CULTIVATING CONFIDENCE IN THE SCRIPTURES AMONG

ATTENDING ADULTS AT HOPEWELL BAPTIST CHURCH

IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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by

Andrew Lee Thomas

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APPROVAL SHEET

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Read and Approved by:

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Date_____

I dedicate this dissertation to our dear children—Hannah, David, Sarah, and Joshua—who have spent most of their lives in church revitalization ministry beside their grateful and proud father. I also dedicate this dissertation to my beloved wife, Ginny, who daily proves to me the truthfulness of Proverbs 18:22— "he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." In addition, I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord Jesus Christ in humble gratitude for saving me.

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PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge William D. Henard for his helpfully encouraging supervisory assistance. In the midst of all the other responsibilities, serving as my faculty supervisor could not have been enviable or easy. Additionally, I wish to recognize the gifted and faithful men who skillfully led my revitalization cohort at SBTS: William D. Henard, Adam W. Greenway, and Timothy K. Beougher. I am indebted to William F. Cook for the faithful NT instruction and foundation he provided to me and to all his students. I also wish to generally acknowledge the faculty and staff of SBTS for their patient efforts to equip persons such as myself for the privilege of gospel ministry. May their labors be multiplied leading to a revitalizing of many congregations.

Moreover, I am beholden in countless ways to Blue River Baptist Church and Hopewell Baptist Church for allowing me to serve as their pastor and for the gifts of time and resources that allowed me to undertake my academic journey at SBTS.

None of this was feasible without the lovingly abundant support of my immediate family. The greatest thanks belong to my gracious wife, Ginny, and to our children, Hannah, David, Sarah, and Joshua, for all of the constant encouragement and ceaseless support they provided over the seemingly endless season of study and writing. I am truly blessed by having all of you in my life.

Andy Thomas

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"All in favor say 'Aye'," said the moderator soberly. A voluminous "Aye!" was the unanimous response. With that simple exchange, Hopewell Baptist Church (HBC) in Louisville, Kentucky, adopted its first statement of faith: The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M), 2000. The church has existed since 1898 and never embraced the need for a doctrinal statement; in one moment that all changed. The eventful evening, in the fall of 2015, marked the official change in the church's position on numerous things. These changes included in part such critical areas as the church's functional polity, unincorporated status, and Church Covenant. One newly adopted change, however, related directly to the church's view of Scripture. Contained in HBC's view of Scripture is the potential to determine the direction of the church in nearly limitless ways.

Context

HBC began as a mission of Jeffersontown Baptist Church in 1889.[1] The church house, built in 1914, was located on donated land adjacent to Hopewell road, five miles south of Jeffersontown, Kentucky. By 1898 HBC had over two dozen members and joined the local Baptist association. Throughout HBC's early years it was dependent on the local SBTS (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) for short tenured pastors.[2] In time, the congregation increased in numbers, so buildings providing more space were

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[1]"History of Hopewell Baptist Church," in *Hopewell Baptist Church Pictorial Directory* (Cleveland, TN: Baptist Book Store Church Directory Service, 1987). All historical information on HBC pertaining to events prior to 1987 is found in this brief history from the church directory.

[2]Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For an excellent source on the history of SBTS, see this work.

added. By 1942 the church was eighty in number. Thus, a new sanctuary was started.
The pattern of growing numbers and new or expanding buildings, with student pastors
from SBTS, continued unabated until the 1970's. At this time, HBC marked its sizeable
peak in buildings and numbers; these would slowly decline until the present day. The
church needed revitalization if it was to see the dawn of another decade.

Throughout its history, HBC offered the staple Southern Baptist Convention
(SBC) programs: Sunday School, Training Union, and Royal Ambassadors to name but a
few. The programs came with the SBC produced literature. The numerical strength of
these programs at HBC and their SBC endorsement seemed to validate their use. The
quality of Bible instruction at HBC, however, varied radically and the quality of the
program literature wavered equally. The general efficacy of these SBC programs as used
by HBC, when evaluated from a generational perspective, reveal deficiencies in making
genuine Christ followers. The programs' historically exalted stature are incongruent with
their visible long-term ineffectiveness at HBC. Regardless of the plethora of SBC
endorsed programs, HBC demonstrated serious weaknesses; chief among these and
potentially contributing to them was its functional view of the Bible.

The View of the Scriptures at HBC

In many ways it appeared that HBC placed considerable confidence in the
Scriptures. The official view of Scripture at HBC is in its doctrinal statement, The
BF&M 2000. It was adopted unanimously by HBC in 2015 after a well-attended series
of classes taught by the senior pastor on the content of the BF&M 2000. The first section
of the statement pointedly addresses the Bible:

> The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of
> Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its
> author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.
> Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by
> which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the
> true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human
> conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony

to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.[3]
This brief statement is the official view of the Scriptures at HBC by virtue of its
placement in the church's adopted doctrinal statement. Moreover, the above quoted
section is in the beginning of the BF&M 2000, in a place of priority in the statement.

In an effort to widely disseminate HBC's adopted doctrinal stance, the BF&M
2000 was made available to the congregation. This availability takes the form of a small
pamphlet and a large print version offered in the church foyer. Additionally, the
statement was placed on the church website (hopewellbaptistchurch.org), and the address
for the website was on the front of every church bulletin and newsletter. Because of this
availability, HBC's official view of the Scriptures was an open and known reality.

Consistent with HBC's adopted position on the Bible's significance was its
Bible teaching efforts. Among these efforts was a regular Sunday School held every
Sunday morning before corporate worship. Most classes use age-graded LifeWay
produced Sunday school curriculum. The curriculum's content was consistent with the
BF&M 2000 and its stated view of Scripture. Two other classes used either a Bible based
curriculum consistent with the BF&M 2000 or, as in the pastor's class, taught from
Scripture directly.

Also, consistent with HBC's official doctrinal statement emphasizing
Scriptures' significance was the church's Wednesday night Bible teaching efforts. A pair
of programs called Kids' Hour and Youth Encounter were aimed at evangelizing and
discipling children age three through eighteen. The curriculum for these programs was
created in house and attempted to be faithful to Scripture. Also, an annual week-long
Vacation Bible School held in the summer aimed at evangelizing and discipling pre-K

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[3]"Southern Baptist Convention, "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and
Message," Southern Baptist Convention Net, accessed January 19, 2021, https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-
chart/. The following biblical references are linked to the quoted portion of the BF&M: Exod 24:4; Deut
4:1-2; 17:19; Josh 8:34; Pss 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isa 34:16; 40:8; Jer 15:16; 36:1-32; Matt 5:17-18;
22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Rom 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim
3:15-17; Heb 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Pet 1:25; 2 Pet 1:19-21.

through elementary age children. On Wednesday evenings, the adults had biblical instruction and exhortation varying in length depending upon the amount of time spent in congregational singing, sharing prayer request, and praying.

Consistent with HBC's official position stressing the significance of the Bible was the content of its worship services. HBC saturated its corporate gatherings with Scripture. Reading the biblical text occurred a minimum of three times in a service. Also, multiple prompts for congregational singing consisted of biblical texts, as do many of the songs themselves. These biblical texts were read, quoted, and projected on the sanctuary's viewing screens. With rare exceptions, the sermon was a forty-minute exposition and application of a biblical text in a sermon series working through a book of the Bible. Every part of the service seemed to stress the significance of Scripture.

All of HBC's activities listed above were consistent with the stated view of Scripture in the BF&M 2000 as adopted by the church. There is more to consider, however, than HBC's *official* view of Scripture. HBC's *functional* view of Scripture must also be considered. A church's functional or working view of Scripture is what it believes and therefore acts upon in public and private concerning the Bible. In other words, a person's functional view is revealed by what they do every day. Participation in or affinity for traditional church activities can cover for shifting working views concerning Scripture and thereby hide what is truly believed by a church's members. Early in my tenure at HBC, I began to suspect that the working view of the Bible diverged from the BF&M 2000's position regardless of differing claims.

Many events fueled my suspicions of HBC's pervasively flawed functional view of the Scriptures. One such event was a nonhistorical understanding of Genesis (chs. 1-11) taught in an adult Sunday school class several decades ago. With questions raised and a movement started to provide a bland doctrinal statement to confirm that HBC would "only teach what affirmed biblical truthfulness," the motion failed. The

simple Scripture affirming statement received only minority support.[4] The account of

this event, in combination with other observations, supported the following: (1) a past

functionally flawed view of the Bible at HBC, (2) a past general unwillingness to correct

the flawed view, and (3) a potential current flawed working view of Scripture at HBC.

Of great importance to HBC was the potential for lingering effects from a time when

Scriptures' veracity was minimized. A church can have an official doctrinal statement

that is not genuinely believed or affirmed by its members, as a rudimentary knowledge of

church history can attest.[5] HBC may have exemplified this reality. If indeed there was a

working understanding of the Bible at HBC that was faulty and different from its

doctrinal statement, then one would expect clear evidence of this in its members. The

evidence was abundant.

 A reality at HBC was a general Bible ignorance; this was a partial evidence of

the church's low working view of Scripture. For a predominantly elderly congregation,

this general ignorance was especially troubling since most adults were professing

believers and had been regular church attenders since childhood. If the Scriptures were

truly trusted and prized by them, then it is reasonable to expect the congregants to have

accrued a more robust knowledge of the Scripture. This general Bible knowledge was

conspicuously missing from the congregation. It manifested itself in an ignorance of the

biblical basis for what a church is and why and how a church is to conduct itself.

 Another partial evidence of a low working view of Scripture at HBC was the

infrequency of the Bible in daily conversations. "What comes out of the mouth proceeds

from the heart" (Matt 15:18).[6] The congregants rarely referenced the Bible and generally

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[4]These same events were confirmed to me by multiple sources within the church. The official records of HBC are unavailable for the period when these events occurred.

[5]D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 480-88. Carson observed decades ago that "despite formal affirmations of Scripture's authority and even inerrancy, a great deal of contemporary evangelicalism does not burn with zeal to be submissive to Scripture." Ibid., 480.

[6]Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

did not dialogue about it except uneasily in appointed discussion times. One would expect to find the conversations of Christians saturated with specific Scripture references and general biblical content. God's Word was noticeably scarce, however, in the congregation's daily speech. The scarcity of conversation about and containing the Bible was due to a lack of Scripture memorization and meditation occurring at HBC (Pss 1:2; 119:97). This scarcity may also be attributed to, and even fueled by, the absence of basic private Scripture reading. Much of HBC does not regularly read God's Word (Jas 1:21). Even more of HBC did not read the Bibles daily. They sheepishly acknowledged this neglect when asked in a nonconfrontational manner. Most did not even carry a Bible, in any form, with them when they attended worship services. Apparently, there was little appetite for following any of the portions of the worship service in their own Bibles. Unlike the Bereans, they did not test the faithfulness of the preaching and teaching against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). HBC evidenced a low working view of the Bible, one that believed God's Word is nonessential to daily life.

The evidence listed above of a flawed working view of the Scriptures at HBC is not exhaustive but demonstrated a significant, even critical, issue the church faced. This suggested diagnosis of a flawed working view of the Scriptures was largely unacknowledged or unrecognized by the congregation. The diagnosis was known, however, to the staff of HBC. The church's need for revitalization was in large part a symptom of HBC's functional understanding of the significance of the Bible (Ps 1:1-3). The many other identifiable issues facing the church may eventually require addressing. But, if the congregation of HBC did not alter its deficient working view of the Scriptures there would not be an extant church needing to address any issues.

Rationale

The concerning condition of HBC described in the previous section related to two vital questions: (1) what was the state of confidence in the Scriptures among the

congregants of HBC and (2) how could that state of confidence in the Scriptures be increased at HBC? Both of these vital questions were addressed in this project.

This project attempts to answer the first critical question ("What was the state of confidence in the Scriptures among the congregants of HBC?"). Answering this question was necessary because knowing the true, and not merely perceived, working view of the Scriptures at HBC was essential to meaningful pastoral soul care. To the degree that possessing an objective baseline is possible, it was required. This project sought to establish an objective baseline for the confidence level of HBC's congregation in the Bible. This baseline would inform future ministry planning. Moreover, this proposed baseline would serve as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of various efforts to enhance the working view of the Scriptures among HBC's congregation.

In order to answer the second critical question ("How could the state of confidence in the Scriptures be increased at HBC?") this project developed a multifaceted curriculum focused on the Scriptures (Col 1:28-29). This curriculum concentrated on the constituent concepts of sufficiency and authority, which Wayne Grudem indicates, sustain and enhance a believer's confidence in the Bible.[7] Thus, in addition to establishing an objective baseline for the current confidence level in the Scriptures of HBC'S adults, this project involved designing a multifaceted curriculum for the enhancement of that confidence level. The designing was accomplished using the Scripture itself as the primary source in the creation of the multifaceted curriculum.

In further response to the second critical question ("How could the state of confidence in the Scriptures be increased at HBC?") it was noted that designing a multifaceted curriculum to enhance the working view of the Bible among HBC's adult attenders is of limited benefit if it was unimplemented. Therefore, this project also

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[7]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 73-89,127-38. Grudem gives Scripture's authority and its sufficiency lengthy treatments indicating their vital role in the life of the Christian.

sought to implement the designed curriculum. This should have resulted in greater confidence in God's Word or a less functionally flawed view of the Bible.

As asserted above, knowing the genuine working view of the Bible of HBC's adults was essential; therefore, answering the first question was again necessary ("What was the state of confidence in the Scriptures among the congregants of HBC?"). New data was needed after the creation and implementation of the curriculum. This new data enabled two things. One thing the data enabled was the possession of a means to measure the effectiveness of the implemented curriculum. A second desired result from gaining new data was its potential use as a new base line. This new base line would provide a meaningful tool to aid in future ministry planning at HBC.

The increased Bible confidence among the adults of HBC this project envisioned should result in greater and more meaningful Bible intake throughout the church bringing glory to God (John 15:8). Additionally, there should be an increase of abiding in Christ through his Word by the congregants (John 15:7). This increase could result in "grace and piece . . . [being] multiplied . . . in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" at HBC (2 Pet 1:2). Also, this increase of abiding should result in a corresponding increase in fruit bearing across all areas of the church (John 15:5). The increased fruit bearing could prove to be the key to revitalizing HBC (John 15:8; Jas 1:25). Moreover, HBC's leadership could receive a better foundation from which to guide the church (2 Tim 3:15-17). The congregation could gain a growing understanding of who it is and of what it is to do. Also, the improved trust in the Bible could enable HBC to faithfully align its working and official views of Scripture. (Jas 1:21).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to cultivate greater confidence in the Bible resulting in a more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among adult attenders at HBC in Louisville, Kentucky.

Goals

Three goals reflected the required steps for achieving this project's purpose. The first goal addressed determining an objective baseline of initial confidence in the Bible among HBC's adult congregants from which to measure the effectiveness of the work concerning subsequent goals. The second goal addressed the development of a multi-formatted course curriculum on the sufficiency and authority of the Scripture at HBC. The third goal went a step farther addressing the implementation of the developed multi-formatted course on the authority and sufficiency of the Bible at HBC as a means to increase confidence in Scripture. This third goal was the ultimate goal that the others worked towards. These goals are enumerated as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adults attending HBC.

2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum that will equip the adults attending HBC to place greater confidence rooted in knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority.

3. The third goal was to increase confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in adults attending HBC.

The success of these goals was evaluated by means of specific research methodology.[8] This methodology is described in detail in the next section.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the efficacy of this project. The first goal was to assess the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adult attenders at HBC. A basic pre-session survey, the Bible Confidence Survey (BCS), was offered to all adult attenders at HBC.[9] This assessment gauged all respondent's initial level of professed confidence in and use of the Scriptures. This goal was considered successfully met when at least thirty-three percent of adult attenders completed the BCS

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[8]All of the research instruments used in this project were approved by and performed in compliance with the SBTS Research Ethics Committee prior to use in this ministry project.

[9]See appendix 1.

and the results are analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the then current level of confidence in the Bible at HBC.[10]

The second goal was to develop an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum that would equip the adults attending HBC to place greater confidence through knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. Half of this course curriculum (four sessions) was formatted for a small group setting aiming at an hour of interactive teaching and discussion per session. The other half of the curriculum was designed for delivery as sermons. All curriculum was focused on the nature of God's Word and aimed at increasing participant's confidence in the Bible. This goal was measured by a competent panel consisting of ministers from other churches. This panel used a rubric to evaluate the course material for biblical fidelity, sufficient thoroughness, and applicability.[11] This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of ninety percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level on the applicable rubric. If the initial feedback yielded less than ninety percent, the course was revised in accordance with the panel's evaluation until such time that the criterion met or exceeded the ninety percent sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase confidence through knowledge in the Bibles sufficiency and authority among adults attending HBC. This goal was accomplished by implementing the above mentioned multi-formatted curriculum. This course consisted of small group settings occurring on three differing occasions: Sunday mornings in Sunday school, on Sunday evenings, and on Wednesday evenings. All adults were urged to attend an offering of the small group sessions and all participants were encouraged to engage in group discussion. The other half of the course (four sessions) was

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[10]The exact number required to reach the thirty-three percent threshold was determined using the previous month's average adult attendance in HBC's Sunday morning worship services and dividing that number by a third.

[11]See appendix 2.

implemented as worship services involving the entire congregation. This goal was measured by re-administering the BCS within two weeks of the completion of the final session to all participants.[12] The new data from the BCS was used to measure any change in confidence through knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority among respondents. Additionally, this goal was measured by interviewing at least five willing respondents who professed an increase of confidence between their pre-course and post course confidence levels.[13] This interview process enabled the identification and greater understanding of the factors that led to the change. The interviews were evaluated and themes summarized resulting in additional insights into the factors that led to the changes in confidence. This third goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre-course and post course survey scores and when the interviews were conducted.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

In order to aid the reader, the following definitions of key terms used in this ministry project are provided below.

Scripture. The Scriptures consists of the sixty-six books of the OT and NT, "which have historically been recognized as God's Word in written form."[14] The Baptist Second London Confession (SLC) of 1689 and the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) explicitly affirm this definition.[15]

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[12]See appendix 1.

[13]See appendix 3. To maintain the required, and promised (see first limitation below), anonymity necessary to encourage honesty, respondents were interviewed based on their willingness to participate and a profession of increased confidence in the Scriptures and not based on a comparison of their specific individual pre-course and post-course survey scores.

[14]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1253.

[15]English Particular Baptist General Assembly, "Second London Confession," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed., ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 249; Westminster Assembly of Divines, "Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 6th ed., Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 601-2. Both confessions name only these sixty-six recognized books as inspired Scripture: Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, Ruth, 1 Sam, 2 Sam, 1

Scriptural authority. The Bible inherently has God's authority ("the right or power to command obedience or belief") by virtue of its inspiration, and as Dockery states, "it derives its authority from the self-revealing and self-authenticating God."[16] Grudem, however, offers this project's adopted working definition for the authority of Scripture when he asserts that "all the words in Scripture are God's in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."[17]

Scriptural sufficiency. "Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history," Grudem asserts, "And that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly."[18] Essentially agreeing with Grudem, Piper states the concept of Scriptural sufficiency as the idea that "the Scriptures are sufficient in the sense that they are the only ("once for all") inspired and (therefore) inerrant words of God that we need, in order to know the way of salvation ("make you wise unto salvation") and the way of obedience ("equipped for every good work")" (2 Tim 3:15-17; Jude 1:3).[19]

This project had four limitations. First, the accuracy of the surveys depended

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Kgs, 2 Kgs, 1 Chr, 2 Chr, Ezra, Neh, Esth, Job, Pss, Prov, Eccl, Song, Isa, Jer, Lam, Ezek, Dan, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Jonah, Mic, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal, Matt, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Rom, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 Thess, 2 Thess, 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus, Phlm, Heb, Jas, 1 Pet, 2 Pet, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Rev.

[16]David S. Dockery, "The Authority of the Bible." SBC Life: Journal of the Southern Baptist Convention. Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, February 2008. http://www.sbclife .net/Articles/2008/02/sla8.; James P. Boyce, "A Brief Catechism of Bible Doctrine," in *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887; repr., Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 495-96.

[17]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

[18]Ibid., 127.

