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INCREASING THE CONFIDENCE OF SMALL GROUP  
LEADERS IN BIBLE TEACHING AT STAPLES MILL  
ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Adam Ryan Nuckols  
December 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

INCREASING THE CONFIDENCE OF SMALL GROUP  
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GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

Adam Ryan Nuckols

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Oren R. Martin (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
John D. Trentham

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To my loving and patient wife, Lacy, who has supported this work from the beginning.

To my three daughters, Karis, Joy, and Jaidyn, whose encouragement and love have  
helped me endure this work.

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## PREFACE

It is a high honor to serve alongside fervent followers of Jesus at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church in Glen Allen, Virginia. I praise my great God and Savior for the opportunity to be a minister of his word and it is this high calling that motivates this project. I am thankful for the encouragement and guidance offered by my fellow pastors at SMRBC, Jim Booth, Tommy Knighten, and Dustin McElduff, who exemplify a passion for God's word and his people. Also, I thank God for the amazing group of adult leaders in the student ministry at SMRBC who are such dependable and capable partners in ministering to the youth of our church. They have encouraged and supported me in completing this project and have led beautifully when my academic pursuit caused me to be absent from my post. Additionally, my faculty supervisor, Dr. Oren Martin, has been an incredible mentor and helper during this project. I am indebted to him for his service to me in accomplishing this task.

More importantly, the love and support of my wife, Lacy, has been a sweet gift in my pursuit of completing this project. Her encouragement, love, and care for me is truly a blessing from God. I count it one of the highlights in my life to partner with her in ministry. Also, I am so thankful for my three daughters who show me unwavering affection, even when I am away for ministry and study.

Finally, I give all the praise and glory to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His mercy and grace in my life is an unending source of hope, joy, and peace. I pray this project will be a blessing to his church for his glory alone.

Adam Nuckols

Glen Allen, Virginia

December 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The motto for Staples Mill Road Baptist Church (SMRBC) is “Rooted in Truth. Reaching in Love.” God's Word is highly esteemed at SMRBC with sound, biblical preaching and small groups that gather weekly for Bible study. However, the church leadership understands that leaders must be developed for the Bible teaching in small group contexts to be correct and effective. To maximize the potential for the church to share and show the love of Jesus both in our community and abroad, leaders must be trained to teach God’s Word. Therefore, SMRBC is committed to developing an intentional method to train small group leaders to study and teach God’s Word for the purpose of the church to be faithfully fulfilled.

#### **Context**

Staples Mill Road Baptist Church (SMRBC) is in Glen Allen, Virginia. Glen Allen is a suburb just northwest of Richmond, VA, with a population of approximately 15,000. The Richmond metro area has a population of approximately 1.2 million. SMRBC began in November 1971 when Trinity Baptist Church and Bryant Memorial Baptist Church merged. The current combined average Sunday attendance for the four worship services at SMRBC is 550. The church is committed to taking the good news of Jesus to families, neighbors, and the ends of the earth.

During my three years of serving as the Associate Pastor of Student Ministries, I have come to know numerous strengths of the ministry of SMRBC. The capacity and capability of some church members to study and teach the Bible contribute to the strengths of the church. The vibrant faith of many members is evident in a passion

for international missions. With the International Mission Board (IMB) headquarters located within ten miles, SMRBC has been, and currently is, a church home to many former and current IMB employees. In fact, three of the four full-time pastoral staff team served the IMB overseas on a long-term basis. The presence of experienced international missionaries brings a ministry emphasis to connect to God's heart for the nations. The Bible is taught in multiple settings to reveal the need to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the year 2018, twelve church members participated in short-term overseas mission projects. The projects involved partnerships with IMB missionaries in Nepal and Poland.

The second strength of the church is a commitment to teaching the Bible in multiple settings. The primary teaching of Scripture at SMRBC occurs during the weekly expository sermons preached by Pastor Jim Booth. Booth faithfully preaches through books of the Bible for the congregation to be exposed to the truth of Scripture, including difficult passages. Booth's preaching serves as a model to the congregation for how the Bible should be read and understood based on the principles of sound exegesis. Another setting for Bible teaching is found in the 18 adult Life Groups<sup>1</sup> that gather throughout the week. These Life Groups serve as small group Bible studies led primarily by lay teachers. Most of the Life Groups consist of church members who are close in age and life stage, such as parents of young children or teenagers. While most of the Life Groups are co-ed, the church does offer a group exclusively for men and one exclusively for women. These Life Groups' focus on Bible intake offers members another opportunity for learning how to observe, interpret, and apply biblical truth.

A third strength of the church is the faithful ministry to non-English speakers and the homeless in the community. Several church members help provide a way for

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<sup>1</sup> Small group Bible studies are called Life Groups at SMRBC. I will refer to Life Groups as small groups and Life Group leaders as small group leaders.

international residents of Glen Allen to learn how to speak English more fluently. There are currently two English Clubs that meet weekly with one meeting at the church building and another meeting at a local shopping mall. The church members who participate in this ministry use the English Club to share and show the love of Jesus to people who are not native to America. Also, several church members host a weekly Bible study in downtown Richmond for the homeless. This Bible study is open to any homeless community members who want to attend, and the leaders provide a meal during each session. The English Clubs and homeless ministry reflect a compassionate heart for those who need the gospel of Jesus Christ, and these ministries are encouraged by biblical teaching that compels these church members to love our neighbors.

The fourth strength of SMRBC is the initiation of Grow Groups<sup>2</sup> during the year of 2018. Grow Groups are small groups of men or women involved in an intentional time of growing in faith. These groups began as the church implemented the Building Blocks plan of generational discipleship in 2016. Building Blocks are an intentional discipleship pathway for church members to enter to continually experience growth in their relationship with Jesus. Building Blocks have a particular focus on parents with children for the primary discipleship to take place in the home. The idea for Grow Groups came because of the pastoral staff realizing that we could not ask parents to disciple their children, or anyone else for that matter, if they had not been personally discipled themselves. Currently there are twelve church members involved in these groups offering members the opportunity to learn how to study the Bible independently.

While there are numerous strengths evident at SMRBC to praise God for, there is a primary area of growth that needs to be addressed. The church needs to develop capable Bible teachers who know how to study God's Word and lead small groups. This

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<sup>2</sup> Discipleship groups are called Grow Groups at SMRBC. Any reference to small groups and small group leaders will include Grow Groups and Grow Group leaders.

need is evident as I observe poor Bible teaching from long-time church members who are in the role of teaching small groups. I have observed these teachers in various small groups display teaching methods that are not ideal for equipping group members to study the Bible independently. Also, the Bible teachers in our church need to be trained to teach Christ from both the Old and New Testaments to avoid having small group lessons devolve into morality tales with no connection to the gospel.

Also, the church needs to increase the number of capable Bible teachers to increase the number of small groups. The desire for both types of groups is that they are small enough to allow for robust discussion about the Bible and to develop close relationships. These dynamics become difficult to achieve and sustain if the groups include too many people. Currently, the church has multiple small groups that could multiply based on their size, but the primary hindrance of seeing this happen is a lack of capable and willing new leaders to form a new group. The stagnation caused by groups that are unwilling and unable to multiply increases the probability for seeing group members who are anonymous, unengaged, and not actively participating in the mission of the church.

Also, SMRBC needs to increase the number of small groups because these groups serve as a primary vehicle of discipleship in our ministry strategy. The vision of the pastoral staff is for some of these groups to multiply bi-annually, but the lack of confident and competent Bible teachers impedes this plan. Both men and women are fearful and unwilling to lead a small group due, in part, to a lack of experience in Bible study and teaching. Evidently, some small group leaders rely heavily on resources that are book studies, at best, as opposed to Bible studies, and this practice contributes to the lack of confidence and competence in our leaders. Another reason for a lack of small group leaders is the reality that many adults in the church have never had an experience of intentional discipleship.

## **Rationale**

The lack of competent and effective Bible teachers serving as small group leaders is the most concerning weakness, and the lack of effectiveness and competency is a result of leaders who lack the necessary knowledge and motivation to effectively study the Bible. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11–12). The small group leaders must be trained to teach the Bible to equip church members for the work of ministry. The preaching from our Senior Pastor is effective, and the church does have some competent and experienced small group leaders. However, the church needs to improve the overall Bible teaching occurring in small groups. Each small group leader needs to be equipped and encouraged to handle God’s Word correctly so that members of their small group can understand the Bible better and grow in faith. Handling Scripture rightly is not only a command given to pastors in the church, but the command is Paul’s admonition to Timothy for him to diligently study the Scriptures to obey and teach the correctly interpreted truth of God’s word (2 Tim 2:15). All followers of Christ are entrusted with the call to continue the ministry of Christ. Therefore, all disciples must know how to interpret, understand, and apply the authoritative truth of the Bible.

