teaching of God’s Word. O’Brien explains,

These in v. 11 are deliberately emphasized since they provide the church with the teaching of Christ for the edification of the body (v. 12) and for the avoidance of false teaching (v. 14). They enable others to exercise their own respective ministries

² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 297. Recent attention has been drawn to O’Brien’s inadequate method of citing his sources, which led Eerdmans to withdraw his commentary on Ephesians, Hebrews, and Philippians. See Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., “Eerdmans Statement on Three New Testament Commentaries,” August 15, 2016, accessed January 13, 2018, <http://www.eerdmans.com/Pages/Item/59043/Commentary-Statement.aspx>. This flaw, while serious, does not negate the value of O’Brien’s work.

³ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 298.

⁴ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 274.

⁵ O’Brien writes, “The pastors and teachers are linked here by a single definite article in the Greek, which suggests a close association of functions between two kinds of ministers who operate within one congregation.” O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 300.

so that the body is built to maturity, wholeness, and unity. Those listed are ministers of the Word through whom the gospel is revealed, declared, and taught.⁶

In verse 12, Paul outlines why these gifted ministers are given to the church through a series of three prepositional phrases: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” F. F. Bruce writes, “These various forms of ministry were given to the people of God to equip them for the diversity of service which they were to render in the community, so that the community as a whole—‘the body of Christ’—would be built up.”⁷

There is significant debate concerning how these three prepositional phrases relate to one another. One prominent view interprets all three phrases as coordinate, describing the ministry of the five groups of gifted individuals in verse 11.⁸ This position is supported by ancient theologians like Chrysostom and John of Damascus, as well as more recent commentators like Lincoln.⁹

The second major position understands the three prepositional phrases to build successively upon one another. Gifted ministers have been given to the church so that they can equip its members to exercise their gifts in ministry. The result of both ministers and members utilizing their gifts is the church being built up in maturity.¹⁰ The second interpretation seems to be the correct one because it fits Paul’s primary purpose in this section of the letter. His focus in Ephesians 4:7-16 is the special role all Christians have in the growth and maturity of the church. With such a goal in mind, it would be

⁶ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 298.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 349.

⁸ Hoehner summarizes, “It would connote that he gave gifts for the purpose of preparing the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the building up of the body of Christ. As such, it portrays the gifted people in verse 11 as the ones referred to in all the above three phrases with the rest of the people having little responsibility, thereby making a definite distinction between clergy and laity.” Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 547.

⁹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 277.

¹⁰ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 301-2.

counterproductive to stress that the work of the ministry is the responsibility of only a few specialized individuals.

The immediate reason for which Christ has blessed his church with gifted ministers is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Christ has blessed the church with the groups of gifted individuals in verse 11 so that through their ministry the entire church is equipped to do the full work of ministry.

The ultimate purpose for which Christ has given the church gifted ministers is unpacked in the final phrase, “for building up the body of Christ.” O’Brien stresses, “All that has been spoken in v. 11 and in the first two phrases of v. 12 is directed towards the goal of building the body of Christ, so that together the ministers of v. 11 and ‘the saints’ serve this divinely appointed goal.”¹¹

The implication of Paul’s argument is that the work of ministry must extend beyond that of the church’s ministers if the church is to grow into maturity. Apostles and prophets must declare God’s Word. Evangelists must proclaim the gospel. Pastors and teachers must train and instruct the church with the Scriptures. However, as Hoehner argues, “the work of ministry does not stop there--it continues as these gifted individuals prepare all the saints for the work of the ministry with the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ.”¹² If the body of Christ is to be built up properly, every individual saint has a role to play, a point Paul will return to emphasize in verse 16.

In verse 13, Paul explains that building up the body involves its growth to full maturity.¹³ He does this through a series of three similar expressions which denote the final goal. First, Paul says that “the building up of the body of Christ” includes unity

¹¹ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 304.

¹² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

¹³ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 349.

within the church around common doctrine and common experience.¹⁴ Second, the body is to attain to “mature manhood,” a reference not to the maturity of individual believers but to the church as a whole. The final expression expresses the goal as “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” It is when both the ministers and members are working together that the church measures up to Christ’s full stature.¹⁵

It is important to see the corporate dimension of Paul’s words. Individual Christians are individually gifted, not merely for their individual growth and maturation, but for the growth and maturity of the whole church. Hoehner stresses, “Hence, if every individual believer allows the Spirit to use that gift to the measure given to him or her, then all the body of Christ will grow to the measure of Christ’s full stature. Maturity involves sharing individual spiritual growth and using one’s spiritual gifts within the body.”¹⁶ The reason growth in maturity is essential is clarified in verse 14—so that the church will not be gullible like a child who is easily deceived. In graphic language, Paul compares the spiritually immature to a small boat thrashed about by the winds and waves, entirely at the mercy of the prevailing conditions. Paul purposefully emphasizes the negative picture of verse 14 so that the reader will grasp the importance of Christ’s giving the church gifted ministers. Andrew Lincoln explains,

Immaturity on the part of believers cannot be treated as a neutral state which will be outgrown in due course. It is a highly dangerous condition because it lays them open to manipulation by cunning people and the forces of error. But it is for precisely such a situation that pastors and teachers have been provided--to prevent believers in their immaturity from falling prey to false teaching and to lead them from the instability which ends in error to the stability of the truth.¹⁷

¹⁴ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

¹⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 557.

¹⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 558.

¹⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 259.

In contrast to the negative picture of verse 14, Paul reveals how the church is to grow up into Christian maturity—by “speaking the truth in love.” Paul’s contrast is powerful and purposeful: whereas the false teachers with deceptive tactics proclaim error, church members are to speak gospel truth to one another in love. The contrast is twofold: the false teachers proclaim errors while God’s people speak truth, and the former peddle their falsehoods with deceit while God’s people proclaim truth in love.

Readers must grasp the significance of Paul’s argument. The church grows in maturity, and avoids being tossed about by the winds of faddish doctrines, only when its members regularly speak the truth of the gospel to one another in love. Speaking the truth of God’s Word into the life of fellow Christians is not the exclusive responsibility of the church’s ministers. The opposite is true: God has given the church ministers so they will rightly equip the saints to speak the truth of God’s Word to one another. In verse 16, Paul reemphasizes that the result of Christians speaking the truth in love is that the body of Christ grows up into the fullness of Christ. Once again, Paul stresses that every member of the body has an essential role to play in the growth of the body.

Colossians 3:15-16

Colossians 3:16 supports the thesis by extending the responsibility of discipleship to every member of the church. Paul stresses that the ministry of the Word extends beyond the pulpit to include teaching, admonishing, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Colossians 2:6-7 introduces a key theme that Paul applies throughout the letter: “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” From 2:8-23, Paul combats a theological threat that had infiltrated the church, diminished the significance of Christ, and corrupted what the Colossians were originally taught. While pinning down the precise details of this erroneous teaching is difficult, Moo suggests that false teachers were appealing to spiritual beings, visions, and secret rules, and in so doing

they were undermining Christ's sufficiency.¹⁸ Having effectively opposed the theological infection plaguing the Colossian church, Paul turns his attention to the ethical dimension of walking in Christ beginning in 3:1.

In Colossians 3:16, speaking to the entire Colossian congregation, Paul exhorts them to let "the word of Christ" richly dwell among them. What is the "word of Christ" to which Paul refers? Commentators are divided on whether this is an objective genitive (the word about Christ) or a subjective genitive (the word Christ spoke). Both Richard Melic and Douglas Moo seem to prefer interpreting this as an objective genitive, with Moo stating, "Probably Paul means not 'the word, or message, that Christ proclaimed' but 'the message that proclaims Christ,' 'the message about the messiah.' Paul uses the phrase to summarize the authentic teaching about Christ and his significance."¹⁹ Bruce, on the other hand, prefers the subjective genitive: "Christian teaching must be based on the teaching of Jesus himself; it must be unmistakably 'the word of Christ.'"²⁰ Yet Dunn cautions against ruling out either option since Paul could imply both: "It can denote both the word (gospel) of which (the) Christ is the content, and the word which (the) Christ spoke (Jesus tradition); there is no reason why the genitive should be pressed to an either-or decision."²¹

The context of Paul's instructions indicates that this command is not merely directed to individual Christians, but to the church corporately, as the remainder of the verse indicates. While Christians should let the message of Christ rule their individual

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 60.

¹⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 285-86.

²⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 157-58.

²¹ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 236.

hearts, Paul is urging the entire community to center their corporate lives on the Word of Christ.

The word of Christ is not meant to temporarily visit the church, but instead to permanently dwell at the center of the church. Dunn explains, “The use of *οἰκέω* with *ἐν*-prefixed underlines the settled character of the ‘indwelling’ envisaged: *οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες* elsewhere means ‘the inhabitants’; as the rabbis later pointed out, he who dwells in a house is the master of the house, not just a passing guest.”²² The Word of Christ does not just stop by, it must move in and take over the church’s activities and worship. The adverb *richly* indicates that the word of Christ should not be superficial, but should deeply penetrate the life of the church.

It is interesting to compare Colossians 3:16 with Paul’s parallel instruction in Ephesians 5:18-20. While in Colossians Paul calls for the “word of Christ” to dwell among the church, in Ephesians he commands the church to “be filled with the Spirit,” with similar activities resulting in both passages. Considering the similarities, one should interpret the phrases as synonymous, two sides of the same coin. To let the Word of Christ dwell among the church is to be filled with the Spirit.

The rest of verse 16 is organized around three governing participles—teaching, admonishing, and singing. The initial two participles (teaching and admonishing) are coordinate, and they are accomplished through the vehicle of the final participle (singing). Moo summarizes Paul’s intention: “Paul wants the community to teach and admonish each other by various kinds of songs, and he wants them to do this singing to God with hearts full of gratitude.”²³

Interestingly, the phrase “teaching and admonishing” echoes Paul’s description of his own ministry in Colossians 1:28. Such a clear repetition is not accidental. The

²² Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 236.

²³ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 288.

responsibility of teaching and admonition is not reserved for the apostles or church leaders alone, but the assignment of the entire church. It is essential to grasp that the church as a whole is mutually responsible to undertake the essential gospel work of instructing and admonishing one another if a culture of intimate spiritual care is to flourish within churches.

Teaching presents Christian doctrine positively while admonishing carries with it negative warnings about the danger of wandering from the truth.²⁴ In addition, while teaching is more orderly and doctrinal, admonition, according to Melick, “is generally practical and moral, rather than abstract and theological.”²⁵

Paul makes it clear that such teaching and admonishing must be done in wisdom. This short qualifier is critical or else a church will exhort one another with folly. A church must also recognize the context of Paul’s instruction. In 3:12-15, Paul calls the church to put on humility, meekness, forgiveness, and love. Remembering that these beautiful qualities should define the church safeguards the congregation from equating calloused criticisms with biblical admonition.

Teaching and admonishing should be accomplished through singing. While this clarification seems odd in today’s highly literate society that has unlimited access to printed resources, it must be remembered that Paul ministered in a period before the printing press and the accessibility of printed resources for many people. Singing was a powerful way of teaching truth. Dunn states, “Prior to the invention of printing, hymns and songs were a necessary and invaluable means of implanting Christian teaching.”²⁶

²⁴ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 289.

²⁵ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 304.

²⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 237.

The songs that should be utilized to teach and admonish are “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” While there is uncertainty concerning the particular nuance of the various terms, Paul did not intend a sharp division. Bruce clarifies, “It is unlikely that any sharply demarcated division is intended, although ‘psalms’ might be drawn from the OT Psalter, the ‘hymns’ might be Christian canticles, and ‘spiritual songs’ might be unpremeditated words sung ‘in the Spirit,’ voicing holy aspirations.”²⁷

While Paul does not clarify exactly what each type of song means, he does communicate how each song must be sung. Every variety of song must be infused with sincere thanksgiving. The church should sing in gratitude for all that God has done. In addition, such songs of joyful praise must be done “in your hearts to God.” This qualification emphasizes that singing must well up from the depths of the heart, not simply fall from the lips.²⁸

In conclusion, Colossians 3:16 demonstrates that the entire church is responsible to teach and admonish one another with the words of Christ. Moo summarizes an implication of this passage: “Teaching and admonishing, while undoubtedly often the responsibility of particularly gifted individuals within the congregation, were also engaged in by every member of the congregation.”²⁹ While Paul clearly understood his apostolic ministry in terms of teaching and admonishing, here he envisions church members partaking in those responsibilities also. Intimate spiritual care is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian. The ministry of the Word must extend beyond the pulpit to include teaching, admonishing, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

²⁷ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 158-59.

²⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 240.

²⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 290.

First Thessalonians 5

Having established in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 that spiritual care is the responsibility of every Christian, an exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 5: 11 and 5:14 further support that assertion while carefully refining it. Intimate spiritual care—speaking the truth in love and teaching and admonishing one another—is not a generic, one-size-fits-all ministry philosophy. As Paul demonstrates in these verses, believers are to utilize God’s Word to care for one another in an individualized manner—tailored to meet the unique spiritual needs of each person.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul clarifies a serious misunderstanding about the coming of the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, the reader learns that some within the believing community were deeply grieved because they misunderstood the fate of believers who died before Christ’s return. At the same time, others within the church used the Lord’s return as an excuse for idleness. Both problems—hopelessness in some and laziness in others—resulted from confusion about the Lord’s coming.

After clarifying important aspects about the coming day of the Lord and demonstrating why it is an incentive for an active, sober lifestyle, Paul calls upon the church to use his teaching to “encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (5:11). His instructions echo a previous command in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” While Paul’s instructions repeat his command in 4:18, here Paul adds the additional phrase “and build one another up,” which further explains his intention. Bruce interprets the phrase as “help one another grow spiritually.”³⁰ This phrase derives from the world of construction.

Paul is placing the obligation of intimate spiritual care upon every member of the believing community. Every member of the church is to take the apostolic teaching and use it to encourage and build one another up. Malherbe contends, “Here he [Paul] is

³⁰ F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 115.

concerned with reciprocity within the congregation.”³¹ The argument that spiritual care is the responsibility of every Christian is further clarified in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Here, Paul calls the members of the church to care for one another in an individualized manner.

A significant exegetical problem that confronts the reader and challenges the basis for this thesis centers on the identity of the recipients of Paul’s instruction in verse 14. To whom is Paul speaking—the church leaders mentioned in verse 12 or to the entire congregation? While many Christians may assume that Paul’s instructions are limited to the leaders of the church, there are clear reasons to believe otherwise.

First, throughout this letter, Paul consistently utilizes the vocative term “brothers” to address the entire church, not just the leadership.³² Fee explains, “To this point in the letter, as well as in its final occurrence in verse 25, this vocative has been consistently addressed to the community as a whole.”³³

Additionally, the instructions given in verses 12-13 and the instructions of verses 15-22 are all directed to the church as a whole. It would be unusual for an author to change the target of his instruction without making any explicit reference to that change. In light of these considerations, it is proper to assume that Paul’s instructions in verse 14 apply to the same group he addresses from verse 12 to verse 22—the entire congregation.

The fact that Paul is addressing the entire congregation does not deny, however, that leaders have a unique responsibility in these matters. They have a special responsibility to admonish, encourage, and help; yet, they are not solely responsible. In Paul’s perspective, the entire church is responsible to admonish, encourage, and help one

³¹ Abraham Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32b (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 301.

³² See 1 Thess 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 25

³³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 209.

another. Green concludes, “This pastoral responsibility is not placed solely in the hands of the leadership but delegated to all the members of the church.”³⁴

The first command Paul gives is for the church to “admonish the idle.” Malherbe explains that this command is “the harshest form of exhortation Paul mentions in the letter. . . . The disorderliness that had developed in Thessalonica after his departure was sufficiently serious to require sterner attention.”³⁵ Admonition of the idle necessarily includes disapproval of their disruptive conduct with a call to correct their ways.³⁶ To “build one another up” the church cannot only engage in positive words of encouragement; they must also correct and admonish.³⁷

The individuals who are to receive the admonishment are identified as “the idle.” Malherbe teaches, “The word *ataktōs* literally means ‘disorderly’ and referred to people who refused to submit to accepted forms of behavior.”³⁸ Those believers refusing to work in Thessalonica, and thus disrupting the peace of the congregations, should not be coddled, but confronted.

Considering the challenging nature of the exhortation to be given to community members who are out of line, one can see why it is necessary for intimate spiritual care to come from the entire congregation, and not simply the leaders. Bruce writes, “It must not be thought that the leaders were hypercritical in their attitude of such people; the whole community should dissociate itself in a practical manner from the discreditable course

³⁴ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 252.

³⁵ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 317.

³⁶ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 123.

³⁷ Green explains, “The church is not to remain passive in the face of disorderly members but should respond to correct their conduct by admonishing them.” Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 253.

³⁸ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 317.

they were pursuing.”³⁹ When the entire congregation shoulders the responsibility to admonish those in need of correction, the erring individuals will properly feel the gravity of the admonition.

Second, the church is commanded to “encourage the fainthearted.” The fainthearted were those who had been defeated by the challenges of life. They were on the verge of giving up, unwilling or unable to continue.⁴⁰ To these bruised individuals, the congregation was called to respond in a way that would encourage them. The different spiritual situation of the fainthearted from those who were disorderly required the congregation to respond differently. Instead of confrontation, they needed consolation, to be reminded of their value to Christ, their significance to the church, and the hope of heaven that would reinvigorate their failing hearts.

Third, Paul called the church to “help the weak.” The term for *help* “implies holding in the sense of holding up, supporting.”⁴¹ While many interpreters believe that “the idle” referred to those who were disruptively refusing to work, and that “the fainthearted” included those who were overwhelmed by the loss of a loved one, there are no contextual clues concerning the identity of “the weak.”⁴²

Lastly, the entire church is called to “be patient with them all.” The word translated *patient* is not Paul’s usual word *hypomonē*, but rather *makrothumeite*, which

³⁹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 123.

⁴⁰ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 210.

⁴¹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 123.

⁴² Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 211. Fee states, “But whoever they were, they need the support, or help, of the rest of the believing community. ‘Weakness,’ it should be noted, has very often been held in disdain by others, who think of themselves as the ‘strong’; however, Paul has here captured one of the marks of truly Christian faith, as it has been exhibited in full by our Lord himself in his earthly life.” Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 211

conveys long-suffering.⁴³ Intimate spiritual care is a wearying enterprise. Long-suffering patience is required.

In conclusion, in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14 Paul is calling upon the entire church to use the apostolic teaching to encourage and build one another up. This intimate spiritual care must be personalized to the needs of each person and done with long-suffering patience. Instead of spiritual care flowing in only one direction—from leaders to congregation—Paul envisions spiritual care as a reciprocal activity with each member caring for one another by utilizing God’s Word practically. As Malherbe says, Paul “does not visualize care as flowing in one direction, from a defined group of persons to the larger congregation, but conceives of the activity as reciprocal. The activity is thought of in functional rather than institutional terms” and aims to achieve the expansive goal of edification.⁴⁴

Hebrews 3:12-14 and 10:19-25

Having shown the necessity of intimate spiritual care for the growth of the church corporately, one discovers an important clarification in Hebrews 3 and 10. An exegesis of Hebrews 3:12-14 and Hebrews 10:19-25 demonstrates the importance of believers exhorting and encouraging one another for the sake of the individual Christian’s eternal wellbeing. Both passages emphasize the necessity of intimate spiritual care from complimentary perspectives. In Hebrews 3, the author commands the congregation to engage in intimate spiritual care to avoid a hardened heart that fails to enjoy the rest of God’s eternal salvation. In Hebrews 10, the author encourages intimate spiritual care so that every individual Christian will be stirred up to love and good deeds. In these ways, individual perseverance and individual sanctification are the result of the corporate community engaging in intimate spiritual care.