[19]John Piper, "Thoughts on the Sufficiency of Scripture: What It Does and Doesn't Mean," Desiring God (Blog), February 9, 2005, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/thoughts-on-the-sufficiency-of-scripture. Some other helpful definitions of the sufficiency of Scripture include Carl Trueman, "The Sufficiency of Scripture: What Does It Mean That Scripture Is Sufficient? And What Is It Sufficient For?" 9Marks, July 16, 2013, https://www.9marks.org/article/journalsufficiency-scripture/; Kevin DeYong, "The Sufficiency of Christ and the Sufficiency of Scripture," The Gospel Coalition (Blog), October 29, 2013, https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2013/10/29/the-sufficiency-of-christ-and-the-sufficiency-of-scripture/; and Tim Challies, "The Bible's Sufficiency," @Challies (Blog), January 28, 2004, https://www.challies.com/articles/the-bibles-sufficiency/.

on the honesty of respondents. All respondents were assured of anonymity to mitigate dishonesty. Second, the efficacy of the survey process was limited by the respondents' self-awareness. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were urged to take the surveys home allowing time to answer reflectively. Third, the effectiveness of the designed curriculum was limited by the participants' preferred learning styles. To mitigate this limitation, various parts of the curriculum were covered in differing formats. Fourth, this project's efficacy was limited by the literacy level of participants. To partially mitigate this limitation, Bibles rated for differing reading levels accompanied the curriculum.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed only HBC's regular adult attenders. Regular adult attenders self-identified before the initial BCS and the final BCS. The surveys of attenders not participating in all eight sessions were excluded. Second, the course curriculum was formatted for an eight-week timespan. This gave limited but adequate time to implement the multi-formatted curriculum and then conduct the post-series survey and interviews.

Conclusion

God provided his people at HBC with an invaluable treasure worthy of full confidence: his Word. The following chapters show what an incredible treasure God's Word is for his people when they confidently submit to its authority and trust its sufficiency. Chapter 2 focuses on the biblical and theological basis for cultivating confidence in the Bible's authority and sufficiency because of its essential role in the sanctification process. Chapter 3 focuses on theoretical, practical, and historical issues related to cultivating confidence in the Scripture's authority and sufficiency due to its central role in the sanctification process.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR
THE PRIMACY OF SCRIPTURE IN THE
SANCTIFICATION PROCESS

It is popular to minimize or even deny the Bible's critical role in the Christian

life. This downgrading of Scripture is a spiritually fatal attitude for a Christian. Often

the deemphasizing of the Bible is an assault upon Scripture's veracity, sufficiency, and

applicability to contemporary life. At other times a sad lessening of Scripture's role is

achieved by exalting other vital means of the believers' sanctification. Community,

charitable works, and giving are exalted among various important means. While God

uses many means to conform his children into Christ's image, no other means can

supplant his Word. "The most transforming practice available to us," Donald Whitney

emphatically declares, "is the disciplined intake of Scripture."[1] "Nothing can substitute

for it."[2] Scripture is sufficient and authoritative in the sanctifying of God's NT people.

This truth resides in the gospels and epistles. The Bible's life-sustaining qualities are

ardently asserted in the OT and affirmed in the NT. Believers ignore Scripture's

sufficiency and authority, trusting increasingly in other means to their spiritual determent.

Confidence in the Bible is necessary for sanctification.

Matthew 4:1-4

Examples of the exaltation of God's Word as the chief means for sanctification

are observable in the Gospels of the NT. Matthew's God-breathed account of the first

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[1]Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 28-29.

[2]Ibid.

testing of Jesus is a key example (Matt 4:1-4) as Jesus affirms Scripture's authority and sufficiency for sustaining the spiritual life of his New Covenant people. Christ's Bible-exalting affirmations rebuff satanic temptations in the setting of Israel's past failures.[3]

The significance of Matthew's narrative is made clearer by the OT events that foreshadowed Jesus' temptation.[4] These events' background is the exodus under Moses' leadership; specifically, the entering of the Sinai covenant, the subsequent failure of Israel when tested, the failure to enter Canaan, and the following forty years of wilderness wandering.[5] This background is evident from the OT quotes Jesus used to resist Satan (Deut 8:3; 6:13, 16).[6] The quotes pertain to events prior to the conquest of Canaan, but center on Israel's testing.[7] Evidence like the parallel between Moses' pre-covenant fasting period, OT Israel's length of wandering, and Jesus' fasting period is also significant.[8] The repeat of the number forty (years or days respectively) in the accounts[9] and the Jordan River location as both the place of Jesus' baptism and of Israel's entrance into Canaan further signify a linkage.[10] The contrast of the failed start of God's OT people to live in covenant in the promised land and the successful start of Jesus Christ's

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[3]D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *Expositor's Biblical Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 112.

[4]R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 96-97. The testing was an "examination of Jesus' newly revealed relationship with God." Ibid., 97.

[5]Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1. Blomberg sees deep OT roots, noting, "[in Matt] every major theological emphasis . . . is reinforced with OT support."

[6]G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 417-18.

[7]France, *Matthew*, 97.

[8]Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture,* New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 83-84; Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13,* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 64.

[9]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 14. The exact phrase used by Mathew of Jesus' fasting period, "forty days and forty nights," is an allusion to Moses' pre-covenant fast on Mt. Sinai (Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18).

[10]Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 417-20.

ministry as God's Son and David's anointed heir is intended by Matthew as a fitting start to Jesus' earthly ministry.[11]

These similar events with differing outcomes signify Jesus' initiating of a new work of God with a new people of God.[12] Blomberg observes that "Israel as a people or Moses as a leader failed the test," further noting succinctly that "Jesus passes his."[13] Jesus is the true Israelite, succeeding where Israel failed.[14] Christ's success is evident in his resisting the tempter.[15] He is typologically fulfilling OT Scripture; he "must in some way recapitulate the experience of Israel or of David."[16] Jesus is establishing the Kingdom of God and is the Davidic King and initiator of a New Covenant people encompassing the believing Old Covenant people.[17]

Jesus' victory over the devil allows for appreciation of not only his act of resisting, but also the means used to accomplish it. Jesus is more than simply countering the devil. Rather, he is blazing a trail.[18] Carson states it simply: Jesus is inaugurating

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[11]Carson, *Matthew*, 28; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2008), 126-27. No lack of veracity is implied. Later events paralleling earlier events are referenced to emphasize key themes.

[12]D. A. Carson, "Approaching the Bible", in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 16-17. "Jesus is presented as the 'son' that Israel never was," asserts Carson, "obedient, persevering, and submissive to God's Word," and also as the "locus of the true Israel." Ibid.

[13]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 14; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 73-74; Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary: New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 131.

[14]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 127-28.

[15]Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 83. Beale concurs with Blomberg stating, "Jesus resists the same temptations to which Israel succumbed" (Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 418).

[16]Carson, *Matthew*, 28. Carson argues Jesus' temptation is typological fulfillment: "often the relation between prophecy and fulfillment is typological," thus, "Jesus must undergo wilderness testing." Ibid.

[17]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 2.

[18]Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 417. Beale sees Jesus as "micro-Israel" replacing, "the micronational Israel." Ibid.

"something new in his coming and ministry."[19] Jesus is modeling so his followers can

emulate.[20] Christ's weapon of choice in his conflict is God's Word and his obedience to

it. God's Word is what Israel failed to believe, and Moses failed to obey, however, Jesus

lived "by every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (4). Matthew 4:1-4 states,

> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came
> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become
> loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread
> alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus' exultation of God's Word is evident in his response to the slanderer's

(τοῦ διαβόλου) unhelpful suggestion.[21] Repeatedly and pointedly, Jesus answers with

Scripture. For his testing, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to a place lacking physical provisions

but with significant OT precedent.[22] "The wilderness" (τὴν ἔρημον), the place of Israel's

testing, is the necessary spot of the temptation (v. 1).[23] The suggestion offered to Jesus

had an air of feasibility to it. Jesus was justifiably in need of food after "fasting for forty

days and forty nights" (νηστεύσας ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα) as

had Moses in Exodus 34:28 (v. 2).[24] The devil's suggestion in the first temptation

implies it is simple for Jesus to turn the present stones to bread. For God's Son to

miraculously acquire his own meal is but a small matter:[25] "and the tempter came and

said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of

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[19]Carson, *Matthew*, 32.

[20]Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 84.

[21]Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament,* 4th ed. (2001; repr., Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005), 8. All Greek quotes are from this source.

[22]Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 70-71. Mark (1:12) uses stronger wording for the Holy Spirit's role in "driving" Christ to the wilderness for the purpose of testing. Ibid., 70.

[23]As used in this setting, "[temptation's] evil sense comes from its use for an evil purpose" (Archibald Thomas Robertson and James A. Swanson*, Word Pictures in the New Testament*, concise ed. (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 8).

[24]France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 129-30; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 64.

[25]France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

bread'" (εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι γένωνται) (v. 3).[26] But Jesus

responds as the faithfully trusting "Son of God" that his heavenly Father just publicly

affirmed him to be (Matt 3:16-17).[27] The issue is *Obedience to his Father's will*.[28]

Christ is not an entitled fool using sonship to annul his appointed purpose.[29] Jesus

trustingly quotes God's Word. Bread can wait.[30]

Jesus responds to the first recorded temptation citing, "Man shall not live by

bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ

ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ) (v. 4).[31]

The quote is a pithy observation containing a general truth (an aphorism). The truth

expressed is that all must trustingly obey all God says.[32] Israel's hunger was intended to

teach that hearing and obeying God's Word is the greatest priority in life.[33] The nation

failed to learn this truth; however, the God-man Jesus faithfully lived by it.[34]

Jesus accomplishes multiple Scripture exalting things in responding to the

devil.[35] First Christ "distills the timeless spiritual principle" found in the OT text: always

obediently trust God, even for food in the wilderness.[36] Israel should have confidently

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[26]Carson, *Matthew*, 112; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 64-65; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 73. Hagner, Morris, and Carson concur with Blomberg's statement, "The clause, 'If you are the son of God' (4:3) is in Greek a first-class condition and does not suggest that the Devil doubts Jesus' sonship; rather he wants to find out what kind of Son Jesus will be" (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 14).

[27]Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 61-62.

[28]Osborne and Arnold, *Matthew*, 131. Osborne and Arnold propose seeing Jesus' three temptations as potentially corresponding to the three commanded ways of loving God in Deut 6:5.

[29]Carson, *Matthew*, 113.

[30]Turner, *Matthew*, 128.

[31]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 15; Carson, *Matthew*, 113. The LXX is quoted (Deut 8:3).

[32]Osborne and Arnold, *Matthew*, 132-33.

[33]France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 130-31; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 64.

[34]Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 70.

[35]Ibid., 66.

[36]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 15.

depended on God's provision, trusting God and his Word as did Jesus. Christ also applies this principle to himself and his situation. He is willingly dependent upon his Father's provision for sustenance. As head of the new people of God, Jesus does not use his sonship to meet even his legitimate bodily needs. As Jesus claims in John 4:34, his "food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." Thus, Christ demonstrates obedience, showing he is his Father's faithful trusting Son.[37] Third, Jesus models for his Kingdom citizens how to wield the "sword of the Spirit" in spiritual warfare (Eph 6:17). Christ authoritatively quotes an aptly chosen, well applied, and contextually appropriate verse to elude entrapment. As Messiah, he models appropriate Scripture use (v. 4) in the Holy Spirit's power (Luke 4:1). Fourth, Jesus exalts the Scripture by demonstrating its sufficiency to address his current situation and its authority to end any question of him supernaturally providing for himself. In practice, he exalts the Scripture by trusting it as the revealed mind and will of God. For, as Carson notes, "Jesus' response is based solely on Scripture: "It is written" (γέγραπται) (v. 4)."[38] Jesus uses this phrase often. Matthew signifies by using the perfect passive indicative that Scripture "stands written and is still enforce."[39] "Obedience to God's Word" was to Jesus, Carson further argues, "more necessary than bread."[40] Furthermore, Jesus exalts Scripture by quoting a verse which itself exalts God's Word by expressly affirming its sufficiency and authority.[41] Scripture is the life-sustaining Word of God: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (v. 4).

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[37]Carson, *Matthew*, 113. See Heb 3:5-6 and 5:7-8 for a biblical elaboration of this point.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Robertson and Swanson, *Word Pictures*, 9. Morris notes the same thing. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 74.

[40]Carson, *Matthew*, 113.

[41]Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 74.

In Matthew's account of Christ's first temptation, the declared Son of God and Head of God's New Covenant people affirms Scripture as authoritative and sufficient to sustain spiritual life. This life is daily nourished by God's Word, just as physical life is sustained by eating food.[42] Scripture must be treasured, obeyed, and believed above the real pressures of circumstance. Consistent with Jesus' affirmation of God's Word, are its qualities that make it uniquely necessary for sanctifying God's people.

Psalm 19:7-11

The nature and effect of Scripture are addressed in the OT. In the Psalter of the OT, the psalmist asserts that God's Word holds unique qualities making it sufficient and authoritative in sanctifying his people (Ps 19:7-11). In a God-breathed creation and Torah psalm of praise, King David espouses Scripture's ability to give God's people the wisdom required to live pleasing to him.[43] Further, David glowingly attributes Scriptures' formative ability to its inherent special characteristics.

Psalm 19 divides into three sections.[44] The first section (vv. 1-6) addresses general revelation's universal speech which is proclaimed by creation and consists of the

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[42]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 118.

[43]Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeer Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 11-13; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *Expositor's Biblical Commentary,* gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 19; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 982; Gordan J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 68-71. The phrase "A psalm of David" (מִזְמֹור לְדָוִד) may only show association and the superscription's inspiration is generally unrecognized. Authorship is not directly asserted; however, I defer to tradition and refer to David as the author of Ps 19.

[44]Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Bible Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 108; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 179-80; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006), 284-85. Some view the Psalm as an originally united work and cite its "structure of intensification" and "shared vocabulary" as evidence (Walter Brueggemann and W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101-03). Goldingay acknowledges the similar styles of the various divisions but comes to the contrary conclusion by finding no syntactic link in the sections. Broyles concurs. But Craigie, as do I, acknowledges this debate but prefers considering the Psalm in its current and united form.

revelation of the skies (vv. 1-4b) and of the sun (vv. 4c-6).[45] A basic knowledge of God

resides in his creation. An import of this section is the grand scope of the heavens'

speech which forms a basis of viewing the scale and scope of the glories of God's Word

in the next section.[46] This next section (vv. 7-11) focuses on the characteristics and

corresponding benefits of the special revelation of God's Word. Uniquely, Scripture

reveals a knowledge about *Yahweh and his Word*.[47] Psalm 19:7-11 states,

> The Law of the LORD is perfect,
>   reviving the soul;
> the testimony of the LORD is sure,
>   making wise the simple;
> the precepts of the LORD are right,
>   rejoicing the heart;
> the commandment of the LORD is pure,
>   enlightening the eyes;
> the fear of the LORD is clean,
>   enduring forever;
> the rules of the LORD are true,
>   and righteous altogether.
> More to be desired are they than gold,
>   even much fine gold;
> sweeter also than honey
>   and drippings of the honeycomb.
> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
>   in keeping them there is great reward.

The last part (vv. 12-14) focuses on David's desire to live righteously before Yahweh.

The nature of the Psalms is to stir, motivate, inform, and give voice to our

praises.[48] C. S. Lewis was famously moved to write of Psalm 19, "I take this to be the

greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."[49] If one is

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[45]VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 179.

[46]Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 102.

[47]Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 182. Craigie acknowledges a transition from "God" (אֵל) proclaimed in the first section to "LORD" (יְהוָה) being more personally revealed and interacted with through the Torah in the psalm's remainder. Craigie sees an allusion to the Torah's superiority over the tree of knowledge by use of progression and attribution of specific characteristics to God's Word.

[48]William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush., *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 425-28. The Hebrew title for the book of Psalms is translated "praises."

[49]C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 63.

unmoved by reading or hearing a psalm, then at least part of its purpose is unrealized. A psalm describes the author, his experiences, and his God in poetic language. But psalms also prescribe actions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings using the same poetry.[50] A psalm's dual nature, prescriptive and descriptive, is vital to its purpose. Poetic structure, multiple metaphors, and irregular sentences compound the challenge of interpretation.[51]

In a mere five verses (vv. 7-11) of a psalm with little-known background, David provides the reader with ten descriptions of the nature of Scripture and six potential benefits it offers. In a series of parallelisms, David uses six synonyms for the Word of God.[52] David's experience of God's Word forms an acknowledgeable pattern and is intended for emulation; his positive experience with the Scripture should become the reader's. Below I examine these descriptions, benefits, and terms for Scripture.

The six Hebrew terms used for God's Word in Psalm 19:7-11 should convey a grand and comprehensive picture of Scripture. VanGemeren wisely warns against studying these terms in mere abstraction.[53] Concurring, Goldingay asserts that the synonyms "embrace the concrete instructions in their specificity as well as the whole in its unity."[54] The terms exemplify the idea of a whole is more than the sum of its parts.

"Law" (v. 7a) is a noun (תּוֹרַת) sometimes also translated as "direction," "teaching," or "instruction."[55] This term is used by David in the broadest sense to focus

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[50]DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 204.

[51]John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2008), 378-79; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 231-42.

[52]Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 314-15.

[53]VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 181.

[54]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 291. Craigie concurs with Goldingay. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 181.

[55]Rudolf Kittel et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 1101-102; Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 435-36. All Hebrew text is from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

on God's Word as the informer of his divine will to his people in all that it addresses. Broyles concurs with Goldingay's observation that the term may "also refer to the story of Yhwh's acts with Israel."[56] The word "testimony" is also used by David (v. 7c). It is the noun (עֵדוּת) occasionally translated as "statutes." It emphasizes the "law code in general" as God's testimony.[57] "Precepts" is a word utilized by David (v. 8a) to emphasize the appointed nature of God's commandments. It is the plural noun (פִּקּוּדָי) sometimes also translated as "statutes."[58] The term "commandment" (v. 8c) also used by David is the noun (מִצְוַת) that is a synonym for "law" and "decree" that stresses God's Word as the law code.[59] Next, David uses the term "fear" (v. 9a) for God's Word.[60] It is the noun (יִרְאַת) also translated as "reverence."[61] Its use here draws attention to God's Word as what he reveres and by extension what we should revere.[62] "The fear of the Lord," asserts Broyles, "refers not to the attitude of faith in God but, in keeping with its parallel expressions, to the codified faith of written torah," and Brueggemann and Bellinger note that "whom one reveres, one obeys."[63] "Rules" (v. 9c), the noun (מִשְׁפְטֵי־), is also used by David and is sometimes translated "judgments" or "ordinances."[64] The term emphasizes God's Word as his binding decisions, that is, his righteous ruling in matters Scripture addresses. Together the terms paint a vibrant picture of Scripture's

[56]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 291; Broyles, *Psalms*, 442. Deut is an example of "Law."

[57]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 730.

[58]Ibid., 824.

[59]Ibid., 846-47.

[60]John I. Durham, *Psalms*, in vol. 4 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 208. Durham, lacking sufficient warrant, suggests reading the noun translated "utterances" (אִמְרָתֶךָ) instead of "fear" (יִרְאַת) arguing it better conforms to developing thought.

[61]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 432.

[62]Goldingay sees יִרְאַת יְהֹוָה as another subjective genitive stating the reverence Yhwh requires and the "teaching that indicates what reverence for Yhwh looks like" (Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 291).

[63]Broyles, *Psalms*, 108; Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 103.

[64]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 1048-49.

extensive nature.

The supernatural nature of Scripture is poetically lauded by the psalmist using multiple moving and often overlapping Hebrew terms. David first uses the word "Perfect" (v. 7a). It is the adjective (תְּמִימָה) sometimes translated as "sound," "whole," or "unimpaired".[65] This descriptive term emphasizes the Word of God's intact and complete nature and thus its ability to accomplish all that God desires for it to do. It is sufficient and lacking nothing genuinely needful. "Sure" is the second term used (v. 7c). This term is the verb (נֶאֱמָנָה) occasionally translated as "confirmed" or "established."[66] The word stresses the solid or sound and unwavering nature of God's revealed Word.

A third term David uses is "right" (v. 8a). It is the adjective (יְשָׁרִים) sometimes translated as "upright" or "straight."[67] The term focuses on the honest, righteous, truth-telling nature of God's Word. Scripture does not lead astray. David also uses the word "Pure" (v. 8c) to describe Scripture. It is the adjective (בָּרָה) which emphasizes the uncontaminated nature of God's Word.[68] It is sometimes translated as "clear," as in an unpolluted spring or river from which one can satisfy their thirst without fear. "Clean" is also used (v. 9a) and is the adjective (טְהוֹרָה) sometimes translated as "pure."[69] This word describes that which is ethically untainted and lacking in moral corruption. "Enduring forever" (v. 9b) is an expression (עוֹמֶדֶת לָעַד) sometimes translated as "standing forever," which David also uses.[70] This expression emphasizes the fact that God's Word will never degenerate; it will abide perpetually containing all of its current attributes. The

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[65]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 1071.

[66]Ibid., 52.

[67]Ibid., 449.

[68]Ibid., 141.

[69]Ibid., 373.

[70]Ibid., 763, 723.

word "True" is also utilized (v. 9c). It is the noun (אֱמֶת) occasionally translated as "faithful."[71] This word stresses the reliable and sure nature of Scripture.