The weakness of unwilling and incapable Bible teachers is no more evident than when our church hosts a Ministry Fair to recruit new members to serve in various capacities including the need for more small group leaders. The role of small group leader seems to result in the least number of inquiries from members. Also, there have been instances when a direct request is made from a pastor to a church member to serve as a small group leader and the request is turned down for various reasons. Another example of the weakness of unwilling and incapable Bible teachers is that I have had to ask a small group leader in our student ministry to step down from that role due to the inability to teach an effective Bible lesson despite numerous attempts to offer help and



development in that area.

Another concern connected to the weakness of ineffective Bible teachers is evident as some groups have difficulty fostering healthy relationships and community due to the large size of the group. The plan to split one of these groups for the members to have an opportunity to know one another better and engage in deeper discussion about the Bible is hindered because another suitable Bible teacher cannot be found. According to the current leader of this small group, multiple attempts have been made to recruit a new leader, but no one has been able or willing to take on this role. The reality of a lack of willing and competent Bible teachers shows the need for faithful men to be identified and entrusted with God's word so they can teach others (2 Tim 2:2). Furthermore, if we, as a church family, are effectively making disciples by teaching others to obey all that Christ commanded then competent Bible teachers should be routinely produced (Matt 28:18–20).

To address the lack of willing and competent Bible teachers, this project offered small group leaders a 6-session course focused on faithfully studying and teaching the Bible. This course covered sound methodology for biblical interpretation and teaching. Training the small group leaders increased their confidence to teach the Bible, and the course equipped them to model sound Bible study and teaching principles for the members of their group. While devotional Bible reading is necessary for followers of Jesus, this project focused on detailed Bible study for the purpose of teaching. Both approaches to understanding God's Word should lead to more fervent following and worshipping of King Jesus.

The training course for teaching the small group leaders of SMRBC to faithfully study and teach Scripture focused on the principles of sound hermeneutics and exegesis. Principles such as authorial intent, identifying genres, context, syntax, and interpreting Scripture with Scripture were included in this course. The course instructed members on how to find and present Christ as the primary theme and substance of every

passage of Scripture. The course also provided members the tools necessary to identify and select quality resources that will aid in personal Bible study, and the course offered principles for preparing and delivering effective Bible lessons in a small group setting. The course increased the confidence of our small group leaders to prepare and teach effective Bible lessons as they were equipped and encouraged to apply a proper hermeneutic to exegete the biblical text appropriately. An increase in faithful Bible study and teaching influenced the ministry of the church bringing our members to consistently trust the Bible as the sole authority in their lives (Heb 13:7).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to increase the confidence of small group leaders in Bible teaching at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church.

### **Goals**

The goals for my project served to achieve the stated purpose of equipping leaders at SMRBC to effectively study and teach the Bible.

- (1) The first goal was to assess the current Bible study practices and knowledge between both adult and student Life Group leaders.
- (2) The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that will equip Life Group leaders to faithfully study and teach the Bible.
- (3) The third goal was to increase the knowledge of Bible study and teaching among SMRBC Life Group leaders.
- (4) The fourth goal was to increase the confidence of the Life Group leaders as it relates to preparing and teaching a Bible lesson and to enhance their method of Bible teaching preparation.

The goals for my project served to achieve the stated purpose of equipping small group leaders at SMRBC to study and teach the Bible.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess the current Bible study practices and biblical knowledge of small group leaders. Administering an assessment inventory measured this

goal.<sup>3</sup> The inventory assessed each leader's current Bible study practices as well as knowledge of Scripture. The inventory was in digital format consisting of 20 questions for each respondent. An attempt was made for personal contact with each small group leader asking them to fill out the inventory when received in an email, and the email indicated my desire for them to have the inventory submitted within one week of receiving the email. The inventory was emailed twelve weeks before the first teaching session. The goal was considered successfully met when at least 25 of the 38 current Life Group leaders completed the inventory and the results were analyzed to reveal the Bible study practices employed among SMRBC small group leaders.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that equips small group leaders to faithfully study and teach the Bible. The curriculum covered the basics of hermeneutics, exegesis, and primary methods of developing correct and engaging Bible lessons. The curriculum was in booklet format and included fill-in-the-blank sections, discussion starters for each session, as well as homework portions for each participant to complete in between each session. A panel of six current and former pastors utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum which measured this goal.<sup>4</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark had not been initially met, the material would have been revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of Bible study and teaching among small group leaders. This goal was measured by administering a pre-and post-survey used to measure the change in knowledge of biblical teaching.<sup>5</sup> The pre-survey

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 3.

was in digital format and emailed to each small group leader two weeks before the first teaching session, and the post-survey was emailed to each participant the day following the last teaching session. The pre-survey was unique to the assessment inventory with questions focused on knowledge of specific hermeneutic principles as opposed to the individual teacher's current Bible study practices. I asked that each survey be submitted within one week of receiving the email. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores.

The fourth goal was to increase the confidence of the Life Group leaders as it relates to preparing and teaching a Bible lesson. This goal was measured by administering a pre-and post-survey used to measure the change in the leader's confidence level.<sup>6</sup> The pre-and post-survey included questions regarding the confidence of each small group leader in addition to questions regarding their knowledge of Bible study and teaching. The confidence section was labeled on the digital surveys delivered by email to each leader. Also, this goal was measured by interviewing the five leaders who demonstrated the greatest increase of confidence between their pre and post survey scores to determine the factors that led to the change. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores. The interviews were evaluated and themes summarized resulting in additional insights into the factors that led to the changes in confidence level.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The terms used in this ministry project are defined below to aid the reader's understanding of the subject.

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 3.

*Hermeneutics.* Hermeneutics is defined as “sound biblical interpretation”<sup>7</sup> or “the science of interpretation; or the art of interpretation.”<sup>8</sup> This project aims to teach hermeneutics as defined by Elliott E. Johnson who writes, “The goal of interpretation...is to know the Author's/author's intended meaning as it is expressed in the text.”<sup>9</sup>

*Small group.* For this project “small group” will be the reference term for adult and student Life Groups as well as Grow Groups in the life of SMRBC. SMRBC’s Life Groups and Grow Groups fit Sam O’Neal’s definition of a small group as “a collection of between three and thirty people who regularly meet and participate in activities together with the goal of experiencing spiritual growth.”<sup>10</sup>

*Small group leader.* “Small group leader” will be the title given to the primary teacher of a small group. The small group leader will be the adult male or female responsible for teaching the Bible to their group on a consistent basis.

*Christian teaching.* “Christian teaching” will be referenced in line with the definition given by Dr. John David Trentham as he writes, “Christian teaching ministry is the intentional facilitation of redemptive learning in gathered church contexts, by the means of Scripture and doctrine, unto discipleship.”<sup>11</sup>

Two delimitations will be placed on the project. First, participants are required to be SMRBC members currently serving in the role of small group leader or have been recruited to serve in the role of small group leader. Membership at SMRBC ensures each

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<sup>7</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 57.

<sup>8</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Silva Moisés, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Sam O’Neal, *Field Guide for Small Group Leaders: Setting the Tone, Accommodating Learning Styles, and More* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2012), 22.

<sup>11</sup> John D. Trentham, “Mere Didaskalia: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 218.

participant is a baptized believer committed to the stated purpose of the church. Second, the project will be limited to twenty-one weeks. The twenty-one-week project will consist of pre-assessment, curriculum development, course instruction, post-assessment, and result evaluation. The completion and success of the project will depend on participant responsiveness and teachability.

### **Conclusion**

Developing leaders at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church who effectively study and teach the Bible will strengthen the ministry of the church in many ways. I want this project to be a tool for developing more effective Bible teachers at SMRBC. As small group leaders at SMRBC refine their capacity and ability to uncover the truth of God's Word they will be more capable of clearly conveying biblical truth to others. Also, as small group leaders employ sound hermeneutics and exegesis, their group members will learn to study the Bible and strengthen their relationship and devotion to God. My assertion is that the church will see an overall increase in ministry participation and disciple-making as more church members are exposed to compelling Bible teaching in small groups each week. Finally, I am convinced that fruitful, personal Bible study will increase among our leaders and Bible teaching will improve with hermeneutic and exegetical instruction. The lasting result of this project will be a church that will mature in unity and Christlikeness.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NECESSITY OF TEACHING SCRIPTURE TO FULFILL THE MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

Christian teaching is a vital task as it relates to the church fulfilling her mission, and the teaching of God's Word is suboptimal if it is not correctly understood. Klein writes, "Correctly understanding Scripture is an arduous and often puzzling task."<sup>1</sup> The journey to uncover truth found in the Bible can be difficult, but the journey is necessary to teach God's Word to His people. An essential component of teaching Scripture is finding the meaning of the text and clearly communicating that meaning to the hearers. Duvall writes of this goal, "We do not create meaning out of a text; rather, we seek to find the meaning that is already there."<sup>2</sup> In other words, there is a timeless meaning for each passage of Scripture, and it is the duty of all Christians who are tasked with teaching the Bible to interpret, communicate, and apply that meaning. While there are OT prophecies that have more than one meaning, the Bible teacher must interpret and convey both the immediate and final fulfillment of these prophecies. The meaning of the text can be a challenge to interpret since the biblical authors are no longer alive to explain their writing. Therefore, the interpreter must consider the author's context, what the original recipient understood the writing to mean, and any other referential meanings connected to the text. However, understanding that God is the author of all Scripture and used men to record His message with their unique characteristics and context is vital for sound Bible

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<sup>1</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 3.