⁴³ Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 211.

⁴⁴ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 307.

Hebrews 3:12-14

In Hebrews 3, the author underscores the importance of believers mutually encouraging one another so that none of them will fall away from God and into damnable rebellion. William Lane emphasizes, “The avoidance of apostasy demands not simply individual vigilance but the constant care of each member of the community for one another.”⁴⁵

In the immediate context, the author quotes extensively from Psalm 95 to add gravity to his instruction.⁴⁶ The psalm recounts Israel’s refusal to enter Canaan and their rejection of God’s promise in hostile unbelief. Their disposition incurred the wrath of God as they refused to enter the rest of God’s promise due to their rebellion. The author wishes for his readers to grasp the similarities to their present circumstance.

To powerfully communicate the danger inherent in the church’s present circumstances, the author engages in a method of exegesis called *midrash peshet*. As Lane explains, in this method “the writer has selected certain words and thoughts from the quotation that he considers appropriate to his readers and works them into his pastoral instruction.”⁴⁷ These interpretive links press the ancient text into the present experience of the readers.

Following the quote from Psalm 95, the author issues a stern warning in Hebrews 3:12 to “take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart.” The author is issuing a real warning to protect the church against a legitimate threat. O’Brien describes this unbelief as “a positive refusal to believe, and active disobedience to God.”⁴⁸ Such unbelief is stanch rebellion against God.

⁴⁵ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 84.

⁴⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 84.

⁴⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 86.

⁴⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 146.

The warning in verse 12 is of paramount importance for every Christian to hear because the Christian community is not immune to the same spiritual malaise that inflicted the wayward Israelites that perished in the desert. Yet, the result of rebellious unbelief is much weightier for the Christian community than for the wilderness generation, as verse 14 reveals. Since Christ is greater than Moses, the consequence of abandoning Christ is graver than that which befell the Israelites. Instead of missing the earthly blessings of the promised land, Christian rebellion will forfeit the eternal blessings of the promised new age.⁴⁹

Falling away from the living God is to forfeit one's share in Christ's salvation. Lane clarifies that by using standard business terminology, the author presents the relationship between Christ and his church "in the binding terms of a business partnership. The community can rely on the faithfulness of Christ, but they too must display 'good faith.' They have been placed under obligation."⁵⁰ The conditional clause "if indeed" stresses the provisional quality of the relationship. Genuine, saving faith must persevere to the end.

If the warning of verse 12 is real, and the danger of failing to endure is eternally devastating, as verse 14 indicates, then how do Christians heed the warning to avoid the danger? The answer is provided in verse 13—through establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care. O'Brien explains, "To make sure that an evil heart of unbelief does not appear in any one of them, the community as a whole as well as each member within it is to be vigilant and constant in their care for others by mutual exhortation."⁵¹

⁴⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 65-66.

⁵⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 87.

⁵¹ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 147.

The author begins verse 13 with a strong adversative—“but”—indicating that an important remedy to the danger of an unbelieving heart is mutual admonition. The verb “exhort” has a wide semantic range which includes “warning and reproof as well as encouragement and comfort.”⁵² Pulling the term *today* from his earlier quote from Psalm 95, the author underscores the ongoing urgency of mutual admonition—believers are to exhort another every day.

By using the passive voice of “be hardened,” the author indicates that sin is a poison that deceives and deadens a person, leading to a hopeless position.⁵³ For this reason, a cultural of intimate spiritual care is essential if sin’s deceitful allure is to be exposed and avoided. Bruce explains the wisdom of the exhortation to mutual encouragement:

In isolation from his fellow-believers each individual among them was more liable to succumb to the subtle temptations that pressed in upon him from so many sides, but if they came together regularly for mutual encouragement the devotion of all would be kept warm and their common hope would be in less danger of flickering and dying. In isolation each was prone to be impressed by the specious arguments which underlined the worldly wisdom of a certain measure of compromise of their Christian faith and witness; in the healthy atmosphere of the Christian fellowship these arguments would be the more readily appraised at their true worth, and recognized as being so many manifestations of “the deceitfulness of sin.”⁵⁴

The call to exhortation utilizes the reflexive pronoun “one another” instead of the reciprocal pronoun “each other.” This deliberate word choice additionally emphasizes the mutual responsibility each member has for one another.⁵⁵

In Hebrews 3, the author places a clear priority on establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care. Since the warning of an evil, unbelieving heart is real and dire, and since the danger of falling away from the living God is perilous and eternal, a

⁵² O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 147-48.

⁵³ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 87.

⁵⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 67.

⁵⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 87.

congregation must exhort one another daily. Individual perseverance in the faith is a community project.

Hebrews 10:19-25

While Hebrews 3 emphasizes that perseverance in the faith is a community project, Hebrews 10 demonstrates that growth in the faith is also. In this climactic paragraph, the author of Hebrews calls Christians to practice diligent spiritual care—stirring one another up to love and good works.

In this paragraph, the author weaves together his exposition of Christ as priest and sacrifice and appeals for the church to understand and enjoy the blessings of Christ in their daily life. He does this by organizing his instruction around three parallel exhortations in 10:22, 10:23, and 10:24—“let us draw near,” “let us hold fast,” and “let us consider how to stir up one another.” The author utilizes his powerful teaching on Christ as a means to motivate the readers to action.⁵⁶

Two glorious blessings form the basis of the appeal—Christians have certain access to God (19-20) and a great priest over God’s household (22). Lane states, “The present participle ἔχοντες, ‘since we have,’ has two complementary objects *παρρησία*, ‘authorization,’ for access to the heavenly sanctuary (v 19) and *ἱερέα μέγαν*, ‘a great priest,’ in charge of God’s household (v 21).”⁵⁷ Since Jesus has given Christians access to God through his sacrificial death and since he is a great priest over God’s family, the author urges believers to apply these glorious blessings in three practical ways.

First, he says, “Let draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Confident in the sufficiency of Christ, a Christian draws near to God, not trembling in uncertainty, but with sincerity and assurance.

⁵⁶ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 340.

⁵⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 283.

Opinions differ concerning what is being referred to when the author uses the imagery of sprinkling and washing. Some, like Bruce, argue that the author is referring to Christian baptism, saying, “But the present reality which he has in mind is surely Christian baptism—consisting, of course, not merely in the outward application of water, but in the outward application of water as the visible sign of inward and spiritual cleansing wrought by God in those who come to Him through Christ.”⁵⁸ Other commentators, however, believe the author’s imagery refers to Old Testament purification rituals. Guthrie states, “The two concepts of ‘hearts sprinkled’ and ‘bodies washed’ must be understood against the backdrop of the old covenant purification rituals.”⁵⁹ He goes on to argue against those who view these phrases as a reference to Christian baptism by claiming they are reading such ideas into the text.⁶⁰

The second exhortation is found in verse 23: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.” Throughout Hebrews, “hope” is not a subjective wishing, but a certain, fixed confidence anchored to God’s objective, unbreakable promises. The author then reinforces that idea with the word *akline*, which Guthrie explains, “Literally means ‘that which does not bend’ or ‘that which is straight,’ which communicates the concept of stability or immutability.”⁶¹ Thus, believers are called to hold unflinchingly tight to the Christian hope which is secured in the person and work of Christ, without wavering or bending in any circumstance. The reason the author calls for such white-knuckled clinging to the Christian hope is because God is faithful.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 250.

⁵⁹ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 344.

⁶⁰ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 344. O’Brien states this position even more strongly: “Our author has given no overt signals ‘that he has the Christian rite in mind.’ Instead he continues his use of Old Testament washing imagery, in connection with the purification rites found in the Pentateuch (see Heb. 9:13), in order ‘to communicate that the work of Christ has prepared believers to enter the presence of God.’” O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 368.

⁶¹ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 344.

The third exhortation is found in verses 24-25. Here the reader discovers a clear call for a culture of intimate spiritual care to permeate the believing community. The author says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Lane explains, “The exhortation . . . centers on the responsibility of Christians to exhibit practical concern for one another.”⁶² A culture of intimate spiritual care must be a priority for every member of the church.

A culture of mutual encouragement requires deliberate attention and initiative. The word translated “let us consider” (*katanoeo*), means to pay careful notice and attention.⁶³ Believers must not passively wait for ways to encourage one another, but instead deliberately look for ways to stir up one another.

Beyond just focused intentionality, a culture of intimate spiritual care also requires loving tenacity. The word translated “stir up” is strong. In Acts 15:39 it describes the heated argument that broke out between Barnabas and Saul concerning Mark.⁶⁴ Church members are to passionately stir up one another to perform good works.

The author calls the believing community to purposefully spur one another on with intentionality and focus. The things Christians should provoke one another to is “love and good works.”

The appeal of verse 24 is further explained in opposing expressions in verse 25. ‘Negatively, the believers cannot abandon fellowshiping together. O’Brien says, ‘The failure of some to continue attending the gatherings of the community is cast not simply as neglect but as wrongful abandonment.’⁶⁵ While commentators do not know the

⁶² Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 289.

⁶³ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 345.

⁶⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 253.

⁶⁵ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 370.

precise reason some of the believers were abandoning meeting together, the danger of doing so is clearly understood. Bruce states, “Under the various pressures which were being brought to bear upon them, to withdraw from the society of their fellow-believers was to court spiritual defeat; only by remaining united could they preserve their faith and witness.”⁶⁶

In Hebrews 3 and 10, one reads an emphatic call to intimate spiritual care. Perseverance in the faith and growth in “love and good works” are only possible when believers mutually encourage and exhort one another. Faithfulness is communal. No Christian is adequate to endure alone, for this reason God surrounds individual believers with a church. Guthrie says, “Christians are to display a deep care and concern for one another, expressed not only through positive support and reassurance, but also through reproof and warning.”⁶⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, a careful exegesis of passages from Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews demonstrates that spiritual care is the responsibility of every Christian. If the church is to grow up into corporate maturity, then its individual members must regularly speak God’s Word to one another through a variety of avenues. If individual Christians are going to survive the deadening allure of sin and grow in love and good works, then the church around them must consistently exhort one another and spur one another on with God’s Word. For the good of the church and the survival of one’s individual soul, every Christian must work to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care.

⁶⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 255.

⁶⁷ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 345-46.

CHAPTER 3
NECESSARY FOUNDATIONS FOR A CULTURE
OF INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE

In light of the previous chapter’s biblical evidence, establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care is an important and biblical goal. The difficulty, however, is that a culture of intimate spiritual care is not merely a program. It is not a stand-alone structure that a pastor can paste to the life of the church. Instead, it is a delicate garden that must be tended by the structures of the church if it will then feed the entire congregation with its life-giving fruit.

So, what factors must exist within a church’s ecosystem for the garden of spiritual care to flourish? After surveying the relevant literature, this chapter provides that answer by synthesizing the material and explaining four necessary elements that allow a culture of intimate spiritual care to exist within a church. These elements are a high, accurate understanding of Scripture; defined, committed relationships; clarity on sanctification; and practical training.

A High, Accurate Understanding of Scripture

The biblical evidence examined in the previous chapter reveals that ordinary Christians are commanded to utilize the Scriptures to encourage and admonish one another. Yet if a church is to utilize God’s Word to care for one another, they must have a clear understanding of how the Scriptures are to be read and rightly interpreted. Therefore, intimate spiritual care must exist within a church that has a high, accurate understanding of Scripture.

In his high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prays to His Father saying, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (v. 17). Not only does Jesus’ prayer indicate the total

truthfulness of Scripture, but He also reveals the primary means by which spiritual growth occurs: God’s Word. Commenting upon this verse, J. C. Ryle argues, “The word is the great instrument by which the Holy Ghost carries forward the work of inward sanctification. By bringing the word to bear more forcibly on mind and will, and conscience, and affection, we make the character grow more holy.”¹ Intimate spiritual care, therefore, begins with God’s Word. It is only in the Scriptures that a person discovers the true condition of their need and the ultimate solution to their problem.

Mark Dever emphasizes the importance of God’s Word among church members by listing expositional preaching as the first mark of a health church. He argues, “If you get the priority of the Word established, then you have in place the single most important aspect of the church’s life, and growing health is virtually assured, because God has decided to act by His Spirit through His Word.”² While a church may inadvertently stumble upon all the other elements needed for intimate spiritual care, without a high view of God’s Word and an accurate understanding of it, true spiritual care will eventually wither and die. God has sovereignly chosen to work His glorious purposes among His people by His Word. Dever states, “God has chosen to use His Word to bring life. That’s the pattern that we see in Scripture and in history. His Word is His own chosen instrument for bringing life.”³

In *Reverberation*, Jonathan Leeman stresses that God’s Word is the one element absolutely necessary for a church to live and grow. He stresses, “One thing is necessary in our churches—hearing God’s Word through preaching, reading, singing, and praying.”⁴

¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 4:201.

² Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 39.

³ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 42.

⁴ Jonathan Leeman, *Reverberation: How God’s Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 22.

Leeman's book seeks to demonstrate that "God's Word, working through God's Spirit, is God's primary instrument for growing God's Church."⁵ The problem that Leeman articulates, and which many pastors painfully recognize, is that God's Word seems to fall with a thud only once a week through the sermon. While preaching is necessary, it is not enough; God's Word must echo throughout the life of the church beyond the sermon if its life-transforming power is to be unleashed.

Leeman follows the Word as it bounces through the lives and relationships of the church. He outlines the importance of singing biblically-rich songs since singing "is the medium by which God's people grab hold of His Word and align their emotions and affections to God's."⁶ Beyond singing, the Word reverberates through the prayer as God's people align their hopes and petitions according to God's Word. Additionally, God's Word moves forth from the sermon and echoes within the church through disciplining relationships as members help one another follow the Word.

If God's Word is the one essential element needed for a church to bloom, as both Dever and Leeman argue, then a culture of intimate spiritual care begins with the Word. It is the soil in which the garden grows and is sustained. Two aspects of a church's commitment to God's Word are necessary to emphasize.

First, a church must have a high view of Scripture. A church must recognize Scripture's authority, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. If these critical understandings of Scripture are absent from a church, then the flower of spiritual care will eventually succumb to the thorns of worldly wisdom. If God's Word is not authoritative, then its counter-intuitive teachings will eventually be replaced by something more sensible to man's understanding. If Scripture is not inerrant, then a church will soon disregard the portions with which it vehemently disagrees. If the Bible is not clear and relevant to the

⁵ Leeman, *Reverberation*, 19.

⁶ Leeman, *Reverberation*, 157.

realities of ordinary life, then it will not be consulted. And if Scripture is not sufficient, then it will be supplemented with and overshadowed by the therapeutic philosophies of today's experts. A high view of God's Word must exist for intimate spiritual care to thrive.

Yet, a high view of Scripture is not enough; a church must also have an accurate understanding of it. If a church's members do not understand the Bible accurately, then their sincere scriptural care could prove disastrous. They may use the Bible unbiblically. Clear training on how to study and apply the Bible is important.

Since the time of the Reformation, protestant scholars have emphasized the clarity of Scripture. As Charles Hodge aptly summarizes, "the Bible is a plain book."⁷ The Bible was written in such a way that its teachings are clear and understandable to ordinary believers. The Second London Confession of Faith, written in 1689, declares,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for Salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.⁸

In emphasizing the importance of accurately understanding Scripture, the clarity of Scripture is not being denied. In fact, intimate spiritual care would be futile if a proper understanding of the Scriptures was not within the reach of ordinary Christians. Nevertheless, as Larry Pettegrew clarifies, "There is a difference between clarity and simplicity. Scripture is clear, not mystical or hidden. But often it takes work to understand what the biblical authors meant in a certain passage."⁹ The clarity of Scripture does not promise that proper understanding is easy, but that it is possible.

⁷ Charles Hodges, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 1:150, Kindle.

⁸ William L. Lumpkin, ed., "The Second London Confession (1677, 1688)," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1969), 251.

⁹ Larry D. Pettegrew, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *The Masters Seminary Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 213.

Since the world of Scripture—its language, culture, and concepts—is different in many ways from today, it sometimes proves difficult to bridge the centuries from the ancient world to today. Beyond the challenges of dealing with an ancient book, Christians sometimes read the Bible in ways it was never meant to be read, treating it primarily as an encyclopedia of application. David Powlison explains, “The Bible’s stories, histories, and prophecies—even many of the commands, teachings, promises, and prayers—take thoughtful work in order to reapply with current relevance. If you receive them directly—as if they speak directly to you, about you, with your issues in view—you will misunderstand and misapply Scripture.”¹⁰

Recognizing the seemingly enormous gulf that separates them from certain portions of the Bible, some Christians only focus their attention on those sections which are directly applicable. According to Michael Emlet, the result of this approach is that “we end up ministering with an embarrassingly thinner but supposedly more relevant Bible.”¹¹ While these portions of Scripture *are* Scripture, they are not the *only* Scriptures. Paul declared, “All of Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (1 Tim 3:16). God intends believers to utilize all of Scripture to intimately care for one another, not just fragmentary sections that seem more relevant.

In light of these difficulties, Christians often need to be taught basic rules for understanding Scripture so they can grow more effective in properly applying God’s Word through intimate spiritual care. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “If we are to avoid flights of

¹⁰ David Powlison, “Reading the Bible for Personal Application,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible’s Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, ed. Wayne Grudem, John C. Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 57-58.

¹¹ Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2009), 16. Emlet describes directly applicable passages as “ditch” passages, where bridging the divide seems like merely stepping across a ditch. On the other hand, there are “canyon” passages, where it feels impossible to connect today’s world to the world of the Bible.

fancy in interpretation we need some understanding of what governs the right approach to the meaning of the Bible.”¹² Two tools to help provide the right approach are biblical theology and proper hermeneutics. Goldsworthy explains, “If there is such a unifying theme throughout the Bible, then the structure of the biblical message—the overall relationship of each part to the whole—becomes of prime importance for interpretation.”¹³

According to Michael Lawrence, “biblical theology is about reading the Bible, not as if it’s sixty-six separate books, but a single book with a single plot—God’s glory displayed through Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ When this overarching story of Scripture is understood, a Christian can make sense of each individual section of the unfolding drama. A church member will no longer be solely reliant upon directly applicable passages because he will see how all of Scripture is a story of salvation that centers on Christ. Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum stress, “Ultimately, we cannot understand what God intends for us in any part of Scripture until we have understood that text in light of the fullness of revelation in Christ. Jesus, then, is the goal of all of God’s previous revelation.”¹⁵ Biblical theology is essential for reading the Bible rightly. Hamilton argues, “Studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should.”¹⁶

¹² Graeme Goldsworthy, “Gospel & Kingdom,” in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2000), 28.