Next, David utilizes the expression "Righteous altogether" (v. 9d). It is the expression (צָדְקוּ יַחְדָּו) which emphatically emphasizes that God's Word is completely righteous and wholly just.[72] The expression serves as the summary statement for the characteristics of Scripture presented in this Psalm.[73] It is every bit of the Scripture that is righteous. "To be desired" (v. 10a) is the verb (הַנֶּחֱמָדִים) occasionally translated as "covet."[74] This term is used by David to stress the extreme value of God's Word by emphasizing its desirability in excess of "much fine gold." Scripture is worth wanting. "Sweeter" (v. 10c) is an adjective (וּמְתוּקִים) emphasizing the pleasing and therefore desirable nature of the Scriptures in excess of, Goldingay asserts, "honey and the drippings of the honeycomb."[75] The psalmist confesses to having a "sweet tooth" for the Word of God. Psalm 19 is a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, picture of the nature of God's Word. The full effect of considering all of these overlapping aspects of Scripture is intended to leave one confidently trusting the sufficiency and authority of God's Word.

David proclaims that God's Word affects and benefits the believing recipient of it in numerous positive ways. "Reviving the soul" (v. 7b) is the first benefit provided. This Hebrew expression (מְשִׁיבַת נָפֶשׁ) means "converting the life."[76] The expression highlights Scripture's ability to restore "full vigor" to the "flagging spirit" of a person and provide "the enduring inner food" that sustain genuine spiritual life.[77] The next benefit

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[71]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 54.

[72]Ibid., 842, 403.

[73]Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 182.

[74]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 326.

[75]Ibid., 608-09; Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 293. The standard of sweetness was bee honey.

[76]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 999, 659-61.

[77]Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 182.

David offers is "Making wise the simple" (v. 7d). This Hebrew expression (מַחְכִּימַת פֶּתִי)

stresses the Scripture's ability to make a teachable person wise.[78] "Rejoicing the heart"

(v. 8b) is another listed benefit. This Hebrew expression (מְשַׂמְּחֵי־לֵב) emphasizes the

joyous effect of Scripture on the inner man, specifically on his "seat of emotions or

passions."[79] "Enlightening the eyes" (v. 8d) is an additional benefit of Scripture.

Goldingay sees this Hebrew expression (מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם) emphasizing the ability to "reveal

the dimensions of truth and reality in human existence."[80] A further benefit emphasizes

Scripture's ability to, as a diligent watchman does, alert to potential danger and warn of

harm. This benefit applies in manifold areas of one's life: "Moreover, by them is your

servant warned" (v. 11a) which is the Hebrew expression (גַּם־עַבְדְּךָ נִזְהָר).[81] This last

benefit is a parallel idea to the previous one offered. "In keeping them there is great

reward" (v. 11b) is a Hebrew expression (בְּהֶם בְּשָׁמְרָם עֵקֶב רָב) stressing not the mere

avoidance of harm through the admonishment of Scripture, but rather the accruing of

tremendous benefit from following God's Word.[82] "Yahweh's revelation," is

understatedly described by Broyles as leading "not merely to awe and fear of natural

powers, nor to legalistic religion, but to a relationship . . . personal and cherished."[83] This

concept serves as the capstone to the personal and poetic argument David shares:

confidently trust God's sufficient authoritative Word and benefit.

Psalm 119:97-104

In the OT the effectiveness of God's Word for sanctification is addressed

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[78]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 314, 834.

[79]Ibid., 970, 525.

[80]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 292; Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 21, 1105.

[81]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 168-69, 264, 1105.

[82]Ibid., 784, 912-13, 1036-37.

[83]Broyles, *Psalms*, 109.

beyond Psalm 19. The author of Psalm 119:97-104 asserts that Scripture possesses characteristics making it effectual in the sanctification process.[84] The entire repetitive psalm is elaborate creative praise of Scripture, possibly recited during the OT feast of Pentecost.[85] The psalmist demonstrates by his interaction and reflections with the Word of God that it is sufficient and authoritative for revealing to the believer how to live a life pleasing to God.[86] In this Torah psalm, the author makes his heart swelling claims of the Scriptures' nature and effect in moving poetry.[87] The poetry consists of twenty-two strophes of eight verses each. The psalm's acrostic nature is a mnemonic aid in the process of memorization and subsequent meditation, further stressing the importance the psalmist placed on retaining an exalted view of Scripture and the internalizing of God's Word.[88] The acrostic nature also conveys wholeness, completeness, order, and movement.[89] The psalmist writes in Psalm 119:97-104, the "מ" strophe,[90]

> Oh how I love your law!
>   It is my meditation all the day.
> Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
>   for it is ever with me.
> I have more understanding than all my teachers,
>   for your testimonies are my meditation.
> I understand more than the aged,
>   for I keep your precepts.
> I hold back my feet from every evil way,
>   in order to keep your word.
> I do not turn aside from your rules,

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[84]Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 315-16.

[85]Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-50,* rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Nashville: Nelson, 2002), 180; DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 870.

[86]LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 445.

[87]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 381.

[88]Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 21-22, 42.

[89]Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 519; Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 315-16. "Unfortunately, this aspect . . . cannot be appreciated fully in translation" (Ibid., 316).

[90]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 377. Goldingay observes that "each of the eight verses begins with the appropriate letter, is syntactically self-contained, and can be understood independently of its context, though sometimes there are links of thought and language between lines" (Ibid.).

for you have taught me.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
  sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
  therefore I hate every false way.

The psalmist uses eight synonyms for the Word of God in Psalm 119. These Hebrew terms convey the comprehensiveness of Scripture.[91] In merely the eight verses starting with the letter "מ", the author uses seven of the eight synonyms found in the psalm.[92] Five of these words are also used in Psalm 19 and are examined above. The first term the psalmist uses is "law" (v. 97a); it is the noun (תּוֹרָתֶךָ) used in Psalm 19:7. The word "commandment" (v. 98b) is used next and is the noun (מִצְוֹתֶךָ) used in Psalm 19:8. "Testimonies" (v. 99b) is the next word used by the psalmist and is the noun (עֵדְוֹתֶיךָ) also found in Psalm 19:8. "Precepts" (vv. 100b, 104a), used twice in this text, is the noun (פִּקּוּדֶיךָ). Additionally, the term is found in Psalm 19:9; as is the noun used by the psalmist (מִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ) translated "judgements" (v. 102a).

Two of the seven synonyms for Scripture found in the Psalm 119:97-104 are absent from Psalm 19, these two terms are considered more closely. The term "word" (v. 101b) is a singular Hebrew noun (דְּבָרֶךָ). It is also translated "speech" or "saying" and can mean "the sum of that which is spoken."[93] This term's use by the psalmist emphasizes Scripture's divine origin, regardless of its form. The term "words" (v. 103a) is a plural Hebrew noun (אִמְרָתֶךָ). This noun is often translated "speech," "commandment," or "utterance."[94] It occurs eight more times in Psalm 119 and is used to emphasize, like the previous noun considered, God as Scripture's source. This idea is especially important because God's Word reflects the character of its speaker. This

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[91]DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 872. Only small "nuances of meaning" in the synonyms are noted, advising, "little is gained by attempting to distinguish a separate meaning" (Ibid.).

[92]Ibid., 871-72.

[93]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 182.

[94]Ibid., 57.

reflection of character is the argument made in biblical texts such as Psalm 19:7-11.

The benefits of Scripture attested to by the psalmist fall into three broad and overlapping categories. The substance of these categories is also evident in Psalm 19. These categories of the benefits of Scripture are the accruing of understanding and the gaining of wisdom, the hatred and shunning of evil, and the love of the truth. Of the description of the benefits of God's Word provided by the psalmist, Beale observes, these characteristics "are virtually identical to the Christian saint."[95]

The psalmist describes the benefit of wisdom and understanding that Scripture offers using three terms. The psalmist asserts Scripture "makes me wiser (תְּחַכְּמֵנִי) than my enemies" (v. 98a). In this verse, he is emphasizing Scriptures ability to "teach him wisdom."[96] Wisdom can be understood as, "[the] ability to live life in accordance with how things really are, and thus in a way that works" and honors God.[97] The Psalmist also states that due to meditating on God's testimonies, "I have more understanding (הִשְׂכַּלְתִּי) than all my teachers" (v. 99a). With the use of this term, he is stressing the ability of God's word to benefit him by providing him with "insight" and "comprehension."[98] The benefit of "understanding" is experienced more by the psalmist than his "teachers" (מְלַמְּדַי) serving to magnify the Bible's beneficial nature. Moreover, the psalmist claims, "I understand (אֶתְבּוֹנָן) more than the aged" (v. 100a).[99] Here he uses a term often translated as "discern"; it emphasizes the ability to distinguish between the nature or character of things. This ability comes from God's Word. The added detail, the benefit of "understanding" has accrued to the psalmist in greater measure than what the "ancient"

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[95]Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 934.

[96]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 314.

[97]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 381. Here is the lone occurrence in Ps 119 of the verb "be wise"; however, Goldingay considers it "implicit" throughout (Ibid., 418).

[98]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 962.

[99]Ibid., 107.

or "aged" (מְזְקֵנִים) have gained, amplifies the focus on the beneficial character of *knowing and observing* Scripture.[100] The psalmist summarizes Scripture's understanding imparting effect by asserting through it "I get understanding (אֶתְבּוֹנָן)" (v. 104a). In a succinct statement, the psalmist returns to the previous term ("understanding") signifying both his overlapping use of terms and the comprehensive nature of Scripture's benefits.

The second category of Scripture's benefits is its dual ability to both direct away from evil and foster a hatred of it. The psalmist confesses his avoidance of "every evil way, in order to keep your word" (v. 101). God's Word is the compass marking the direction the psalmist must take to stay clear of every evil. This directing aspect of the Word of God is why Allen refers to Scripture as "God's guidebook."[101] And correspondingly, "every evil way" is desired in a lesser amount than "keeping" Scripture. The psalmist further discloses that he does "not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me" (v. 102). *God is teaching* the psalmist how to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord through the Scriptures.[102] The term transgression is unused by the psalmist; however, the picture of transgression, wandering from the established path, is invoked and avoided. God instructs away from transgressing by means of his Word. In return, the psalmist keeps the Scriptures and, walks the path prescribed by God in his Word. Moreover, the psalmist asserts he gains discernment because of Scripture and as a consequence he can claim, "I hate (שָׂנֵאתִי) every false way" (v. 104).[103] This claim forms the parallel truth to the claim of love for the Scripture discussed below. The Bible benefits the psalmist by giving him the ability to walk a path evading evil and by growing

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[100]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3., 419.

[101]Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 184.

[102]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 419-20. "The Torah is no do-it-yourself manual that God has handed over to human beings to use as best they can," Allen astutely asserts, "but the written part of a lifelong teach-in" (Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 184). Goldingay agrees: the psalmist knows, "Yhwh [is] teaching what the decisions mean and demand, not merely their content" (Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 419).

[103]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 971.

a hatred for "every false way" which he can clearly recognize and gladly avoid.[104]

The third category of Scripture's benefit is its ability to nurture a love for the truth found in it. This nurtured love is the corresponding benefit of the Bible's ability to grow a hatred of evil described above. The psalmist's clear declaration of his love for God's Word starts the "מ" strophe in Psalm 119: "Oh how I love (מֶה־אָהַבְתִּי) your law!" (v. 97a).[105] This declaration is the parallel truth corresponding with the last assertion of this strophe: "I hate every false way" (v. 104). The evidence of the psalmist's love for God's Word is his confession that Scripture "is my meditation (שִׂיחָתִי) all the day" (v. 97b).[106] He habitually murmurs the Words of God to himself, rolling them around in his mouth and heart (cf. Deut 6:6-8).[107] The psalmist writes of this practice twice in three verses (vv. 97b, 99b). He is like the "Blessed" man strategically described in the opening verses of the Psalter.[108] Out of a growing longing for Scripture, the psalmist confesses: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (v. 103). Daily interaction with the Bible nurtures the psalmist's increasing appetite for it.

The testimony of the psalmist, evident from the structure of Psalm 119, is written to express his desirous love for Scripture and the corresponding benefits of trusting it. In essence he asserts, Scripture is sufficient for and authoritative in the work of revealing to the believer how to live a life pleasing to God. The psalmist's Holy Spirit inspired assertion is still valid today. The use of the NT formula "as it is written" demonstrates solidarity between NT authors and "the spirit of Psalm 119."[109]

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[104]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 420.

[105]Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 12-13.

[106]Ibid., 967. Ps 1:2 also connects love for Scripture and constantly meditating on it.

[107]Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 418.

[108]Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 106.

[109]Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 192.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

The NT's pastoral epistles address the issues of Scriptures' nature and ability to produce what a believer requires. In the epistle of 2 Timothy (3:15-17), the Apostle Paul asserts Scripture's sufficiency and authority in the sanctification process of God's people.[110] God's Word is the remedy prescribed by Paul for the "difficulty" that will "arise in the last days" (vv. 1-9). God's Word is the counter to false teachings Timothy and his flock will face (vv. 10-17).[111] Timothy is counseled to confidently trust the Scripture's inherent ability to produce God-honoring and life-sustaining results in any believer. Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:15-17,

> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Timothy receives direct instruction on Scriptures' significance as he is reminded of its authority and sufficiency. God's Word is referenced, using two synonymous expressions. The first way Paul refers to God's Word is as "the sacred writings" ([τὰ] ἱερὰ γράμματα) (v. 15). This phrase is used in the LXX, and by Josephus and Philo for the OT.[112] Robertson contends this phrase is also translatable as "holy Scripture."[113] The phrase is used in reminding Timothy of the childhood instruction he

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[110]William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), lxii-lxix.

[111]Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 27, 40; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 10-14. Pauline authorship is stated (1:1) and rejecting it is unwise. Questions of the timing and location of composition are open to legitimate debate; these are unaddressed directly in the text, however, the traditional "minority" understanding of Timothy's ministry in Ephesus during Paul's second imprisonment is most likely.

[112]Ralph Earle, *2 Timothy*, in vol. 11 of *Expositor's Biblical Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 409; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 234; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 563-64; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 582-83. Mounce, Lea, and Earle argue ἱερὰ γράμματα was a technical expression for the OT. Mounce suggests, contrary to Towner, Paul, "chooses the anarthrous plural construction to develop his argument in the direction of joining the Hebrew Scripture and the gospel" (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 564). The phrase occurs only here in the NT.

[113]Robertson takes the terms "γράμματα" and "γραφὴ" as synonyms. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Epistles of Paul*, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 542.

received from God's Word;[114] however, the expression *itself* emphasizes the special holy

nature of the Scriptures, not its age or usefulness.[115] The Bible is more than good or

helpful writings; it is "sacred writings." God's Word is holy in origin and thus in its

nature. Paul draws a contrast between the sacred nature of Scripture and the secular

instruction of false teachers he is exhorting Timothy to oppose (2 Tim 3:1-9).[116]

Sacred Scripture is inherently able to accomplish multiple essential tasks.[117]

One such critical task is "to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"

(τὰ δυνάμενά σε σοφίσαι εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ πίστεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) (v. 15b).[118]

Grudem sees this claim as evidence for Scripture's sufficiency arguing, "The words of

God we have in Scripture are all the words of God we need in order to be saved."[119]

Scripture's ability is due partly to its content. An example of this OT content are

passages claiming the Messiah must die and rise from the grave (Luke 24:25-7, 44-9;

John 5:39).[120] Also, the Word of God is the very means initially used to bring one to

salvation in Jesus Christ (Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23).[121] Moreover, believers likewise grow in

godliness or sanctification ("salvation") by God's Word (Pss 19:7-11; 119:97-104).[122]

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[114]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 233-34.

[115]Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 908.

[116]Donald Guthrie, "2 Timothy," in *New Bible Commentary*, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1309.

[117]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 793-94.

[118]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 584; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 564-65. Mounce argues, and Towner agrees, this expression emphasizes "the completeness and clarity brought by the gospel message [to the OT and to the centrality of faith in Christ]" (Ibid., 564).

[119]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127.

[120]Earle, *2 Timothy*, 409; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 234.

[121]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127.

[122]Earle, *2 Timothy*, 409; Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 891-92, 908. Towner sees echoes of Ps 119:98 from the LXX used by Paul but admits only a slight resemblance. Grudem finds in Ps 119:1, "An equivalence between being 'blameless' and 'walking in the law of the Lord,'" and asserts elsewhere that "all that God requires of us is recorded in his written Word: simply to do all that the Bible commands us is to be blameless in God's sight" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 118, 128).

Therefore, Paul next lists multiple ways that Scripture enables believers to grow in godliness (v. 16).

Paul also uses the noun γραφὴ, "Scripture" or "writings," to refer to God's Word (v. 16a). The term means any writings and has this broad meaning outside the NT, however, Grudem and Mounce assert γραφὴ has a specialized NT meaning requiring it to exclusively mean God's written Word.[123] In some instances, in the NT, the term appears to have a broader meaning than God's written Word and the *context* specifies the referenced writings (Luke 24:27, 2 Pet 3:16).[124] In most NT occurrences, γραφὴ does refers to all or part of the OT (Luke 4:21), but, this assertion does not require translating γραφὴ as "Scripture" instead of "writings" in every instance.[125] For an author can *intend* for context to narrow a term's range of meaning. The term emphasizes the written nature of what God "breathed" and people wrote down. In this text, γραφὴ should be translated as "writings," with the adjective "θεόπνευστος" clarifying which writings. The attributive adjective preceding "Scripture" specifies that Paul is referring to God's written Word as opposed to other possible irrelevant writings (v. 16).[126] A correct translation of

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[123]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 74; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 565.

[124]D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1996), 45, 57-61. A fallacy of false assumptions about technical meaning is possible here: "an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning . . . usually derived either from a subset of evidence or from the interpreter's personal systematic theology" (Ibid., 45). This fallacy occurred by an "unwarranted restriction of the semantic field," a fallacy in itself (Ibid., 57).

[125]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 75-76. The term γραφὴ, referring directly to the OT in most NT instances, is fitting. For the Jewish "writings" and the NT's foundation is the OT. English readers have the issues distorted by the word "Scripture"; as currently used, it refers to a religion's sacred writings.

[126]Ibid., 74; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 565-70; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 588. This adjective is attributive, an incidental description, and not a predicate adjective, an additional statement. The absence of a verb, and the adjective following the noun it describes (γραφὴ), make this an attributive adjective construction. The lack of a definite article before γραφὴ makes θεόπνευστος a bare adjective; in these NT constructions, normally, the predicate adjective comes before the noun, but the attributive trails it. θεόπνευστος is describing γραφὴ and forms a partial thought. Grudem comes to the opposite conclusion, attaching much significance to the presence of καὶ, as does Towner. Assuming the authenticity of καὶ, and it is grammatically problematic, but appears in all the relevant Greek codices, it is preferable to translate it as "also" (adjunctive) and θεόπνευστος as an attributive adjective.

πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος καὶ (v. 16a) is "Every God-breathed writing [is] also." Thus 2 Timothy 3:16 should read accordingly.[127]

Paul pointedly declares the unique nature of God's Word by describing it as "breathed out by God" (θεόπνευστος).[128] This Greek adjective is a passive construction occurring in the NT only here and consisting of a compound of the words for "God" and "breathe."[129] It is "every" (πᾶσα) inspired writing or "all" of God's written Word that Paul asserts is "profitable."[130] The Word of God is both wholly inspired and, thus, also sacred or holy. The often debated process of inspiration is unaddressed; however, the fact and result of it is stated plainly.[131] A second adjective describing Scripture is ὠφέλιμος. Paul directly claims Scripture is also "profitable" or "useful" for several things (v. 16).[132] The term only appears in the Bible in the Pastoral Epistles. The claim

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[127]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 587-88. My translation may suggest only parts of Scripture are inspired, leaving room for forming a canon within a canon. Erickson asserts, "it is unlikely that Paul was attempting to make a distinction between inspired and uninspired Scripture" *within this known* "definite body of writings" (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 235). The two-canon argument, however, reasons that only the 'inspired' parts of the Bible are useful. One may wish to shun unpopular biblical claims; however, ignoring swaths of Scripture is not viable. The text claims "every God-breathed writing is profitable." According to Bruce, the writing's "profitableness" was *part of the criteria* for initial inclusion in the canon. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 263-69. Therefore, an argument for partial "inspiration" of pieces of the text fails to seriously consider how the canon was initially formed. Metzger asserts, the Bible's broader testimony of itself, of its sufficiency and "authority, is grounded in its nature and source;" they are God-breathed writings and subsequently acknowledged by the church. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 283-84. The writings in the NT canon demonstrated authoritative human authorship, inspiration, and the ability to edify. If part of God's Word is now thought to fail the stated criteria, then it is the modern thinker's understanding that is shifting, not Scripture's eternally fixed God-breathed nature that has changed.

[128]According to Fee, the "God-breathed" language, consistent with 2 Pet 1:21, is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 757.

[129]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 589.

[130]Robertson sees a "definite assertion of inspiration," for *every* writing Paul addresses by describing them as God-breathed. Robertson, *Epistles of Paul*, 627. Assenting Mounce argues, Scripture's utility, in its entirety, "flows out of its inspiration," in its entirety. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

[131]Earle, *2 Timothy*, 409; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 236. Inspiration's process is more pointedly addressed in 2 Pet 1:21. Carson counsels, "It is important to distinguish the *mode* of revelation (dream, vision, dictation, etc.) from the *manner* of inspiration (the employment of various literary techniques and genres) from the *result* of inspiration (what Scripture says, God says) and the *purpose* of inspiration (to make us wise unto salvation)" (Carson, *Approaching the Bible*, 8).