<sup>2</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 41.

teaching. Each passage of Scripture must be studied and taught with both the historical context in mind as well as the fully disclosed context of the whole counsel of God's Word.

The interpretation of the biblical author's original intent is the foundation for effective Bible study and teaching. As Vanhoozer writes, "A text is a complex communicative act with matter (propositional content), energy (illocutionary force), and purpose (perlocutionary effect)."<sup>3</sup> His point is the authors of Scripture determined what they would write, how they would express the content written, as well as the desired result from the readers of the text. All the authors' thoughts and activities in the writing of Scripture happened under the sovereign authority and inspiration of God. Therefore, the task for the contemporary Bible teacher is complex, precise, and of vital importance for the church for gospel ministry to continue until Christ returns.

### **Exegesis of Matthew 28:18-20 and Training for Obedience**

One of my daughters, Joy, likes to bake. Over time she has become proficient in baking cakes, pies, cookies, and making the best pizza dough I've ever tasted. However, her skill in baking developed over time with practice and direction from my wife, who is an excellent baker in her own right. In fact, on Joy's first solo attempt at baking an apple pie, she mistook teaspoons for tablespoons in the recipe. The pie ended up spicy, so spicy that it was inedible. Joy learned from that experience she must be careful to not only read a recipe but understand the contents of the recipe. She has gone on to make wonderful apple pies since then with the amount of spices the recipe calls for.

The Bible should not be viewed as the recipe for the Christian life because understanding and applying God's Word is impossible apart from the work of the Holy

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 228.



Spirit in one's life giving the gift of faith and illuminating timeless truth. While the Bible is more than a set of principles for God's people to live by and the story of how the Christian life is even possible, it is not less than that. Therefore, the imperative for all disciples of Jesus is to know the contents of Scripture and to do what it says. Jesus elaborates this point to his original disciples at his appearing to them on a mountain in Galilee. Jesus declares after he rose from the dead, and before he ascended to heaven, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20).

The timing of Christ's command given in Galilee to his disciples is critical for understanding the response of the church. According to Davies and Allison, "The resurrection marks the end of Jesus' earthly time and inaugurates the time of the post-Easter church. In accord with this our pericope (i) looks back to summarize Jesus' ministry ('all I have commanded you') and (ii) looks forward to the time of the church to outline a programme."<sup>4</sup> Jesus' Great Commission serves as a comprehensive mission statement for the church throughout the ages. The church, under the headship of Christ, has the purpose of proclaiming the gospel to people and, upon Spirit-wrought conversion, to teach them to obey the Bible. While Jesus' commission to his disciples before his ascension is straightforward, the contemporary church must have a strategy to consistently apply this truth. Therefore, the church must train Bible teachers in order to be obedient to Jesus' command.

The words of Christ offer his original hearers, as well as the contemporary reader, all the instruction needed to initiate and carry out God's plan of producing

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<sup>4</sup> William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 3 (London: T&T Clark Int., 2004), 678.

disciples. First, Christ establishes the foundation for why his followers should live to make disciples. In his commentary of Matthew's Gospel, Barbieri states, "This authority (*exousia*, "official right or power") had been given to Jesus by the Father and now He was instructing the disciples to go on the basis of that authority."<sup>5</sup> Barbieri's point is that Jesus is in a position to direct others to continue his ministry after he is physically absent from earth. His position of power finds basis in who he is, God's Son, and what he has done, sacrificed himself for the sin of the world and conquered sin and death in resurrection. Anyone who claims to follow Jesus is subject to his authority.

The authority of Christ is demonstrated as he commands his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples." As Edmond Heibert observes,

I agree that the activity of making disciples is the focus of Jesus' commission, a point that is clear in the original language. However, the activities Jesus gives to his church are essential to accomplishing the task. First, Jesus commands his followers to "Go," and the command to "Go" directs members of the body of Christ to move about the entire world according to God's intended purpose. Jesus is clear that his church was not to stay always and only together in one place. Furthermore, as Christ followers proceed to travel around the world their primary purpose is to proclaim the good news about Jesus so other people might believe in him for salvation. The church must "Go" in order to accomplish the task given by Jesus to "cause people to become followers of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

People become disciples of Christ as the Holy Spirit places his people in close relation to others as a means of grace to share and show the love of Jesus. I can think of no better example of disciple-making than Philip being told by an angel to go south to encounter the Ethiopian eunuch who is reading prophecy from Isaiah. The eunuch asks him who the prophecy is about and Philip shares with him the good news about Jesus. Upon hearing Philip's teaching the eunuch believes and is baptized in water by the very road he was traveling on (Acts 8:26-40).

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<sup>5</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 93.

<sup>6</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 470.

Not only does Philip demonstrate obedience to Jesus' command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" but he also is obedient to the command to "baptize." The act of baptism is not the means of making disciples. D.A. Carson comments on this act of obedience as he writes, "The NT can scarcely conceive of a disciple who is not baptized or is not instructed. Indeed, the force of this command is to make Jesus' disciples responsible for making disciples of others, a task characterized by baptism and instruction."<sup>7</sup> The intention for baptism given by Christ in his Great Commission is a picture of new life resulting from faith in the gospel and a display of allegiance to Jesus as Lord and King (Rom 6:4; 1 Pet 3:21). The command to baptize flows biblically from obedience in making disciples.

Additionally, Jesus' command "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" is not only the means of making disciples but the plan for the church throughout the generations until Christ returns. Upon careful study of the Greek language translated by various commentators and grammarians, Robert Culver paraphrases Christ's command to baptize and instruct, "Men thus informed by you and convinced by the Holy Spirit of the truth as it is in Christ and who wish openly to confess their submission to the Lordship of the triune God are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and [in the name] of the Son, and [in the name] of the Holy Ghost. After baptism they are further to be instructed in all the teachings of Christianity. They should guard these truths in their own lives."<sup>8</sup> Culver's paraphrase does well to interpret Jesus' intended order of events pertaining to making disciples. Instruction for obedience in the Christian life appropriately takes place after one trusts in Christ for salvation and publicly declares allegiance to him as Lord. The reason for this order is indicated elsewhere in Scripture as

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<sup>7</sup> Don A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 597.

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16-20," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10, no. 2 (1967), 126.

an individual has no capacity to obey all of Christ's commands apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which takes place at conversion (1 Cor 2:14-16; Rom 8:7-9; Tit 3:5-6). Any act of obedience to the commands of Christ done from an unregenerate heart can only be performed with the thought of earning God's favor or simply false piety (Isa 64:6; Hos 6:6). Repentance and faith are God's intended responses for his people to the good news of Jesus as made clear in the Great Commission. In his book *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* Daniel Doriani writes, "Do the people in view stand inside or outside God's covenant of grace? If they are outside the covenant, the prime application is, 'Repent and believe.' If they are within, application begins with a reminder, 'God loves you and called you into a relationship with him. His grace empowers you to follow him and motivates you to serve him.'"<sup>9</sup> In other words, Doriani believes Bible teachers must acknowledge the possibility of hearers who need to begin to follow Christ with a response to the gospel in faith. However, Bible teachers must also seek to offer already-believing hearers an explanation of not only how the truth of God's Word is to be applied but also why it must be applied. The Great Commission describes the essence of biblical application. Disciples of Jesus must be taught to observe all of Christ's commands.

In obedience to the Great Commission, the body of believers' purpose is to make disciples. In order for complete obedience to take place a local church must train Bible teachers in sound exegesis and hermeneutics to be employed in small group teaching settings. An example for the contemporary church is Ezra's reading the Word of God to the Israelites who returned from exile and the Levites helping the people understand the reading (Ezra 8:5-8). The consistent, expository preaching from the head undershepherd is essential along with others who can effectively teach in order to aid

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Zondervan, 2001), 5.

church members in comprehension and application of God's Word. Jesus' command "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" must be understood as teaching the whole canon of Scripture and not only the quotes from Jesus during his incarnation found in the Gospel accounts. Carson writes, "The revelation of Jesus as Messiah at this late stage in salvation history brings the fulfillment of everything to which the OT Scriptures pointed and constitutes their valid continuity; but this means that the focus is necessarily on Jesus ... What the disciples teach is not dogma steeped in abstract theorizing but content to be *obeyed*."<sup>10</sup> The church must teach the entire Bible so disciples learn how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the OT and the foundation of all of the NT. Teaching the whole Bible should be a constant pursuit for every local church and requires additional trained Bible teachers other than the lead pastor who preaches. My point is that consistent Bible teaching in multiple settings is necessary for a church to pass on faith in Christ to future generations and to fulfill the Great Commission. Parents, children, teenagers, senior adults, single adults and every person who claims to follow Jesus must regularly expose themselves to beneficial Bible teaching throughout their lives in order to make disciples according to the command of Christ.