¹³ Goldsworthy, “Gospel & Kingdom,” 28-29.

¹⁴ Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 15.

¹⁵ Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from the Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 39. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “If Jesus is the one mediator between God and man, then he must mediate the meaning of the whole of God’s communication to us.” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 62.

¹⁶ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 19-20.

In an article explaining biblical theology's role within Christian counseling, Richard Shultz outlines several advantages biblical theology provides. Two of the advantages are particularly relevant toward creating a culture of intimate spiritual care. He argues convincingly that biblical theology helps a Christian understand his place in the biblical story line, thus guarding proper interpretation. In addition, biblical theology keeps a Christian from confusing oneself with uniquely historical biblical characters. He concludes by stating, "Thus biblical theology, rightly conceived and carried out, provides an essential tool not only for summarizing Scriptural teachings, but also for accurately understanding and judiciously applying Scripture to our lives and those of others, while, at the same time, helping us to understand the nature of the counseling task itself."¹⁷

Understanding biblical theology guards a Christian from applying Scripture in an unscriptural fashion. It prevents believers from reducing God's Word down to a how-to manual for successful living. In *How People Change*, Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp stress,

The Bible cannot be reduced to a set of directions for successful living. This does violence to the very nature of the Word of God and robs it of its power. The Bible is the world's most significant story, the story of God's cosmos-restoring work of redemption. The Bible is a "big picture" book. It introduces us to God, defines our identity, lays out the meaning and purpose of life, and shows us where to find help for the one disease that infects us all—sin. If you try to reduce the Bible to a set of directions, not only will you miss its overall wisdom, you will not make sense of the directions. They only make sense in the context of the whole story.¹⁸

While it is paramount that Christians have a robust understanding of biblical theology if they are to apply Scripture properly to one another's lives, they must also have a nuanced hermeneutic that accurately handles Scripture's various genres. In *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, Robert Stein states, "There are various kinds of

¹⁷ Richard L. Schultz, "For I Did Not Shrink from Declaring to You the Whole Purpose of God: Biblical Theology's Role within Christian Counseling," *The Transdisciplinary Journal of Christian Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2010): 53.

¹⁸ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2006), 92.

literary forms in the Bible. Each of them possesses its own rules of interpretation. . . . If we are not aware of the rules under which the biblical author wrote, misinterpretation almost certainly will take place.”¹⁹

In addition to understand the general rules of interpretation, church members should have a simple process for studying the Scriptures. One strategy that encourages Christians to study God’s Word for themselves is the inductive study approach. This approach occurs in three stages: observation, interpretation, and application. In the observation stage, the goal is to encounter what the passage says. At this point, Bible readers ask questions to uncover the who, what, when, where, and why of the passage. In addition, the reader wants to notice key words and phrases as well as important conjunctive adverbs, such as wherefore, therefore, and for this reason. These crucial connections are key to uncovering the logical development of the text.

Flowing from the observation stage, the reader moves into interpretation. During this period of Bible study, the goal is to discover what the text means. Having grasped what the text says, this stage helps the reader interpret the Bible to see what it means. After wrestling with the meaning of the text, the inductive study approach calls the reader to then discover how to apply the text. After the reader has studied what the passage says and wrestled with what it means, he is then properly equipped to apply the passage to his life and intimately care for others with the text.

Having stressed the importance of properly understanding God’s Word, the question arises: how much biblical theology and hermeneutics are necessary for intimate spiritual care within the church? Ordinary Christians without advanced biblical training are adequate. While church member should continually strive for a deeper, fuller understanding of God’s Word, understanding the basics of interpreting the Bible is sufficient.

¹⁹ Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75.

One of the greatest long-term consequences of a pulpit ministry devoted to expository preaching—passage after passage through books of the Bible—is that it gradually teaches the congregation the basics of biblical interpretation. Through the preacher’s faithful example, congregants are taught to let the text determine the meaning, handle various biblical genres, understand both literary and canonical context, see Christ in all of Scripture, and draw gospel-rooted applications from world of the text for the world of today. Faithfully modeling proper interpretive principles in the regular pulpit ministry of the church is one of the greatest ways the leadership can cultivate a high, accurate understanding of God’s Word.

In addition to faithfully preaching expositional sermons, a church’s leadership should provide focused training on biblical hermeneutics. A church could offer a repeating Sunday school or small group course on how to study the Bible. This study could teach the basics of the inductive Bible study method so that church members can be trained. In addition, church members should be encouraged to read together Christian books that demonstrate and model sound exegesis and hermeneutics. Many introductory resources are written with regular church members in mind.²⁰ These resources should be repeatedly emphasized within the life of the church.

An additional resource that assists church members in proper understanding is a good study Bible, such as the ESV Study Bible.²¹ A good study Bible provides the necessary guardrails to assist Christians in staying on the road of proper interpretation. Regularly consulting the explanatory notes beneath the texts can often train Christians to

²⁰ See, for example, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); and Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 2007). A helpful resource for students is Jon Nielson, *Bible Study: A Student’s Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013).

²¹ Crossway Bibles, *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007).

first consider what the text originally meant before jumping immediately to what it now means.

For a culture of intimate spiritual care to take root and bloom within a church, there must be a high, accurate understanding of Scripture. The church must not only rightly prioritize God's Word, it must also properly interpret and apply it. This requires church members to center their lives and relationships on the authority, inerrancy, sufficiency, and clarity of Scripture. It also requires church members to know the overarching story of Scripture and the proper ways to interpret the Bible's various parts. Biblical theology and hermeneutics make accurate understanding possible.

Defined, Committed Relationships

Beyond a high, accurate understanding of Scripture, a church's ecosystem must also include committed, defined relationships if intimate spiritual care will exist. A church must have an accurate understanding of the New Testament's teaching on relationships—both the honesty with which it speaks and the importance it places upon them. Additionally, a church must embrace meaningful church membership, with all its necessary implications, to provide definition and necessary boundaries for intimate spiritual care.

Honesty about Relationships

A church must embrace the Bible's honest teaching on the importance of relationships. First, a church must wrestle with the honesty of the New Testament's teaching on relationships within a church. In *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, Lane and Tripp explain that relationships are messy, filled with sin and grace, sorrow and joy, exhilaration and agony. They write, "The difficulty is that sin and grace coexist in all of them. Sin gets in the way of what grace can do, while grace covers what sin causes. Our

relationships vividly display this dynamic mixture of gold and dross.”²² For the messy, frustrating, sometimes infuriating work of spiritual care to endure, there must be an accurate understanding of the challenges inherent in all meaningful relationships.

One can see the necessity of relationships and their inherent fragility by examining the numerous “one another” commands in the New Testament. Repeatedly, the New Testament authors command local churches to love one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, and show patience to one another. These frequent exhortations not only demonstrate the extreme importance of sanctifying relationships within the church, but also the tendency of those relationships to breakdown in sin. Lane and Tripp state, “The Bible assumes that relationships this side of eternity will be messy and require a lot of work.”²³

Sadly, however, some Christians seem to assume the opposite is true. Church members wrongly assume that since they are Christians, sanctifying relationships should come naturally—or at least more easily. And when this assumption is painfully proven false, jaded church members retreat into isolation. In ways, then, a church must lower the membership’s expectations for life in the church by honestly emphasizing the unavoidable messiness of all relationships. Just as gardens take constant tending, so do relationships of intimate spiritual care. Church members must be reminded of this biblical truth for a culture of spiritual care to exist.

Church members should also be taught that the messiness of relationships is a God-appointed means of sanctification. There is a good purpose in the pain of committed, Christian relationships. Lane and Tripp explain, “What happens in the messiness of relationships is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start

²² Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2006), 7.

²³ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 32.

coming to the end of ourselves. Only when this happens do we reach out for the help God alone can provide.”²⁴ For a culture of spiritual care to flourish, church members must embrace the messiness of relationships as one of the means God employs in making us like Christ.

Beyond emphasizing Scripture’s honesty about relationships, a church must also explain the importance Scripture places upon relationships. Examining the New Testament’s honesty about church relationships should lower member’s expectation on one hand. Yet, on the other hand, the New Testament emphasizes the importance of these challenging relationships by showing that God purposefully utilizes these challenging relationships to shape Christian’s into Christ’s image. Ironically, then, Christians need their expectations lowered *and* raised if they seek to establish a culture of intimate spiritual care.

As the previous chapter’s biblical evidence revealed, sanctification and spiritual survival occur within the context of community. Since every person is born spiritually broken, easily deceived by sin, Scripture remedies the danger of sin’s hardening effects by commanding Christians to exhort one another daily. Paul Tripp warns, “None of us is wired to live this Christian life alone. None of us is safe living separated and unknown. Each of us, whether pastor or congregant, needs the eyes of others in order to see ourselves with clarity and accuracy.”²⁵ Church members must grasp that it is both disobedient and delusional to live the Christian life in isolation, outside of relationships of intimate spiritual care.

While God created humanity to live in open community, the fall turned mankind inward. The first couple hid from God and shielded their shame from one another. That

²⁴ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 12.

²⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 73.

tendency toward privacy and isolation continues in human hearts. Therefore, church members must regularly hear that God is calling them out of seclusion and into honest community. Richard Donahue argues, “The New Testament picture of discipleship challenges a privatized view of Christian life.”²⁶ That challenge must be heard regularly if a culture of intimate spiritual care will take root within a church.

Establish Meaningful Membership

In addition to embracing the Bible’s honest teaching on the importance of relationships, a church must establish meaningful membership. When thinking about church membership, some people may dismiss it as unimportant since there seems to be little New Testament evidence for it. While certain structures of membership are absent from the New Testament, the essence of church membership permeates the New Testament’s picture of what it means to be a Christian.

In *Church Membership*, having surveyed the New Testament evidence, Jonathan Leeman argues, “To be a Christian is to belong to a church. No one gets saved and then wanders around by him or herself, thinking about whether to join a church. People repent and are then baptized into the fellowship of the church.”²⁷ A churchless Christian is a New Testament oxymoron. The epistles are written to churches or to individuals leading churches.²⁸ From Pentecost onward, sinners are saved and united to local churches. R. B. Kuiper stresses, “The Scriptural rule is that, while membership in

²⁶ John R. Donahue, “Discipleship and the Life of Grace,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28, no. 2 (1986): 77.

²⁷ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 46.

²⁸ See Benjamin Merkle, “The Biblical Basis for Church Membership,” in *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*, ed. John S. Hammett and Benjamin Merkle (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 49-50.

the church is not a prerequisite of salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation.”²⁹

So, what is the essence of church membership? At its heart, church membership is about responsibility. Leeman explains, “Church membership, in other words, is all about a church taking specific responsibility for you, and you for a church.”³⁰ To whom and for whom are believers responsible? Church membership provides a clear answer to that important question.

Dever and Dunlop argue, “If you want to cultivate a culture of intentional relationships, you will need to make a big deal of membership. Rather than letting membership languish unnoticed in the background, make it front and center as the gateway to life in your church.”³¹ Membership should be emphasized because the “one another” commands lose meaning if they are not seen as special responsibilities to be shown to specific people. Church membership makes it clear who Christians are especially committed to love, care for, and watch over. Community is impossible if one does not know to whom he is committed.

Dever explains that, at its heart, discipling has been described as “a bunch of church members taking responsibility to prepare one another for glory.”³² Taking responsibility for one another carries certain expectations and implications. For one, church members must commit to give and receive spiritual care to one another, willfully opening their own lives to the care—and sometimes correction—of others. Since individuals are easily deceived about their own sinfulness, meaningful membership

²⁹ R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ: A Scriptural Appreciation of the One Holy Church* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, n.d.), 112.

³⁰ Leeman, *Church Membership*, 65.

³¹ Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 126.

³² Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 43.

pursues what Tripp calls “intentionally intrusive, Christ-centered, grace-driven, redemptive community.”³³

A necessary implication of meaningful membership is that the church vigilantly guards against accepting unregenerate church members. The New Testament evidence consistently demonstrates that only after a credible profession of faith was an individual welcomed into the membership of the local church.³⁴ Yet, if a local church readily admits into membership those who are not themselves Christians, then the ministry of the church will suffer greatly. Dever states, “A large body of nominal Christians will subvert the churches’ ministry in the world, in itself, and even in their own lives. When the lives of those in the church lie about Jesus, the church has lost its purpose and fails to be a light to the world.”³⁵ In 1894, Edward Hiscox vigorously warned, “If our churches are to fulfill their mission, remain true to their traditions, and honor their apostolical pretensions, they must insist, with unabated vigor, on a regenerated membership. Nor must they insist on it in theory only, but take every precaution to maintain it in practice.”³⁶ Thus, if the ministry of intimate spiritual care is to flourish within a church, regenerate church membership must be practiced.³⁷

Coupled with church membership, the church must also commit itself to practice church discipline. Albert Mohler says, “Authentic biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.”³⁸ Jesus emphasized

³³ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 84.

³⁴ See Acts 2:41-42,47; 14:23; 16:5; 20:28; Rom 1:2; 1 Cor 1:2; 3:16; Phil 1:1.

³⁵ Mark Dever, “The Practical Issues of Church Membership,” in Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, 90-91.

³⁶ Edward T. Hiscox, “The New Directory of Baptist Churches,” 1894, accessed May 27, 2019, <https://www.fbinate.com/hiscox/chapter3.html>.

³⁷ For practical guidance on how to promote meaningful membership see Dever, “The Practical Issues of Church Membership,” 96-101.

³⁸ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: A Collection of*

the necessity of church discipline in Matthew 18, when one of his few direct teachings about the church outlined a process for church discipline.³⁹

Through church discipline, a body of believers not only guards the purity of the church, protects the testimony of the church, and defends the honor of God, but it also disciplines the wandering saint with severe, yet necessary action. In his doctoral project, Cline wisely comments, “To fail to practice church discipline is to fail to practice effective discipleship.”⁴⁰ A church unwilling to practice biblical discipline undermines its membership’s confidence in the Scriptures and wilts their resolve to admonish one another in the hard sin-struggles inherit in a fallen world. How can the church expect its individual members to do the intimate spiritual care that it is unwilling to do corporately? J. L. Dagg insightfully warns, “when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”⁴¹

If a culture of intimate spiritual care is to take root and blossom within a church, it must exist within a gracious web of committed, defined relationships. The church must raise and lower the expectations of its members. It must raise them to grasp the staggering truth that sanctification and salvation are community projects; Christians need one another’s help to get to heaven. Yet, it must also lower the false expectation that assumes Christian relationships will not be messy or mixed with deep heartache.

Historic Baptist Documents, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 43-44.

³⁹ Thomas Schreiner insightfully comments, “Confronting others with sin is difficult, and Jesus’ words confirm that such discipline constitutes His will for the church. Indeed, Jesus said little about the church during His ministry, and the fact that He spoke particularly about church discipline shows how important it is for the life of the church.” Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Biblical Basis for Church Discipline,” in Hammett and Merkle, *Those Who Must Give an Account*, 112-13.

⁴⁰ Timothy Lynn Cline, “Developing and Implementing a Discipleship Plan for Chillicothe Baptist Church, Chillicothe, Ohio” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 69.

⁴¹ John L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 274.

Clarity on Sanctification

While a high, accurate understanding of Scripture and committed, defined relationships are necessary to create a suitable habitat for intimate spiritual care, more elements are needed. In addition, a church must have biblical clarity on sanctification. Weeds of faulty understanding must be uprooted, and the doctrinal seeds of proper teaching must be planted so church members will know how to help one another grow in Christlikeness.

Weeds That Must Be Uprooted

Several weeds of misunderstanding must be uprooted if a church is to establish a culture of intimate spiritual care. The first is the weed of individualism. Sanctification is a community project. Christlikeness cannot be cultivated in isolation. Lane and Tripp stress, “Change is something God intends his people to experience together. . . . Change within community is counterintuitive to the way we often think, but Scripture clearly presents it as God’s way of making us more like Christ.”⁴²

Some Christians may believe that since they have God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, they do not need intimate spiritual relationships marked by transparency and accountability. However, that assumption simply is not true. Tripp argues that sin deceives the sinner; it blinds a person to the true state of his soul. Tripp says, “Spiritually blind people are not only blind; they are blind to their own blindness. They are blind, but they think that they see well. So the spiritually blind person walks around with the delusion that no one has a more accurate view of him than he does.”⁴³ This startling truth is why Christians need one another and the regular exhortation of intimate spiritual care.

In addition to individualism, the weeds of legalism must be uprooted. Sin has distorted humanity’s understanding of God and his commands so that individuals believe

⁴² Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 77.

⁴³ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 73.

that blessings must be pried from God’s hands through obedience to His commands.⁴⁴ That assumption is the essence of legalism. It is the belief that God will love a person if and when he does better. Sinclair Ferguson explains, “The essence of legalism is rooted not merely in our view of law as such but in a distorted view of God as the giver of his law.”⁴⁵ Legalism is separating God’s law from God’s character; hearing His commands while losing sight of His smiling face as He gives them.

Sadly, the legalistic spirit does not suddenly disappear when a person becomes a Christian. Ferguson argues that even when doctrinal legalism is rejected, practical legalism can thrive beneath the soil of one’s heart. This hidden legalism often drives a person’s pursuit of holiness. Ferguson says, “The instinct of the awakened individual [is] to say, ‘I will now try much harder, and I will do better.’ It seems logical: I realize I have failed. I must reverse this failure by doing better. But it is serpentine logic, for it compounds the old legal spirit.”⁴⁶

When undertaken with a legalistic spirit, obedience to God is dishonoring to him because it is a distortion of him. While behavior may change, true sanctification will never occur. Therefore, if a church is to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care, it must not only remove the weed of doctrinal legalism, but also the roots of practical legalism that stretch beneath the surface.

Closely connected to the weeds of legalism are the tendrils of antinomianism, which also must be uprooted. According to Ferguson, “the simplest way to think of antinomianism is that it denies the role of the law in the Christian life.”⁴⁷ In this view,

⁴⁴ Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The entail of that theology is that if you are to receive anything from this misanthrope deity, then it must now be paid for and earned.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, & Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 81.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 83.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 94.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 140.

law and grace are darkness and light. They cannot co-exist with each other. One necessarily drives out the other; therefore, those under grace have no need of the Law.

The vines of antinomianism entangle many Christians today. Many Christians believe that since they are Christian, perfectly justified by faith, obedience to God’s law is now unnecessary. Since God has accepted them as they are, there is no need to be encumbered by obedience to God’s commands. As a result, intimate spiritual care is abandoned.

Ferguson explains that at first glance, legalism and antinomianism appear to be opposite extremes, but in fact they are “nonidentical twins that emerge from the same womb.”⁴⁸ Both are errors that divorce God’s law from God’s character. Tim Keller writes,

They participate in the same incomprehension of the joy of obedience—they see obedience as something imposed on us by a God whose love is conditional and who is unwilling to give us blessing unless we do quite a lot of work. The only difference is that the legalist wearily assumes the burden, while the antinomian refuses it and casts it off by insisting that if God is really loving, he wouldn’t ask for it.⁴⁹

The implication of this insight is that antinomianism is not the antidote for legalism, or vice versa. Both are weeds that must be uprooted for the garden of spiritual care to exist. Ferguson argues that the gospel is the only solution for both: “There is only one genuine cure for legalism. It is the same medicine the gospel prescribes for antinomianism: understanding and tasting union with Jesus Christ himself.”⁵⁰

Seeds That Must Be Planted

If a culture of intimate spiritual care is to flourish within a church, the weeds of individualism, legalism, and antinomianism must be removed. Yet, in addition to removing weeds, the seeds of right understanding must be planted.