[132]Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 253. "Advantageous," and "beneficial," also translate ὠφέλιμος.

of profitability applies to "every" (πᾶσα) God-breathed writing.[133] A claim of usefulness is applied equally, but not exhaustively, to four common pastoral activities.[134] These elements are chiastic in structure, aiding in retention, the first and last focus on orthodoxy and the middle two address orthopraxy.[135]

Scripture as the God-breathed Word is profitable "for teaching" (πρὸς διδασκαλίαν) (v. 16). "Teaching" is a broad-ranging activity possibly corresponding with "training." The Scripture is the subject matter that is to be taught.[136] Mounce argues that this term is technical for the doctrinal formulations found in Scripture.[137] The Word of God is what the believer is to know and, as Towner understands the term, teach.[138] Paul also asserts God's Word is profitable "for reproof" (πρὸς ἐλεγμόν) or "rebuke" (v. 16). This term occurs in the NT only here; however, it is found often in the LXX relating "to the process of making someone aware of sin."[139] Mounce affirms Lea and Griffin's contention that "it may refer to a rebuke that exposes the errors of false teachers" or "to errors in our personal lives" possibly rising from false teachings.[140] With this activity Paul shifts from the teaching of biblical orthodoxy to the confronting of flawed orthopraxy by means of the Word of God. Paul further claims God's Word is profitable "for correction" (πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν) (v. 16). This Greek term is from an old word meaning to set up straight or return to a right position and is also found here only in all

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[133]Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Lyman Rand Tucker, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 27. Lea tepidly favors "all," agreeing with Kaiser and Tucker and seeing little difference between "all" or "every" here, "since the meaning comes out similarly" (Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 235).

[134]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 590.

[135]Ibid., 592.

[136]Kaiser and Tucker, *Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 29.

[137]Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

[138]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 590.

[139]Ibid., 590-91.

[140]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 237; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

the NT.[141] The word is also translated as "training" and emphasizes the ability of Scripture, "in doctrine or personal practice," Lea argues, to "restore people to spiritual positions they have forfeited."[142] The flawed orthopraxy exposed by the "reproof" of the Scripture is now corrected and orthopraxy is restored and enforced by the positive "correction" of the Word of God. Paul also advices Timothy that God's Word is profitable "for training in righteousness" (πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ) (v. 16). The concept of "training" corresponds with that which was done in the rearing of children in the first century: training, learning, instructing.[143] The formation takes place using God's Word so that the pupil learns all aspects and applications of righteousness, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It is Scripture that forms, shapes, and disciplines us into people leading holy or righteous lives. Mounce reminds that "['righteousness'] is not only a gift bestowed but also a virtue to be sought (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22), the latter being emphasized."[144]

Paul asserts Scripture's profitableness in multiple ways. The comprehensive result of this profitableness is that, in the believer, something specific and necessary can occur (v. 17). "Complete" (ἄρτιος), "competent," "Capable," or "proficient" is how the occurrence is first described using a specially adapted word.[145] The term means a focused aptitude or special suitableness for a prescribed use. In conjunction with the Holy Spirit, God's Word makes God's man able to accomplish God's prescribed task. The second, and related, result of Scripture's usefulness is that the believer is "equipped" (ἐξηρτισμένος) or "fully furnished."[146] God's man has every conceivable tool and piece

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[141]Robertson, *Epistles of Paul*, 628; Earle, *2 Timothy*, 410.

[142]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 237.

[143]Earle, *2 Timothy*, 410; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 591.

[144]Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

[145]Robertson, *Epistles of Paul*, 628; Earle, *2 Timothy*, 410. It is located only here in all the NT.

[146]Robertson, *Epistles of Paul*, 628.

of specialized equipment his task requires in his Bible. "The use of the perfect tense for "equipped," Lea and Griffin reason, "suggests . . . an abiding condition."[147] God's man is complete and capable for Scripture is sufficient. The scope of equipping by Scripture is wide-ranging; it is "for every good work" (πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν). There is no providentially appointed task the Bible cannot fully equip the "man of God" to face (1 Tim 6:11).

Paul asserts it is the "man of God" (τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος) who is "complete" and "equipped for every good work" through the Bible. This term is applied only to Moses and the other prophets of the Lord in the OT, further showing Scripture's ability to form any disciple of Christ.[148] For "God's man" was to be wholly devoted and an example of Christ-honoring living (1 Tim 3:1-7; 4:6-16). Surely, all believers can be complete and sufficiently equipped, if the same Word they have is also adequate for "God's man."[149] Paul's key charge is to always "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:1-2). For God's people *need* his Word!

Scripture is sufficient and authoritative for sanctification. The Bible is reliable and trustworthy. It is our God-breathed source and substance of instruction from and about God. It is the sure bread we live by, receiving it from God's mouth. Scripture is the means of our exhortation and reproving. It is greatly desirable and profitable for use in our homes and churches and it is worth our habitual meditation. If confidence in "God's Word is taken away, all kinds of satanic lies come to fill the void, the desire to resist temptation breaks down, and sin inevitably occurs."[150] This consequence of eroding trust in his Word is why Carson argues, "The church cannot exist and flourish

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[147]Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 237; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 571.

[148]Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 593-94.

[149]Ibid., 593.

[150]Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 222.

without unreservedly embracing the Bible."[151]

Scripture's sufficient nature, as the above texts detail, is critical. For if HBC abandons what is uniquely able to guide it through this life, then it is doomed to wander in the dark of ignorance. Only with a certain and reliable road map, God's Word, is there assurance that what is now trusted about God and his nature, purposes, and plans corresponds with reality. If the Bible is jettisoned from daily experience not only is HBC's sure source of knowledge about God removed but also its source of reliable information concerning itself— its nature, purpose, origin, and ultimate destination. Moreover, HBC will have no sure source of information about its surroundings without God's Word. HBC may guess at the origins of creation and its place with in it, however, guessing is the best they can do without the God-breathed book sufficient to accurately answer these and countless other fundamental questions.

The Bible's life giving and authoritative nature necessarily means God's Word is not one of many equally trustworthy sources of data available. Scripture stands alone as God's written revelation of himself and what he desires his people to know. Other works *may* have happened upon some truths, for humans are inherently curious and industrious, but HBC could not know that what they of their own means construed is true and accurate. God breathed Scripture; consequently, it is his fixed, final, and firm Word on all that it addresses. To trust Scripture is to trust God and what *he* has said; to neglect or diminish it is to forsake the sure Rock and in futility wade into a sea of confusion. HBC must cultivate its confidence in God's sufficient and authoritative Word as the starting place and only sure foundation for authentic renewal. Next, the cure of cultivating confidence in Scripture is considered in current church revitalization works, along with a historical foundation for it, and a critical aspect of implementing it.

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[151]D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 151.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
FOUNDATIONS FOR THE PRIMACY OF
SCRIPTURE IN THE SANCTIFICATION
PROCESS

A pervasive diminishment of Scripture is occurring in many once Bible

trusting churches. In the United States far more churches than not need revitalization.

The correlation between a deficient recognition of the primacy of Scripture and the

faltering of so many churches is no mere coincidence. The devaluing of God's Word, by

elevating to the level of divine authority mere experiences and invented voices, reveals a

prevalent belief that Scripture alone is not enough. Downgrading the Bible is evidenced

in faltering churches in countless ways.

One of these evidences is the popularity of alternate sources of "revelation"

among professing Christians. A chief danger of a book like Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling*

is that it fosters a widening in the gap between God's people and his authentic Word.[1]

Young's warmly penned "revelation" is driving wedges in abundance for its sales exceed

fifteen million copies. *Jesus Calling* encourages Christians to look beyond Scripture to

receive extrabiblical words supposedly from God and revealed to Young. The unstated

premise of the book is that all necessary for Christian faith and practice is not found in

the Bible; it communicates that more is required. In effect, Young rejects the

Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* while claiming the contrary: "The Bible is, of

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[1]Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), XIII-XIV; Tim Challies, "10 Serious Problems with Jesus Calling," @Challies (Blog), November 11, 2015, https://www. challies.com/articles/10-serious-problems-with-jesus-calling/; Jeremiah Johnson, "That's Not Jesus Calling," Grace to You (Blog), October 24, 2016, https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161024. Challies's is the most thorough of these two critiques.

course, the only inerrant Word of God; my writings must be consistent with that unchanging standard."[2] The packaging of *Jesus Calling* as a daily devotional, claiming to be words from Jesus, however, argues strongly for a dangerous mixing of Scripture and Young's supposed revelations.[3] The revealing aspect of the creation and voluminous sales of *Jesus Calling* is not its existence, for there is false revelation in every era, but the masses of people who favor it over authentic, sufficient, and authoritative Scripture.

If faltering churches are to revitalize, they will require the restoration of great confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. Recent books of varying quality on church revitalization offer a similar prescription and are explored below. Moreover, churches also need clear affirmations of Scripture's primacy, like the BF&M 2000, to cultivate great confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. These clear affirmations are briefly considered as they relate to Scripture's primacy. In addition, churches must require faithful leadership to model great confidence in Scripture's primacy in order to cultivate confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. Various works touching on the role of church leadership in modeling great confidence in Scripture are examined and principles are drawn in the final part of the chapter.

Restoring Biblical Confidence

Examples of how God's Word is exalted as the key means of sanctifying believers are found in recent books targeting the renewal of struggling local churches. The emphasis on increasing confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority as essential to the health of churches is offered in many works; however, its role is diminished in many others. Not improving the functional view of Scripture as a targeted remedy for plateaued and dying churches may further obscure this key issue of waning

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[2]Young, *Jesus Calling*, XIII-XIV.

[3]Jesse Johnson, "Jesus Calling," The Cripplegate (Blog), August 22, 2012, http://thecripple gate.com/ the-jesus-calling/.

confidence in God's Word as both a cause and an effect of declining spiritual health.

The need for the Bible to be confidently believed and adhered to is essential for church health. Consequently, the need to center Scripture in the life of believers is equally important in the life of a black church. Thabiti Anyabwile argues for the restoration of the centrality of Scripture in the revitalization process of the black church in part by making this the theme of the first and largest section of his book *Reviving the Black Church*.[4] The remaining two sections of Anyabwile's book call for using specific scriptural teachings requiring confidence, belief, and adherence to Scripture by church leadership and congregation alike.

Anyabwile contends that the primary issue facing the black church needing new life is what most other non-black churches in need of renewal face: the need to, "Put the Bible and its message back at the center of everything."[5] This call to recentralize Scripture in declining churches is not a mere shifting to simple lip service concerning biblical centrality—and thus biblical sufficiency and authority. For, in agreement with Jonathan Leeman who is credited for the power plant imagery, Anyabwile argues that "the Word of God must become as central to the life and activity of the church as a power plant is to the life and activity of our cities and homes. . . . [It] must course through every aspect of faith and practice, giving energy and life to everything it touches."[6] Notably missing from this book is an emphasis on better marketing techniques, improved gospel packaging, and greater quality special events; all of which are regularly offered in many church revitalization books. Anyabwile contends that "the only thing that brings lasting

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[4]Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim A Sacred Institution* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 13-94.

[5]Ibid., 30.

[6]Ibid., 29. Anyabwile draws from Leman's helpful work. Jonathan Leeman, *Reverberation: How God's Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 47.

life and vigor to the congregation is the Bible."[7] Consistent with Scripture's self-attestation, Anyabwile is confident the Bible is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12), and adequate in the revitalizing task (Heb 4:12).[8]

Counter to Anyabwile's position on the identity of the central issue facing most churches in need of new life is one offered by Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz. In the book *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*, the Schultzes argue it is church practices that push people away and stifle spiritual growth.[9] These authors contend that people are "just suspicious and tired of the way church (as we know it) has been packaged."[10] The Schultzes assert it is not ignorance, unbelief, or neglect of Scripture that thwarts church vitality. The problem with our declining churches, contends the Schultzes, is they are simply *not loving enough*—they lack "radical hospitality," "fearless conversations," "genuine humility," and "divine anticipation."[11] While its reasonably argued that many, if not most, churches needing renewal are insufficiently showing Christ's love, the Schultzes have misdiagnosed the fundamental issue.

Genuine Christian love and its subsequent display is produced by the Holy Spirit as believers abide in Christ (John 15:5-7; Gal 5:22). An essential and foundational means of bearing fruit in Christ is enabled through the Word (John 17:7; Eph 5:16). Connecting God's Word, believers abiding in Christ, and manifested life led Alvin Reid to observe, "[A] correlation between churches eating a healthy diet of Scriptural truth and subsequent spiritual vitality."[12] Generally, God multiplies the disciple conforming to

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[7]Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 247.

[8]Ibid.

[9] Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz, *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore: And How 4 Acts of Love Will Make Your Church Irresistible* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2013), 43, 54.

[10]Ibid., 54.

[11]Ibid., 68.

[12]Alvin Reid, *Revitalize Your Church through Gospel Recovery* (Wake Forest, NC: Gospel Advance Books, 2013), 32.

Scripture.[13] Thus Anyabwile asserts concerning declining churches that "we cannot expect revival while failing to love God's Word"; however, he also acknowledges the need to "love God's people," and "love our neighbors and enemies."[14] Genuine Christ-like love for people is produced in conjunction with a love of the Word.

The books cited above by Anyabwile and the Schultzes represent differing general perspectives on the critical issue of how to best help plateaued and declining churches. One perspective views the issue as one of action and the other views it as one of essence. The first perspective (the Schultzes') views churches in need of new life as merely doing the wrong things or correct things ineffectively. The second perspective (Anyabwile's) views churches in need of revitalization as being in spiritual want and thus required to not only alter activity but transform at the personal and corporate level by God's Word. This distinction of perspectives does not imply adherents to either view see no merit in the other; however, they disagree on what the most *basic and essential* issues are for most churches needing renewal.

Many recent books on church revitalization fall somewhere between the two perspectives stated above. Because each church is different, many, potentially most, need to not only alter numerous practices but also experience Holy Spirit wrought transformation through God's Word.[15] Thom Rainer offers multiple reasons (decreasing pastoral tenures, a lack of corporate prayer, inward focus, and obsessing over facilities, among others) for a church to need renewal.[16] Several of Rainer's reasons have little to do with a church needing renewal from God's Word. Consequently, Rainer's *Autopsy of*

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[13]Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 5-9.

[14]Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 248.

[15]William David Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 3; Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 25-26.

[16]Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 3-82.

a Deceased Church is an example of a work on church revitalization belonging in between the above stated perspectives due to Rainer's emphasis on the varied conditions found in the churches in question. Because this project's focus is on a church primarily needing renewal through God's Word the following overview of recent books on church revitalization acknowledging this need is offered. The offering is not exhaustive and limited to books published after 2016.[17]

A book with a clarion call to return to Scripture's authority and sufficiency as a key means to bring about new life in a church is *Revitalize* by Andrew Davis. Davis goes so far as to place a "low view of Scripture" as the first "mark of a dying or dead church" and asserts that doubting the Bible's sufficiency evidences rebellion against God.[18] In keeping with Anyabwile's view of the greatest fundamental issue facing most churches in need of new life, and counter to the Schultzes' view, Davis may go even farther writing, "The Word of God in its testimony to the saving work of Christ is the only method given to churches by which they *can* be revitalized (italics added)."[19] Davis's argument assumes Scripture's authority and sufficiency,

> Revitalization is nothing less than the transformation of individual human hearts—
> by either conversion or sanctification—on a church wide scale. This work of
> comprehensive salvation from sin comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, and
> Romans 10:17 says saving faith comes by hearing the Word. It doesn't matter what
> other things happen in your church; if the Word of God is not central to the

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[17]There are notable works on church revitalization published before 2017 that should have an enduring effect well beyond their publication date. Due to inherent limitations on this project, some books are excluded. Among the more helpful of these books are the following works: Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2015); Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches*, rev. ed. (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016); Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016); R. D. Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016); Harry L. Reeder III and David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church*, rev. and exp. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008); Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *Nuts & Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2015); Tom Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate, 2016).

[18]Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 42.

[19]Ibid., 79.

revitalization effort, no genuine transformation will ever occur.[20]

This argument shows Davis's belief that new life is more than simply raising the number of attenders in worship to a sustainable level for the perceivable future.[21] Davis contends that "church health cannot be reduced to baptism, attendance, and budget statistics" while acknowledging that "such numbers can be important indicators of health or disease." Therefore, in *Revitalize* Davis uses another source than often-utilized statistics for evaluating church health offering a definition of revitalization emphasizing the Bible's authority and sufficiency. Revitalization is, according to Davis, "The effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health," as defined by the Bible.[22]

Davis's definition of revitalization excludes merely altering methods in an effort to increase numbers, but rather it wholly embraces the core issue: "[the need to genuinely] rely on God's Word, not on techniques."[23] The extent of the relying on God's Word called for involves, "Every ministry and moment of church life."[24] In *Revitalize* Davis maintains that there is an ongoing struggle in many hearts and congregations. This struggle is between those that see the Word of God, when fully embraced, as sufficient for the revitalization of Christ's church, as I do, and those who are primarily committed to a Charles G. Finney like "science' of revival."[25] The difference between these two perspectives can easily be blurred in ministry praxis. For the situation in every church is unique. Many churches need to embrace the sufficiency and authority of Scripture *and*

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[20]Davis, *Revitalize*, 79.

[21]Ibid., 19-20.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., 23.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., 87. Davis quotes Charles G. Finney's *Revival Lectures* to explain what is meant by the concept expressed in the phrases "science of revival": "A revival of religion is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means."

subsequently alter much of their praxis accordingly. Davis counsels, "In every case, true revitalization comes not with man-developed techniques, but with a firm reliance on the sufficiency of the Word of God to transform human hearts."[26] This type of counsel places Davis on the Anyabwile end of the offered perspectives.

A book published after 2016 authored from a perspective consistent with a call to return to Scripture's authority and sufficiency as the foundation for church revitalization is *ReClaimed Church* by Bill Henard.[27] The book, according to Henard, is about, "The application of biblical truth to the church so that the church," is reclaimed like a valuable piece of beautifully restored antique furniture.[28] *ReClaimed Church*'s emphasis is placed on understanding and evaluating the various life stages (birth through adulthood) of a church so as to "reclaim" it, however, it does not merely assume the personal spiritual vitality of the members.[29] Personal feasting on Scripture by individual members is encouraged, as well as, the need for corporate grounding, "In the Word so that its decision making, doctrine, and practice are biblically based" (1 Tim 1:1-11). Henard balances an emphasis on the need to, "Handle more than just spiritual issues," with the essential nature of a biblical, "Foundational spiritual structure" for a health seeking church.[30] Church health reflects, "What we have become on the inside," argues Henard of healthy congregations, "as a result of God's transforming Grace and Power."[31] This transformation is only possible by the Holy Spirit as church members abide in Christ through his Word. Therefore, Henard argues, "Everything that is done in revitalization

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[26]Davis, *Revitalize*, 87.

[27]Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 4.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., xiii.

[30]Ibid., 28-29.

[31]Ibid., 31-32.

must be biblically based."[32] Henard restates this essential concept warning that "in principle and example, everything that the church now does must find its root in Scripture."[33] The revitalizer and eventually his congregation should sincerely embrace the bibliology usefully offered by Henard,

> God's Word is truth (John 17:17). Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), God-breathed, and thereby true, infallible, profitable for teaching, instruction, correction (2 Tim 3:16), and sanctifying into maturity (John 17:17) and stands alone as highest authority, the truth by which all other claims of truth must be evaluated. Therefore, our lives, mission and ministry must be tethered to the unchanging truth of God.[34]

The above offering is sufficient alone to demonstrate that *ReClaimed Church* belongs on the Anyabwile end of the offered perspectives opposite the Schultzes' book.

  Who Broke My Church? by Kent R. Hunter is another book published after 2016 with an appeal to return to Scripture's authority and sufficiency as the key means to bring about revitalization in a church. This book offers seven strategies for church renewal, but none of the strategies are feasible without the spiritual renewal of the church's members with God's Word.[35] Therefore, Hunter's book draws liberally on carefully interpreted and applied Scriptures and the first third of it identifies the problem with plateaued and declining churches as essentially a spiritual one.[36]

  Hunter shares two key concepts often missing in renewal books steeped in a priority of programs philosophy. One idea is that "the health of a church is a reflection of the spiritual vitality of the believers within it."[37] The simple concept is regularly overlooked. "Increased mission and ministry results," Hunter contends, "are not attached

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[32]Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, 152.

[33]Ibid., 161.

[34]Ibid., 197.

[35]Kent R. Hunter, *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival* (New York: Faith Words, 2017), 1-72.

[36]Ibid., 23, 30-31.