It follows, then for the church to train Bible teachers for the purpose of complete obedience to Jesus' Great Commission. How many people regularly attend a local church and claim to be a disciple of Christ are learning to observe all the commands of Jesus? How many people are in the role of a Bible teacher for a small group of a local church effectively teach Christ from the OT? How many people regularly attend a local church and claim to be a disciple of Christ consistently study the Bible, based on how they are taught in the local church, in order to fully obey the Great Commission? The answer to all of these questions would reveal the health of any local church. An ever-increasing number of church members should find themselves growing in godliness as

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<sup>10</sup> Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew*, 599.

they observe all that Christ has commanded, and trained Bible teachers are required for this to be a reality in a local church. According to R.L. Thomas, “The lesson in understanding what Jesus meant by ‘all that I commanded you’ at the end of Matthew's Gospel is a call to strive for a closer and more precise interpretation of Jesus’ teaching and commands in light of the circumstances in which they were given. ‘Teaching them to observe’ requires no less than the disciples’ best efforts in understanding Jesus' intent when He gave each of those teachings.”<sup>11</sup> Basically, Thomas is saying intense study of the text is necessary for obedience in application. Indeed, the need for understanding of the historical and literary context of each passage of Scripture is required to fulfill the Great Commission, and a hearty attempt to understand the historical and literary context should be made by any individual in the role of Bible teacher. A love for Jesus precedes obedience and application of his commands, and a love for Jesus grows as a result of knowing him better through obedience and application.

### **Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-12**

Education can be described as a process of receiving or giving systematic instruction. In my own life, education has given me the opportunity to participate in jobs, activities, and discussions because many things in life require a basis of knowledge to pursue. Most jobs and occupations require an individual to employ a learned skill to be effective. For example, activities such as athletics, art, and driving involve an initial stage of learning that leads to an awareness of how to perform at an adequate level. Furthermore, meaningful discussions on any topic from religion to politics can be significant if the parties involved have been educated in the topic discussed. Education is

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<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “The Great Commission : What to Teach.” *Master’s Seminary Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2010), 16.

vital for many aspects of life to be helpful, worthwhile, and effective. Therefore, education for the church about God as He is revealed in Scripture is essential.

Additionally, ministry can be defined as “all significant activity for the edification of the community.”<sup>12</sup> God accomplishes His ministry of reconciliation by equipping and working through His people, and Bible teaching is an essential element of equipping believers for the work of ministry. Paul’s letter to the churches in Ephesus provides insight to the role of Bible teachers in a local church setting. Paul was clear in his understanding that the teaching of Scripture was necessary for the unity of the church. Hoehner writes, “Possibly realizing that the Ephesians were starting to forsake their first love, Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to love both God and their fellow saints more deeply.”<sup>13</sup> Paul uses the word “unity” twice in this letter and this word is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. The theme of unity found in Paul’s letter to the Christian community established during his Ephesian mission is made obvious in several other ways.<sup>14</sup> Hoehner goes on to write, “The phrases ‘in Christ’ (εν κριστω), ‘in whom’ (εν ω), ‘in the Lord’ (εν κυριω), or similar expressions occur thirty-eight times in Ephesians and indicate the means by whom or the sphere in whom the unity is achieved.”<sup>15</sup> Also, Paul’s letter describes the individual members of the church as believers who are all part of the body of Christ. The unity in loving God and people results from God’s gift of church leaders who will train the church to minister to others with the love of Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “Διακονέω, Διακονία, Διάκονος,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 87.

<sup>13</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 106.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Skevington Wood, *Ephesians, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 103.

In the middle of Paul's letter he writes about how the church will both attain and maintain unity, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ,..." (Eph 4:11-12). This theme of unity is found in the immediate context of this passage as Paul exhorts believers to trust in God's grace given to all who are of faith, both Jew and Greek, and that they live united in peace (4:3-7). Further still, F.F. Bruce writes of the unity mentioned by Paul, "The unity of the faith is effectively the same as the unity of the Spirit which the readers have earlier been exhorted to preserve; it is the unity which binds together those who share the common faith in Christ."<sup>16</sup> His point is that, in Ephesians 4, Paul reminds the believers about the tie that binds them together, which is the Holy Spirit given by God and faith in the Son of God (4:13). The emphasis of unity in Paul's letters reveals the significance for the church throughout the generations.

Paul goes on to give instruction to the church on how to cultivate this precious unity. In this passage encouraging unity he inserts a list of functions in the body of Christ that are in accordance with particular giftings (4:11). Among these gifted roles are "shepherds and teachers." Paul is not writing about the gift of shepherding and teaching being given to people, but he is writing about shepherds and teachers as gifts of people with a specific function in the church.<sup>17</sup> Paul uses the word ποιμενας to refer to those who serve as guardians and leaders of the church. Peter uses the same word to refer to Jesus as "Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25). Whereas the Old Testament applies the title of Shepherd to God at times (Gen 49:24; Psa 23:1; Isa 40:1), the New Testament

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 350.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 197.



transfers the role of protection and care for God's people to Christ.<sup>18</sup> Jesus is metaphorically described as a Shepherd to describe his role as the one who guides and leads the souls of all members of the church. Paul delivers this message to the Christian community in Ephesus to help them realize Christ's gift and design for his church is for men to fill this shepherding role in his incarnational absence. Christ is physically present to guard and lead the church through men who are called to carry out this duty.

For this duty as shepherd to be fulfilled, one must understand what the shepherding of the body has been since the foundation of the church. Other biblical authors mention the role of "shepherd" or "pastor" as those who care for and feed "the flock" (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-2).<sup>19</sup> The implication is that the shepherds feed the flock of God by teaching the Scriptures, because the truth of God's Word is the spiritual nourishment the church needs on an ongoing basis. In fact, Peter gives the command to "shepherd the flock of God" as he was commissioned by Christ to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).<sup>20</sup>

The connection is evident in Scripture between shepherding and teaching God's people as Paul uses the definite article *τους* before each type of gifted individual except "teachers." He lists "shepherds and teachers" together with no definite article in between to show the inseparable link between these two roles. The implication of Paul's writing is that the teaching of God's Word is necessary for the church to be fed and protected. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes that pastors should be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). Furthermore, in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Himself, after his resurrection, commanded the eleven to "make disciples of all nations" by "teaching them to observe all

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<sup>18</sup> Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Jamieson, Andrew R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 350.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 350.

that I have commanded you.”<sup>21</sup> In order for the flock of God to be shepherded, they must be taught. Teaching is important and essential in the life of the church, and teaching is the requirement given by Christ for effectively producing disciples.

Having established the teaching of God’s Word as essential for the vitality and unity of the church, the nature and manner of this teaching given in Ephesians 4:11 must be addressed. Paul uses the term διδασκαλούς to describe those who impart instruction and is identical with the ποιμενας, or shepherds, listed.<sup>22</sup> Bruce goes on to comment on this role described by Paul,

Paul assumes, in writing to Rome, that the ‘form of teaching’ which the Christians of that city had received was sufficiently clear and comprehensive to enable them to detect and reject propaganda which was incompatible with it (Rom. 6:17; 16:17). Timothy is directed not only to pursue a teaching ministry himself but also to entrust what he has learned “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also’ (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2); provision would thus be made for the continuity of the teaching in the next generations.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of the biblical instruction given by the shepherds and teachers is thorough and intended to serve as a primary safeguard against false teaching and disunity. The only type of teaching that fulfills this purpose is expository teaching that covers the whole counsel of God over time.

At this point, a case must be made for why Paul assumes the teachers given to the church would employ a manner of teaching that could only be described as expository. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul exhorts the young church leader to, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). Paul goes on to warn Timothy that there

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 348.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “Διδάσκω, Διδάσκαλος, Νομοδιδάσκαλος, Καλοδιδάσκαλος, Ψευδοδιδάσκαλος, Διδασκαλία, Ἐτεροδιδασκαλέω, Διδαχή, Διδακτός, Διδακτικός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–), 158.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 348-349.

would be times when people would have an aversion to the teaching of truth, but he encourages him to continue teaching the Bible with endurance and zeal. Paul’s warning is that people will not tolerate expository teaching that seeks to expose God’s intended truth in a way that compels the conformity of the hearers lives to the truth found in Scripture. Nevertheless, Timothy, and subsequently any teacher given to the church throughout the generations, is to “preach the word.” Effectively teaching God’s Word is not accomplished by reciting verses from the Bible and then sharing personal thoughts and opinions about the meaning. Effective teaching is expository teaching, and expository teaching is narrowly and specifically defined. Haddon Robinson writes, “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>24</sup> Another definition of expository preaching is given by Stephen Olford as he writes, “Expository preaching is the spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God’s Word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response.”<sup>25</sup> Both definitions offer aid to understand that expository preaching comes only as a result of the Holy Spirit illuminating the timeless truth of Scripture in a way that will be communicated to a group of hearers.