⁴⁸ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 84.

⁴⁹ Timothy Keller, forward to Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 14.

⁵⁰ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 157.

One seed that must be planted within the framework of the church is an accurate understanding that sanctification is accomplished and certain in Christ. In *Possessed by God*, David Peterson builds a strong case for definitive sanctification: “Holiness cannot simply be acquired by human effort. It is a status or condition which God imparts to those whom he chooses to bring into a special relationship with himself through covenant and redemption. But it is a status that carries with it particular responsibilities.”⁵¹

Sanctification is a settled fact, unshakably accomplished by God for everyone united by faith to Christ. This crucial point must never be ignored.

While stressing the importance of definitive sanctification may seem to undermine the pursuit of holiness, it actually supplies the confidence to press forward in obedience. Kelly Kopic explains, “The Christian hope rests not ultimately upon our own diligence, but on God’s faithfulness. . . . Christians can be confident about their growth in sanctification and eternal security because they are confident in the God who promises it.”⁵² Sanctification is certain and has been perfectly secured by Christ for all believers. When pressed down into the dust by temptation and failure, grasping by faith the certainty of Christ’s sufficiency enables a believer to rise again in hope.

The dynamic of gospel fact fueling gospel obedience is the second doctrinal seed that must be planted in the church’s understanding of sanctification. The indicatives of what Christ has done are always the grounds for the imperatives of what believers do. The logic of the New Testament ethic is for a Christian to become what he already is in Christ.

This logic is revealed throughout the New Testament. Paul writes, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor 5:7).

⁵¹ David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 23.

⁵² Kelly M. Kopic, “Introduction: ‘Life in the Midst of Battle: John Owen’s Approach to Sin, Temptation, and the Christian Life,’” in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, by John Owen, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 31-32.

In other words, since the church really is unleavened (indicative), it is to cleanse out the old leaven of sin (imperative). This logic dominates Paul's thinking throughout Romans 6. In verse 12, Paul commands Christians to "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions." But he grounds that imperative in an indicative statement in verse 14: "Since you are not under law but under grace."

Human logic assumes the opposite: obeying God's imperatives to be holy results in the indicative of holiness. Yet, that is the serpent's logic, which twists God's grace into a prize to be won instead of a gift to be cherished. The call of sanctification is to become what one already is by the grace of God in Christ. By grasping the certainty of one's holiness in Christ, a believer is propelled toward holiness in action. Peterson says, "When the message about his [Jesus'] completed and eternally effective work is applied to the heart r conscience of believers, it brings about an inner conviction of forgiveness, acceptance and hope. A life of dedicated service or worship results."⁵³

While a Christian must understand that definitive sanctification is accomplished by Christ and the New Testament ethic is a call to become what a believer already is, a Christian must also grasp the dynamic between responsibility and dependence in pursuing holiness. Jerry Bridges explains,

Though the power for godly character comes from Christ, the responsibility for developing and displaying that character is ours. This principle seems to be one of the most difficult for us to understand and apply. One day we sense our personal responsibility and seek to live a godly life by the strength of our own will power. The next day, realizing the futility of trusting in ourselves, we turn it all over to Christ and abdicate our responsibility which is set forth in the Scriptures. We need to learn that the Bible teaches both total responsibility and total dependence in all aspects of the Christian life.⁵⁴

⁵³ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 39. John D. Carter summarizes the New Testament logic: "Believers are commanded to act morally because they have a new identity in and with Christ." John D. Carter, "Towards a Biblical Model of Counseling," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 8, no. 1 (1980): 45-52.

⁵⁴ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress 1983), 75-76.

This dynamic requires Christians to see that spiritual growth requires hard work and diligent effort. At the same time, Christians must understand that any growth is utterly impossible without God's supernatural grace.

One finds this nuanced relationship between dependence and responsibility in Philippians 2:12-13, where Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Christians are commanded to work; they are responsible, yet their working is ultimately God's work.

In light of this passage, John Murray explains, "God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us, not the willing to exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing."⁵⁵ If Christians are to avoid both laziness and arrogance, then they must be taught to embrace their total responsibility and absolute dependence.

Last, Christians must understand that spiritual growth is a process. In one sense sanctification is fully and definitively accomplished by Christ, yet in another sense it is a painstaking process of daily putting off sinful behaviors and putting on obedience to Christ. Sanctification is not an instantaneous transformation like flipping on a light switch. It is a gradual change, like the dawning of the sun—unstoppable and certain, yet gradual.

Becoming what a Christian already is in Christ does not happen overnight. It happens over a lifetime. Understanding this daunting truth is necessary so that a Christian is not deceived by false expectations and thereby gives up in discouragement. Jerry Bridges warns, "Only one who has a strong desire to be holy will ever persevere in the

⁵⁵ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), 157.

painfully slow and difficult task of pursuing holiness. There are too many failures. The habits of our old nature and the attacks of Satan are too strong for us to persevere unless the Holy Spirit is at work in us to create a desire for holiness.”⁵⁶

Spiritual Care Facilitates Sanctification

Considering the errors to uproot and the proper truths to implant, the question remains: how does a culture of intimate spiritual care facilitate sanctification? Two ways believers are to encourage sanctification in one another bear mentioning.

First, Christians need to watch over one another, intentionally asserting themselves into one another’s live so that sin’s deceiving effect may be exposed. Since sin blinds individuals to their blindness, Christians need the regular input of others to achieve accurate self-assessment. This is the instruction of Hebrews 3 and 10, which was examined in the previous chapter.

Watching over one another also calls for honest accountability. The primary means by which one comes to know and enjoy the fullness of Christ is through the ordinary means of grace. Owen explains, “The way whereby and the means wherein Christ communicates himself is, and are, his ordinances ordinarily; he that expects anything from him must attend upon him therein.”⁵⁷ Christians must graciously call one another to desperately cultivate a lifestyle of spiritual disciplines.

Second, Christians must regularly bring God’s unrelenting love in Christ into the view of their fellow sinners. Owens writes, “Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror; yea, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet.”⁵⁸ Since all Christian obedience is a response to God’s love,

⁵⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 57.

⁵⁷ Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 136.

⁵⁸ Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 131.

the goal must be to fill one another's minds and hearts with the staggering, inexhaustible love of God in Christ.

A hope-sustaining, joy-enriching, confidence-boosting doctrine that promotes glad-hearted obedience in the thick of temptation is the believer's union with Christ. Robert Letham states, "Union with Christ is right at the center of the Christian doctrine of salvation. The whole of our relationship with God can be summed up in such terms"⁵⁹ Christ is the ocean of blessing apart from which a Christian has nothing. All the blessings of salvation—inseparably, simultaneously and eschatologically—are contained in Jesus Christ himself.⁶⁰ Therefore, to enjoy these blessings and to draw upon them during times of need, believers must understand the beauty of one's union with Christ. Murray explains,

It is out of the measureless fullness of grace and truth, of wisdom and power, of goodness and love, of righteousness and faithfulness which resides in him that God's people draw for all their needs in this life and for the hope of the life to come. There is no truth, therefore, more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Christ. It also promotes sanctification, not only because all sanctifying grace is derived from Christ as the crucified and exalted Redeemer, but also because the recognition of fellowship with Christ and of the high privilege it entails incites to gratitude, obedience, and devotion.⁶¹

So, how does intimate spiritual care facilitate sanctification? Chiefly, it does so by repeatedly bringing Christ in all his fullness into the muck and mess of struggling saints. By pointing one another's heart to Christ, the inexhaustible fountain of all good things, a superior love seizes one's affections drawing him forth into loving obedience. Kopic states, "The goal of the Christian life is not external conformity or mindless action, but passionate love for God informed by the mind and embraced by the will. So the path

⁵⁹ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 1.

⁶⁰ Lee Gatiss, "The Inexhaustible Fountain of All Good Things: Union with Christ in Calvin on Ephesians," *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (2009): 198.

⁶¹ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 181.

forward is not to decrease one’s affections but rather to enlarge them and fill them with ‘heavenly things.’”⁶²

If a culture of intimate spiritual care is to thrive within a church, it must have a clear understanding of sanctification. The poisonous weeds of false understanding must be uprooted, and the seed of biblical truth must be planted in their place.

Practical Training

While a culture of intimate spiritual care requires a high, accurate understanding of God’s Word, committed and defined relationships, and clarity on biblical sanctification, a final element is also needed—practical training. The congregation must be trained to understand that intimate spiritual care is every member’s responsibility and that it is practically possible, even though it requires intentional effort.

Every Member’s Responsibility

If a culture of intimate spiritual care is going to thrive, the church cannot assume this work rests solely on the shoulders of a single pastor or a team of elders. Pierre and Reju counsel pastors, “If you labor as though the spiritual well-being of every member directly depends on you, you will eventually fold under such an impossible burden. God in his wisdom assigned the task of discipleship not to a single man, nor even to a team of men, but to the entire church.”⁶³

The Bible teaches that discipleship—of which intimate spiritual care is a subset—is the responsibility of every Christian. Yet, many Christians feel disqualified from this responsibility. Since they need help themselves, they assume they are not capable of offering help to others. In *Side by Side*, Ed Welch argues that this assumption

⁶² Kopic, introduction to Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 28.

⁶³ Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju, *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 103.

is not true: “Those who help best are the ones who both need help and give help.”⁶⁴

Church members must be taught to understand that their own ongoing need for help does not disqualify them from helping others. Tripp explains, “God uses people, who themselves are in need of change, as instruments of the same kind of change in others.”⁶⁵ Tripp’s foundational argument is that God has purposed to use broken people as His instruments of change in the lives of others, which is a point that church members must hear repeatedly.

Spiritual care is not the assignment of a certain segment of professional Christians or experts—it is the responsibility of every believer, frail and faulty though they may be. Before church members open themselves to be used by God on an ongoing basis in the work of spiritual care, they must grasp that they are useable. God has ordained discipleship to flow from needy people to people in need.

Practical and Possible

In addition to being shown that spiritual care is the joyful responsibility of every member, the church must also comprehend that spiritual care is both practical and possible. Many Christians envision discipleship in formalized structures of classrooms and lectures; therefore, even when shown it is their responsibility, they are convinced it is an impossible task beyond their capacity and expertise.

For this reason, Christians must learn to embrace the practicality of intimate spiritual care. Welch’s book is particularly helpful in this regard because it clearly demonstrates the ordinariness of caring for the needs of others within the church. It takes the abstract concept of intimate spiritual care and shows that it is achievable as relationships deepen through the simple interactions of greetings, questions, and prayers.

⁶⁴ Edward T. Welch, *Side By Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11.

⁶⁵ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), xi.

David Powlison defines counseling simply as “intentionally helpful conversations.”⁶⁶ That definition helpfully pulls the lofty concept of counseling down into the ordinary environment of daily life. Intimate spiritual care is nothing more than Bible-informed, gospel-centered, grace-saturated conversations.

However, no matter how practically it is defined, a simple plan must be provided that gives structure to the fruitful work of spiritual care. There must be a trellis to facilitate the growth of the vine. A practical structure that would be helpful to nourish the growth of spiritual care has been proposed by Greg Ogden in *Transforming Discipleship*. Ogden advocates a strategy of “micro-groups” in which “three or four people journey together for twelve to eighteen months will they grow toward maturity and are equipped to disciple others. As this relationship comes to a close, each person is challenged to invite two or three others into the same walk of faith then then reproduce, and so on.”⁶⁷ Ogden emphasizes three aspects of these micro-groups that facilitate true spiritual care. First, these groups are highly relational. They are marked by deepening intimacy as life is shared, struggles are confessed, burdens are carried, and grace is given. There is not a teacher and pupil dynamic. Instead, each partner is responsible to prepare, share, and grow. David Platt stresses the importance and challenge of relational discipleship:

Making disciples is not an easy process. It is trying. It is messy. It is slow, tedious, even painful at times. It is all these things because it is relational. Jesus has not given us an effortless step-by-step formula for impacting nations for his glory. He has given us people, and he has said, “Live for them. Love them, serve them, and lead them. Lead them to lead others to follow me. In the process you will multiply the gospel to the ends of the earth.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 1.

⁶⁷ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 123.

⁶⁸ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 93.

Second, Ogden’s micro-groups are designed for multiplication. He writes, “Any credible definition of disciplining should contain within it the concept of reproduction.”⁶⁹ In Ogden’s philosophy, each discipling partner covenants to continue the process with two or three others the following year. This is the process Paul pressed upon Timothy when he said, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). If a *culture* of intimate spiritual care is to spread within a local church, the discipleship structure must be designed for multiplication.

Third, the aim of Ogden’s discipleship strategy is transformation. He argues, “When we open our hearts in transparent trust to each other around the truth of God’s Word in the spirit of life-changing accountability while engaged in our God-given mission, we are in the Holy Spirit’s hothouse of transformation.”⁷⁰ The goal of intimate spiritual care isn’t instilling information, but facilitating transformation. When God’s Word is applied in the intimacy and accountability of micro-groups, spiritual transformation occurs by God’s grace.

While Ogden’s approach is biblical, his is not the only trellis-structure that can facilitate the vine-work of spiritual care. Other faithful, reproducible structures are available. Nevertheless, church leaders must grasp the importance of communicating that intimate spiritual care is practical and possible.

Intentionality

While spiritual care is practical and possible, it nevertheless must be intentional. A culture of intimate spiritual care will never just happen; it must be intentionally pursued. One way of doing so is by making it an expectation. Church leaders must communicate the privilege of membership in terms of spiritual care and discipling relationships. From

⁶⁹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 131.

⁷⁰ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 145.

the very beginning, in a new membership class, the church should explain the primary responsibility of intentional discipling relationships.

Andy Johnson explains of the new membership material for Capitol Hill Baptist Church,

Almost certainly the best way to connect at CHBC is to initiate or accept an offer to establish an intentional discipling relationship. . . . The kind of relationships where we intentionally set out to study Scripture, or to read a good Christian book, or to talk about this week's sermon all with the aim of encouraging one another to hope and trust more in God.⁷¹

By defining the expectations of membership in terms of knowing and loving one another, a church cultivates a culture of intimate spiritual care.

Additionally, a church can promote a culture of intentional spiritual care by making solid discipling resources readily available. Books can be given away at members' meetings or as a way of expressing thanks, and members could be encouraged to read them together. Jamie Dunlop and Mark Dever counsel, "Encourage church members to meet together with other members on a regular basis to read a Christian book together, study a book of the Bible together, or simply encourage each other's spiritual life."⁷²

For a culture of intimate spiritual care to grow within a church, members must receive some practical training. They must be taught to see that spiritual care is every member's responsibility. They must grasp that spiritual care is both possible and practical, and they must be challenged regularly to take the initiative in pursuing discipling relationships.

Conclusion

A lasting culture of intimate spiritual care will never be established overnight. It is not a structure that can be copied from one ministry and pasted to another. Instead of

⁷¹ Andy Johnson, "Getting Connected at Capitol Hill Baptist Church," January 1, 2012, accessed May 27, 2019, <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/getting-connected-at-capitol-hill-baptist-church/>.

⁷² Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 120.

viewing it as a stand-alone structure, it is more accurately illustrated as a garden. For the garden to thrive, an ecosystem must surround it which makes growth possible. Four essential elements in that ecosystem are a high, accurate understanding of Scripture; committed, defined relationships; clarity on biblical sanctification; and practical training on how intimate spiritual care is done.

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter describes the ministry project, from its preparation through its completion. The purpose of this project was to begin a culture of intimate spiritual care among the members of Burtonsville Baptist Church. The means utilized to accomplish that purpose were to assess the church’s current knowledge and practices of intimate spiritual care, develop a curriculum to provide theological and practical training on the subject, and train a select group of members by teaching them the curriculum. The project began implementation on June 1, 2019, and ended on August 4, 2019. This chapter summarizes the implementation of the ministry project.

Curriculum

Having spent extensive time reading and researching the biblical and theological foundations for a culture of intimate spiritual care, it was not difficult to determine the content of the curriculum.¹ Much of chapters 2 and 3 were utilized to create a well-rounded approach to intimate spiritual care. The challenge was in limiting the focus of the material and organizing it so that it logically progressed throughout the five-week seminar. In the end, I determined that a series of leading questions would capture the participants’ attention while guiding them through the structure of the course.

Session 1 was titled “What Is Intimate Spiritual Care?” Besides introducing several preliminary matters—the goal of the ministry project, the rationale for selecting it, and the definition of key terms—the majority of the session focused upon the biblical evidence for a culture of intimate spiritual care. Leaning heavily upon the research and

¹ See appendix 3 for the curriculum.

insights gained in chapter 2, this session examined Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:14. The primary aim was to answer the overarching question by demonstrating that intimate spiritual care is when ordinary church members regularly use the truths of God’s Word to encourage, correct, and assist one another in a personalized manner.

Session 2 was titled “Why Is Intimate Spiritual Care Important?” Having examined what intimate spiritual care is, the next question that must be answered is why intimate spiritual care matters. To answer this overarching question, this session examined Hebrews 3:12-14 and Hebrews 10:19-25. By thoughtful examination of these two important texts, participants were taught that both perseverance in the faith—holding fast one’s original confidence firm to the end, as Hebrews 3:14 expresses it—and growth in love and good works, as Hebrews 10:24 says, are both accomplished through the God-appointed means of intimate spiritual care.

In session 3, titled “Why Is Intimate Spiritual Care So Difficult?” the focus was on diagnosing some of the most common hindrances associated with intimate spiritual care. Careful examination of the first two questions begs this question, for if intimate spiritual care is both commanded and vitally important, then why is a culture of intimate spiritual care often a weakness within local churches? While there are numerous explanations for a deficiency in intimate spiritual care, this session focused on five common hindrances: ignorance, pride, feelings of inadequacy, the messy nature of human relationships, and misshapen priorities.

Session 4 addressed the question, “What Does Intimate Spiritual Care Require?” Leaning on the insights gained throughout chapter 3, this session outlined two critical components which are necessary for a culture of intimate spiritual care—a high, accurate understanding of God’s Word and clarity on biblical sanctification.

In Session 5, titled “What Does Intimate Spiritual Care Look Like?,” the material shifted to discussing the next steps that must be taken to implement spiritual care

within the life of the congregation. Since the goal of the project was not simply to establish a program of spiritual care, but a culture of spiritual care, I sought to avoid a programmatic structure. Instead, utilizing insights from chapter 3, this session outlined several means for fostering spiritual care within the relationships of the church. At the recommendation of the expert panel, the curriculum in session 5 was modified to encourage greater input and discussion from the participants. By allowing them to give insight and make recommendations, the panel hoped that this final session would help participants embrace the responsibility they have in cultivating a culture of intimate spiritual care.