[37]Ibid., 3-4.

to a program . . . [but] are tied to individual spiritual growth of Christians in the church."[38] Hunter paraphrases Oswald Chambers' classic *My Utmost for His Highest* to succinctly restate the key idea: "The bearing of fruit is always shown in Scripture to be the visible result of an intimate relationship with Jesus."[39] The basis of an intimate relationship with Jesus is God's Word. A second, but related, concept Hunter gives is the idea of Kingdom culture; it is only caught in Scripture and "fuels a healthy church."[40] Kingdom culture is described by Hunter as Kingdom DNA, made up of biblical values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldview, all of which determine behavior.[41] Renewing churches are filled with Christians who inhale a Kingdom "atmosphere powered" by the inspired Word.[42] Hunter's book is a work belonging on the church "renewal by God's Word" end of the offered perspectives, opposite the "adjust the poor practices" end.

Clear Affirmations of Scripture

Churches need clear affirmations of Scripture's primacy to cultivate and maintain great confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority.[43] The use of confessions of faith and doctrinal statements to both clarify what a congregation believes and elucidate what the Scripture teaches in various areas of faith and practice extends back to early in church history.[44] Confessions are often written in times of tumult and confusion; they serve other purposes also, as William L. Lumpkin notes of the Baptist

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[38]Hunter, *Who Broke My Church?*, 20.

[39]Ibid.; Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992), 6.

[40]Hunter, *Who Broke My Church?*, 118-39.

[41]Ibid., 62-65.

[42]Ibid., 125.

[43]R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Baptist Identity: Is There a Future?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 8.

[44]Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 1, *The History of Creeds*, 6th ed. (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 12-42.

SLC of 1689, "[It was] intended as an apologetic and educative instrument."[45] For the Baptist who produced the SLC, it was a structured summary of what they believed the Bible teaches written in mostly Presbyterian terms but still embraced by them.[46] Eventually confessions were utilized to evaluate the orthodoxy of denominations, churches, and individual believer's faith,[47] to "distinguish the church from the world," and to differentiate various denominations.[48] Philip Schaff concisely writes of the value and usefulness of creeds that "they are summaries of the doctrines of the Bible, aids to its sound understanding, bonds of union among their professors, public standards and guards against false doctrine and practice."[49]

Of the many beliefs addressed in church creeds, the church's views on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture was addressed for various reasons in multiple confessions. Clarifying the authority and sufficiency of Scripture became a great necessity in the theological movements leading to the Protestant Reformation. One example found by Lumpkin from the early fifteenth century in a Lollard tract entitled *The Lanterne of Lizt*, states, "Holy Scripture is the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct; therefore, all should be allowed to study the Bible in their mother tongue."[50] An early Baptist example from the seventeenth century is Thomas Helwys's *A*

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[45]William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 235-36, 239; Daniel L. Akin, "The Future of Southern Baptists: Mandates for What We Should Be in the Twenty-First Century," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 70; Jason K. Allen, "Revisiting the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (I)," Jason K. Allen (Blog), February 29, 2016, https://jasonkallen.com/2016/02/revisiting-the-baptist-faith-message-2000-i/.

[46]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 244-48.

[47]Robert Parham, "BF&M Becomes Litmus Test for Leadership and Employment in Southern Baptist Life." Good Faith Media, October 2, 2000, https://goodfaithmedia.org/baptist-faith-and-message-becomes-litmus-test-for-leadership-and-employment-in-southern-baptist-life-cms-637/.

[48]Schaff and Schaff, *History of Creeds*, 8. Mohler's assertion is similar. (Mohler, "Baptist Identity," 4-5).

[49]Schaff and Schaff, *History of Creeds*, 8. "Creed" and "confession" are interchangeable. Ibid.

[50]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 12.

Declaration of Faith of English People. This confession's article on the Bible covers its

content, functional purpose, sufficiency, and authority,

> That the Scripture of the Old and New Testament are written for our instruction, (2 Tim 3:16) and that we ought to search them for they testify of Christ (John 5:39). And therefore, to be used with all reverence, as containing the Holy Word of God, which is our direction in all things whatsoever [spelling changed].[51]

A later example of the church's views on the priority of Scripture addressed in

a confession is the Baptist SLC of 1689. In the relevant chapter of the SLC to this

project, chapter 1, is a near exact rendering of the Presbyterian WCF of 1647. The SLC

reads, "The holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving

knowledge, faith, and obedience."[52] Both confessions have a section on the nature of

Scripture's authority,

> The authority of the Holy Scripture for which it ought to be believed depends not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; therefore, it is to be received because it is the Word of God [spelling changed].[53]

Additionally, both confessions contain a section affirming Scripture's sufficiency. The

SLC's section reads,

> The whole Counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men [spelling changed].[54]

The WCF has an additional clause in its section. For the purpose of this project, it is

essentially the same affirmation of the sufficiency of Scripture as the SLC and reads,

> The whole Counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's

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[51]Thomas Helwys, "A Declaration of Faith of English People," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed., ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 122.

[52]English Particular Baptist General Assembly, "Second London Confession," in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 248.

[53]Ibid., 250; Westminster Assembly of Divines, "Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, vol. 3, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, 6th ed., ed. Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 602.

[54]English Particular Baptist General Assembly, "Second London Confession," 250.

salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down *in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men [spelling changed and italics added].[55]

The WCF was altered slightly to become the SLC. The SLC had two additional chapters added (on singing psalms and laying on hands) to become the *Philadelphia Confession* of 1742 when it was adopted by Baptist churches in America's first Baptist association—the Philadelphia Association.[56] Scripture's authority and sufficiency were affirmed during the transitions described above. The Word's sufficiency and authority were also affirmed in the referencing of the confessions to the Bible verses on which they are based.

The New Hampshire Confession (NHC) of 1833 was modified by various Baptist groups and reprinted in numerous church manuals. "This confession," Lumpkin asserts, "became the most widely disseminated creedal declaration of American Baptist."[57] The confession would eventually receive an additional ten sections and become the BF&M of 1925, being adopted by the SBC and published as a statement of faith commonly held by Southern Baptists of the time.[58] The NHC starts with the Scriptures in keeping the pattern seen in the WCF and reads,

> We believe the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried [spelling changed].[59]

This widely used Baptist confession affirms both the sufficiency and authority of the Bible. The Scripture's desirability is also affirmed with the use of the term "treasure."

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[55]Westminster Assembly of Divines, "Westminster Confession of Faith," 603. Italics show the different wording of the WCF from the SLC.

[56]Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 348-53. In America, this Confession was commonly referred to as, "The Baptist Confession" well into the nineteenth century. Ibid., 353.

[57]Ibid., 361.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Baptist Convention of New Hampshire, "New Hampshire Confession," in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 361-62.

In 1963, the BF&M of 1925 was changed by adding wording to pointedly address issues then facing the SBC.[60] No language from the 1925 edition was removed from the relevant Article 1 in the 1963 edition except the two-word beginning, "We believe," which emphasized the objective nature of the statement concerning God's Word. There was also an exchange of the word "divine" for "heavenly," removing a circumlocution in favor of greater clarity. Article 1 of the 1963 BF&M reads,

> The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and *is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man*. It is a perfect treasure of *divine* instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. *The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ* [italics indicate additions to the 1925 BF&M].[61]

The stated intention in producing the BF&M of 1963, according to its preamble, was not to allow the existence of two potentially problem portions of Article 1.[62] These portions were used by some to undermine confidence in Scripture's authority and sufficiency regardless of stated intentions.[63] These problem portions of the 1963 edition were necessarily and controversially addressed in a later 2000 correction to the confession.[64] Jason Allen writes of the correction, "it fixed the 1963 slippage, especially on the Word of God."[65] Allen further described the later corrected portions of Article 1 of the 1963

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[60]Thomas C. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 3, *The Modern Era* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007), 326.

[61]Southern Baptist Convention, "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith & Message," Southern Baptist Convention Net, accessed January 19, 2021, https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Baptist Faith & Message Study Committee, "Response to Initial Feedback," Southern Baptist Convention Net, May 26, 2000, https://bfm.sbc.net/committee-response-to-initial-feedback/. The Committee argued, "The Bible is inerrant, infallible, and is our sole authority for faith and practice in the Church. As . . . Hobbs, repeatedly declared to the Convention, this was all implied in the 1963 statement" (Ibid.).

[64]Allen, "Revisiting the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 (I)."

[65]Ibid.

edition as an "inadvertent backdoor in our confessional statement."[66] The considerable effort made to correct these problem portions further demonstrates the intention of the majority of the SBC for the BF&M to affirm the inerrancy, sufficiency, and authority of the Scripture.[67]

The first problem portion addressed in Article 1 of the BF&M concerned the phrase stating that the Bible "is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man."[68] This wording was replaced in the current edition with "is God's revelation of Himself to man," removing the words, "the record of."[69] R. Albert Mohler, who served on the BF&M Study Committee responsible for recommending the change,[70] succinctly provides the reasoning for it: "The Bible is not merely a record of revelation. It is revelation itself."[71] "The Bible is not a fallible witness to the revelation of God"; Mohler further asserts, "It is God's perfectly inspired Word."[72]

The second problem portion addressed in Article 1 of the BF&M concerned the sentence from the prior edition: "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ."[73] Mohler diagnosed the problem with this wording observing that "30 years of abuses and attacks upon the integrity of the Bible made clear that some were using this language to deny the truthfulness and authority of the Word of God."[74] Under

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[66]Jason K. Allen, "Revisiting the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 (II)," Jason K. Allen (Blog), March 7, 2016, https://jasonkallen.com/2016/03/revisiting-the-baptist-faith-and-message-2000-ii/.

[67]Allen, "Revisiting the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 (I)."

[68]Southern Baptist Convention, "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000."

[69]Nettles, *The Modern Era*, 301-2.

[70]Ibid., 288.

[71]R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Scriptures, Baptist Faith & Message Article 1," in *An Exposition from the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, ed. Lawrence Smith (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 1.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Southern Baptist Convention, "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000."

[74]Mohler, "The Scriptures, Baptist Faith & Message Article 1," 1.

the wording of the 1963 edition any Bible passage could be declared inconsistent with the declarer's understanding of Jesus.[75] The result was an errant discrediting of biblical content viewed as unpalatable or embarrassing to modern sensibilities.[76] The discrediting process called into question such Bible teaching as the sinfulness of practicing homosexuality and the exclusivity of saving faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, as well as many other scriptural teachings. According to the BF&M Study Committee, in practice, the driving of "a wedge between the incarnate Word and the written Word," often resulted.[77] The abused terminology was replaced with "all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is himself the focus of divine revelation."[78] The new wording affirms Jesus' centrality in the Bible, but not the subjective hermeneutic exploited earlier.

It is the current BF&M that HBC adopted as its statement of faith. Article 1 of the adopted BF&M addresses the Scriptures and reads,

> The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.[79]

The BF&M affirms the inerrancy, sufficiency, and authority of the Scriptures in a manner consistent with how most post-Reformation churches have for centuries.[80] There is no guarantee, however, that such official affirmations result in a daily trust of God's Word for the average church member. It is clear that the BF&M is targeted in part

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[75]Mohler, "The Scriptures, Baptist Faith & Message Article 1," 2.

[76]Nettles, *The Modern Era*, 302.

[77]Baptist Faith & Message Study Committee, "Response to Initial Feedback."

[78]Southern Baptist Convention, "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000."

[79]Ibid.

[80]David S. Dockery, "The Crisis of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life: Reflections on the Past, Looking to the Future," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 51.

at encouraging daily trust in the Scriptures. This goal is visible in the initial four sentences of Article 1 which describe Scripture's nature, and implying the appropriate response to it, Trust.[81] Scripture is God's Word and therefore trustworthy.

For a confession such as the BF&M to have a genuine benefit to a church which has adopted it, like HBC, certain events must also occur within that church. Without the following activities occurring, the BF&M cannot serve as a means to bolster confidence in the Scripture at HBC. The BF&M must be taught to the members so they truly comprehend what it says and means by what it says.[82] Concerning the BF&M, Jason Allen exhorted a group of SBC leaders, "[teach] it in our churches."[83] For, "The people make the confession," Allen notes of the ability of a confession to solidify beliefs, "but the confession should make the people."[84] It must also be credibly proved to the members how the BF&M summarizes and clarifies what we believe and how those beliefs distinguishes us from other churches and denominations. Therefore, Allen also exhorts SBC leaders to require and guard the BF&M, "in our entities," and to apply it, "in every available way throughout our denomination."[85]

Furthermore, it must be convincingly demonstrated that the confession's content is clearly based on solid biblical footings. To fail in this demonstration is to inadvertently undermine Scripture's authority and sufficiency and thus weaken the church. The confession's intent is to summarize key biblical concepts, strengthening confidence in the Bible, not to replace God's Word. Showing the biblical foundations that a faithful confession is based on provides an extra means to gauge potential

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[81]Dockery, "The Crisis of Scripture in Southern Baptist Life," 51.

[82]Thomas C. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 2, *Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 100.

[83]Allen, "Revisiting the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 (II)."

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid.

theological drift and halt it should it occur.[86]

In addition, the confession must be accessible in formats people are comfortable in using. It should be available digitally and in large print. To fail in this issue of accessibility is to ensure the BF&M is adopted formally, but unembraced and unutilized by church members.

As the above activities are accomplished, it is due to church leadership ensuring they occur. The process of embracing and using a confession is dependent upon faithful leadership; this is also true of confidently embracing the Bible directly.

Modeling Biblical Confidence

"In many circumstances we don't even have mediocre preachers," wrote David Gordon of pulpit ministry, "in the average church on the average Sunday," and in the decade since Gordon's observation, little has improved for "the average Christian family in the average pew."[87] Ironically, R. Albert Mohler notes that "evangelical ministers commonly state that biblical preaching is the hallmark of their calling."[88] Mohler concurs with Gordan's view of today's preaching, observing that "the priority of preaching is simply not evident."[89] Today's poor preaching has birthed the expression, "Sermonettes for Christianettes." Haddon Robinson notes that for many, expository preaching, "Evokes little more than a wide yawn," and Michael Ross concurs attesting, "To the dismal state of preaching," bemoaning the weekly, "Paltry diet being fed to the people of God."[90] Summarizing the consensus, Ross views the current scene as, "A

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[86]Nettles, *The Modern Era*, 215-16.

[87]T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 7, Kindle.

[88]R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Priority of Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando, FL: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002), 1.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20; Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church through Your Pulpit* (San Clemente, CA: Mentor, 2006), 15.

famine in our land for the Word of God, a dying hunger for 'holy manna' (Amos 8:11)."[91]

Given the condition of the average pulpit ministry, one would expect to find evidence of a famine for God's Word manifested in current churches. As scurvy signals a vitamin C deficiency; the signs of prolonged deficient preaching may include numerical decline, prolonged apathy, intense conflicts, short pastoral tenures, few converts, shrinking community impact, and excessive nostalgia amongst other negative effects.[92] "God has been gagged" by deficiencies in the very place where one should expect to hear from him loudly and clearly—church pulpits.[93]

Many churches need new life due partly to preaching they endured, some for decades.[94] A solution is a restoration of the preaching of God's Word.[95] Ross asserts, "True church revitalization can never take place and be maintained unless it is the product of a biblical pulpit."[96] The privilege and responsibility of biblical preaching is a multifaceted task involving the entirety of who the minister is: heart, mind, soul, and giftings. Thus, the obligation to correctly understand, apply, and clearly but passionately deliver God's Word in the Spirit's power is so diverse a task as to leave one unsure where to focus. To revitalize pulpit ministry at HBC, the pastoral modeling of the significance of Scripture is a necessary and chosen focus.

Kaiser concurs (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 7-8).

[91]Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 16.

[92]Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 93.

[93]D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 11.

[94]Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 17-82. This section's narrow focus does not imply that only the aspects addressed are necessary to revitalize preaching for the revitalization of churches.

[95]Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 76, 118.

[96]Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 19. Ross asserts that a declining church "needs a revitalized pulpit" (Ibid.,).

Churches require faithful leadership to model great trust in the Scripture in order to cultivate confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority within the congregation. The primary handler of Scripture observed is the person delivering the sermon during the worship service; he reads, quotes, and references the Bible. Consequently, the preacher is bringing a message in the way he treats the Scripture. Robinson argues, "No observant person would seriously deny that we communicate messages even when we do not speak."[97] This other message is often unintentional and unrecognized. Possible unintentional messages can enhance or diminish a sermon. With enough time a secondary message can become the primary message embraced. Herschel York warns of a secondary message's power, "The way you handle the Word in the pulpit is the way your people will handle the Word in their lives."[98] A message on Scripture's sufficiency goes unembraced if given by one ignoring the Bible, showing a flippant attitude toward it. The ways of communicating must support and complement each other, therefore, how the Bible is handled by a preacher always matters.[99] Don Kistler asks, "Why should . . . [people] turn to it for answers when their leaders don't?"[100] Faithful use of the Word matters no less in a church renewal effort.

One way Scripture's significance is modeled is to make it prominent in worship services. This importance should include the length and percentage of time given in services to hearing God's Word. This prominence is how one obeys the teaching, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Tim 4:13). "We submit that the public reading of God's Word," the Olfords argue, "is equally crucial in our

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[97]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 202.

[98]Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 20.

[99]Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 323.

[100]Don Kistler, "Preaching with Authority," in Kistler, *Feed My Sheep*, 227.

day."[101] John Broadus agrees asserting, "Adequate Scripture reading," is "highly important . . . [in] the worship service."[102] Adequate Bible reading should not be ignored in our gatherings. Scripture reading can be done in nearly limitless places in worship. Healthy worship necessarily involves hearing God's Word, stressing its importance.

Scripture's significance is also modeled by a passionate and authoritative reading of it. The Bible is to be felt and understood by both reader and listener. A garbled reading of God's Word suggests something other than reverence for Scripture. The Olfords, and Broadus concurs, value quality Bible reading instructing preachers "to practice and perfect the public reading of Scripture . . . [as] a regular discipline in your preparation."[103] The Olfords also advise, "When you read or preach the Word of God there should be clarity of articulation, purity of pronunciation, and energy of enunciation," and observe a cause of unclear speech is, "When a person is tentative in what he says, the net result is that of garbled speech."[104] Practice addresses tentativeness. Flat reading inspires no one, so Broadus counted sympathy essential to public Bible reading, "So as not only to understand but promptly and thoroughly to sympathize with the sentiment."[105] The need for emotive Bible reading concurs with John MacArthur's plea: "[avoid] truth without emotions and emotions without truth."[106] Emotionless Bible reading is sinful. Reading a biblical text flatly fails to adequately share it. Conveying the

[101]Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 24.

[102]John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1979.), 320. Broadus does not define his understanding of adequate.

[103]Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 24; Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery*, 319.

[104]Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 25, 238.

[105]Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery*, 319. Sympathy in public reading is explained as "great flexibility of voice to be able to express immediately and exactly every varying shade of feeling."

[106]John MacArthur Jr., "Frequently Asked Questions about Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, John MacArthur Jr. and the Master's Seminary Faculty, ed. Richard Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 344.

weighty wonder of God's Word matters when reading it. To avoid stumbling and unemotive readings, identify the texts long before their use. Ample practice time is needed to encourage fervent authoritative Bible reading and display Scripture's weight.

Scripture's significance is also modeled by a clear grounding of all sermons to their text. Textually unrooted sermons compelled York to warn, "No matter how great a communicator one may be, if the content of the sermon is not congruent with the Word of God, it cannot and will not achieve anything of eternal value."[107] The lack of a connection of a sermon (in all its constituent parts) to its biblical text communicates unwanted concepts.[108] Among these undesired concepts is that what the text actually says and means is irrelevant for man's opinions matter more. Clear linkage of the sermon and biblical text is inadequately referred to by Vines as, "A high degree of similarity between text and sermon."[109] The textless grounding of sermons is why Kaiser issued, "A loud call for preaching that is totally biblical in that it is guided by God's Word in its origins, production, and proclamation."[110] Derek Thomas concurs by using the 1645 *Directory of Public Worship of God*: "When raising a point from the text, . . . ensure that 'it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text.' and 'that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence.'"[111] Agreeing, Richard Mayhue explains the sermon must find, "Its sole source in Scripture . . . [and] is extracted from Scripture through careful exegesis," and further explains that sermon, "Preparation interprets Scripture in its normal sense and its context, . . . [in delivery it] clearly explains the original God-

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[107]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 77.

[108]John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 129-32.

[109]Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 90.

[110]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 19.