Therefore, only expository preaching can be considered Paul’s intended description of the instruction imparted by the “teachers” in Ephesians 4:11, because a “spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation” is exclusively connected to a timeless

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<sup>24</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen F. Olford, et al., *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 69.

meaning and singular interpretation of every part of God’s Word. Duvall and Hays give a clear explanation of biblical teaching as they write, “*Meaning* refers to what the author intended to communicate through the text. Because a text’s meaning is tied to the author, it will be the same for all Christians.”<sup>26</sup> The point made as it relates to the text of Ephesian 4 is the “teachers” listed by Paul have a narrowly defined duty in serving God’s people. Teachers are given by God to communicate the meaning of the Bible so the church can apply truth in a way that brings glory to God. John Stott writes, “If it is true that a human being cannot live by bread only, but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God, then it is also true of churches. Churches live, grow, and thrive in response to the Word of God. I have seen congregations come alive by the faithful and systematic unfolding of the Word of God.”<sup>27</sup> Stott communicates the essential nature of consistently and comprehensively teaching God’s Word, and the health of each local church depends on the amount of and type of preaching received.

Paul goes on to explain the purpose for teachers being given to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). To correctly interpret the intended meaning of this verse, the relationship between the three prepositions (προς, εως, εις,) must be determined. Hoehner offers a sensible interpretation that does not allow for a distinction between clergy and laity, as he writes, “In this case, however, it seems that the first preposition (προς) expresses the immediate purpose while the other two prepositions (εις) denote direction or goal.”<sup>28</sup> In other words this propositional progression shows God gave the people with the spiritual gifts listed in verse 11 for the immediate purpose of equipping all the saints with a goal of training them for the “work of ministry,” but the ultimate goal is the “building up the body of

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<sup>26</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 236.

<sup>27</sup> John R.W. Stott, “Creating the Bridge,” taken from Michael Duduit, ed., *Communicate with Power: Insights from America’s Top Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 187-188.

<sup>28</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 549.

Christ.” This progression does not allow for an unbiblical contrast between clergy and laypeople.<sup>29</sup> For example, the immediate context of this passage teaches that we “all are to be united in faith (Eph 4:13) and each person is a vital part of the body of Christ needed to grow in love (Eph 4:16). The “teachers” listed do have a distinct gift and role in serving the church, but the gift does not make them more significant in the life of the church. The gift of teaching is given to be stewarded only for the purposes of God which are made clear in verse 12.

A case can be made that Paul’s Greek should be translated with commas in between each phrase, “to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ” making all three phrases a description of the ministry of the listed officers in verse 11.<sup>30</sup> However, Baugh demonstrates that Paul’s writing does not give a basis for church officers to be considered more special, powerful, or prestigious than any other member of the body of Christ. He writes, “By saying that this is the “task of ministry” (διακονία, *diakonia*), Paul shows that these officers are not lords over but servants (διάκονοι, *diakonoî*) of the church, as was the Lord Jesus (Mark 10:42–45) and Paul himself (3:7). While it is true that the church, in general, has responsibilities for what is termed “service” or “ministry” with the same term, διακονία (*diakonia*), found in verse 12b (1 Cor 12:5; 2 Cor 9:12–13; Rev 2:19), in our passage Paul is focusing on the ministry of the word for tasks and benefits articulated in verses 13–14, whereas the general office service is referenced particularly in verses 15–16.”<sup>31</sup> His point is there are ministry distinctions between the shepherd teachers and the laity that are described in the context of the passage, but the distinctions are not to be considered an avenue for the

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<sup>29</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 549.

<sup>30</sup> Steven M. Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Wayne H. House, Hall W. Harris III, and Andrew W. Pitts, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 337.

<sup>31</sup> Baugh, *Ephesians: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, 339–340.

elders to garner undue power or pride. Whereas the task of the shepherd and teacher is essential, the work of ministry performed by each member of the local church is equally vital.

To be clear, I am in favor of the prior translation that does not insert a comma between the phrases since Paul changes the preposition from *προς το εἰς*. Although the prepositions can be translated synonymously, it would seem Paul is purposefully “making the second and third subordinate to the first”<sup>32</sup> The context of the passage supports the translation of the pastors and teachers training church members so they will be a member “working properly” (Eph 4:16) in loving service to one another. In summary, Bible teaching is critical for a local church to effectively function as the body of Christ in the world for the glory of God.

### **Exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:15 and Ministry Training**

My high school track coach was an influential figure in my life. I always despised running as a component of athletic training until I gave in to the badgering of a friend and joined my high school’s cross-country team my junior year. Under the tutelage of my coach, I not only came to enjoy distance running, but I excelled competitively in the sport. What made this activity that I hated at one time to become something I was passionate about? I feel it was, in larger part, due to my coach running with the team in practice. Not only did he have extensive knowledge of distance running and training and possessing a personal history as an accomplished track athlete in high school and college, but he actively trained with our team. The fact that our coach participated in training along with us made a significant impact on me as a runner. As a student-athlete I trusted my coach and followed his instruction because he consistently proved his competency and passion as a runner. The helpful characteristics of my coach were revealed as his

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<sup>32</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 128.

actions aligned with his words of instruction. Reflecting on this experience from high school, I understand effective leadership results from the training of leaders. The model of teaching and leadership combining verbal instruction and modeling can apply to most arenas in contemporary culture but leading and teaching in both word and deed must be applied to any local church to remain biblically faithful. The Apostle Paul emphasizes the need for church leaders to pursue training to teach the Bible faithfully and effectively in 2 Timothy 2:15.

First, to understand Paul's instruction to Timothy we must understand the historical context of the letter. First and Second Timothy, along with Paul's letter to Titus, make up a series of correspondence from Paul and two of his apprentices commonly known as the "Pastoral Epistles" or "Pastorals." However, Timothy and Titus did not actually serve in the role of established pastor of a church. According to Andreas Köstenberger, "For this reason the Pastorals are not so much advice to younger ministers or generic manuals of church order as they are Paul's instructions to his special delegates, issued toward the closing of the apostolic era at a time when the aging apostle would have felt a keen responsibility to ensure the orderly transition from the apostolic to the postapostolic period."<sup>33</sup> Köstenberger's analysis of the background of Second Timothy brings an awareness of Paul's intention for the letter. However, even though the Pastoral Epistles are occasional documents, they are not limited to an application specific only for the original audience. While Paul does offer personal instruction to Timothy on dealing with issues in the church at Ephesus, his pronouncements must be acknowledged as divinely inspired instruction for the church "that transcends his immediate circumstances."<sup>34</sup> A correct hermeneutic provides for the application of 2 Timothy 2:15,

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<sup>33</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Köstenberger and Wilder *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, 11.

and God, according to his perfect, sovereign plan, intends for his people to read, understand, and apply his words.

As the truth of Paul's second letter to Timothy is timeless regarding application, the occasion for which it was written gives guidance for contemporary adherence. Second Timothy is the last of the three Pastoral Epistles, and this letter is written by Paul from his imprisonment in Rome in A.D. 67 or 68.<sup>35</sup> Paul warns Timothy of a false teaching characterized by controversy, argumentation, deceptiveness, immorality, and teaching motivated by greed.<sup>36</sup> His second letter to Timothy continues to encourage Timothy to rely on God's strength to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel, and that he correctly handle and teach the message of the apostles (2:15).<sup>37</sup> While the situation Paul addresses in this letter is unique to Timothy and the church at Ephesus, the general principles included are important for the practice of the contemporary church.<sup>38</sup> The elements of church governance, leadership qualifications, and the commitment to teaching God's Word are not to be left up to personal preference or the tradition of local churches. The divine instruction to be applied in the church throughout the generations is found exclusively in the Bible.

Therefore, we must look to how applying 2 Timothy 2:15 in the church today will lead to the faithful and effective teaching of the Bible. As noted earlier, Paul addresses false teaching that plagues the Christian community in Ephesus. Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "The false teacher is almost always accused of hypocrisy, that is, of preaching virtue in public while practicing vice in private. These vices can easily be

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<sup>35</sup> George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Köstenberger and Wilder, *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, 27.



placed into three standard categories: love of pleasure, love of money, and love of glory.”<sup>39</sup> Johnson makes clear how Paul makes the distinction between who Timothy should be and what he should do and who the false teachers are and how they act. Paul makes the point that the false teachers are not doing their best to present themselves to God as “approved,” they have a need to be “ashamed,” and they wrongly handle “the word of truth.” Timothy must avoid the sins of the false teachers and so should every leader of a local church.