The sessions were written two weeks prior to the Sunday they were taught, and then sent to an expert panel for review using the evaluation rubric.² The expert panel consisted of two elders within the church, one of whom holds a Master of Divinity degree and the other a tenured professor at the United States Naval Academy. In addition to the elders, the expert panel also included a Bible professor who holds a Masters of Divinity degree. Per the project's requirements, every lesson plan was evaluated by the expert panel and subsequently revised until 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The expert panel gave the curriculum high marks that met or exceeded the sufficient level on the rubric and regularly contributed helpful suggestions. Based upon their input, the curriculum was modified to increase class participation by utilizing various technique that would foster personal reflection and facilitate group discussion. One specific recommendation from every member of the expert panel was to shift the final session of the course from a lecture-dominated structure to a discussion-centered format. Since the project was to establish a culture of intimate spiritual care within BBC specifically, they argued that it would be wise to get feedback and insight from the

² See appendix 2.

individuals who participated in the course. The elders would then curate the group's suggestions to implement a plan to deepen and broaden the church's approach to intimate spiritual care. While I was hesitant to embrace their counsel at first, I came to see the wisdom of tapping into the excitement of the seminar's participants by empowering them to guide the implementation of the material in the life of the church.

Class Formation

BBC has eighty-seven adult members, and one goal was to limit participants of the seminar to twenty adult members. With such a class, a sizable percentage of the church's membership would participate in the training while still enabling the seminar to maintain an intimate feel, conducive for discussion and class participation.

The seminar was announced several months in advance at the church's members' meetings. The church was informed of the seminar's purpose, introduced to the topic, and interested members were encouraged to speak with me. In the weeks leading up to the course, many church members were also personally invited to participate in the seminar. It was emphasized that every participant would be required to view all five of the sessions. Since the seminar occurred throughout the summer when nearly every interested participant would be on vacation at least one weekend, a video recording of each session was made available to absent participants.

In the week prior to the first seminar session, an email was sent to every adult member of the church, inviting them to participate. In the email, church members were informed of the dates, times, and location of each meeting. In addition, I reminded them of what was required for participation in the class—completing a pre-seminar survey, faithfully attending/watching all five sessions, and completing a post-training survey. Church members were then encouraged to respond to the email if they were willing to participate. Table 1 disaggregates participants by age group.

Table 1. Participants by age group

Age Group	Number of Participants
20s	4
30s	4
40s	1
50s	7
60s	1
Unspecified	1

Pre-Training Survey

Every participant who agreed to participate in the seminar agreed to complete both a pre-training and post-training survey of twenty-two items. While the survey was initially created during a Project Methodology seminar several years ago, it was revised with the help of my faculty supervisor prior to being sent to the Ethics Committee at Southern Seminary, and prior to conducting research and implementing the project. I received approval to conduct research from the Ethics Committee on May 29, 2019.

In the week before the seminar's first session, an email was sent to each participant, which included the pre-training survey as an attachment. Participants were encouraged to print the survey and bring it to the first class. Additionally, the email informed participants that the survey must be completed anonymously, so a 4-digit code should be utilized instead of their names.

In addition to sending the survey as an attachment, copies of the survey were made available to participants when they arrived for the first class session. For the first ten minutes of the session, participants were given the opportunity to complete the pre-training survey and place them in a collection folder. There were 18 surveys returned, yet one survey was not fully completed. In all, therefore, there were 17 usable surveys submitted during the first week of the training.

Implementing the Seminar

The five-week seminar began on July 7 and ended on August 4. The class met every Sunday evening at 6:00 pm and concluded between 7:15 pm and 7:30 pm. While

Sunday evenings were an ideal time for the seminar to occur, meeting throughout the month of July—at the height of vacation season—was challenging since many families were away at least one week during that period. To compensate for this difficulty, every session was video recorded, and a link was sent to absent individuals so they could watch the teaching. Every absent participant gave verbal confirmation that they watched the seminar video prior to the next session. The one exception to this statement was a participant who missed both the fourth and fifth sessions, and therefore did not submit a post-training survey.

The class met in the church’s sanctuary, with every participant gathered to the front right side of the room. While rows of seats were not necessarily conducive to group interaction, the church is accustomed to meeting in this format, so it was not abnormal. In addition, meeting in the church’s sanctuary enabled the use of the church’s audio and video equipment. Drinks, snacks, and desserts were provided for participants to enjoy, cultivating a less formal environment.

After participants made a small plate of snacks and found their seats, the class began around 6:05 pm. Each session started with prayer, asking God to use the seminar to begin a long-term transformation within the church. Following the prayer, every session after the first session included a review of the previous sessions. During this review time, I repeated the dominant questions of the previous weeks—for example, week 2’s question was, “why is intimate spiritual care so important?”—and then quickly moved through the material that was covered, highlighting important points from the previous sessions. After the review was complete, the purpose of the current session was introduced, and the material presented.

Following the first session, the expert panel recommended increasing class participation. I began utilizing the teaching strategy of “Think, Pair, Share” to initiate more thoughtful group discussion. A discussion question was posed to the group and then individuals spent a minute thinking about their answers privately. Next, participants paired

up in groups of two or three to discuss their thoughts on the discussion question. After several minutes, each group had an opportunity to share their answers before the entire class. At least two “Think, Pair, Share” questions were introduced in each session to deepen discussion and facilitate greater class participation.

The final session of the class was a different format entirely. While the goal of the first four sessions was to teach the theological foundations of intimate spiritual care, the goal of the final session was to discuss practical ways of implementing the material into the life of the church. The class was broken into three smaller groups where each group discussed two questions before reporting answers to the class and providing explanation for their answers. The first question the class was tasked to answer revolved around what would be needed for a culture of intimate spiritual care to flourish within the congregation. This question required every group to diagnosis the areas of church life that needed to be changed as well as identify what actions and priorities needed to be emphasized. Following this group discussion, I taught for twenty minutes answering that question myself. The class then concluded with a follow up question that was answered in the same group format: Over the next twelve months, what are the next steps BBC must take to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care? This question forced participants to think of practical steps that can be taken. Additionally, each group quickly realized that if a culture of intimate spiritual care were to take root within the church, it had to begin with them.

Based on the positive feedback that the elders received from the class format, we plan to continue utilizing Sunday evenings to cover important corollary topics that are necessary for intimate spiritual care to deepen within the church. Later this year, the elders will teach a seminar on how to study and apply the Scriptures. Several additional seminars are also being discussed for the following year.

Post-Training Survey

At the conclusion of the final class on August 4, 2019, class members were given the post-training survey. Participants were told to use the same four-digit PIN and to complete the entire survey. Most of the participants stayed after the session to complete their post-training survey before leaving the church. By the end of the week, all the post-training surveys had been received from those who completed the seminar.

Processing Surveys

A week after the seminar concluded, I began processing the completed surveys. During this time, it was discovered that some of the surveys were unusable. While eighteen people participated in the seminar, only fifteen surveys were usable. Two individuals who completed the pre-training survey never completed a post-training survey. In addition, one participant who completed the post-training survey had only filled in the first half of the pre-training, thus invalidating the answers for research.

Conclusion

The Bible emphasizes that intimate spiritual care is a necessary aspect of a healthy church. Unfortunately, this often-invisible aspect of the church's Word ministry is frequently ignored or assumed to be the sole responsibility of the church's pastors. This project served the health of BBC by outlining the biblical basis for intimate spiritual care and emphasizing the great importance the New Testament places upon it. To that extent, this project was successful in beginning a culture of spiritual care within the church.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

This chapter seeks to evaluate the ministry project, assessing the project's purpose, goals, strengths and weaknesses. In addition, this chapter identifies ways to improve the project for greater benefit of Burtonsville Baptist Church in the future as well as other local churches. Lastly, this chapter contains personal reflections on the project as a whole.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of the project was to begin a culture of intimate spiritual care among the members of BBC. Having thoroughly researched this topic, prepared a curriculum, and taught a seminar on the subject, the purpose of this project is even more important than I originally thought. There are several reasons for believing that beginning a culture of intimate spiritual care is a noble purpose.

Intimate spiritual care is biblically important. The biblical and theological foundations provided in chapter 2 of this work demonstrate the importance of intimate spiritual care. The fact that the New Testament authors repeatedly call the church to use God's Word to encourage, exhort, and correct one another is clear proof that the purpose of this project aligns with biblical priorities. Yet, as vital as intimate spiritual care is within the logic of the New Testament, it can be easily overlooked in a church's discipleship strategy.

Intimate spiritual care is not easily quantifiable; therefore, it can be ignored if a church defines success in discipleship by observable metrics like giving and attendance. In addition, it is easy for church members to assume that using God's Word to disciple

others is solely the responsibility of the church's pastors. Throughout the seminar I regularly heard feedback from participants who expressed their surprise at just how high a priority the New Testament places upon intimate spiritual care. From personal experience in a variety of church settings, I do not believe their surprise is uncommon. Since intimate spiritual care is important and yet easily overlooked, the purpose of beginning to establish a culture of intimate spiritual care is a worthy aim.

This project was vitally important within BBC. While the rationale for pursuing this topic appears in chapter 1, the feedback from the participants confirmed the assumption that the people of BBC yearn for a culture of intimate, personalized spiritual care. Because of its biblical importance, the fact that it is easily overlooked, and the pressing need within BBC, the purpose of beginning a culture of intimate spiritual care among the members of BBC was a wise choice.

Having evaluated the fit of the project's purpose, it is also important to assess whether this purpose was accomplished successfully. Considering the quantitative data, in addition to the positive feedback from the expert panel and the training's participants, the purpose was effectively achieved. Has a culture of intimate spiritual care thoroughly taken root? No. A five-week teaching curriculum could never firmly establish such a culture; however, the practice of intimate spiritual care has begun to grow within the lives of those who participated in the seminar, and by God's grace a corporate culture will come to fruition in the years ahead. More fundamentally, the practice of spiritual care has begun to take root because the curriculum enabled participants to see the biblical logic for intimate spiritual care and their membership responsibilities to cultivate it.

Evaluation of Goals

The goals of the project progressively built upon one another, enabling the purpose of the project to be accomplished. Each goal successfully met, enabled the next goal to be fulfilled. The three goals of the project were as follows: (1) to assess the church's current knowledge and practices of spiritual care among a select group of members of

Burtonsville Baptist Church; (2) to develop a curriculum to provide theological and practical training in intimate spiritual care to a select group of members; (3) to train the select group of members on intimate spiritual care by teaching the curriculum. Each goal will be evaluated individually to ascertain if it was properly met.

The first goal was to assess the church's current knowledge and practices of spiritual care among a select group of BBC members. This goal was accomplished by distributing the Spiritual Care Survey prior to the start of the first training session to the eighteen class participants.¹ Having tailored the survey to accurately reflect the emphases of the training curriculum, the assessment tool was structured to capture both the church's knowledge and practice of spiritual care. With the help of my faculty supervisor, each survey question was refined to remove ambiguity, technical language, and complex sentences with the objective to word each question in such a simple manner that participants would not overanalyze any statement, but give their honest, initial impression.

Besides simplifying the survey, I also aimed to diversify the structure of the survey by asking several questions that assumed a negative answer. Additionally, several questions were included that could measure a respondent's practice of intimate spiritual care, not merely his biblical understanding of it.

After analyzing the pre-training surveys, the group's understanding of intimate spiritual care showed confusion in three primary areas. First, the group's responses evidenced a lack of clarity on the Christian's responsibility for growth in Christian maturity. While they strongly affirmed a Christian's total dependency upon God for spiritual growth, scoring an average of 4.6 on that question, they disagreed that a Christian is simultaneously totally responsible for his spiritual growth as well, scoring an average of 2.8 on that question.

¹ See appendix 1.

A second area weakness that would impede a culture of intimate spiritual care centered on the group's practical confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. While the group strongly affirmed that the Bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems (5.8 average), they concluded that many of the problems people struggle with require the help of a professional counselor (3.4 average). While professional counseling is important, believing that many problems require professional counseling could help explain the absence of a culture of intimate spiritual care within the church body.

A third area of weakness the pre-training survey exposed was individualism. Many respondents affirmed that if a Christian has God's Word and the Holy Spirit, then he has all that is necessary to spiritually thrive (3.6 average). Additionally, the group disagreed that other Christians can see a person's spiritual life more easily than that person can see his own (3.4 average). That spirit of individualism revealed itself practically when only one participant said that within the last month he sought counsel from another believer for help walking through a common life problem, while one-third of the class (five individuals) disagreed that they had. The pre-training survey also proved helpful to assess the church's current knowledge and practices of intimate spiritual care. In addition, it provided a strong baseline to determine the effectiveness of the training curriculum.

The second goal centered upon developing a curriculum to provide theological and practical training in intimate spiritual care. This goal was considered successful when an expert panel reviewed the material and 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level according to the categories of the rubric.² While the expert panel repeatedly gave the content of the curriculum high marks, they also pressed for more discussion questions and greater group participation.

² See appendix 2.

Utilizing the research from chapters 2 and 3, the curriculum laid the biblical foundation for intimate spiritual care while also summarizing why the New Testament repeatedly places a strong emphasis upon it. The curriculum also sought to identify several of the major hindrances in establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care. While it is important to know what intimate spiritual care is and why it is important, it is also vital to understand what faulty assumptions and sinful tendencies deter Christians from fully engaging in intimate spiritual care. The curriculum also focused on a couple of corporate qualities that enable spiritual care to thrive—a high, accurate understanding of God’s Word and clarity on biblical sanctification. As stated previously, at the recommendation of the expert panel, the curriculum ended with practical discussion of ways to begin incorporating intimate spiritual care within the life of BBC.

The third goal of the project was to train a select group of members on intimate spiritual care by teaching the curriculum. This goal was measured by re-administering the Spiritual Care Survey. The goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the scores of the pre- and post-training surveys.

As noted in chapter 4, I was only able to use fifteen of the class surveys in the t-test of dependent samples because some participants failed to turn in a post-training survey or returned incomplete surveys. To run the statistical analysis, I inverted the responses of several questions that assumed a negative answer.³ The goal was met when the t-test of dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-training survey scores: $t_{(14)} = -8.488, p < .0001$.

³ In the Spiritual Care Survey, questions 4, 6, 7, and 12 were inverted questions that assumed a negative answer.

Table 2. T-test results

	<i>Pre-Test total</i>	<i>Post-Test total</i>
Mean	101.4666667	113.8
Variance	49.6952381	29.45714286
Observations	15	15
Pearson Correlation	0.620555003	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t Stat	-8.488382153	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.4124E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.761310136	
P(T<=t) two-tail	6.82481E-07	
t Critical two-tail	2.144786688	

Strengths of the Project

The greatest strength of the project centered upon the focus of the study. By focusing the project on intimate spiritual care, I was able to address a significant need within the life of BBC. Ultimately, my goal was not merely to complete my doctoral education and therefore see the project as a necessary means to that end. I wanted to see a pressing need within the church addressed, and by God's grace, for a healthier church culture to begin taking root. While it is yet to be determined if this project will be a watershed moment in the life of the church, it has caused a core group of church members to see the importance of intimate spiritual care and their individual responsibility in caring for one another.

The curriculum enabled the group to grasp just how critical intimate spiritual care is. Therefore, the curriculum—particularly the first two lessons—is also a strength. These lessons not only provided biblical proof for the practice of intimate spiritual care, but they also showed why it is essential for both individual Christians and local churches. During an open discussion in the week 4 of the seminar, several individuals shared that they were surprised by the importance Hebrews 3 and 10 place upon intimate spiritual care. God has ordered the Christian life to be lived in community. Intimate spiritual care is not simply a nice addition to a growing Christian life; it is necessary.

A third strength of the project was the structure of each individual class session. Having the class on Sunday evenings was a great decision. It allowed free discussion without feeling rushed. Additionally, the expert panel's tenacious insistence on including more discussion questions and group participation proved wise. There was an enjoyable balance between formal teaching and informal, yet purposeful discussion. The elders were so encouraged by the structure of the class that we plan to continue utilizing Sunday evenings in this manner.

Weaknesses of the Project

While there were many strengths to the project, it also had weaknesses. One weakness was the season of the year in which the seminar was conducted. As noted in chapter 4, meeting throughout the month of July and early August put the seminar at the peak of vacation season. Every week, two or three group participants were out of town. Even though they watched a video of the session within the following week, missing the in-person session was less than ideal.

Another weakness in the project was the length of the seminar. Five weeks to cover the material proved too short. This weakness was especially pronounced during week 4 of the study when examining two critical components required for intimate spiritual care—a high, accurate understanding of God's Word and clarity on biblical sanctification. I felt especially rushed as we worked through the material, and the class did also. At a minimum, both components should receive their own session. Since both components are complex within themselves, it would be best to build seminars around each.

A third weakness of the project was that the curriculum did not adequately cover how to intimately care for one another. The curriculum laid the biblical and theological foundation for it, why it is important, why it is often hindered, and what it requires, but did not provide a practical framework for doing intimate spiritual care. In part, this weakness is a direct consequence of the previous weakness—the brevity of the

seminar's length. There was not enough time to lay the foundations and build a practical structure of intimate spiritual care. Yet, if intimate spiritual care is going to take root within the church, practical instruction must be given to the congregation.

A fourth weakness of the project revolved around the wording of question 3 in the Spiritual Care Survey: "The Bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems." While I tried to remove jargon and frame each question in a clear, accessible manner, I failed to identify and remove the technical language of "sufficient" and "authoritative" in this question. Additionally, this question should have been broken into two questions so that the sufficiency and authority of Scripture had their own question. For Scripture's sufficiency a better question would have been, "I believe the Bible addresses common life problems." To discover the groups views on the Bible's authority, I should have asked, "Everything the Bible teaches is totally true and determines right and wrong."

What I Would Do Differently

In light of these weaknesses, I would do several things differently to improve the project. First, I would not schedule the seminar in the middle of the summer when a majority of the participants would be out of town. While providing a video recording of each seminar helped mitigate the negative effects of summer absence, it would be wiser to schedule the seminar for a different month.

Second, I would create a workbook for the participants that included definitions of key terms, important Scripture passages, and a note sheet for each session. Having a workbook would have assisted the participants in taking thorough notes. It would have also allowed them to more fully process the discussion questions. Additionally, it would have provided them with a lasting tool they could return to for further study or utilize as a training guide to teach others.

Lastly, if I were to do this project differently, I would lengthen session 4 into two or more weeks. In fact, over the next year, the elders have planned to teach a series

of Sunday night seminars on the two topics covered in that one session—biblical theology and hermeneutics, and sanctification. By focusing on both subjects in only one session, neither subject was adequately examined.

Personal and Theological Reflections

Looking back on the project and the subject matter, I am left with several impressions. First, I am struck by the importance of intimate spiritual care. The author of Hebrews' teaching in Hebrews 3 is staggering in its severity. The church is warned about the deadening deceitfulness of sin and the grave danger of falling away from faith. Sandwiched between the author's warning and the eternal danger of apostasy is the remedy of intimate spiritual care: "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13). Is there any way to intensify the call to intimate spiritual care? I do not think so.

And yet, despite the clear priority the New Testament places upon intimate spiritual care, it has been absent from the culture of every church of which I have been a member. The very fact that the New Testament authors must repeatedly call the church toward intimate spiritual care is a sobering reminder that such a caring culture will never happen automatically; it must be intentionally pursued and tenaciously maintained.