[111]Derek Thomas, "Expository Preaching: Keep Your Eye on the Text," in Kistler, *Feed My Sheep*, 61.

intended meaning of Scripture, . . . [and] applies the Scriptural meaning for today."[112]

"Preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2), not simply about the Word or what is generally true of it. The key difference as explained by Thomas is, "not only that [the preacher] is to preach from the Bible, but that he is to expound the particular passage he is preaching."[113] Explicitly grounding a sermon in its biblical text Alan Stibbs calls, "The business of the preacher;" for the preacher, "Is to stick to the passage chosen and set forth exclusively what it has to say or suggest."[114] Stibbs further offers a reason for sticking to the text, "So that the ideas expressed and the principles enunciated . . . plainly come out of the written Word of God, and have its authority for their support rather than just the opinion or enthusiasm of their human expositor."[115] If preaching, as Stibbs describes it, is unpracticed the result is a loss of confidence in Scripture's authority and sufficiency; an effect to which he alludes. In a church laboring to gain merely plateaued status, undermining the Bible's nature is a real error with deadly costs. To avoid this error, and address its affects, sermons must be deliberately and clearly ground in the text. The point of the passage is the point of the sermon, with all subpoints deriving directly from its text. Thus, showing clear linkage and an explicit basis for the whole sermon in its text. When preaching, pastors must embrace the idea of having nothing of eternal value to offer but God's Word. This knowledge drives a preacher to embrace the Word, to study, apply, and preach only it. A desired result of expository preaching is to display Scripture's overall significance as its specific truths are proclaimed from a biblical text in specific sermons.

Scripture's weight is also modeled by preaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). One can preach expository messages and not address portions of the Bible,

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[112]Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in MacArthur and the Master's Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 13.

[113]Thomas, "Expository Preaching," 63.

[114]Alan M. Stibbs, *Expounding God's Word* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960), 17.

[115]Ibid.

for a finite sum of sermons are preached in a lifetime. One could also preach expository messages and skip unpleasant texts; each individual sermon may be expository and embrace Stibbs's description of the preacher's task. Thomas notes it is possible, "To preach expository messages *textually*—in Romans this week, in the Psalms the next, and in Haggai the following."[116] But skipping parts of biblical books robs listeners of a full and healthy grasp of the Bible. In the concept of sharing God's whole counsel, one has past, but not abandoned, merely considering one sermon; the full pulpit ministry is involved. "There is something about the very discipline of exposition" Thomas argues, "that makes it impossible not to pick up the threads of an argument that begins in a previous chapter and runs on for several more."[117] Preaching God's whole counsel is linking various parts of Scripture, proclaiming all of the text as it appears. This telling is done in manageable portions as an endless process. In a sense preaching God's whole counsel is thinking his thoughts after him and then telling his revealed thoughts. MacArthur describes the humbling concept as "retaining the thoughts of the Spirit."[118] This retaining is preaching Romans chapters 1-8 and 9-16 for the Holy Spirit inspired all of it. Preaching God's whole counsel means preaching Canaan's conquest and Christ's cross; both have value.

A specific way Scripture's significance is shown in preaching the entirety of God's counsel is by it exposing his people to the full range of biblical, "Interests and concerns."[119] Every subject the text raises is covered. Ignoring difficult or disliked texts is avoided. Ross laments the lack of such preaching, "Congregations needing

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[116]Thomas, "Expository Preaching," 84.

[117]Ibid.

[118]John MacArthur Jr., introduction to *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, John MacArthur Jr. and the Master's Seminary Faculty, ed. Richard Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), xv.

[119]J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 234-35.

revitalization often suffer from decades of not being taught well in basic ecclesiology, historic doctrines or the call to true discipleship."[120] Without the obligation to preach all the Bible entire subjects can, and do, go neglected with sins such as racism, and gluttony going unaddressed. Favorite subjects are regularly revisited and important subjects neglected when there is no commitment to expositional preaching in the largest, God's whole counsel embracing sense. Stott's council that "the more we feel it necessary . . . to dwell on the judgment of God upon sin, the more we need also to dwell on his mercy toward sinners," though sound, is superfluous for a pastor's pulpit ministry.[121] The error of favoring subjects is evaded by the expository preaching of God's whole counsel.

Scripture's significance is also seen in preaching God's whole counsel by exposing his people to the full biblical scope and molding them in the process. The exposure ensures God's people hear John and Obadiah proclaimed; they feast on Romans and Jude. If one believes all Scripture is, "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16), then one must value hearing all parts of God's Word and having it shape one's ability to read, study, and interpret it. This shaping is often achieved unwittingly. "Necessary principles of sound interpretation can be absorbed, almost by osmosis," Thomas writes of the shaping of people through lengthy contact with expository preaching by way of, "Repeated forays into relatively obscure passages from week to week in the pulpit."[122] Thomas further notes that plain exposure weekly to the biblical text, "Cannot but cement form and content."[123]

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[120]Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 59.

[121]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 312.

[122]Thomas, "Expository Preaching," 87.

[123]Ibid.

Testifying of this result, Thomas notes the joy of hearing, "Someone bring something out of a text that reflects (albeit unwittingly) what they have heard done countless times."[124]

Expository preaching is key to honoring God's whole counsel and teaching others to as well. A pastor can show his trust in God's Word by preaching it; for how will people grow in confidence in the Bible if their leader shows none? A pastor must faithfully model how to handle the Bible. In so doing, he displays the weight of God's Word. Because Ross correctly argues, "True church revitalization," cannot occur, "unless it is the product of a biblical pulpit," how pastors use the Bible is key to renewal.[125] God's Word in the pulpit is on public display; it must be reverently trusted, obeyed, and proclaimed or its soon forsaken. A pastor feeds his sheep the Bible and sees their souls thrive or he offers cheap alternatives and sees their souls sicken.

For failing churches, such as HBC, to experience genuine renewal, they require the return of a great confidence in the Bible's authority and sufficiency. Many new books on church revitalization prescribe exalting God's Word as the essential means of targeting renewal in unhealthy congregations. Beyond the works reviewed above advising the nurturing of confidence in Scripture, numerous churches since the Reformation have utilized official affirmations of the primacy of God's Word to aid in growing and sustaining trust in it. The contemporary affirmation adopted, but not necessarily fully understood and embraced, by HBC is the 2000 BF&M. Therefore, in a case like HBC's, it is essential to link the BF&M to the desired growing confidence in Scripture's sufficiency and authority stated in it. The needed linkage is partly attempted in and fundamental to the course and curriculum portion of this ministry project at HBC. Moreover, churches needing revitalization must require that faithful leadership model, in numerous ways, a prodigious trust in God and his Word. This modeling is utilized at

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[124]Thomas, "Expository Preaching," 87.

[125]Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 19.

HBC and is fundamental in the creation and implementation of a course and its curriculum intended to cultivate trust in the Bible's authority and sufficiency. A growing confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority in a church, like HBC, is a desired result of the prescribed faithful modeling of great trust in God's Word. Inherent to HBC's confidence in Scripture is the potential to guide the direction of the church toward a renewal of health or toward the continuance of debilitating sickness. The issue of church revitalization and its necessary dependence on Scripture is one of life and death.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Pre-Implementation Phase

On January 14, 2020 the Missions Committee at Hopewell Baptist Church (HBC) met for its monthly meeting. This committee is one of only two extant and is responsible for the various ministries of the church. During this meeting I shared the idea of having a two-month emphasis on building Bible confidence with HBC's key leadership. As pastor, I proposed that we conduct this emphasis in the Fall of 2020. The idea was embraced partly because HBC previously experienced two different well received lengthy periods of focus the prior year—one on "repentance toward God" and one on "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Also, much of HBC's leadership saw the need to increase Bible confidence. This meeting was the beginning of the implementation of my ministry project to cultivate greater confidence in the Bible resulting in a more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among adult attenders at HBC. After this meeting, I began to introduce the coming ministry focus in numerous settings as often as possible, as well as formerly mentioning it from the pulpit.

Project Goals

I set three goals in order to achieve this project's purpose. One goal aimed to define an objective baseline of initial confidence in the Bible among HBC's adult congregants from which to measure the effectiveness of the work concerning other goals. The second goal targeted the development of a multi-formatted course curriculum on the sufficiency and authority of the Scripture at HBC. The third goal went a step farther aiming at the execution of the multi-formatted course on the authority and sufficiency of

the Bible at HBC as a means to increase confidence in Scripture. This goal was one that the others worked towards. These goals were enumerated as follows:

1. Assess the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adults attending HBC.

2. Develop an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum that will equip the adults attending HBC to place greater confidence rooted in knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority.

3. Increase confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in adults attending HBC.

Goal 2 Implementation Phase

The order of goal implementation followed a logical progression. Because the created curriculum is targeted at increasing Bible confidence *rooted in knowledge* it was unnecessary to wait on the results of the initial Bible Confidence Survey (BCS) to start the lengthy process of curriculum creation.[1] Therefore, the first goal to be implemented was the second: "develop an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum that will equip the adults attending HBC to place greater confidence rooted in knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority."[2] This four month phase started on February 2 and continued in mostly two-week increments marking the first part of goal 2 enactment.

Curriculum Creation

The theme of the first two sessions I created was some of Jesus' testimony on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. These two sessions were created from February 2-29, explicitly rooted in Matthew 4:1-4, and largely drawn from the content of the first Bible passage covered in chapter 2 of this project. The content of both sessions was reworked into hearer friendly formats. The first sermon (Matt 3:1-3) focused on the idea that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and the true embodiment of believing Israel,

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[1]See appendix 1.

[2]See appendix 4.

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successfully models faithfulness to God during temptation by believing and obeying Scripture. The second session (Matt 4:4) focused on the fact that Jesus Christ models triumphing over temptation by knowing, believing, trusting, and obeying Scripture.

I created the next three sessions March 1- April 11 and gave them the theme of some of the testimony of two psalmists concerning the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The third and fourth sessions were plainly rooted in Psalm 19:7-11 and mostly drawn from material in the second Bible passage covered in chapter 2. The content of these two sessions was rewritten into more hearer friendly formats. The third session focused on the idea that Scripture is the written supernatural, desirable, authoritative, and sufficient revealed will of God. The fourth session focused on Scripture having many substantial desirous benefits for the one who believes and obeys it. The fifth session was rooted in Psalm 119:97-104 and primarily drawn from material on the third Bible passage covered in chapter 2. This session's content was rewritten into a sermon friendly format. It focused on Scripture as the written authoritative and sufficient revealed will of God that can have multiple significant desirous benefits for the one who believes and obeys it.

The sixth session's theme was a brief survey of some historic confessions of faith and focused on the testimonies of prior generations concerning the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This lesson was created April 12-25 and primarily examined how our predecessors in the Christian faith affirmed Scripture so as to encourage us to trust its sufficiency and authority. The session was rooted in the historic confessions covered in, and primarily drawn from, the material of the second section of this project's chapter 3 by rewriting it into a lesson friendly format.

The theme of the next sessions was apostolic testimony concerning Scriptures' sufficiency and authority. I created both of these sessions April 26-May 23. One session was rooted in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and primarily drawn from material on the fourth Bible passage covered in chapter 2. The content of this session was grounded in Scripture and rewritten into a sermon friendly format. This sermon focused on the idea that the

sufficient and authoritative God-breathed Word can be believed and trusted to equip us for all that is needed for salvation and a life of good works. The final session was plainly rooted in Hebrews 4:11-13. Unlike the other sessions, I created this one without reference to chapter 2 by focusing on the sufficient and authoritative Word working in the Christian to produce faithful endurance so that we may be unashamed at the judgment.

COVID-19 Changes

The week of July 19-25, I reworked four of the sessions. HBC could not meet in a small group setting and properly social distance, a key safety issue for our highly vulnerable attenders. Given the Office of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Kentucky's relevant COVID-19 restrictions, HBC's options for meeting were now greatly limited. These limitations were ongoing and included specific state restrictions, HBC's inability to sterilize multiple areas repeatedly (including restrooms, classrooms, and everything in between), and the general comfort of the perceived level of safety, and thus willingness to attend, of potential participants. Now lessons 2, 4, 6, and 8 were prepped for preaching in HBC's large sanctuary as part of our safely social distanced Wednesday evening services. Having tweaked the format of the classroom lessons into sermons, I no longer had a multi-format curriculum. Nevertheless, I attempted to make the best of the difficult situation, even though the loss of the multi-formatting negated efforts to mitigate inherent limits caused by participants' differing learning styles.[3]

Curriculum Evaluations

The second part of the goal implementation process was the curriculum review. Using the approved Curriculum Evaluation Rubric, the formal evaluation process lasted two weeks—July 26 through August 15.[4] This process was preceded by identifying a

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[3]See the third limitation in chapter 1.

[4]See appendix 2 for the Curriculum Evaluation Rubric.

competent panel consisting of ministers and elders from other Southern Baptist churches who volunteered via email to participate. With their consent the eight-part curriculum, a curriculum outline, and the previously approved rubric was emailed to each of them. All panelists had either extensive pastoral ministry experience, graduate theological education, or both. The six-person panel was ensured anonymity to encourage honest evaluations and were asked to mail their unsigned completed rubrics back to me in envelopes lacking return addresses.

Within two weeks of emailing the curriculum, I received all the completed rubrics in the mail. Half of the rubrics provided comments of various types and quality in the designated places on the marked rubrics. I considered the second goal successfully met, since a minimum of ninety percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level on all the applicable rubrics. I then shifted to the implementation of my second goal. Overall, 97.9 percent of the curriculum's evaluation criterion was evaluated by the panel to be "sufficient" or "exemplary." The sixth sermon received 93.7 percent "sufficient" or better and was rated the lowest. The second and fifth sermons both received 100 percent "sufficient" or better and were evaluated the highest. If the initial feedback had yielded less than ninety percent, I was prepared to make revisions in accordance with the panel's evaluations; however, revision was unnecessary. Thus, I proceeded to the next phase.

Goal 1 Implementation Phase

I began the formal implementation of my first goal while waiting on the curriculum evaluations to return. This first goal was to "assess the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adults attending HBC." I created the BCS, a multiple-choice thirty question Likert scale survey with responses

ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for use in meeting this first and upcoming third goals.[5]

I bought ink pens, reams of paper, and a black ink cartridge. I then printed copies of the approved BCS and stapled a blank sheet of paper on the back of each survey. I also included a sheet of paper with either a large number one or two printed on the front to aid in easily differentiating pre-course and post-course surveys. The sheets of paper bracketing each survey facilitated anonymity and, hopefully, encouraged honesty.

Throughout the month of July and until August 23, I pointedly shared with the people of HBC that my ministry project, or our emphasis on the Bible, was approaching. I generally provided a brief overview of what this ministry project involved so that the BCS was not suddenly sprang upon anyone at HBC. On August 23 before the Sunday service began, I gave the full explanation of what was taking place. It was then that the BCS and ink pens were made available to the attenders and the agreement to participate was read aloud to the congregation. I offered a gentle encouragement to take part. The need to participate in all the sessions and the ability to use the online option, if needed, was explained and anonymity was earnestly promised. The need for honesty and not "telling the preacher what you think he wants to hear" was also emphasized. Most attenders took a survey home with them. This same process was repeated on August 30 and the first completed pre-course surveys were anonymously returned and placed in a designated spot at the back of the church. I retrieved all surveys following the service, placing them in a labeled manilla folder. On September 6, I offered the final chance to participate in the ministry project by instructing attenders as described above. Each participant filled out their BCS before the worship service began, placing it in the designated spot where I later collected them as described above.

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[5]See appendix 1.

The results of the pre-course BCS were entered in to a preformatted Excel spreadsheet by participant-chosen Personal Identification Number (PIN) for later comparison to the post-course survey results. I painstakingly triple checked the data entries for accuracy. I then returned to the task a day later with refreshed eyes and checked my data entries a fourth time. The numerical value for each response ranged from 1 to 6. For most responses, "strongly agree" was the most desired and was given the numerical value of 6. For items 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 17, "strongly disagree" was the most desired response and the assigned numerical value was reversed from the other responses accordingly.

This pre-course BCS gauged at least thirty-three percent of adult attenders' initial level of professed confidence in and use of the Scriptures as required. The average attendance at HBC for the month of August was thirty-two. The total number of pre-course surveys collected was twenty-five, a number exceeding thirty-three percent of thirty-two. Therefore, this goal was considered met for the BCS provided the clear pre-course survey data needed for comparison to the post-course survey data to be gathered for the third goal.

Goal 3 Implementation Phase

My third goal was to "increase confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in adults attending HBC." This third goal had three key parts—curriculum implementation, administering the post-course BCS, and conducting post-course interviews and analysis.

More COVID-19 Changes

An additional project change was brought on by the COVID-19 related restrictions from the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Office of the Governor. Originally,

the curriculum was intended to be taught over an eight-week timespan.[6] This timespan

would allow for a sermon in our Sunday morning worship service every other week and

two classes on Sundays (morning and evening) and one on Wednesday (evening)

covering the subsequent lesson in the alternating weeks. The idea was to allow no gaps at

HBC in the Scriptural emphases. Under COVID-19 restrictions only the Sunday morning

sermon and Wednesday evening class were doable and only if we met in the sanctuary for

reasons previously stated. Consequently, in order to maintain a schedule that minimized

the gaps in our emphasis on building confidence in Scripture, thus keeping the spirit of

what was intended in the original eight-week timespan, I shifted the curriculum

implementation to a four-week timespan. I now planned for HBC to meet every

consecutive Sunday for the applicable sermon (sessions 1, 3, 5, and 7) and every

consecutive Wednesday for the respective sermon (sessions 2, 4, 6, 8). My reluctancy to

preach the sixth lesson as a Sunday morning sermon, for it was a historical overview of

confessions of faith and, therefore, clearly did not meet the biblical mandate to "preach

the Word" (2 Tim 4:2), was also a consideration in how I chose to proceed.

Preaching Through the Curriculum

The first part of my implementation of the third goal began on Sunday,

September 6, a Labor Day weekend, and I planned to continue it until Wednesday,

September 30. In the days before each session, I practiced reading the relevant biblical

texts, generally reviewed my sermon notes, and prayed fervently for unction as I prepared

to preach through the curriculum I created. I placed a box of Holman Christian Standard

Bibles, bought by HBC for attenders who might need a Bible they could understand, in a

conspicuous place at the entrance to the sanctuary. Additionally, I presented a stack of

English Standard Version Bibles for the same purpose.

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[6]See the second delimitation in chapter 1.

In the first week of implementing my third goal, I preached the first lesson, Matthew 4:1-3, on Sunday morning (September 6) and the second lesson, Matthew 4:4, on Wednesday evening (September 9). For both services, as usual, I arrived at the church building and unlocked it several hours before their scheduled start time. I used the time to pray, review my notes, practice reading the call to worship and the other Scripture reading. I also curtailed distractions beforehand by ensuring the room temperature was comfortable and the lighting, audio, and video equipment were all in working order. The theme for the first week's two closely linked sessions was Jesus' testimony on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

On Sunday the scriptural call to worship and later Bible reading in the service were John 6:60-69 and Isaiah 40:6-8 respectively. In the sermon, I presented the setting of Matthew 4:1-4 and emphasized both Jesus' role as the modeler of how to confront temptation with Scripture and his role as the fulfiller of all righteousness who successfully believed and obeyed the sufficient and authoritative Word of God. The focus of the sermon was on making clear to all, including the twenty-nine adults gathered, that Jesus *exemplified* how to view and utilize Scripture.

On Wednesday I preached pointedly on exactly *how* Jesus triumphed over temptation—by knowing, believing, trusting, and obeying the sufficient authoritative Word of God. The week's final sermon ended with a plea to the twenty people physically present to follow the example of Jesus by confidently trusting God's sufficient authoritative Word and by reading Matthew 7:24-29. It appeared that both messages were received soberly by those present.

In the second week of implementing my third goal, I preached on David's prized jewel from Psalm 19:7-11 in both the Sunday morning (September 13) and the Wednesday evening services (September 16). This week's messages were part of a theme focused on the testimony of the psalmists concerning the sufficiency and authority of

God's Word. For both of these services, I went through my usual preservice routine as described above.

The Sunday Scriptural call to worship and later Bible reading were Deuteronomy 8:1-3 and Ephesians 5:25-27 respectively. On Sunday I presented the context of Psalm 19, the six synonyms for Scripture found in the text, and the Word's ten descriptions. The focus of the sermon was on making clear to the thirty-nine adults gathered what Scripture is.

On Wednesday I preached on the six potential benefits that may be gained from God's Word mentioned in the text. This sermon focused on what Scripture can do because of what it is. This last message ended with a plea to the nineteen adults physically present to confidently trust God's sufficient authoritative Word and benefit. Based on the congregation's reaction during and after the sermons, I tentatively concluded the third and fourth messages in the course were well received.

On the Sunday of the third week of implementing my third goal, I preached from Psalm 119:97-104 to twenty-eight adult attenders in the Sunday morning (September 20) service. The theme was the same as the prior two sessions—the testimony of a psalmist concerning the sufficiency and authority of God's Word. I prepared for this service in the customary way I described above.

The scriptural call to worship and the Bible reading prior to the prayer of intercession were Psalm 1 and Hebrews 4:6-13 respectively. The message described two additional synonyms not found in Psalm 19 and additional benefits detailed in the sessions specific text. This one message from Psalm 119:97-104 covered both what the Word of God is and what it can do because of what it is. The session was closed with a series of reflection encouraging questions: "Are you feasting on God's Word? Do you know and experience the benefits it offers?" Even with the mandatory social distancing and mask wearing, the adult attenders seamed to respond positively to the sermon and to discuss it among themselves as they departed.