Paul exhorts Timothy as he writes, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved...” Paul uses the word *οπουδασον* translated as “Do your best” in the ESV and carrying the meaning of doing something with intense effort.<sup>40</sup> Paul’s imperative to Timothy is that he would zealously pursue a lifestyle as a teacher that contrasts the false teachers. He goes on to describe the type of teacher he is to strive to be as one who is shown to be genuine when tested by God (*δοκιμον παραστησαι τω θεω*) Paul instructs Timothy that, as a leader of God’s church, his only concern is God’s standard for approval. He encourages the young believer to labor in leading the church with pleasing God as the utmost aim. Paul’s teaching, once again, establishes a contrast between the ideal for Christian leaders and the false teachers who threatened the gospel-centered ministry of the church. Calvin comments on the teacher who is not concerned with God’s approval above all as he writes, “Since all disputes about doctrine arise from this source, that men are desirous to make a boast of ingenuity before the world, Paul here applies the best and most excellent remedy, when he commands Timothy to keep his eyes fixed on God.”<sup>41</sup> His point is that Paul exhorts Timothy to consider the face God deals with the

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<sup>39</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul’s Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New Testament In Context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 74.

<sup>40</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 661.

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 221.

study and teaching of gospel ministers and the aim must be to “work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). The teacher who carries out this aim will devote himself to the exposition of God’s Word, because he is not focused on pleasing himself or pursuing the praise of men.

Conversely, a primary factor for unhealthy Bible study methods and irresponsible Bible teaching is the desire to make others and oneself feel good by teaching meanings of the text that align with cultural whims that stand opposed to the timeless truth of God. On the other hand, a biblical church leader will hold as the highest priority the teaching of God’s Word grounded in clear, sound exposition. Paul urges Timothy to have the ambition of pleasing God as he leads people, and this ambition brings nothing to be ashamed of before the Heavenly Father. His explanation for how he will lead God’s people is found in his concluding phrase “rightly handling the word of truth.” This phrase serves as a part of his instruction to Timothy for him to accurately teach the gospel. In Knight’s view of translating *τον λογον της αληθειας*, “The sense of the phrase here is probably best conveyed in the rendering ‘the message of the truth.’ To handle this word correctly is to handle it in accord with its intention and to communicate properly its meaning.”<sup>42</sup> Basically, Knight is saying Paul’s instruction to Timothy is to exegete Scripture with a proper view of authorial intent and timeless interpretation. This function for a church leader would contrast the false teachers’ man-centered approach to teaching and would have no need to be ashamed before God who is the ultimate judge of fit Bible teaching.

It follows, then that church leaders will have the responsibility to teach God’s Word, and teaching God’s Word requires training that indicates obedience to the command of Christ to give “your best” and to accurately communicate the Bible. The necessity of training for the task of Bible teaching is evident in the example of both Jesus

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<sup>42</sup> Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 412.

and Paul and their relationship with those who would carry on the ministry of the gospel. During his three years of public ministry, Jesus intentionally taught the twelve disciples how to understand and apply God's Word. His training included how his disciples should know him as the fulfillment of all the Law and Prophets (Luke 24:44; Acts 24:14). Jesus knew the Holy Spirit would come to his disciples at Pentecost after his ascension, but he still trained them and modeled for them a correct interpretation of Scripture. In a similar way, Paul spent time strengthening the church and training early converts to preach the gospel using the Old Testament (Acts 14:27-28; 15:41; 18:23). Paul writes to the church at Ephesus,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him (Eph 3:8-12).

Paul's teaching of Christ as God's eternal plan and purpose is to equip and encourage the church. Paul's training of the early church was God's necessary provision for creating an ever-increasing, unified people who will be his means of grace to the world throughout the ages. The training of Christians to teach the Bible is essential for a local church to thrive.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize the biblical and theological basis for my project is Christians must be trained to effectively teach the Bible, and teaching God's Word is a requirement for the church to fulfill her intended purpose. Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus clearly reveals Bible teachers are a gift of God to the church in order for disciple-making to continue until Christ returns (Eph 4:11-12). Also, Paul makes clear the teaching of God's Word is essential for the vitality and unity of the church. Additionally, Paul's second letter to Timothy teaches church leaders to pursue training in order to faithfully

and effectively teach Scripture (2 Tim 2:15). The Word of God exhorts all who are gifted with a teaching role in a local church to strive to live a lifestyle of holiness and prepare to teach the Bible with a heart that solely seeks God's approval. Finally, the Great Commission from Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel record illuminates the need for expositional Bible teaching in every local church for all disciples to learn to obey all of Christ's commands. Therefore, the church should pursue the means of training Bible teachers in sound exegesis and hermeneutics.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL BASIS FOR TEACHING THE BIBLE IN SMALL GROUPS TO CREATE A DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The purpose of this ministry project is to increase the confidence of small group leaders in Bible teaching at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church. The biblical and theological basis for the teaching of scripture in a local church setting is given in Chapter 2, and this chapter will explain the essential components for developing sound teaching methods for a small group Bible study as well as the theoretical purpose of developing this method. This chapter will argue that teaching the Bible in small group ministry creates a discipleship culture in the local church.

#### **Developing a Vision for Making Disciples Through Bible Teaching**

The word *effective* is defined as success in producing a desired or intended result. Bible teaching that can be described as effective results in people following Christ with increasing devotion and passion. In Acts 14:21-22, Paul and Barnabas not only made disciples in Derbe through the preaching of the gospel, but they went through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch strengthening and encouraging the disciples to persevere in faith. Two aspects of Bible teaching are made clear in this passage. First, teaching the truth of God's grace shown through Christ as revealed in Scripture is necessary for people to experience the peace with God. Second, ongoing teaching of the Bible should have the effect of encouraging disciples and increasing love and devotion to Christ. The Bible provides this vision for producing disciples through Bible teaching, and small group leaders in local churches should follow this pattern for making fervent followers of

Christ. Effective Bible teaching is essential for a local church to effectively make disciples. One does not follow Christ with zeal and devotion if the individual is not growing in knowledge and understanding of Holy Scripture, the words of Christ.

An appropriate vision for discipleship can be found in Titus 2 as Paul elaborates in this letter about his desire for the good news about Jesus to be proclaimed, preserved, and passed on. As Voddie Baucham writes, “An examination of the first two chapters in Titus reveals a pattern I like to call the ‘three-legged stool’ of discipleship. These three supports are (1) godly, mature men and women in the church; (2) godly, manly pastors and elders; (3) biblically functioning homes.”<sup>1</sup> His point is that Titus will make disciples through the ministry of a local church as all people are taught God’s Word and apply it to every aspect of life. Also, Baucham’s vision for a disciple, based on his examination of Titus 2 is a man or woman pursuing and growing in righteousness in submission to the teaching and leadership of God-ordained undershepherds in a local church. Furthermore, this man or woman exudes godly, biblical influence on those closest to them relationally. All three aspects of this pattern of discipleship are dependent on the study and teaching of God’s Word. The “older men” and “older women” Paul refers to are not only physically older but spiritually mature. Baucham writes, “When Paul refers to older men and older women, he is speaking not merely of their age but of the mature character that God forges over time as men and women walk with him.”<sup>2</sup> Spiritual maturity only happens as a result of an individual Christ-follower increasingly taking in scripture through personal devotional reading and study, the consistent exposure to expository preaching, and sitting under sound Bible teaching in a small group setting. The biblical model for receiving sound Bible teaching is first mandated for the home as parents teach the Word of God

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<sup>1</sup> Voddie Baucham, Jr., “Equipping the Generations: A Three-pronged Approach to Discipleship,” *The Journal of Family Ministry*, 2(1), (2011), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Baucham, “Equipping the Generations,” 75.

diligently to their children (Deut 6:7). Also, God gifts others in the church family to both preach and teach the Bible (Eph 4:11, 1 Cor 12:28). The teaching and preaching offered in various settings in the life of a local church serves to equip, mature, and unite the disciples to carry out the ministry of Christ. For a local church to effectively produce disciples, Bible teaching should be offered during both the Sunday sermon and small group settings.

Small group settings can vary in size, structure, and schedule within the ministry of a local church. For example, a small group could be structured as a class meeting in a room within the church property where a teacher speaks to a group of dozens of people for an hour on a Sunday evening. Also, these groups could consist of only two or three individuals meeting on a weekday morning or evening in a home or restaurant for the purpose of prayer, accountability, and Bible study. No matter what form the small group takes, the essential element is Bible study and teaching to serve not only as a catalyst for individual believers to be involved in small group ministry but as the very foundation and purpose of each group. Greg Ogden summarizes the nature of discipleship as he writes, “When the truth of God’s Word is at the heart of self-revealing, intimate relationships rooted in life-change accountability, you have the ingredients for Spirit-motivated transformation.”<sup>3</sup> He goes on to emphatically state the necessity of Scripture in discipleship, “The place to discover reality from the only perspective that counts is the Bible...The objective of this Bible study is to encounter reality and then through God’s power bring our lives in line with it.”<sup>4</sup> Ogden is writing about teaching and studying the Bible in a small group setting, and he is convinced this is a biblical vision of disciple-making. However, my argument is that merely teaching the Bible in a

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<sup>3</sup> Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2007), xii.