The clear importance the New Testament places upon intimate spiritual care resulted in a second important take-away—the danger of Christian individualism. As previously stated, when evaluating the first goal of the project, the pre-training survey revealed a distorted view of self-sufficiency. Over half the group disagreed in some fashion with the statement that other Christians are able to see their spiritual life more easily than they can see their own. Additionally, only two individuals "disagreed" with the statement that all a Christian needs to spiritually thrive is God's Word and the Holy Spirit. Such attitudes undermine the biblical call for intimate spiritual care. They relegate intimate spiritual care to a spiritual elective, not a core component of the Christian life. Yet, if what the New Testament teaches is true, if a person's sin blinds and deceives them and

can eventually cause them to fall away from the faith entirely, then every Christian needs admonition, correction, and encouragement of other Christians to spiritually survive—let alone thrive.

In examining the group’s pre- and post-training surveys I was alarmed by the groups answer to a specific question. Question 4 of the survey states, “Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a professional counselor.” Over one-third of the class—six individuals—expressed agreement with that statement in some fashion. This question received an average score of 3.4, the third lowest score on the survey. At the same time, the group firmly supported the statement that the Bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems and agreeing that ordinary Christians are expected to regularly encourage one another with God’s Word. I was surprised by the disconnect between affirming Scripture’s sufficiency and the expectation for ordinary Christians to care for one another with it, while assuming that many problems with which people struggle require the help of a professional counselor. While there are certain problems in which professional counseling is needed, the assumption that *many* of the problems people face require the help of a professional counselor seems to undermine the biblical priority of intimate spiritual care.

If the group who participated in the seminar—some of most mature members of the church—believe this, then I can be fairly certain that it is a common assumption within the church at large. Even more troubling is that the post-training survey did not show a dramatic increased score for question 4, 3.8 as opposed to 3.4. While this unexpected result may have been due to a confusing, poorly worded question, I was nevertheless startled by the group’s response.

Last, I cannot reflect upon this project without underscoring how the Lord shaped me through this experience. Throughout the process of researching and implementing this project, God confirmed the importance of intimate spiritual care by forcing me to see my great need for it. Around the time I began my doctoral studies, I

experienced a prolonged period of spiritual depression. The fatigue of pastoring alone along with the mounting weight of failed expectations became an unsustainable load upon my soul.

In his peculiar providence, the Lord forced me to see my own need for intimate spiritual care. It was only when I opened my life to others—my hurts, my sins, and my disappointments, and allowed them to reinterpret my feelings according to the gospel—that the light of God’s grace began to dispel the darkness. Through that painful experience, I have come to grasp just how essential intimate spiritual care truly is. If other ordinary Christians would not have intimately cared for me during that period, I do not think I would have survived. With severe kindness, God has caused me to appreciate the profound importance the New Testament places upon intimate spiritual care.

Conclusion

Even though the immediate goals of this project have been realized, the long-term ramifications of it are yet to be seen. My prayer is that God will continue transforming the culture of Burtonsville Baptist church. Those who participated in the seminar have expressed a budding commitment to implement the truths they have learned. The church’s leaders have pledged to continue establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care. And yet, the Lord alone will cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care within Burtonsville Baptist church. To him alone belongs the glory.

APPENDIX 1
SPIRITUAL CARE SURVEY

The following survey was used to provide a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of current knowledge and practice concerning spiritual care among the congregants.

SPIRITUAL CARE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of intimate spiritual care of the participant. Justin A. Runyan is conducting the research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this project.

Please provide the last four digits of your social security number or phone number. This will ensure your anonymity, freeing you to answer each question honestly.

Date: _____
4 Digit Code: _____
Gender: _____ Age: _____

Directions: Please answer the appropriate questions using the following scale:

SD = Strongly Disagree
D = Disagree
DS = Disagree Somewhat
AS = Agree Somewhat
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree
NS = Not Sure

1. Ordinary Christians are expected to regularly encourage one another with God's Word.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
2. In the past month, I have used the Bible to help someone walk through a common life problem.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
3. The Bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
4. Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a professional counselor.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
5. If a Christian is not regularly encouraging other Christians, then he is disobeying God's commands.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
6. If a Christian has God's Word and the Holy Spirit, she has all that is necessary to spiritually thrive.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
7. Growing Christians struggle with temptation far less often than newer Christians.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
8. Other Christians are able to see my spiritual life more easily than I can see my own.
SD D DS AS A SA NS

9. A Christian needs encouragement, counsel and warning from other believers to stay strong in the faith.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
10. It is spiritually dangerous for Christians to live isolated lives.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
11. In the past month, I have received counsel from another believer to help me walk through a common life problem.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
12. Friendships between Christians should be less painful and messy than friendships between non-Christians.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
13. Meaningful membership in a church is often inconvenient and sacrificial.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
14. God often uses messy relationship where grace and forgiveness are needed to grow Christians.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
15. God uses imperfect Christians to help other imperfect Christians grow.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
16. Growing in Christ is an ongoing struggle that requires daily effort.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
17. A Christian is totally responsible for his growth in Christian maturity.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
18. A Christian is totally dependent on God for his growth in Christian maturity.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
19. The primary way to overcome sinful habits is by increasing one's love for Christ.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
20. In the past month, I have been reading the Bible and spending time in prayer every day.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
21. If a friend began sharing details of their personal problems, I would feel confident showing him love and compassion.
SD D DS AS A SA NS
22. If a friend began sharing details of their personal problems, I would feel confident helping him with insights from the Bible.
SD D DS AS A SA NS

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the spiritual care curriculum and was distributed to the select expert panel described in the goal section of chapter 1.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Spiritual Care Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson to be Evaluated:					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The material is biblical and theologically sound.					
The material is clearly relevant to the issue of spiritual care					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The curriculum makes use of various learning approaches such as lecture, discussion, case studies, and role play.					
The lesson is clear and could be re-taught by another person.					

APPENDIX 3
SEMINAR CURRICULUM

SESSION 1 – “WHAT IS INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE?”

Purpose of Session 1:

- To introduce the goal of the project and explain why the subject matter was chosen for the assignment.
- To define key terms.
- To demonstrate the biblical evidence for a culture of intimate spiritual care.

Outline of Session 1:

THE GOAL OF PROJECT

“To begin a culture of intimate spiritual care among the members of Burtonsville Baptist Church.”

KEY TERMS

Spiritual care – “the informal ministry of the Word in which ordinary members utilize the Scriptures to encourage, admonish, and instruct one another.”

3 levels of Word Ministry:¹ [Tim Keller, *Preaching*, 1-4]

- Level 3 – Preparing and Delivering Sermons
- Level 2 – Formally Teaching the Bible (Formal counseling, Bible studies, Sunday School)
- ***Level 1 – Christians explaining and applying the message of the Bible to other Christians and neighbors in informal, personal settings.***
- Tim Keller – “Every Christian should be able to give both teaching (*didaskalia*, the ordinary word for instruction) and admonition (*noutheo*—a common word for strong, life-changing counsel) that convey to others the teaching of the Bible.”²

Intimate – Personal, often accomplished one-on-one or in small group settings, in relationships that require honesty, commitment, and transparency.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 1-4, Kindle.

² Keller, *Preaching*, 1.

Discipling – “helping others follow Jesus”³

- Spiritual care is an indispensable component of biblical discipleship.

Rationale

Why of all the potential topics to address did I choose to focus my project on a culture of intimate spiritual care?

- Reason 1: A culture of intimate spiritual care is a driving force in the life of a healthy church. It deepens fellowship, empowers evangelism, and drives both individual and corporate sanctification.
 - Tim Keller – “We must beware of thinking the Sunday sermon can carry all the freight of any church’s ministry of the Word.”⁴
 - Greg Ogden – “I have concluded that the preached Word needs the context of community, where its meaning can be discussed and its implications considered. To the extent that we listen to preaching week after week without processing it, our spirits can build a resistance to it. Only as we wrestle with the Word, particularly in a relational setting, does it seep into our being and transform us.”⁵
- Reason 2: A culture of intimate spiritual care is not a strength within the life of our church.
 - I was tasked to focus my project on a weakness, not a strength, and this is an area where God desires us to grow.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Main Point

- The church grows in maturity, avoids being tossed about by the winds of faddish doctrines, only when its members regularly speak the truth of the gospel to one another in love. Speaking the truth of God’s Word into the life of fellow Christians is not the exclusive responsibility of the church’s ministers. The opposite is true: God has given the church ministers so they will rightly equip the saints to speak the truth of God’s Word to one another.

Context

Beautiful juxtaposition of the church’s unity and its purposeful diversity

- One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God (4:4-6)

³ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13.

⁴ Keller, *Preaching*, 5.

⁵ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 46.

- “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7)
- The resurrected Christ has poured out the spoils of his victory on the church by providing gifted individuals (4:8-11)

5 Groups of gifted individuals

- The ministry of each group centers upon the teaching of God’s Word.

Reason God has gifted the church ministers

- A sequence of three stair-stepping prepositional phrases.
- Immediate Reason: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry”
 - Christ has blessed the church with the groups of gifted individuals in verse 11 so that through their ministry the entire church is equipped to do the full work of ministry.
- Ultimate Reason: “for building up the body of Christ”
- Harold Hoehner – “Apostles and evangelists need to proclaim the message and establish churches. Prophets and pastors-teachers need to inform and instruct believers. But the work of the ministry does not stop there—it continues as these gifted individuals prepare all the saints for the work of ministry with the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ.”⁶
- If the body of Christ is to be built up properly, every individual saint has a role to play.

What is that role?

- We arrive at it in verse 15.
- Having emphasized the goal—unity & knowledge, mature manhood, not storm-tossed children gullible to deceitful schemes—Paul unpacks the means to the goal.
- “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way to him who is the head, into Christ.”
- The way the church matures is when its members are equipped to speak the truth of the gospel in love to one another.
- Informally. Regularly. Purposefully.

Conclusion:

- Intimate spiritual care is the privilege and responsibility of every church member. Ministers equip church members to speak the truth to one another in love. Only then will the whole body grow into maturity.

⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 551.

COLOSSIANS 3:15-16

Main Point:

- The entire church is responsible to teach and admonish one another with the words of Christ. The ministry of the Word extends beyond the pulpit to include teaching, admonishing, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

A word to the entire church

- The instructions of verse 16 are given to the entire church.
- This command is not merely directed to individual Christians, but to the church corporately. While Christians should let the message of Christ rule their individual hearts, Paul is urging the entire community to center their corporate lives on the Word of Christ.
- “Dwell” implies permanence. Christ word isn’t to be a guest in the life of the church, but the master of the house.
- “Richly” indicates the word of Christ should not be superficial, but deeply penetrate the life of the church.

The flow of the verse

- The first two participles (teaching and admonishing) are coordinate, and they are accomplished through the vehicle of the final participle (singing).
- Teaching presents Christian doctrine positively.
- Admonishing carries with it negative warnings about wandering from the truth.
- Teaching is generally more doctrinal. Admonition is generally more practical.
- In our highly literate society, it seems strange that teaching and admonishing would be accomplished through singing. Yet, in the ancient world—before the printing press—singing was a powerful way of teaching truth—implanting truth in hearts and minds.
- *ACTIVITY: Start signing some old TV show songs and have the group join in.*
- While there is ambiguity as to what each variety of song means, there is no confusion on how the songs should be sung—with sincere thanksgiving.

A shared task

- The phrase “teaching and admonishing” echo Paul’s description of his own ministry in Colossians 1:28. “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom...”
- Such a clear repetition is not accidental. The responsibility of teaching and admonition is not reserved for the apostles or church leaders, but the assignment of the entire church.
- The whole church is mutually responsible to undertake the essential work of instructing and admonition one another.

Conclusion

- Douglas Moo – “Teaching and admonishing, while undoubtedly often the responsibility of particularly gifted individuals within the congregation, were also engaged in by every member of the congregation.”⁷

1 THESSALONIANS 5

Main Point

- Intimate spiritual care—speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and teaching and admonishing one another (Philippians 3)—is not a generic, one-size-fits-all ministry philosophy. As Paul demonstrates in 1 Thessalonians 5, believers are to utilize God’s Word to care for one another in an individualized manner—tailored to meet the unique spiritual needs of each person.

Context

- Previously Paul has given important teaching on the coming of the Lord. 4:13 reveals that some in the Christian community were distraught because of faulty doctrine concerning believers who died before Christ’s return.
- At the same time, some within the church were idle, seeing little need to work in light of Christ’s return.
- After teaching about the coming day of the Lord, Paul calls upon the church to “encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (5:11).
- These words echo his instructions in 4:18: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Everyone’s responsibility

- Paul is placing the obligation of intimate spiritual care upon every member of the believing community. Every member of the church is to take the apostolic teaching and use it to encourage and build one another up.
- This is further clarified in 5:14

Problem: To whom is Paul speaking?

- To whom is Paul speaking in verse 14? The leaders of verse 12 or the entire church?
- Reasons to see that Paul’s instruction is directed to the whole church.
 - Throughout this letter, the term “brothers” is always addressed to the church, not just the leadership.
 - The instructions of 12-13 and 15-22 are all directed to the church as a whole.
 - Gene Green concludes – “This pastoral responsibility is not placed solely in the hands of leadership but delegated to all the members of the church.”⁸

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 290.

⁸ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 252.

Intimate, Personalized Care

- Admonish the idle
 - This is the harshest form of exhortation in this letter.
 - The idle are the disorderly, those who (most likely) have refused to work thinking that Jesus would return soon.
 - These idlers should not be coddled, but confronted.
 - To “build one another up” the church cannot only engage in positive words of encouragement; they must also correct and admonish when necessary.
 - Here is an important reason why EVERY member, not just the leaders should be engaged in this important work: When the entire congregation shoulders the responsibility to admonish those in need of correction, the erring individual will properly feel the gravity of the admonition.
- Encourage the fainthearted
 - The fainthearted are those defeated by the challenges of life. They were on the verge of giving up, unwilling or unable to continue.
 - These may have been those who were overwhelmed by the loss of a loved one.
 - The different spiritual situation of the fainthearted from those who were disorderly required the congregation to respond differently.
 - Instead of confrontation, they need consolation, to be encouraged by being reminded of their value to Christ, their significance to the church, and the hope of heaven that would reinvigorate their failing hearts.
- Help the weak
 - The term for help implies holding in the sense of holding up, supporting.
 - While the world disdains weakness and chastises it, the church is to display the beauty of truly Christian faith, that which was demonstrated by Christ on earth, by helping the weak.
- Be patient with them all
 - Paul uses an unusual word for patience, which conveys long-suffering.
 - Intimate spiritual care is a wearying enterprise. Long-suffering patience is needed.

Conclusion

- Paul is calling upon the entire church to use the apostolic teaching to encourage and build one another up. This intimate spiritual care must be personalized to the needs of each person and done with long-suffering patience. Instead of spiritual care flowing in only one direction—from leaders to congregation—Paul envisions spiritual care as a reciprocal activity with each member caring for one another by utilizing God’s Word practically.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

SESSION 2 – “WHY INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE IS SO IMPORTANT?”

Purpose of this Session 2:

- To demonstrate that individual growth in Christ is a community project.
- To highlight the danger when a culture of intimate spiritual care is lacking

Outline of Session 2:

REVIEW

Last week, after defining some terms, we looked at the biblical evidence for spiritual care.

- Spiritual care – “the informal ministry of the Word in which ordinary members utilize the Scriptures to encourage, admonish, and instruct one another.”
- Ephesians 4: Intimate spiritual care is the privilege and responsibility of every church member. Ministers equip church members to speak the truth to one another in love. Only then will the whole body grow into maturity.
- Colossians 3: The entire church is responsible to teach and admonish one another with the words of Christ. The ministry of the Word extends beyond the pulpit to include teaching, admonishing, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.
- 1 Thessalonians 5: Intimate spiritual care is not a generic, one-size-fits-all ministry philosophy. Believers are to utilize God’s Word to care for one another in an individualized manner—tailored to meet the unique spiritual needs of each person.

Putting the pieces together: Intimate spiritual care is when ordinary church members regularly use the truths of God’s Word to encourage, correct, and assist one another in a personalized manner.

- It is speaking the truth to one another in love
- It occurs when God’s Word dwells richly within our church and our individual lives
- It is both TEACHING (positive & doctrinal) and ADMONITION (negative & practical)
- It is personal – spiritual care tailored to each individual person.

GOAL OF THIS SESSION:

Having seen the biblical evidence for intimate spiritual care, in this session we want to examine the importance of intimate spiritual care. Here is the question I will seek to answer: **WHY IS A CULTURE OF INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE SO IMPORTANT?**

- To do this, we will examine two texts in the book of Hebrews: Hebrews 3 & Hebrews 10.
- These passages demonstrate the importance of spiritual care for the sake of the individual Christian’s eternal wellbeing.
- They do this from complimentary perspectives.
- Hebrews 3 shows how intimate spiritual care is necessary to avoid a hardened heart that fails to enjoy the rest of God’s eternal salvation.
- Hebrews 10 shows that intimate spiritual care stirs up individual Christians to love and good deeds.

Individual perseverance and individual sanctification are the result of the corporate community engaging in intimate spiritual care.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

Hebrews 3:12-14

Main Point

In Hebrews 3, the author underscores the importance of intimate spiritual care so that none of these Christians will fall away from God and into damnable rebellion.

- This is a *warning* passage.
- And this book is written *to Christians*.
- So to grasp the importance of intimate spiritual care, we must not water down or explain away the grave warning included in this text.
- William Lane – “The avoidance of apostasy demands not simply individual vigilance but the constant care of each member of the community for one another.”⁹

Context

In this chapter the author quotes extensively from Psalm 95. That Psalm recounts Israel’s refusal to enter Canaan and their rejection of God’s promise in hostile unbelief.

- Their hardened unbelief incurred God’s wrath.
- The author wants his readers to see the similarities to their present circumstances.
- Many scholars believe that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were on the verge of returning to Judaism due to sustained persecution.
- By selecting certain words and thoughts from Psalm 95, the author builds interpretive links between the ancient text and the present experience of his readers.

Stern Warning – verse 12

Following the quote from Psalm 95, the author issues a stern warning in 3:12.

- This is a real warning against a real danger.
- This unbelief is “a positive refusal to believe, and active disobedience to God.”¹⁰
- Christians of every age need to hear the stern warning of verse 12 because no Christian community is immune to the spiritual malaise that inflicted the wayward Israelites that perished in the desert.

Grave Danger – verse 14

Yet, the danger of rebellious unbelief is much weightier for Christian communities.

- Since Christ is greater than Moses, the consequences of abandoning Christ is graver than that which befell the Israelites.
- Instead of missing the earthly blessings of the promised land, Christian rebellion will forfeit the eternal blessings of the new age.

⁹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 84.

¹⁰ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 146.