On the Wednesday (September 23), during the implementation of my third goal, I ran into a problem. The city of Louisville, Kentucky in which HBC is located, was placed under an official state of emergency due to anticipated civil unrest. A 9:00 p.m. mandatory curfew was initiated. While HBC was officially exempt from the curfew as a house of worship, after consulting our local law enforcement (Jeffersontown Police Department), HBC's leadership unanimously decided to cancel our Wednesday evening service out of an abundance of caution. Thus, the state of emergency necessitated the postponing of the sixth session, a brief survey of relevant portions of key historical confessions, until Wednesday, September 30.

In the planned fourth week of implementing my third goal, I preached on 2 Timothy 3:15-17 in the Sunday morning (September 27) service. The theme was the testimony of an apostle concerning the sufficiency and authority of God's Word. I prepared for this service in the manner described previously. The main idea of the message was that the sufficient and authoritative God-breathed Word can be believed and trusted to equip us for all that is needed for salvation and a life of good works. The scriptural call to worship and the Bible reading portions of the service were Proverbs 1:1-7 and 2 Peter 1:16-21 respectively. The twenty-five adult attenders seamed to respond favorably to the sermon's content.

On the final Wednesday (September 30) of the implementation of my third goal, I taught through the previously postponed lesson—a brief survey of historical confessions—in the evening service to a gathered crowd of seventeen adults. The theme of the session was the testimonies of past generations on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The thesis of my historical survey was that the affirmations of Scripture by those who proceeded us in the faith can encourage us to trust its sufficiency and authority. During the session I explained both what a confession is and its purpose. I handed out a simplified copy of my teaching manuscript which I printed the day before the session. Among the germane parts of the confessions reviewed were the Westminster, the Second

London, the New Hampshire, and all three versions of the Baptist Faith and Message. The majority of adult attenders appeared to appreciate the overview of the relevant parts of the key confessions having never heard one before.

In the eighth and final session of the implementing of my third goal, I preached on Hebrews 4:11-13 in the Sunday morning (October 4) service. The theme, like the seventh session, was apostolic testimony on the sufficiency and authority of God's Word. The main idea of the message was that God's Word works in us to produce faithful endurance so that believers may be unashamed at the judgment. I prepared for this service in my usual manner, as described above. The scriptural call to worship and the Bible reading portions of the service were John 20:24-31 and Philippians 1:1-6 respectively. The twenty-seven adult attenders seamed to favorably receive the sermon's content. This first part of the execution of the final goal was met once I preached through all eight sessions of the Bible Confidence Curriculum.

Administering the BCS Again

The second part of implementing the third goal began at the end of my Sunday, October 4 sermon. I then made available to adult attenders at HBC the BCS again. It remained available until Sunday, October 18, the due date to have the surveys returned. All of the instruction given when the pre-course BCS was made available matched the instruction given when the post-course BCS was made available; however, a few new pieces were added. I reminded people to use the same PIN on the second survey that they used on their first. Moreover, I instructed participants to leave off their PIN if they had not participated, either online or in person, in all eight of the course sessions. I repeated these instructions each time the church gathered until the due date for the post-course BCSs. A list of the PINs used on the pre-course surveys was provided to minimize participants potentially forgetting their already created PIN. I received twenty-one matched, and therefore useable, BCSs by the due date. I ended up not using four pre-

course surveys because they lacked a matching post-course survey as determined using the participant-chosen PINs.

I entered the data from the usable post-course BCSs on the same prepared Excel datasheet I used for the pre-course BCS results. I meticulously and repeatedly checked the data entries for accuracy and then analyzed the results. This part of the third goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-course BCS scores: $t_{(20)} = -5.595$, $p < .0001$. The positive statistically significant difference argues for increased confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in the participants.

Interviews

Once I collected the final BCSs, I measured this goal's success further by interviewing five willing respondents who professed an increase of Bible confidence between their pre-course and post-course levels.[7] Those interviewed responded to my verbal request of the congregation for a short interview with any who were willing and felt they had a greater confidence in Scripture after the post-course survey was collected. This short interview process started with handing in writing and then reading to the participant the pre-approved introductory statement and was conducted at HBC immediately following services on Sunday, October 11 and Wednesday, October 14. All responses were written as close to verbatim as my limited hand writing ability allowed and later typed. The interviews were evaluated and themes summarized resulting in additional insights into the factors that led to the changes in Bible confidence.

The interviews enabled the identification and greater understanding of the factors that led to the changes evidenced in the post-course survey results. Factors of

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[7]See appendix 3. To keep the required, and promised (see first limitation in chapter 1), anonymity needed to encourage honesty, respondents were interviewed based merely on their willingness to participate and a profession of increased confidence in the Scriptures.

particular interest referred to by the participants were the shared experience of going through the sessions as a congregation and the benefit of a prolonged emphases specifically on the Scripture. In addition, an increased understanding of the nature of God's Word was also credited for influencing the cultivation of confidence by those interviewed. Generally, this increased understanding is evidenced by the rise in the post-course BCS mean (116.52380) as compared to the pre-course BCS mean (104.90476). Specifically, the increased understanding of the nature of God's Word as uniquely inspired and, therefore, sufficient and authoritative was referred to by multiple anonymously interviewed persons. This last part of the execution of the final goal was successfully met once the interviews were conducted, summarized, and analyzed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to cultivate a greater confidence in the Bible resulting in more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among adult attenders at HBC in Louisville, Kentucky. I established three goals to fulfill the purpose and all three of the established goals were met and measured through the predetermined means. The conclusion of the project produced a successful assessment of the adult attenders' current level of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. Moreover, it produced a curriculum designed to cultivate greater confidence rooted in knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority that was deemed sufficient by an experienced panel. The conclusion of the project also produced greater confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority. Therefore, the purpose of cultivating greater confidence in the Bible resulting in more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among adult attenders at HBC was achieved.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This ministry project boosted the spiritual life of Hopewell Baptist Church

(HBC). The emphasis upon cultivating confidence in the sufficiency and authority of

God's Word embedded as the core and purpose in this project strengthened the faith of

HBC's regular attenders through implementing its three goals. The result was the laying

of a foundation at HBC for more faithful reliance on Scripture in all areas of life and

ministry.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The explicit purpose of this project was to cultivate greater confidence in the

Bible resulting in a more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among

adult attenders at HBC in Louisville, Kentucky. This purpose was worth pursuing for

greater confidence in the Bible was needed by the regular attenders at HBC as their pre-

course surveys demonstrated and I otherwise suspected.

Immediately noticeable to me, and of particular interest, from the pre-course

surveys was the conspicuous gap between the respondents' confessions concerning the

believed status of Scripture and the utilization of it. Generally, this gap was present in

most of the twenty-five pre-course surveys. One typical respondent indicated that they

were in strong agreement with the statements, "The Bible tells us all that God requires us

to know and do." and "I am convinced that God has spoken to mankind in the Bible in a

way that he has not spoken through any other book." This same typical respondent also

indicated disagreement with the statements, "I often intentionally memorize Scripture"

and "I am likely to enjoy meditating on a passage of Scripture this week." Moreover, they also disagreed with the statements, "If I missed a regular Bible reading today, then I would feel the loss" and "I thoroughly enjoy reading the Bible."

Consequently, to increase the Bible confidence of regular attenders at HBC in any meaningful manner may prove a, if not *the*, key to revitalizing the church through an increase in its and its constituent members fruitful ministry resulting from such an increase. This project was successfully accomplished partly through the evaluation of the attenders at HBC's confidence in Scripture and was further accomplished through the creation and preaching of a curriculum designed to increase this confidence rooted in knowledge. The result of the implementation of the curriculum was a more faithful reliance upon the Bible in all areas of life and ministry by the participants who showed a statistically significant change in their confidence in and reliance on the Bible.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project was measured by three goals. The first two goals served the third and ultimate goal. Regardless, every goal had merits of its own.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adults attending HBC. This goal was successfully met by administering to adult attenders at HBC the Bible Confidence Survey (BCS) that I designed to evaluate the current state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. The quality of the BCS could have been better, or rather more precise, and its questions placed in a more logical order. Possibly, the thirteenth question was worded poorly. Even with the BCS's weaknesses, it was adequate for the accomplishment of this goal. The process of surveying would have been improved had every last adult attender participated in this survey, however, the initial number surveyed, twenty-five, was sufficient to give me the needed Bible confidence baseline. The COVID-19 restrictions

meant that the HBC adult attenders available for surveying consisted of a different group of people than it otherwise would have without the existing restrictions. Thus, my Bible confidence baseline may have been altered by this uncontrollable factor.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum to equip the adults attending HBC to place greater confidence rooted in knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. The fashioned curriculum was meticulously grounded in Scripture and strategically aimed at cultivating greater confidence through knowledge in the Bible's sufficiency and authority. The initial multi-formatted aspect of the course curriculum had to be modified into a single formatted curriculum due to limits upon how, and therefore when, HBC could gather to utilize it brought about by COVID-19 related restrictions. This second goal was accomplished when the panel of six experienced and theologically educated pastors anonymously reviewed the course curriculum rating each session as either, at a minimum of ninety percent, "sufficient" or "exemplary" using the approved curriculum evaluation rubric.

Goal 3

The third goal was to increase confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in adults attending HBC. This third goal was multifaceted. It was successfully met in three distinct stages.

The first stage of the third goal was accomplished when I preached to the adult attenders at HBC the course curriculum from the second goal designed to increase confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority. This preaching of the curriculum occurred on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings over the span of just over one month—September 6, 2020 through October 4, 2020.

The second stage of the third goal was met when the BCS, created before the execution of the first goal, was re-administered to the regular adult attenders who had

participated in all eight sessions of the created Bible confidence curriculum. This re-administering of the BCS was carried out over the span of two weeks. Consequently, this process allowed for analyzing the pre-course and post-course surveys to determine if the preaching of the course curriculum increased confidence rooted in knowledge of the Bible's sufficiency and authority in participating adults attending HBC. Based on a t-test for dependent samples, there was a statistically significant difference in the participants responses from pre-course and post-course BCS scores ($t_{(20)}$ = -5.595, p < .0001) indicating the second stage of the second goal was successfully achieved.[1]

The third stage of the third goal was accomplished when, subsequent to the re-administering of the BCS, I interviewed five volunteers using the approved questions.[2] These volunteers professed an increase of confidence in Scripture's sufficiency and authority after attending the eight sessions. I evaluated the answers and summarized relevant themes to gain additional insights and complete this final stage of the last goal.

Of interest among the ideas expressed by the interviewed was the significance of participating in the course as a congregation. The benefit of receiving teaching on the nature of Scripture was similarly referenced by several of those interviewed. One person asserted, "It was most meaningful to me to learn how God's Word is no less important because it is in writing." They further confessed, "I have always had questions about how God 'speaks' through writings and this series on the Bible helped me" with those questions. The potential benefits to be gained from God's Word was also referred to by a participant; as was the general faith affirming nature of the eight sessions.

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[1]The following results are for the t-test—paired two sample for means. The pre-course BCS. mean was 104.9047619 and the post-course BCS mean was 116.5238095. The pre-course variance was 325.1904762 and the post-course variance was 203.8619048. The observations were 21 for both pre-course and post-course surveys. The Pearson correlation was 0.851544543 and the hypothesized mean difference was 0. The df was 20 and the t Stat was -5.595535578. The P(T<=t) one-tail was .000000888455 and the t Critical one-tail was 1.724718243.

[2]See appendix 3.

Strengths of the Project

At times the execution of this ministry project seemed to face one obstacle after another—a global pandemic and civil unrest. As I reflect on the entire endeavor, though, there were at least these five strengths that are now evident to me in this project.

General Focus on Scripture

As most Christians might expect, the church was generally strengthened by the intense month-long focus on God's Word. This lengthy intense focus was credited by the third person I interviewed when they stated, "I feel like I have more confidence in the Scriptures from the repeated emphases on what it is and what it can do." They further declared, "The most meaningful part of this was the repeated exposure to God's Word," that forced them, "to think about it and not move on to the next thing." Since God's Word never returns void (Isa 55:11), the greatest impact to a month-long emphasis on Scripture at HBC may not have yet manifested itself. It may not be known for some time. What is known is that God's Word is truth (John 17:17). It is firmly fixed in the heavens (Ps 119:89). It is breathed by him and profitable (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture is necessary; it is necessary for sure gospel knowledge (Rom 10:13-17). According to Jesus, it is necessary for genuine spiritual life (Matt 4:4). It is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).[3] It is how Christ cleanses his bride (Eph 5:26; John 15:3). And God's Word will endure forever (Matt 24:35). Therefore, the Word being emphasized at HBC for over a month, in an intense and purposeful manner through this project's implementation, is a strength.

Self-Evaluation Modeled

The adult attenders at HBC benefitted from a quantitative and qualitative increase in self-evaluation concerning their ongoing use of the Bible. The very process of

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[3]See page 30 for the argument that "the fear of the Lord" is often a synonym for Scripture.

taking the BCS offered a useful means to evaluate their current reliance or confidence in the Scripture. Since the BCS was administered twice in barely over a month's time, its administration forced at least two self-evaluations of Bible use by all participants. These two evaluations, in survey form, were more than most participants receive in a typical year. Moreover, the range of inquiry represented in the BCS modeled a more holistic evaluation of their current Scripture usage and thus formed a qualitatively greater evaluation than mere simple unstructured self-reflection. Whole subject areas of assessment such as Scripture memorization, meditation, comprehension, and application were addressed and not merely the frequency of Bible reading. The beneficial result of a quantitative and qualitative increase in self-evaluation concerning HBC's adult attenders' utilization of the Bible is fundamental to identifying and increasing their actual confidence in Scripture beyond the parameters of this project. Thus, better ongoing self-evaluation of the use of Scripture at HBC diminishes self-deception (Ps 19:12a), both individually and corporately, and can lead to a more accurate understanding of ongoing confidence in the Bible (Heb 3:12). The more accurate understanding cultivated can facilitate a more fruitful ongoing abiding in the Word (Heb 3:14-15).

Willingness of Participants

The willingness to participate by so many different attenders was surprising and refreshing. In some sense, this enlistment was the easiest part of my ministry project. All that was necessary was for me to provide the instructions, the surveys, and collect them at the appointed times. When I consider the number of surveys I received—twenty-five— when compared to the number of regular attenders at HBC, I cannot help but conclude that there was an overwhelming willingness to participate. I am unable to account for the tremendous response and am unsure of what to attribute it to other than kind providence.

Readable Bibles

I had inexcusably forgotten about the need to have readable Bibles readily available to the people of HBC. I needed to be reminded. As part of an attempt to minimize the limitation of the lower literacy levels of some attenders at HBC, I obtained and made available several modern translations of the Bible as part of my project. This basic action provided several of HBC's attenders with their only immediate access to a Bible that they could easily read and reasonably understand. I cannot help but wonder how long I might have overlooked this need had this project not forced me to identify and rectify it. This giving of more easily read Bibles at HBC was a valuable project strength.

Unifying Experience

The newest attenders at HBC needed some common experiences to begin to weave them into the fabric of the church. While worshipping during the COVID-19 pandemic was a common experience, the eight-part series on confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority was a crucial second experience. This project's common experience aspect proved significant for one participant who declared, "I found it meaningful to focus on the Word together with my church family." This unifying experience was particularly important as HBC recently received new attenders from a deceased church. Under COVID-19 restrictions, the usual options available to facilitate corporate cohesion were limited at best. A common experience, such as my project offered, helped cultivate corporate unity forming an unexpected, but valued, strength.

Weaknesses of the Project

As in any ministry endeavor, there are always weaknesses. Some are greater than others, however, they always exist. My project was no exception for it contained at least these five weaknesses which I could easily, and even painfully, identify.

No Small Group Classes

The lack of discussion in a small group setting was a weakness in this project's execution. While I had planned to conduct half of the sessions in multiple small group settings, COVID-19 kept this plan from becoming a reality. Consequently, what was going to be a strength, the ability to have meaningful discussions in a relatively intimate setting, became a weakness of sorts as all eight sessions were delivered as sermons and the potential discussions were omitted. The significant reality of differing learning styles was an obstacle to cultivating confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority that I could not overcome within the parameters of this ministry project. Having pastored HBC for over six years now, I know the specific people who would have potentially benefitted most from the small group sessions with discussions. The lack of small group sessions with discussion is an enormous weakness in the implementation of this ministry project.

Pre-Survey Curriculum Writing

Writing the curriculum before administering the pre-course BCS made using results to guide the writing of the curriculum impossible. This oversight was an initial conceptual weakness to this project that I did not fully appreciate. I chose to write the curriculum without the assistance of the pre-course BCS because I feared being prohibited from spending unrushed quality time creating each of the various lessons. Consequently, I did have plenty of time to focus on each lesson; however, it came at the expense of focusing the application of each lesson on specific issues identified from the results of the pre-course BCS. I also wanted to avoid the inherent problems created by changes in the makeup of HBC's regular attenders in the span between the potential completion of a pre-course BCS and the potential final review and implementation of a course curriculum.

Curriculum Rubric

The rubric I created to use in the reviewing of the course curriculum could have been better. While it was sufficient, more outside input would have made it more focused and possibly more useful in the overall project (Pro 15:22). The lack of commentary on half of the responses was disappointing and may have been avoided by providing an edited copy of the project's purpose and goals along with the curriculum and its outline to the curriculum review panel potentially facilitating an increase in productive responses. I am not asserting the need to create a rubric to evaluate the curriculum rubric and thus the start of an endless cycle. I am asserting the need for more initial input in creating such an important tool as the rubric used to evaluate my course curriculum.

Bible Confidence Survey

As was true of the curriculum review rubric, the BCS could have been better. While the BCS too was sufficient, additional outside counsel could have made it a more useful tool in my project. The quality of the questions I created varied and at least one easily identifiable question should have been asked differently: "I am as likely to ask someone about God as I am to look for the answer in the Bible." Based on what was communicated verbally to me in casual conversation by several project participants, some were unsure of what the above question was asking. To a degree, when I created the BCS I erroneously and errantly assumed the literacy level of the project's participants. My assumptions in creating the BCS questions manifest themselves as a genuine weakness in the survey itself and, consequently, in a large percentage of the whole project.

Partial Online Participation

Some of those who fully participated in the course did so through viewing a portion of the eight relevant sermons online. This online aspect could be considered a strength. For the online viewing allowed a much greater percentage of HBC's regular attenders to participate. Yet the quality of the experience of learning through

nontraditional means may not be as high as traditional means (in person participation) and, therefore, may have negatively affected the potential impact of the course on some participant's confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Had I possessed more foresight; I could have included a question on the BCS inquiring about the number of sessions that were attended in person. The answer to this absent question may have allowed me to analyze the degree that partial online participation was a legitimate weakness for this project. I suspect it was a present weakness to some degree.

Number of Participants

The number of participants in this project was a weakness. The percentage of adult attenders participating was over sixty percent. Yet, the overall number of participants (twenty-one) was so small due to the size of the congregation (the potential participant pool) at HBC. This minor participant number weakens the ability to evaluate the potential to transfer results to other settings and, therefore, is a project weakness.

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What I Would Do Differently

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There are at least these six things that I would do differently if I could. I would pray more! I would specifically and consistently ask for the wisdom to do and to be what the people of HBC need. I would also pray more pointedly for an understanding of how to gain for myself what is essential in the whole project process.

In keeping with the idea of more prayer, I would recruit prayer covering for myself, the ministry project, and HBC. The recruitment would be systematic and specific. I would provide those praying with the current relevant needs and overall updates of progress to allow for the most informed prayer covering possible. I would be relentless in recruiting prayer covering if I could do this project over again.

I would have the curriculum evaluation rubric itself peer reviewed. It would not need a formal peer review, however, having several more sets of discerning eyes assess my curriculum evaluation rubric was needed. Moreover, at least one other person

reviewing the rubric would have created and used their own rubric before. I took the initial creation of the curriculum evaluation rubric too lightly, assuming its quality without a meaningful peer review. That practice would change if I did this ministry project over again.

I would include an edited copy of the project's purpose and goals with the curriculum and the curriculum evaluation rubric when beginning the curriculum review process. The lack of inclusion of the project's purpose and goals with the curriculum may have inhibited more meaningful responses in the comments section of the rubrics I received back. Because my rubric was designed to be returned anonymously, in an effort to facilitate honest evaluation, I had no means to ethically seek specific follow up information and was, therefore, dependent on the quality of the initial analysis via the rubric. It would have profited me to have provided as much information as possible with the curriculum to the reviewers to ensure the most useful review process possible.

I would have the BCS meaningfully peer reviewed. It would not need an official peer review process, however, as I needed to have more survey savvy people analyze the quality and potential efficacy of my survey. At least one reviewer should have possessed prior experience with creating and utilizing their own survey. Given the key role as a diagnostic tool that the BCS played in this project, it was a considerable oversite on my part not to have taken more time to ensure the high quality of all aspects of my survey. I focused so heavily on it being acceptable ethically that its overall quality lacked, a mistake I would not make if I was doing this project again.