<sup>4</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, xv.

small group setting as a part of the ministry of a local church is not a healthy vision for discipleship, but Bible teaching that is both hermeneutically sound and theologically rich can serve as an effective means of producing fervent followers of Jesus in a local church.

The teaching task must be viewed as a vital aspect of ministry that honors God, the Bible, and leads to transformation of the lives of hearers as well as the life of the teacher. In Jackie Smallbones' view, "Teaching Bible in small groups is critical. We need a method that both helps members build relationships with each other and encourages them to remain true to the faith...Ultimately, the task is about (transformation)."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Bible teacher in a small group should be concerned with discipleship and his teaching should lead to group members conforming to Christ. If a church member is a part of a small group weekly for years and never discernably attains a better understanding of the Bible or exhibits a deeper love for Christ, should the small group Bible teacher view his own teaching as deficient? This is a valid question that must be considered with regard to the serious and vital role of teaching Scripture in any setting. As Smallbones writes, "Teaching others is serious business, since it concerns spiritual growth...Since our concern is with spiritual growth, and since this is ultimately God's business, teaching is a spiritual task."<sup>6</sup> I agree with Smallbones' assessment of the spiritual task of Bible teaching in a small group setting, and God's Word is clear that teaching Scripture is a calling to be taken extremely seriously. The Bible offers the warning in the book of James that only few should become Bible teachers, "for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jas. 3:1). James' teaching is that Bible teachers are accountable for handling God's Word accurately and faithfully warranting greater judgment if teaching with carelessness or intentional deception. A

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<sup>5</sup> Jackie Smallbones, "Teaching Bible in Small Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 2, (Fall 1997), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Smallbones, "Teaching Bible in Small Groups," 22.



small group Bible teacher guards himself from this greater judgment by envisioning his teaching task as a primary means that God uses to make disciples.

The reality is that teaching the Bible in small groups must be viewed as an essential part of the disciple-making process in the ministry of a local church. According to the Barna Group's survey entitled *State of the Bible 2019*, only 5% of adults in America can be defined as "Bible centered," meaning they interact frequently with the Bible and it transforms their relationships and shapes their choices.<sup>7</sup> This amounts to a 4% drop in Bible centeredness among American adults since the previous year, 2018 (9%). Furthermore, the report shows that more than one-third of adults (35%) report never using the Bible in 2019, a 10-percentage point increase since 2011 (25%). While this research reveals the trends for Bible engagement for both churched and unchurched adults in America, Christians must be concerned with the view of the Bible's authority for churched adults as well as seemingly ineffective approach to producing disciples who reproduce exponentially. According to Chris Shirley, "Jesus commissioned those who would become the formative core of the early church to make disciples. If that mandate is not being carried out effectively in the context of the local church, the solution is not to abandon the mission, but to strengthen our efforts at accomplishing the charge."<sup>8</sup> In other words, Shirley believes the biblical mandate for every local church always has been and always will be to make disciples, and the mission must be evaluated with regard to efficacy in order to know how to faithfully accomplish the task. The statistics that reveal a steady decline in American adults described as "Bible centered" seem to reveal a deficiency in local churches in, among other things, Bible teaching. Shirley goes on to write:

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<sup>7</sup> Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2019: Trends in Engagement," *Barna*, April 18, 2019, [www.barna.com](http://www.barna.com), 8 September 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Shirley, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship For the Church," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 208.

The local church is composed of disciples who should be investing themselves in the lives of other disciples. The process of following Jesus—discipleship—is the curriculum of this Christ-focused school for making disciples. In Acts 2:42-27, we see a glimpse of the way in which the early church practiced the disciple-making task: ‘add[ing] to their number...teaching...fellowship...praising God...[giving] to anyone as he had need.’ This passage serves as a curricular outline for the priorities of both the local body and the individual disciple after baptism (Acts 2:41): continuing evangelism, teaching, fellowship, worship, and ministry.<sup>9</sup>

I contend that the primary focus among all the functions of a local church in the process of making disciples is bible teaching. Shirley cites the passage in Acts 2 which illuminates the reality that people heard the message of Christ taught by the apostles, they responded in faith, and subsequently “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). As believers are exposed to and heed effective teaching of God’s Word, the ministry of reconciliation will flourish. According to Simon Mak, “God selects leaders, trains them, delegates them with responsibilities, and co-labors with them, but first and most importantly, he gives a leader a vision.”<sup>10</sup> The essence of Mak’s argument is a leader for God’s people in any role or capacity is given a vision from the Lord that has a purpose for the church to grow in Christlikeness. Small group Bible teachers must have a vision for making disciples.

### **Sound Hermeneutics Help Teachers Expose Members to the Truth of Scripture**

The members of a small group Bible study in a local church can increase in both Bible knowledge and maturity of faith as they are consistently taught God’s Word. However, the teaching must be hermeneutically sound to encourage group members to be devoted followers of Jesus. Bible teaching that is haphazard, lazy, or devoid of accurate

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<sup>9</sup> Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship For the Church,” 212.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Mak, “Forming a Kingdom-Minded Missional Community of Discipleship Small Groups.” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2016), 80.

scriptural interpretation can be detrimental to the church, resulting in group members who are immature in faith, lacking Christian growth, or, at worst, following heresy. Small group leaders who employ sound hermeneutic principles in Bible teaching expose group members to the truth of Scripture.

For a small group Bible teacher to expose group members to the truth of Scripture he must understand and utilize proper hermeneutics during lesson preparation. In their book, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard maintain that, “If the goal is correct understanding of communication, we need an approach and methods that reappropriate to the task. Hermeneutics provides the means for acquiring an understanding of the Scriptures.”<sup>11</sup> The point is that Bible teachers must have a primary goal of correctly understanding the text to teach accurately, and correct understanding results from applying hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the strategic process of biblical interpretation that enables the intended meaning of the biblical author to be understood.<sup>12</sup> The goal for all Bible study, teaching, and preaching must be to discern and communicate the author’s intended meaning. Authorial intent for every passage of Scripture is the single, timeless truth that Bible teachers must labor to discover to “rightly handle the Word of God” (2 Tim 2:15).

A small group Bible teacher must first commit to completely submit to God’s Word as the ultimate and sole authority in his life if he is to discover the authorial intent of the biblical text that is to be taught. One cannot truly comprehend the meaning of a text unless it has an effect in one’s life.<sup>13</sup> Also, a biblical interpreter must be aware of presuppositions he brings into his study and possess the capacity to limit these presuppositions to only those forming the foundation of accurate Bible study. One

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<sup>11</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, (Dallas: Word Pub, 1993), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 139.

common presupposition that occurs when approaching Bible study is that the Holy Spirit will illuminate the true meaning of Scripture to the believing reader without the need of going through a process of hermeneutics. While the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is essential for accurate biblical interpretation and can give supernatural understanding to the reader independent from any study method, the observed common means of the Spirit to illuminate the meaning of the text, with few exceptions, is through principled study.

The first sound hermeneutic principle for the small group Bible teacher to employ is making observations of the text. Duvall and Hays comment, “If you move straight from your initial reading of a passage to the application of that passage, you will remain tied to your previous understanding of that text.”<sup>14</sup> Their point is that God wants to have an intimate relationship with His children primarily by speaking through His Word. This intimacy requires devotion, time, and study of the Bible that goes beyond simple, cursory reading. The observation phase of Bible study should include making note of words and phrases that repeat, contrasting or similar ideas, individuals, or items, as well as recognizing cause and effect mentioned in the text. Making note of lists, figures of speech, pronouns, verbs, and conjunctions are other observations that should be made.<sup>15</sup> Other in-depth observations that are helpful to recognize include questions and answers included in the text, dialogue between two or more people, conditional clauses, and the overall tone of the passage. Perhaps the best way to make these observations is to write out or print the passage to be studied to have the ability to freely mark the observed details. For example, repeated words or phrases can be marked with a yellow highlighter, verbs can be underlined with a red pen, and conjunctions can be circled in blue and so on. The system of marking can be customized according to the reader’s preference. The

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<sup>14</sup> Scott J. Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 52.

<sup>15</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 62-63.

important thing is observations of the text are made before any attempt to interpret or apply the passage.