- To fall away from the living God is to forfeit one’s share in Christ’s salvation.
- The conditional phrase “if indeed” stresses the provisional nature of the relationship. Genuine, saving faith must persevere to the end.
- Lane explains, the author presents the relationship between Christ and his church “in binding terms of a business partnership. The community can rely on the faithfulness of Christ, but they too must display ‘good faith.’ They have been placed under obligation.”¹¹

Crucial Instruction

If the warning of verse 12 is real, and the danger of failing to endure is eternally devastating, as verse 14 indicates, then how do Christians heed the warning to avoid the danger?

- The answer is provided in verse 13—through establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care.
- O’Brien explains, “To make sure that an evil heart of unbelief does not appear in any one of them, the community as a whole as well as each member within it is to be vigilant and constant in their care for others by mutual exhortation.”¹²
- The author begins verse 13 with a strong adversative— “but”—indicating that an important remedy to the danger of unbelieving heart is mutual admonition.
- The verb “exhort” has a wide semantic range which includes warning and reproof. It also encompasses encouragement and comfort.
- Pulling the term today from his earlier quote from Psalm 95, the author underscores the ongoing urgency of mutual admonition—believers are to exhort another every day.
- By using the passive voice of “be hardened,” the author indicates that sin is a poison that deceives and deadens a person, leading to a hopeless position.
- For this reason, a cultural of intimate spiritual care is essential if sin’s deceitful allure is to be exposed and avoided.
-

Bruce explains

“In isolation from his fellow-believers each individual among them was more liable to succumb to the subtle temptations that pressed in upon him from so many sides, but if they came together regularly for mutual encouragement the devotion of all would be kept warm and their common hope would be in less danger of flickering and dying. In isolation each was prone to be impressed by the specious arguments which underlined the worldly wisdom of a certain measure of compromise of their Christian faith and witness; in the healthy atmosphere of the Christian fellowship these arguments would be the more readily appraised at their true worth, and recognized as being so many manifestations of ‘the deceitfulness of sin.’”¹³

¹¹ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 87.

¹² O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 147.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 67.

Think // Pair // Share

Is this warning passage addressed to true Christians? If it is, how does it relate to the doctrine of eternal security?

Summary

In Hebrews 3, the author places a clear priority on establishing a culture of intimate spiritual care. Since the warning of an evil, unbelieving heart is real and dire, and since the danger of falling away from the living God is perilous and eternal, a congregation must exhort one another daily. Individual perseverance in the faith is a community project.

So what does this mean?

Spiritual survival and ongoing sanctification occur within the context of community.

- Since every person is born spiritually broken, easily deceived by sin, Scripture remedies the danger of sin's hardening effects by commanding Christians to exhort one another daily.
- Paul Tripp warns, "None of us is wired to live this Christian life alone. None of us is safe living separated and unknown. Each of us, whether pastor or congregant, needs the eyes of others in order to see ourselves with clarity and accuracy."¹⁴
- Since sin blinds us, we will undoubtedly be blinded to our own sin; therefore, we desperately need one another's eyes to see ourselves accurately.
- Tripp says, "Spiritually blind people are not only blind; they are blind to their own blindness. They are blind, but they think that they see well. So the spiritually blind person walks around with the delusion that no one has a more accurate view of him than he does."¹⁵

A Time for Questions

Hebrews 10:19-25

Main Point

While Hebrews 3 emphasizes that perseverance in the faith is a community project, Hebrews 10 demonstrates that growth in the faith is also.

- In this passage, the author of Hebrews calls Christians to practice diligent spiritual care—stirring one another up to love and good works.
- This passage occurs as the climax of a lengthy teaching on Christ as high priest and perfect sacrifice.
- In it he appeals for the church to understand and enjoy the blessings of Christ in their daily life.

Structure

¹⁴ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 73

¹⁵ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 73

He does this through three parallel instructions found in verses 22, 23, and 24.

- The passage begins by providing the basis for his appeals. He states two glorious blessings that believers have—certain access to God (19-20) and a great high priest over God’s household (21).
- The author utilizes these wonderful truths about Christ as a means to motivate the readers to action.

Action #1 – Draw near with full assurance -- 22

Confident in the sufficiency of Christ, a Christian draws near to God, not trembling in uncertainty, but with sincerity and assurance.

Action #2 – Hold fast without wavering -- 23

Throughout Hebrews, “hope” is not a subjective wishing, but a certain, fixed confidence anchored to God’s objective, unbreakable promises.

- Believers are called to hold unflinchingly tight to the Christian hope which is secured in the person and work of Christ, without wavering or bending in any circumstance.
- The reason the author calls for such white-knuckled clinging to the Christian hope is because God is faithful.

Action #3 – Intimate Spiritual Care –24-25

The third action is a call to intimately care for one another.

- Lane, “The exhortation . . . centers on the responsibility of Christians to exhibit practical concern for one another.”¹⁶
- These verses give us insight into important aspects regarding a culture of intimate spiritual care.

1 – Intentionality: A culture of spiritual care requires deliberate attention and initiative.

- The word translated “let us consider” (*katanoeo*), means to pay careful notice and attention.
- Believers must not passively wait for ways to encourage one another, but instead deliberately look for ways to stir up one another.

#2 – Intensity: Beyond just focused intentionality, a culture of intimate spiritual care also requires loving tenacity.

- The word translated “stir up” is strong. In Acts 15:39 it describes the heated argument that broke out between Barnabas and Saul concerning Mark.
- Church members are to passionately stir up one another to perform good works.

#3 – Purpose: The things to which believers are to provoke one another to is “love and good works.”

¹⁶ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 289.

- The implication of this purpose is important. When not stirred and pressed and provoked toward love and good works, individual Christians will fall away from these essential things.
- For our growth in sanctification, we need one another.

A negative contrast is provided in verse 25 which reveals what must be avoided.

- Believers cannot abandon fellowshiping together.
- “The failure of some to continue attending the gatherings of the community is cast not simply as neglect but as wrongful abandonment.”¹⁷
- While commentators do not know the precise reason some of the believers were abandoning meeting together, the danger of doing so is clearly understood.
- Bruce states, “Under the various pressures which were being brought to bear upon them, to withdraw from the society of their fellow-believers was to court spiritual defeat; only by remaining united could they preserve their faith and witness.”¹⁸

•
Think // Pair // Share

If a Christian has God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, does she have all that is necessary to spiritually thrive?

Conclusion

In Hebrews 3 and 10, one reads an emphatic call to intimate spiritual care. Perseverance in the faith and growth in “love and good works” are only possible when believers mutually encourage and exhort one another.

- Faithfulness is communal.
- No Christian is adequate to endure alone, for this reason God surrounds individual believers with a church.
- Guthrie says, “Christians are to display a deep care and concern for one another, expressed not only through positive support and reassurance, but also through reproof and warning.”¹⁹

So what does this mean?

It means that Christlikeness cannot be cultivated in isolation.

- Lane and Tripp stress, “Change is something God intends his people to experience together. . . . Change within community is counterintuitive to the way we often think, but Scripture clearly presents it as God’s way of making us more like Christ.”²⁰

¹⁷ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 370.

¹⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 255.

¹⁹ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 345-46.

²⁰ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2006), 77.

SESSION 3 – WHY IS SPIRITUAL CARE SO DIFFICULT?

Purpose of Session 3:

- To diagnose some of the most common hindrances associated with intimate spiritual care.

Outline of Session 3:

Review

Over the last two weeks, we've examined the biblical evidence for intimate spiritual care.

- As a reminder: Intimate spiritual care is when ordinary church members regularly use the truths of God's Word to encourage, correct, and assist one another in a personalized manner.

In **Session One** we saw that Scripture clearly commands intimate spiritual care. (Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 5).

- Ordinary Christians are expected to regularly encourage one another with God's Word. They are commanded to!
- Therefore, if a Christian isn't regularly encouraging other Christians, then he is disobeying God's commands.

In **Session Two** we saw why Scripture commands intimate spiritual care—because it is REALLY important.

- Hebrews 3: Intimate spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for Christians to persevere in saving faith.
- Hebrews 10: Intimate Spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for growth in godliness.
- A Christian needs encouragement, counsel and warning from other believers to stay strong in the faith.
- And this is because sin blinds us, it dulls us, it numbs us.
 - We are inaccurate assessors of our own hearts.
- Other Christians who know us intimately & honestly ARE able to see our spiritual lives more clearly than we can see my own.
- And therefore, it is spiritually dangerous for a Christian to live isolated lives.

In light of the clear biblical evidence, the question becomes: Why is a culture of intimate spiritual care often a weak point in the life of most churches?

- Why is intimate spiritual care so difficult?
- That is what I want us to discuss this evening.
- Our goal is to diagnosis some of the most common factors which hinder a culture of intimate spiritual care.

Think // Pair // Share

What do you think are the most common hindrances in cultivating a culture of intimate spiritual care?

Reason #1 – Ignorance

One reason a culture of intimate spiritual care is thwarted is ignorance. Some Christians do not know & are not taught that intimate spiritual care is commanded by Scripture.

- That it IS the essence of church life, a foundational responsibility & privilege of every member.
- That church membership fundamentally entails intimate spiritual care. Biblical church membership IS intimate spiritual care.
- Sometimes, churches inadvertently teach the very opposite of this.

In smaller churches, members can be taught that their primary responsibility is to prop up the system of the church.

- Serve on committees. Fill nominating team vacancies. Keep programs operating.
- And they can be so busy doing church work that they have no time for personal, Christian ministry like 1 Thessalonians 5 commands.

In larger churches, members can be taught that their primary responsibility is to pay for ministry and consume ministry.

- They attend, give money, enjoy the show, and then leave.
- And when the church is hyper-fixated on ‘excellence’ church members are subtly taught that real ministry is done by the paid professionals.
- So they miss the meaning of Ephesians 4: that God has given his church ministers not so that they will do all the ministry but so that they can equip the saints to do ministry; that it is only when church members are “speaking the truth in love” that the church body can grow to maturity.

When I speak about ignorance, don’t assume I am assigning blame. Sometimes, we just don’t know any better. And we stumble into the well-worn rut of either keeping the system functioning or assuming that real ministry should be done by those getting paid for it.

Reason #2 – Pride

Another hindrance to a culture of intimate spiritual care is pride. Killing pride is like playing spiritual whack-a-mole.

- The moment you think of gotten rid of it, it pops up again somewhere else in your heart.
- Pride is ingrained into the fabric of our fallen nature. It is subtle and insidious.
- I’ve even found myself prideful about my growth in humility before!

As we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount, it is so instructive that Jesus begins with “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

- Conversion and sanctification never move past that point. They both require the decimation of pride.
- Entrance into the Kingdom and the life of the Kingdom both depend upon seeing that we have nothing to boast in.

There are two primary offshoots of pride that hinder a culture of intimate spiritual care.

1. THE PRIDE OF “I DON’T NEED THIS”

It is a mindset that assumes that we don’t need intimate spiritual care.

- I don’t need other people. I don’t need accountability. I don’t need to open my life up to others.
- It assumes that it can see itself more clearly than anyone else can. Their opinions don’t matter. Everyone else is wrong.
- Yes, other people need ME to admonish them, but I do not need anyone to admonish me.

This type of prideful person thinks she knows more about godliness than God does. What it says in Scripture doesn’t apply to them!

2. THE PRIDE OF “I WON’T DO THIS”

A second form of pride is different but equally dangerous. This person doesn’t think he has everything together, that he is too good for intimate spiritual care, he knows the opposite is true.

- He knows that he is a wreck and a sinner.
- And yet, his pride keeps him from letting anyone else *really* discover that too.
- Hiding in shame is a form of pride.

We discover that in the logic of the beatitudes. Poverty of spirit produces mourning which results in meekness.

- Conviction leads to contrition which results in confession.
- Meekness is being so honest about yourself that you are fine with others seeing you that way—and you treating them gently as a result.
- Lloyd-Jones: "We spend the whole of our lives watching ourselves. But when a man becomes meek he has finished with all that; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say. To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending."²¹

Often times, we want to appear godly more than we long to be godly. And often times, growth in godliness requires the assassination of the appearance of godliness.

- We will see that next in the Sermon on the Mount. Anger and lust are internal, often secret sins. We can hide them and no one knows.
- But what does Jesus call us to do? We are to long for godliness so much that we no longer care about appearances.
 - Leaving gifts at the altar to be reconciled.
 - Metaphorically gauging out eyes and cutting off hands to battle lust.

Pride will kill off a culture of intimate spiritual care.

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 69.

Reason #3 – Inadequacy

A third hindrance to a culture of intimate spiritual care is inadequacy.

- **Question: Why do people feel inadequate to spiritually care for others?**

There are numerous ways that people may feel inadequate to spiritually care for others, but I want to highlight 2.

IMPERFECT THEREFORE INADEQUATE

One common way that people feel inadequate to spiritually care for others is because they know they are imperfect.

- Many times we feel disqualified from the responsibility of caring for others because we know the sinfulness of our own hearts.
- Since we need help ourselves, we assume that we are incapable of offering help to others.

Yet this logic simply isn't true. If it were true, none of us would be qualified!

- Ed Welch: "Those who help best are the one who both need help and give help."²²
- Paul Tripp: "God uses people, who themselves are in need of change, as instruments of the same kind of change in others."²³
- God has purposed to use broken people as His instruments of change in the lives of others.
- In fact, humanly speaking, He has no other types of instruments to use! Everyone is broken.

Spiritual care is not the assignment of a certain segment of professional Christians or experts—it is the responsibility of every believer, frail and faulty though they may be.

- Before we will open ourselves to be used by God on an ongoing basis in the work of spiritual care, we must grasp that we are useable.
- God has ordained discipleship to flow from needy people to people in need.

NOT AN EXPERT THEREFORE INADEQUATE

A second example of feeling inadequate is the fact that most of us aren't experts.

- Since we are not experts in theology and biblical studies, we don't think we can be used by God.
- Since we are not experts in counseling, we think we will do more harm than good.

Yet, we must remember that the people that Paul wrote to in Thessalonica and Ephesus and Rome and Colossae were NOT experts either!

²² Edward T. Welch, *Side By Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11.

²³ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), xi.

- Most of them would have had no schooling! Many of them couldn't even read! They were not trained psychologists—they were just ordinary Christians.
- Yet, they were called to take God's Word and use it to build up one another.
- While some of the problems we face in life do require the help of professional counselors—and I think professional counseling is WONDERFUL.
- I believe the Bible clearly teaches that many problems with which people struggle DOES NOT require the help of a professional counselor.
- If they did, the biblical commands of spiritual care would make no sense!

You do NOT need to be an expert to spiritually care for one another.

Reason #4 – Relationships

Another reason that intimate spiritual care is often hindered is because relationships are messy, painful, and frustrating—and Christian relationships are no different!

- We often assume that friendships between Christians should be less painful and messy than friendships between non-Christians, but that isn't true.
- Since both Christians and non-Christians are sinners, all relationships will be hard.
- David Platt: “Making disciples is not an easy process. It is trying. It is messy. It is slow, tedious, even painful at times. It is all these things because it is relational. Jesus has not given us an effortless step-by-step formula for impacting nations for his glory. He has given us people, and he has said, “Live for them. Love them, serve them, and lead them. Lead them to lead others to follow me. In the process you will multiply the gospel to the ends of the earth.”²⁴

We must grasp the Bible's honesty about Christian relationships. We can see the necessity of relationships and their inherent fragility by examining the numerous “one another” commands in the New Testament.

- Repeatedly, the New Testament authors command local churches to love one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, and show patience to one another.
- These frequent exhortations not only demonstrate the extreme importance of sanctifying relationships within the church, but also the tendency of those relationships to breakdown in sin.
- Lane and Tripp state, “The Bible assumes that relationships this side of eternity will be messy and require a lot of work.”²⁵
- Too often church members wrongly assume that since they are Christians, sanctifying relationships should come naturally—or at least more easily.
- And when this assumption is painfully proven false, jaded church members retreat into isolation.

²⁴ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 93.

²⁵ Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2006), 32.

- In ways, then, a church must lower the membership’s expectations for life in the church by honestly emphasizing the unavoidable messiness of all relationships.

And yet, God works in the messiness! In fact, the messiness of relationships is a God-appointed means of sanctification.

- Lane and Tripp explain, “What happens in the messiness of relationships is that our hearts are revealed, our weaknesses are exposed, and we start coming to the end of ourselves. Only when this happens do we reach out for the help God alone can provide.”²⁶

Reason #5 – Priorities

Although I won’t focus on this, I don’t want to conclude without mentioning it: One of the primary hindrances is misshapen priorities.

- We simply do not prioritize intimate spiritual care—individually and corporately.

Intimate spiritual care is emotionally costly, time consuming, inconvenient, and difficult to evaluate with metrics...and therefore we often focus on other things.

- Easier things. More rewarding things.

This happens in our individual lives. It happens in the church corporately.

- And so to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care, we must often realign our priorities.

Think // Pair // Share

Of these 5 hindrances, which one resonates with you the most?

Preview of Next Week:

Having examine what intimate spiritual care is (week 1) and why it is necessary (week 2) and why it is difficult (this evening), next week we will look at what it requires.

- And we will focus on two things:
 - 1. A clear understanding of Scripture.
 - 2. A clear understanding of Sanctification.

²⁶ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 12.

SESSION 4 – WHAT DOES INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE REQUIRE?

Purpose of this Session 4:

- To outline two critical components necessary for a culture of intimate spiritual care.

Outline of Session 4:

REVIEW

Over the last three weeks, we've examined the biblical evidence for intimate spiritual care.

- As a reminder: Intimate spiritual care is when ordinary church members regularly use the truths of God's Word to encourage, correct, and assist one another in a personalized manner.

In **Session One** we saw that Scripture clearly commands intimate spiritual care. (Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 5).

- Ordinary Christians ARE expected to regularly encourage one another with God's Word. They are commanded to!
- Therefore, if a Christian isn't regularly encouraging other Christians, then he is disobeying God's commands.

In **Session Two** we saw why Scripture commands intimate spiritual care—because it is REALLY important.

- Hebrews 3: Intimate spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for Christians to persevere in saving faith.
- Hebrews 10: Intimate Spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for growth in godliness.
- A Christian NEEDS encouragement, counsel and warning from other believers to stay strong in the faith.
- And this is because sin blinds us, it dulls us, it numbs us.
 - We are inaccurate assessors of our own hearts.
- Other Christians who know us intimately & honestly ARE able to see our spiritual lives more clearly than we can see my own.
- And therefore, it is spiritually dangerous for a Christian to live isolated lives.

In **Session Three** we examined why a culture of spiritual care is so difficult. While there are many reasons, I highlighted 5 primary ones.

- They were ignorance, pride, inadequacy, relationships, and priorities.
- Last week, we learned some important truths.
- We learned that God uses imperfect Christians to help other imperfect Christians grow.
- We learned that it is false to assume that friendships between Christians should be less painful and messy than friendships between non-Christians. Since Christians are sinners, our relationships will be marred by sin and in need of grace.
- We saw that if intimate spiritual care is the essence of church membership, then meaningful members will often be inconvenient and sacrificial.

- Yet, the good news was that God often uses messy relationships where grace and forgiveness are needed in order to grow Christians.

This evening we want to turn our attention from what hinders intimate spiritual care, to what enables a culture of intimate spiritual care.

- What does a culture of intimate spiritual care require?

Think // Pair // Share

Before we move forward, what has stood out most to you so far in our study?