I would administer the pre-course BCS before finalizing the course curriculum and submitting it for review. Had I followed this procedure, I would have been able to glean valuable information from responses on the pre-course BCS. This error may have seriously affected the results of my project and the final level of Bible Confidence demonstrated at HBC. If I had merely tweaked the sessions after scanning the surveys, I could have targeted specific issues indicated in the pre-course BCS. Thus, I could have

more pointedly targeted the gap between professed belief in the Bible's authority and sufficiency and the actual practice of using the Bible on a daily basis that the pre-course BCS results indicated.

I would also cover how to read, memorize, meditate on, and pray Scripture. Adding this content would double the size of the course curriculum. It was these practical aspects of using God's Word, however, that seemed to be most lacking based on the survey responses I received. HBC is not deficient in a professed high view of Scripture, and I suspected as much when first conceiving of this project. It is HBC's functional view of Scripture that needed more direct targeting with the inclusion of practical instruction in the curriculum on how to use the Bible daily for better efficacy; this observation is the knowledge most lacking in HBC's regular attenders.

Theological Reflections

As I progressed through this project many theological implications became apparent. Of the many implications, two seem especially relevant and unaddressed elsewhere in my project writings. The first reflection concerns the idea of cognitive dissonance related to the gap between what we confess concerning our beliefs about the Scriptures and what we actually do with the Scriptures on a daily basis. Scripture itself asserts and the Church acknowledges the primacy of God's Word. Yet, so many professed Bible believing individual Christians, congregations, and denominations neglect the Bible and its teachings. They hold the belief that it is the sufficient and authoritative Word of God and simultaneously believe that their own desires, opinions, ideas, preferences, and even mere whims are to take precedence over it. The dissonance occurs when two held beliefs— (1) what the Bible is and requires of me (2) and what I want and my estimation of my want's importance— are in conflict. When there is cognitive dissonance one of the two beliefs begins to lose out to the other.

It is these two often opposing beliefs concerning Scripture that is an ongoing spiritual battlefield in which all believers wage war. My church and I both wage this war every day. Having focused on HBC's confidence level in the Bible for the length of this project, it has given me a deeper appreciation of the universal nature of the struggle to align our professed beliefs to our daily thoughts and actions. Further, I have cultivated greater compassion towards those who are struggling to hear, believe and obey God's Word. Truly, there is a never-ending need while in this life to grow in our confidence in the authority and sufficiency of God's Word. I embody this need while trying to simultaneously model biblical faithfulness to my family and the congregation I serve.

The second theological reflection is related to the first. Jesus, the sinless son of God, is the only man to not fail to have his professed belief in Scripture and his daily thoughts and actions align perfectly. Jesus experienced no cognitive dissonance. He is not only the subject of the testimony of Scripture and the perfect model of how to hear, believe, and obey God's Word, but Jesus believed and practiced it perfectly for me. He fulfilled all righteousness, purposefully doing for his church what we could never do for ourselves. The reality of these two related reflections demands of an imperfect minister (such as I am) a strong dose of humility and compassion when helping others overcome the practical effects of their own struggles to hear, trust, and finally obey God's Word.

The third theological reflection touches on the very act of reading, comprehending, and applying the Scriptures as it relates to levels of literacy. To a degree God's Word may as well be unread and therefore unapplied, or incorrectly applied, if it is not comprehended when read. In contemporary Christianity, much emphases is correctly placed on reading God's Word. Reading well, however, is not a universal skill in my church. Because there is a societal stigma associated with illiteracy, many are unable to acknowledge that, while they can read, they do not read well or like to read at all.

My first assumption when encountering a lack of meaningful Bible usage among HBC's adults was general indifference, spiritual apathy, or a functionally deficient

view of Scripture. Yet there are some regular attenders who suffer from a low level of literacy—they do not and cannot comprehend some, or in a few cases much, of what they read. The result of this low level of literacy is that they are often unable to grasp complex, or even simple, biblical arguments. I had assumed too high a literacy level amongst HBC's adult attenders, a key mistake. This assumption was unwarranted for some of them. Their practical usage of Scripture may only increase and allow for growth in fruit bearing as their level of literacy increases. One's level of literacy is both a theological and educational issue with powerful spiritual ramifications.

Personal Reflections

In addition to theological reflections, I have a few ruminations that are more personal in nature. These two categories of reflection, theological and personal, can overlap in significant ways. In my case they do overlap substantially.

The most haunting thought I have on the entire process of envisioning and executing this ministry project concerns its timing in the life of HBC. Considering the conceptualizing of this project, I was convinced it would make a quality educative endeavor for me as a ministry student and prove a necessary aid for my stagnant church. Yet, it is the necessary medicine aspect of this project, that when combined with its timing, creates an issue in my mind. If this project was as essential for my church as I believed it was, then how can I justify the delay in its execution that was inherent to doing it as a part of my doctoral requirements? This concern is a sincere ethical dilemma which with I wrestle. I am convinced, in part due to the course work required of me for this degree, that some congregational deficiencies are so fundamentally detrimental to healthy church life that they must be addressed with immediacy. I would place a deficient functional view of Scripture in this critical fundamentally detrimental category. Therefore, HBC may have been better served in the long term had I, as the pastor responsible for it, executed one or more immediate projects to cultivate greater

confidence in the Bible and chosen a needed and important, but less foundationally essential, one as a part of my doctoral requirements.

Had this project fallen short of its purpose, then the issue of the timing of its execution would not exist. It would be largely irrelevant what year I executed this project. Because I was able to see significant increase in Bible confidence among the adult attenders at HBC, though, I am left wondering what if? What could have happened at my church had I addressed Bible confidence sooner? With more faithful reliance upon Scripture in all areas of life and ministry, how much more meaningful fruit might have resulted over the last half decade?

An additional reflection I have pertains to the attenders at HBC personally knowing how to use Scripture for maximum effect. Because the initial usage of the Bible at HBC was as weak as it was, while the professed view of it was as high as it was, I am driven to ponder the role that ignorance of how to use the Bible plays in this matter.

Scripture can be read in numerous different ways. It can be read for mere enjoyment as a piece of classic literature. It can be read for mere background information. It can be carefully studied word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, or thought-by-thought. Reading it can be done by book, chapter, or verse. I am convinced that I have not necessarily modeled how to read one's Bible for maximum affect. Expository sermons, such as I preach, can give the impression that the Bible must always be appreciatingly consumed in intricate detail. I need to make how to read the Bible efficaciously a point of explicit teaching in the best attended gatherings at HBC.

In addition, I need to model how to memorize Scripture more effectively. It is highly hypocritical to evaluate the adults at HBC's lack of Bible memorization when I have done little to lead them in the process. Adding the practice of adopting a Bible verse for large portions of Scripture or separate sermon series to be emphasized audibly over multiple gatherings should form a corrective. Thus, saying our emphasized Bible verse

together in consecutive gatherings could only help. This repetition is a practice that I plan to implement at HBC as a result of having executed this ministry project.

Further, I need to explicitly and regularly model how to meditate on the Scriptures for the adult attenders at HBC by doing so audibly in our best attended gatherings. Too frequently I have given my people only the fruit of my meditating on a piece of Scripture, consequently, robbing them of a means to develop the ability and habit of doing it themselves. This idea can be accomplished by using the adopted Bible verse mentioned above to further facilitate its memorization. The process of audibly meditating on portions of the Bible before the congregation can have the added benefit of naturally transitioning into modeling how to pray the Scripture. Moreover, an end result of greater meditating on the Bible should increase understanding and application leading to more doing of the Word: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas 1:22).

A result of engaging in this ministry project is that I have experienced a renewed desire to see my church grow in its abiding in the Word. Out of the mental energies spent executing this ministry project I have gained new insights on how to facilitate the desired abiding in the Word at HBC.

Conclusion

This project identified a critical need at HBC and strove to aid the church in addressing the issue. The identified issue was an insufficient confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture that manifested itself in how the adult attenders at the stagnant church utilized their Bibles. This project resulted in the creation and implementation of a curriculum to grow confidence in the Word of God. Furthermore, it also resulted in the creation of a means to identify the confidence level. The trajectory of increasing Bible confidence, if continued, can successfully facilitate the further spiritual development of adult attenders at the church.

I believe the future of HBC is filled with seemingly endless Christ honoring possibilities. The beloved church has persevered for nearly a century and a half while, sadly, many of its neighboring churches ceased to exist. Moreover, the church is positioned to steadily increase in its confidence in the Bible and, as a consequence, grow in its abiding in Christ. The result of such potential spiritual growth is the fruit that the struggling church needs to ensure that it is positioned to not merely survive, but to thrive, and make great strides in the coming decades.

This project's long-term effectiveness for HBC will be revealed in time. I am trusting that God and His Word have been honored through this process. I am also trusting that this beloved church is better poised to meet its future challenges by experiencing a measure of revitalization. Lastly, I am thoroughly convinced that I am better able to faithfully lead the church as a result of engaging in this project. Finally, as a practical consequence of this project, I am now more fully equipped to engage in further initiatives addressing Hopewell Baptist Church's manifold other attention-worthy needs.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLE CONFIDENCE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices concerning the Bible of the participant. This research is being conducted by Andrew Thomas for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer some questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time*.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by circling the appropriate answer.

Part 1
1.   Do you consider yourself a Christian?

            Yes   No   I am unsure.

 Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?

            Yes   No   I am unsure.

2.   Are you a regular attender at Hopewell Baptist Church?

            Yes   No

 Are you over age seventeen?

            Yes   No

 5.   Do you own a Bible you can easily read and understand?

            Yes   No

Directions: Answer the following questions. These questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

Part 2
6. I often turn to the Bible for answers to challenging contemporary issues.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

7. I regularly struggle with finding the answers I am looking for in the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

8. I seldom turn to the Bible for personal comfort.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

9. I often find my Bible confusing.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

10. I regularly refer others to the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

11. I often intentionally memorize Scripture.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

12. I do not read my Bible regularly.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

13. I am as likely to ask someone about God as I am to look for the answer in the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

14. I regularly refer others to specific verses in the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

15. I thoroughly enjoy reading the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

16. Usually, I clearly grasp the point of Scriptures I may be reading

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

17. I seldom meditate on a specific passage of Scripture.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

18. I am highly likely to read my Bible every day this week.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

19. This year I plan to invest personal resources in tools to aid me in understanding my Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

20. When facing a conflict between friends I seek to find the solution to the conflict in the Bible.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

21. I am convinced the Bible tells me all I need to know about being a follower of Christ.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

22. I am likely to enjoy meditating on a passage of Scripture this week.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

23. If I missed a regular Bible reading today, then I would feel the loss.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

24. My desire for the Scriptures is greater today than it was three months ago.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

25. I can name a time in the last three months when I applied wisdom I got from God's Word to a challenge I faced.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

26. I look forward to meeting with other believers to hear the Bible read, explained, and applied.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

27. I enjoy singing the truth of Scripture as much as the music that accompanies it.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

28. I am convinced that God has spoken to mankind in the Bible in a way that he has not spoken through any other book.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

29. What is revealed in the Scriptures is authoritative for all Christians.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

30. The Bible tells us all that God requires us to know and do.

SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA

Part Three

Directions: Please create a four-digit personal identification number that is easy for you to remember. Avoid sequential numbers like 1234 or repetitive numbers like 5555 as these are often chosen and may hinder the matching of your two surveys. If you are retaking this survey then please use the number you created previously. Write your Four-Digit Personal Identification Number in the blank: _____.

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Agreement to Participate
      The research in which you are about to participate is designed to increase the current confidence in the Bible for those utilizing a specific curriculum. This research is being conducted by Andrew Thomas for the purpose of evaluating a specific curriculum for a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to evaluate the specific curriculum. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time*.

      <u>Directions</u>: Fill in the following tool by marking the appropriate answer.

Bible Confidence Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of biblical confidence.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on the nature of Scripture.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains relevant points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Read Aloud to the Participant and Handed to Them:

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices concerning the Bible of the participant. This research is being conducted by Andrew Thomas for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer some questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time*. By participating in this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses or summaries of your responses in this project.

Questions Asked of the Participant:

1. Have you attended all eight sessions? If not, which ones did you not attend?

2. Were some lessons easier for you to follow than others? Which were the easiest and hardest for you to follow? Why the difference between the lessons for you?

3. Do you feel that you experienced an increase in your confidence in the Scriptures? Why do you think you experience this change in confidence?

4. Have you noticed any changes is your previous behavior concerning the Bible from before the eight sessions began? What are some of these changes?

5. For you, what was the most meaningful part of participating in these sessions? Why?

Anonymous Participant Answers:

Participant One. (Q1) "Yes." (Q2) "Yes." Easiest—Session 5 (Ps 119:97-104), Hardest—Session 6 (Confession Survey); Hardest because of general unfamiliarity with the confessions. (Q3) "Yes. Now I better grasp the nature of God's Word." (Q4) "Yes. I am reading my Bible for longer periods of time. I'm also thinking about how to start memorizing some specific Bible verses that I should have learned a long time ago." (Q5) "I found it meaningful to focus on the Word together with my church family. Because, by doing this as a whole church we could all experience growing in confidence together."

Participant Two. (Q1) "Yes." (Q2) "Yes." Easiest—Session 5 (Ps 119:97-104), Hardest—Session 6 (Confession Survey); Hardest because of general unfamiliarity

with the historical context and the confessions. (Q3) "Yes. I think I have more confidence in my Bible because I better understand how God's Word is still authoritative regardless of it being in written form." (Q4) "Yes. I'm now reading it more often and paying a lot more attention to what I'm reading when I do. I'm not just plowing through it like I sometimes did before." (Q5) "It was most meaningful to me to learn how God's Word is no less important because it is in writing. I have always had questions about how God 'speaks' through writings and this series on the Bible helped me with that."

Participant Three. (Q1) "Yes." (Q2) "Yes." Easiest—Session 8 (Heb 4:11-13), Hardest—Session 6 (Confession Survey); Unsure. (Q3) "Yes. I feel like I have more confidence in the Scriptures from the repeated emphases on what it is and what it can do throughout the month of September." (Q4) "Yes. I am now reading my Bible pretty regularly. I also keep it in in a much handier place." (Q5) "The most meaningful part of this was the repeated exposure to God's Word. By every service focusing on the Bible I was forced to think about it and not move on to the next thing."

Participant Four. (Q1) "Yes." (Q2) "Yes." Easiest—Session 5 (Ps 119:97-104), Hardest— Session 6 (Confession Survey); Hardest because of general unfamiliarity with the confessions. (Q3) "Yes. I think I appreciate a little better the benefits that Scripture can provide to me than I did before." (Q4) "Yes. I've noticed that I'm thinking more deeply about what I'm reading. And reading my Bible at a slower speed means it takes me longer to read the day's assigned verses." (Q5) "The experience was very affirming to my faith. Because of that it was really meaningful to me."

Participant Five. (Q1) "Yes." (Q2) "Yes." Easiest—Session 8 (Heb 4:11-13), Hardest— Session 6 (Confession Survey); Hardest personally, because overwhelmed in the details of the various confessions. (Q3) "Yes. I feel like I have more confidence in the Scriptures because I have had to focus on it every time I've come to church for the last month." (Q4) "Yes. I'm reading my Bible more often, at different times, and I think I'm also reading it more carefully." (Q5) "I've enjoyed learning about what the Bible is and not just what it says. This was meaningful to me because it allows me to better understand what I'm reading."

APPENDIX 4

BIBLE CONFIDENCE CURRICULUM OUTLINE

I. Section One—Some of Jesus' Testimony on the Authority and Sufficiency of
 Scripture: Matthew 4:1-4
  A. Sermon One—Matthew 4:1-4 "The Stakes Are Life and Death" [Thesis: As
   the Son of God and the true embodiment of believing Israel, Jesus Christ
   successfully models faithfulness to God during temptation by believing
   and obeying Scripture.]
    1. The Familiar Setting of Jesus' Modeling: Matt 4:1-2
    2. Jesus' Modeling During A Familiar Temptation: Matt 4:3
  B. Sermon Two—Matthew 4:4 "Emulating Jesus' Triumph" [Thesis: Jesus Christ
   models triumphing over temptation by knowing, believing, trusting, and
   obeying Scripture.]
    1. Jesus' Response to Temptation
    2. Means of Jesus' Triumph—Knew, Believed, Trusted, and Obeyed
     Scripture

II. Section Two—Some of the Testimony of Two Psalmists on the Authority and
 Sufficiency of Scripture: Palms 19:7-11; 119:97-104
  A. Sermon Three—Psalm 19:7-11 "David's Prized Jewel—What Scripture Is"
   [Thesis: Scripture is the written supernatural and desirable authoritative
   and sufficient revealed will of God.]
    1. Ps 19—David's Multifaceted Jewel
    2. Six Sparkling Synonyms for Scripture: Law, Testimony, Precepts,
     Commandment, Fear, and Rules
    3. Ten Dazzling Descriptions of Scripture: Supernatural Nature and
     Extreme Desirability
  B. Sermon Four—Psalm 19:7-11 "David's Prized Jewel's Beautiful Benefits —
   What Scripture Can Do" [Thesis: Scripture can have multiple significant
   desirous benefits for the one who believes and obeys it.]
    1. Reviving the Soul: Action and Subject
    2. Making Wise the Simple: Action and Subject
    3. Rejoicing the Heart: Action and Subject
    4. Enlightening the Eyes: Subject and Action
    5. Warning: Subject and Action
    6. Reward: Subject, Subject's Action, Word's Action and Type of Action
  C. Sermon Five—Psalm 119:97-104 "A Psalmist's Spinach-Banana Pudding—
   What Scripture Is and What It Can Do" [Thesis: Scripture is the written
   authoritative and sufficient revealed will of God that can have multiple
   significant desirous benefits in the life of the one who believes and obeys
   it.]

1. Format of Ps 119 with Focus on the "מ" [Mem] Strophe: (97-104)
2. Synonyms for Scripture in the "מ" Strophe: Five Familiar (also in Ps 19:7-11) and Two New—Word and Words
3. Potential Benefits of Scripture—What It Can Do: Gives Understanding and Wisdom, Foster Hatred of and Avoidance of Evil, and Nurtures Love of the Word

III. Section Three/Lesson Six—"Past Generations' Testimonies on the Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture—A Brief Survey of Some Confessions of Faith" [Thesis: How those who proceeded us in the faith affirmed Scripture can encourage us to trust its sufficiency and authority.]
   A. What is a Confession of Faith?
   B. What is the Purpose of a Confession of Faith?
   C. Some Relevant Parts of Historical Confessions: "The Lanterne of Lizt" (ca. 1425), "A Declaration of Faith of English People" (ca. 1630), "Westminster Confession of Faith" (1647), "Second London Confession of Faith" (1689), "Philadelphia Confession of Faith" (1742), "New Hampshire Confession" (1833), "Abstract of Principles of SBTS" (1858), and "Baptist Faith & Message" (1925, 1963, and 2000)

IV. Section Four—Some Apostolic Testimony Concerning the Sufficiency and Authority of Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:11-13
   A. Sermon Seven—2 Timothy 3:15-17 "Confidently Trust Scripture for What It Is and What It Can Do" [Thesis: The sufficient and authoritative God-breathed Word can be believed and trusted to equip us for all that is needed for salvation and a life of good works.]
      1. What It Is—Sacred Writings
      2. What It Can Do—Scriptures' Ability: To Make Wise for Salvation
      3. What It Is—Scripture/Writings
      4. What It Is—Scriptures' God Breathed Nature: Entirely, God-Breathed, and Profitable/Useful
      5. What It Can Do—An Effect of Scriptures' Nature: Complete Competency and Equipping
   B. Sermon Eight—Hebrews 4:11-13 "The Sufficient and Authoritative Word at Work" [Thesis: The sufficient and authoritative Word works in us to produce faithful endurance so that believers may be unashamed at the judgment.]
      1. Our Necessary Activity—Faithful Endurance: Striving and Not Falling by Disobedience
      2. The Working Word's Characteristics—How It Works: Alive, Active, and Discerning
      3. The Working Word's Seeing Source—God, the Purposeful Speaker: None can hide, all are fully exposed, and all will give an Account

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING CONFIDENCE IN THE SCRIPTURES AMONG
ATTENDING ADULTS AT HOPEWELL BAPTIST CHURCH
IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Andrew Lee Thomas, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William D. Henard

This project's purpose was to grow greater confidence in the Bible resulting in a more faithful reliance upon it in all areas of life and ministry among adult attenders at Hopewell Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The desired result of growing confidence in Scripture was to facilitate greater spiritual fruit among attenders at the church. This project's goals were to assess and increase the state of confidence in the Bible's sufficiency and authority among adult attenders. The method for accomplishing the project goals was to develop and implement an eight-session multi-formatted course curriculum designed to increase confidence in the sufficiency and authority of the Scripture. An additional method for accomplishing this project's goals was to develop and utilize a diagnostic Bible confidence survey to be administered before and after the curriculum's implementation to diagnose the level of confidence experienced by the adult church attenders at Hopewell Baptist Church.

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