So...what does a culture of intimate spiritual care require? I want to emphasize 2 things.

A High, Accurate Understanding of Scripture

If a church is to utilize God's Word to care for one another, they must have a clear understanding of how the Scriptures are to be read and rightly interpreted.

- Therefore, intimate spiritual care must exist within a church that has a high, accurate understanding of Scripture.
- In his High Priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus prays to His Father saying, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (v. 17).
- Not only does Jesus' prayer indicate the total truthfulness of Scripture, but He also reveals the primary means by which spiritual growth occurs: God's Word.
- Commenting upon this verse, J. C. Ryle argues, "The word is the great instrument by which the Holy Ghost carries forward the work of inward sanctification. By bringing the word to bear more forcibly on mind and will, and conscience, and affection, we make the character grow more holy."²⁷
- Intimate spiritual care, therefore, begins with God's Word. It is only in the Scriptures that a person discovers the true condition of their need and the ultimate solution to their problem.
- Two aspects of a church's commitment to God's Word are necessary to emphasize.

High View

First, a church must have a high view of Scripture. It must strongly agree that the bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems.

- A church must recognize Scripture's authority, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency.
- If these critical understandings of Scripture are absent from a church, then spiritual care will eventually devolve into worldly, futile advice.
- If God's Word is not authoritative, then its counter-intuitive teachings will eventually be replaced by something more sensible to man's understanding.
- If Scripture is not inerrant, then a church will soon disregard the portions with which it vehemently disagrees.
- If the Bible is not clear and relevant to the realities of ordinary life, then it will not be consulted at all.
- A high view of God's Word must exist for intimate spiritual care to thrive.

²⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 4:201.

Accurate Understanding

Yet, while a high view of Scripture is essential, it is not enough; a church must also have an accurate understanding of it.

- If a church's members do not understand the Bible accurately, then their sincere scriptural care could prove disastrous. They may use the Bible unbiblically.
- Since the world of Scripture—its language, culture, and concepts—is different in many ways from today, it sometimes proves difficult to bridge the centuries from the ancient world to today.
- Beyond the challenges of dealing with an ancient book, Christians sometimes read the Bible in ways it was never meant to be read, treating it primarily as an encyclopedia of application.
- David Powlison explains, “The Bible’s stories, histories, and prophecies—even many of the commands, teachings, promises, and prayers—take thoughtful work in order to reapply with current relevance. If you receive them directly—as if they speak directly to you, about you, with your issues in view—you will misunderstand and misapply Scripture.”²⁸

Recognizing the seemingly enormous gulf that separates them from certain portions of the Bible, some Christians only focus their attention on those sections which are directly applicable.

- According to Michael Emlet, the result of this approach is that “we end up ministering with an embarrassingly thinner but supposedly more relevant Bible.”²⁹
- While these portions of Scripture are Scripture, they are not the only Scriptures. Paul declared, “All of Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (1 Tim 3:16).
- God intends believers to utilize all of Scripture to intimately care for one another, not just fragmentary sections that seem more relevant.

Exercise: Ditch Passages & Canyon Passages -- Anxiety

- Someone read Philippians 4:6 – how would you apply this to a person's life?
- How would you utilize the entire life story of Joseph in Genesis to counsel someone who is struggling with anxiety?

Sometimes using Scripture feels like stepping across a small ditch (Like Philippians 4).

Other times it feels like trying to step across an enormous canyon.

- Christians must be trained to understand how to do so properly.
- The church must not only rightly prioritize God's Word, it must also properly interpret and apply it.

²⁸ David Powlison, “Reading the Bible for Personal Application,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, ed. Wayne Grudem, John C. Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 57-58.

²⁹ Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2009), 16.

- This requires church members to center their lives and relationships on the authority, inerrancy, sufficiency, and clarity of Scripture.
- It also requires church members to know the overarching story of Scripture and the proper ways to interpret the Bible's various parts.

Clarity on Sanctification

A church must also have biblical clarity on sanctification. If intimate spiritual care is focused on discipleship—helping others follow Christ—we need to be clear how that happens.

Weeds to Uproot

- Often times there are weeds of misunderstandings that must be uprooted for the garden of intimate spiritual care to thrive.
- The first of those weeds, which we've talked about previously is **Individualism**.
- Sanctification is a community project. Christlikeness cannot be cultivated in isolation.

In addition to individualism, the weeds of **legalism** must be uprooted.

- Sin has distorted humanity's understanding of God and his commands so that individuals believe that blessings must be pried from God's hands through obedience to His commands.
- That assumption is the essence of legalism. It is the belief that God will love a person if and when he does better.
- It is both a distorted view of God's Law AND God's character. It is hearing His commands while losing sight of His smiling face as He gives them.

Sadly, the legalistic spirit does not suddenly disappear when a person becomes a Christian.

- Even when doctrinal legalism is rejected, practical legalism can thrive beneath the soil of one's heart.
- This hidden legalism often drives a person's pursuit of holiness.
- Ferguson says, "The instinct of the awakened individual [is] to say, 'I will now try much harder, and I will do better.' It seems logical: I realize I have failed. I must reverse this failure by doing better. But it is serpentine logic, for it compounds the old legal spirit."³⁰

When undertaken with a legalistic spirit, obedience to God is dishonoring to him because it is a distortion of him. While behavior may change, true sanctification will never occur.

- Therefore, if a church is to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care, it must not only remove the weed of doctrinal legalism, but also the roots of practical legalism that stretch beneath the surface.

Closely connected to legalism is **antinomianism**, which also must be uprooted.

³⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, & Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 94.

- According to Ferguson, “the simplest way to think of antinomianism is that it denies the role of the law in the Christian life.”³¹
- Law and grace are darkness and light. They cannot co-exist with each other. One necessarily drives out the other; therefore, those under grace have no need of the Law.

Antinomianism entangles many Christians today. Many Christians believe that since they are Christian, perfectly justified by faith, obedience to God’s law is now unnecessary.

- To the antinomian, intimate spiritual care is dismissed as “legalistic” (and there is nothing worse than that!)

At first glance, legalism and antinomianism appear to be opposite extremes, but in fact they are “nonidentical twins that emerge from the same womb” (Ferguson). Both errors divorce God’s law from God’s character.

- Tim Keller writes, “They participate in the same incomprehension of the joy of obedience—they see obedience as something imposed on us by a God whose love is conditional and who is unwilling to give us blessing unless we do quite a lot of work. The only difference is that the legalist wearily assumes the burden, while the antinomian refuses it and casts it off by insisting that if God is really loving, he wouldn’t ask for it.”³²
- One will not solve the other. The gospel alone is the solution for both.

Seeds to Plant

In addition to removing these persistent weeds, the seeds of right understanding must be planted.

One seed that must be planted within the framework of the church is **definitive sanctification**. An accurate understanding that sanctification is accomplished and certain in Christ.

- Sanctification is a settled fact, unshakably accomplished by God for everyone united by faith to Christ. This crucial point must never be ignored.
- While stressing the importance of definitive sanctification may seem to undermine the pursuit of holiness, it actually supplies the confidence to press forward in obedience.
- Kelly Kopic explains, “The Christian hope rests not ultimately upon our own diligence, but on God’s faithfulness. . . . Christians can be confident about their growth in sanctification and eternal security because they are confident in the God who promises it.”
- Sanctification is certain and has been perfectly secured by Christ for all believers. When pressed down into the dust by temptation and failure, grasping by faith the certainty of Christ’s sufficiency enables a believer to rise again in hope.

³¹ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 140.

³² Timothy Keller, forward to Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 14.

A second seed is that **gospel fact fuels gospel obedience**.

- The indicatives of what Christ has done are always the grounds for the imperatives of what believers do.
- The logic of the New Testament ethic is for a Christian to become what he already is in Christ.
- This logic is revealed throughout the New Testament. Paul writes, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor 5:7).
- In other words, since the church really is unleavened (indicative), it is to cleanse out the old leaven of sin (imperative).
- Human logic assumes the opposite: obeying God’s imperatives to be holy results in the indicative of holiness.
- Yet, that is the serpent’s logic, which twists God’s grace into a prize to be won instead of a gift to be cherished. The call of sanctification is to become what one already is by the grace of God in Christ.
- By grasping the certainty of one’s holiness in Christ, a believer is propelled toward holiness in action.

Third, a Christian must also grasp the dynamic between **responsibility and dependence** in pursuing holiness.

- **Exercise:** Examine Philippians 2:12-13. Is a Christian responsible to work out his salvation or is he dependent upon God in working out his salvation?
- Jerry Bridges explains, “Though the power for godly character comes from Christ, the responsibility for developing and displaying that character is ours. This principle seems to be one of the most difficult for us to understand and apply. One day we sense our personal responsibility and seek to live a godly life by the strength of our own will power. The next day, realizing the futility of trusting in ourselves, we turn it all over to Christ and abdicate our responsibility which is set forth in the Scriptures. We need to learn that the Bible teaches both total responsibility and total dependence in all aspects of the Christian life.”³³
- This dynamic requires Christians to see that spiritual growth requires hard work and diligent effort. At the same time, Christians must understand that any growth is utterly impossible without God’s supernatural grace.
- Christians are commanded to work; they are responsible, yet their working is ultimately God’s work.
- Is a Christian totally responsible for his growth in Christian maturity—YES.
- Is a Christian totally dependent on God for his growth in Christian maturity—YES.

John Murray explains, “God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us, not the willing to exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing.”³⁴

³³ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress 1983), 75-76.

³⁴ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), 157.

- If Christians are to avoid both laziness and arrogance, then they must be taught to embrace their total responsibility and absolute dependence.

Last, Christians must understand that **sanctification is a process**.

- In one sense sanctification is fully and definitively accomplished by Christ, yet in another sense it is a painstaking process of daily putting off sinful behaviors and putting on obedience to Christ.
- Becoming what a Christian already is in Christ does not happen overnight. It happens over a lifetime. Understanding this daunting truth is necessary so that a Christian is not deceived by false expectations and thereby gives up in discouragement.
- While we often assume it should be the case, it isn't true that growing Christians struggle with temptation far less often than newer Christians.

Putting this together:

Considering the errors to uproot and the proper truths to implant, the question remains: How does a culture of intimate spiritual care facilitate sanctification?

- Two ways believers are to encourage sanctification in one another bear mentioning.

First, Christians need to watch over one another, intentionally asserting themselves into one another's lives so that sin's deceiving effect may be exposed.

- Since sin blinds individuals to their blindness, Christians need the regular input of others to achieve accurate self-assessment.

Second, Christians must regularly bring God's unrelenting love in Christ into the view of their fellow sinners.

- Owens writes, "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror; yea, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet."³⁵
- Since all Christian obedience is a response to God's love, the goal must be to fill one another's minds and hearts with the staggering, inexhaustible love of God in Christ.
- A hope-sustaining, joy-enriching, confidence-boosting doctrine that promotes glad-hearted obedience in the thick of temptation is the believer's union with Christ.
- Christ is the ocean of blessing apart from which a Christian has nothing. All the blessings of salvation—inseparably, simultaneously and eschatologically—are contained in Jesus Christ himself.
- Therefore, to enjoy these blessings and to draw upon them during times of need, believers must understand the beauty of one's union with Christ.
- Murray explains, "It is out of the measureless fullness of grace and truth, of wisdom and power, of goodness and love, of righteousness and faithfulness which resides in him that God's people draw for all their needs in this life and for the hope of the

³⁵ John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 131.

life to come. There is no truth, therefore, more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Christ. It also promotes sanctification, not only because all sanctifying grace is derived from Christ as the crucified and exalted Redeemer, but also because the recognition of fellowship with Christ and of the high privilege it entails incites to gratitude, obedience, and devotion.”³⁶

So, how does intimate spiritual care facilitate sanctification? Chiefly, it does so by repeatedly bringing Christ in all his fullness into the muck and mess of struggling saints. The primary way to overcome sinful habits is by increasing one’s love for Christ.

- By pointing one another’s heart to Christ, the inexhaustible fountain of all good things, a superior love seizes one’s affections drawing him forth into loving obedience.
- Kopic states, “The goal of the Christian life is not external conformity or mindless action, but passionate love for God informed by the mind and embraced by the will. So the path forward is not to decrease one’s affections but rather to enlarge them and fill them with ‘heavenly things.’”³⁷

Think // Pair // Share

How does beholding the glory of Christ propel a believer toward holiness?

³⁶ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 181.

³⁷ Kelly Kopic, “Introduction,” in Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 28.

SESSION 5 – WHAT DOES INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE LOOK LIKE AT BBC?

Purpose of Session 5:

- To discuss what intimate spiritual care looks like in the life of BBC.

Outline of Session 5:

Review

Over the last four weeks, we've examined the biblical evidence for intimate spiritual care.

- As a reminder: Intimate spiritual care is when ordinary church members regularly use the truths of God's Word to encourage, correct, and assist one another in a personalized manner.

In **Session One** we saw that Scripture clearly commands intimate spiritual care. (Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, 1 Thessalonians 5).

- Ordinary Christians ARE expected to regularly encourage one another with God's Word. They are commanded to!
- Therefore, if a Christian isn't regularly encouraging other Christians, then he is disobeying God's commands.

In **Session Two** we saw why Scripture commands intimate spiritual care—because it is REALLY important.

- Hebrews 3: Intimate spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for Christians to persevere in saving faith.
- Hebrews 10: Intimate Spiritual care is an essential God-ordained means for growth in godliness.
- A Christian NEEDS encouragement, counsel and warning from other believers to stay strong in the faith.
- And this is because sin blinds us, it dulls us, it numbs us.
- Other Christians who know us intimately & honestly ARE able to see our spiritual lives more clearly than we can see my own.
- And therefore, it is spiritually dangerous for a Christian to live isolated lives.

In **Session Three** we examined why a culture of spiritual care is so difficult. While there are many reasons, I highlighted 5 primary ones.

- They were ignorance, pride, inadequacy, relationships, and priorities.
- Last week, we learned some important truths.
- We learned that God uses imperfect Christians to help other imperfect Christians grow.
- We learned that it is false to assume that friendships between Christians should be less painful and messy than friendships between non-Christians. Since Christians are sinners, our relationships will be marred by sin and in need of grace.
- We saw that if intimate spiritual care is the essence of church membership, then meaningful members will often be inconvenient and sacrificial.

- Yet, the good news was that God often uses messy relationships where grace and forgiveness are needed in order to grow Christians.

In **Session Four**, we explored what intimate spiritual care requires. We skimmed across the surface of two enormous subjects in our limited time together.

- Intimate spiritual care requires a high, accurate understanding of God’s Word.
- A church must have a high view of Scripture. It must strongly agree that the bible is sufficient and authoritative to address common life problems.
- And a church must have an accurate understanding of Scripture. If we don’t understand Scripture than we can apply the Bible in an unbiblical manner.

Additionally, we saw that a church must also have clarity on sanctification.

- There are false understandings—weeds—like legalism or antinomianism that must be uprooted. And seeds of true understanding that must be planted for the garden of intimate spiritual care to thrive.
- We must grasp that growing Christians will still struggle with temptation.
- And we must understand that The primary way to overcome sinful habits is by increasing one’s love for Christ.

Tonight, we are going to do things a little differently. Our goal tonight is to **DISCUSS** what intimate spiritual care looks like in the life of BBC.

- I’m going to teach some, but most of our time will be spent in discussion.

How do we move forward? What must change? What will these ideas look like in our church?

Discussion Question:

In a moment we are going to break into three large groups to discuss this question together. I want you to record your ideas and nominate a spokesperson to speak on behalf of your group.

- Here is the question: **What is needed for a culture of intimate spiritual care to flourish at BBC?**
- That is intentionally an open ended question.
- What must we prioritize? What must we change? What needs to happen for us to see this topic take root within our fellowship?

10 Minutes of Discussion & Then Reporting

Transforming Discipleship

In his book “Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time” Greg Ogden emphasizes 3 aspects of discipleship that must exist for a culture of intimate spiritual care to flourish.

1. Relational Investment

Disciple making isn’t a program that lasts five-weeks or ten-weeks or thirty-weeks. We have to shift from programs to people.

- Intimacy instead of just information

- We often think that transforming truth automatically leads to transformation.
- While programs are safer, more controllable, and easier to replicate, programs are also less effective.
- Mutual responsibility instead of just attendance
 - In discipling relationships, each person is equally responsible for preparations, self-disclosure, etc.
- Personalization instead of just program completion
 - The discipleship relationship should adapt to life changes and personal struggles and faith challenges.
- Accountability for life change instead of just for content.
 - Christlikeness is the ultimate goal.

What this relational investment means is that a long-view approach must be taken.

- “If we make relationship the priority, we will need to change from our shortcut approaches to making disciples. Underlying the programmatic mindset is the view that disciples can be made quickly.”³⁸
- We must build slowly and build solidly.

2. Reproduction

In addition to relational investment there must be reproduction. An expanding network of discipling relationships must permeate the church.

Year	Evangelist	Discipler
1	100	2
2	200	4
3	300	8
4	400	16
5	500	32
10	1,000	1,024
15	1,500	32,768 ³⁹

The goal must be multiplication instead of simply addition. At first a programmatic, classroom approach seems more productive, but in a long-term outlook the results are different.

- If a culture of intimate spiritual care is going to thrive then reproduction must be woven into its DNA.

3. Transformation

Greg Ogden says, “When we open our hearts in transparent trust to each other around the truth of God’s Word in the spirit of life-changing accountability while engaged in our God-given mission, we are in the Holy Spirit’s hothouse of transformation.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 122.

³⁹ Adapted from Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 132.

⁴⁰ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 145.

- There are four things to notice there.

First, discipleship requires TRUST.

- *“The extent we are willing to reveal to others those areas of our life that need God’s transforming touch is the extent to which we are inviting the Holy Spirit to make us new.”⁴¹*

Second, discipleship requires TRUTH.

- We gather around the truth of God’s Word

Third, COVENANT

- *“Accountability brings us back to the core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple is one under authority. A disciple is one who does not leave any doubt that Jesus is the formative influence over our lives.”⁴²*

Finally, MISSION

- Any real discipleship must drive us out into our daily lives on mission for Jesus. If discipleship doesn’t result in a growing commitment to live on mission for Jesus in our daily lives, then it isn’t biblical discipleship!

Any comments or questions?

Discussion Question

I want us to break into our groups again, but now I want us to narrow our discussion to the next calendar year. Here is the question:

Over the next 12 months what are the next steps BBC must take to cultivate a culture of intimate spiritual care?

⁴¹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 145.

⁴² Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 146.

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ABSTRACT

ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF INTIMATE SPIRITUAL CARE AT BURTONSVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH IN BURTONSVILLE, MARYLAND

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This project sought to begin a culture of intimate spiritual care at Burtonsville Baptist Church in Burtonsville, Maryland. Chapter 1 explores the need for the project. Chapter 2 examines the biblical evidence for the project. Chapter 3 details several supporting elements needed for a culture of intimate spiritual care to flourish. Chapter 4 explains the implementation of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the results of the project, examining its strengths and weaknesses.

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MINISTERIAL

Minister of Youth, New Hope Baptist Church, Gas City, Indiana, 2002-2004

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