The second sound hermeneutical principle for the small group Bible teacher to employ is exploring the context of the Bible passage. First, the historical-cultural context must be studied to determine as much as possible about the original setting, purpose, and people. As Duvall and Hayes point out, “Remember, a valid interpretation of any text must be consistent with the historical-cultural context of that text.”<sup>16</sup> Determining the biblical writer, audience, and other outside details about the text that aid with comprehension are all aspects of determining the historical-cultural context. Next, the contemporary context of the small group Bible teacher must be understood. Understanding that complete objectivity in interpretation is impossible but seeking objectivity through faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit should be the goal. In Duvall and Hayes’ view, “This type of objectivity has to do with preventing our *preunderstanding*, *our* culture, *our* familiarity, or *our* laziness from obscuring the meaning that God has intended for us in the text.”<sup>17</sup> The essence of their argument is that issues and factors in contemporary life can have a detrimental effect when it comes to biblical interpretation, but these factors can be overcome with awareness and a responsible approach to handling the text. Finally, the literary context of the Bible passage must be considered. According to Köstenberger and Patterson, the literary context of a text is made up of three distinct aspects: canon, genre, and language.<sup>18</sup> The canonical interpretation can be defined as assessing the nature of the Old Testament as “the sacred Scripture of the church and a living and active text that addresses each new

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<sup>16</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Duvall, *Grasping God’s Word*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 78.

generation.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, this approach examines the New Testament as it reveals the fulfillment in Christ of the Old Testament’s hope and message.<sup>20</sup> Interpreting the genre of Scripture involves categories of historical narrative, poetry and wisdom, prophecy, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic literature. Understanding specific characteristics of any given genre of Scripture and learning principles for interpreting each type of literature is imperative for the small group Bible teacher.

Additionally, the theological message of the Bible passage to be taught must be interpreted accurately. To handle God’s Word correctly, a small group Bible teacher must strive to do the vital work of discerning biblical theology. Köstenberger and Patterson define biblical theology as “...theology that is biblical, or, in other words, theology that is derived from the Bible rather than imposed onto the Bible by a given interpreter of Scripture.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, biblical theology develops thinking about God, man, and the world based on what is revealed in Scripture as opposed to the fleeting and fluctuating thoughts and opinions of the reader about what God, man, and the world should be like. The process of studying biblical theology must include determining the theme of a given text. This theme should be traced to as many other parts of the Bible as applicable to accurately interpret God’s intended meaning.

The process of sound biblical interpretation does involve time and effort, but the reward for faithful exposition of God’s Word is knowledge of absolute truth and intimacy with the Heavenly Father. The consequences of not adhering to a healthy hermeneutic are widespread and damaging to people in many ways. Historically, intentional misinterpretations of the Bible have led Jewish people, Roman Catholics, and other cults such as Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses to miss faith in Christ alone as the

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<sup>19</sup> Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 156.

<sup>20</sup> Köstenberger and Patterson, 210.

<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger and Patterson, 694.

only way to peace with God. In addition, the contemporary prosperity movement distorts Scripture by interpreting God's will as for His people to have financial and material prosperity. Beyond some of these hermeneutic atrocities are individuals who argue for no interpretation of the text at all and believe the Bible can be understood by simply reading words and doing what they say. Fee and Stuart disagree with each error of interpretation as they write, "Given all this diversity, both inside and outside the church, and all the differences even among scholars, who supposedly know 'the rules,' it is no wonder that some argue for no interpretation, just reading. But as we have seen, this is a false option. The antidote to *bad* interpretation is not *no* interpretation but *good* interpretation, based on commonsense guidelines."<sup>22</sup> The essence of their argument is that following sound hermeneutic principles when reading and studying the Bible is the only way to be faithful and obedient to God while enjoying the experience of drawing near to Him in disciplined study. The small group Bible teacher in a local church setting should not be lazy or unwise when approaching the study of God's Word, and he should take full advantage of the opportunity to have a close relationship with Jesus by spending time in Bible study. The Bible teacher is blessed by faithfully studying God's Word and he will be a blessing to group members by exposing them to truth.

### **Small Group Bible Teachers Can Enable the Application of Biblical Truth**

"Application completes the interpretive journey which begins by entering the world of the text and ends with a return to our world. Application questions finish the process of bringing the text from the 'then and there' to the 'here and now.'<sup>23</sup> Wilhoit and Ryken make this statement about application as it relates to Bible study and teaching

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<sup>22</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 21.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 170.

making the point that discerning the truth of Scripture and teaching it in a group setting is incomplete if points of application are not mentioned. Application of biblical truth is, in many ways, the purpose of biblical truth. God gives His holy word to His people that gives knowledge of who He is and provides all that is needed for life and godliness. James addresses his audience in the first century who would probably have heard his message in a public worship setting. He exhorts them not to be hearers only of Scripture but be doers as well (Jas 1:22). The goal for a small group Bible study should be the same for any Bible-intake scenario that is to respond to truth for the glory of God. A small group Bible teacher must employ sound hermeneutic principles to aid group members in accurately applying biblical truth in their lives. John Frame writes, “The meaning of Scripture is its application.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, one does not understand the meaning or nature of Scripture unless it is used in everyday life. The Bible is God’s Word, and, therefore, if the clear meaning of the text is not used to conform to God, then there is a lack of understanding on behalf of the hearer.

In addition to the need for understanding the meaning of the text, application of biblical truth will never happen consistently in a Christian’s life unless there is a passion for God. Doriani writes, “If God gives a passion to live the truth, two things follow. First, the desire to practice what we discover improves our ability to understand and do the word...Second, a wise life is beautiful (Jas 3:13).”<sup>25</sup> His point is that a passion for God is consequential, to say the least, for effective application of Scripture in the life of a believer. If we say passion is required for application, the question becomes where does this passion come from and how does one get this passion? Passion can be defined as a feeling of intense enthusiasm for someone or something. As John Piper writes,

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<sup>24</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 67, 97.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 2001), 80.



“Behind the repentance that turns away from sin, and behind the faith that embraces Christ, is the birth of a new taste, a new longing, a new passion for the pleasure of God’s presence. This is the root of conversion.”<sup>26</sup> Piper elaborates on what is clear in the Bible that no one has intense enthusiasm for God apart from His making one’s heart new (Psa 14:2-3; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:1). Therefore, each local church must be aware of God’s means of drawing people to Himself. Paul writes in his letter to the churches in Rome that people must hear the gospel proclaimed to call on God for salvation (Rom 10:13-14). If there is no passion for God unless the Bible is effectively taught, then Bible teaching must be prioritized ministry. Furthermore, effective Bible teaching is used by God to regenerate people which leads to the application of God’s Word in the church for the glory of God. All this to say, effective Bible teaching always includes points of application.

Indeed, the key to accurate application of the text begins with asking the right questions. Walt Kaiser argues, “Our purpose, now, is to ask why this word of the text was preserved for the community of faith and what is the author commanding, summoning, encouraging, rebuking, challenging some or all of the new believing community to do in light of what the writer has said in this text—in spite of its admittedly particularistic setting?”<sup>27</sup> In essence, Kaiser argues that the church must look to the authorial intent of the text in order to determine the response to the text. If a small group Bible teacher can help group members uncover the single, inspired meaning of a pericope then proper application can be encouraged and acted on. The leader must seek to interpret the original biblical author’s intent while understanding the dual authorship of Scripture as the Word from God divinely given to readers throughout the ages. The reality of the dual

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<sup>26</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, Revised ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2011), 74.

<sup>27</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 46(2-3), 177.

authorship of the Bible aids the teacher with interpreting the ultimate goal and meaning of Scripture found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The application phase of Bible study and teaching must connect with the observed and interpreted original intent of any given passage of Scripture, and the teacher must seek to limit personal subjectivity in biblical application.<sup>28</sup> The application of biblical truth can differ for individual Christians based on differences in the context of life. For example, a thirteen-year-old boy will honor his father and mother differently than a 40-year-old woman will. However, the differing applications must still be a response to the meaning of the text. As Duvall and Hays write:

*Meaning* refers to what the original author intended to communicate to the original audience in the text. Since the meaning of the text is tied to the author, it will be the same for all Christians. *Application* refers to the response of the individual reader to the meaning of the text. Application is bound to the specific life situation of the reader and will vary from Christian to Christian along with some boundaries based on the author's meaning. Good question: "What does this text mean and how do I apply this meaning to my life?" Bad question: "What does this text mean to me?" The difference between meaning and application is vital.<sup>29</sup>

Basically, they are saying that while specific applications can vary based upon an individual's context it must be aligned with the singular, timeless interpreted meaning of the biblical text. For the small group Bible teacher to use sound hermeneutics in striving to know the meaning of the text and teach it enables group members to accurately apply God's Word.

### **Small Group Bible Teachers Can Effectively Disciple Group Members**

Not only should small group Bible teachers have a vision for making disciples but employing sound hermeneutic principles should help them effectively disciple group members. In Steve Gladen's view, "The leaders need to understand that their small

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<sup>28</sup> J. A. Baird, "Content Analysis and the Computer: A Case-study in the Application of the Scientific Method to Biblical Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 95(2), 255.

<sup>29</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*: 236.

groups are the best place for discipleship and that members of their group are showing up not just for a Bible study, but to learn truths they can take home and apply to real-life situations as a part of spiritual health.”<sup>30</sup> In making this comment, Gladen urges small group leaders to teach the Bible using a comprehensive method uncovering the intended truth as well as offering insight for the application of the interpretation of the text. Once again, we must acknowledge the purpose for the small group ministry of a local church as a primary and essential means of making disciples. Dale Galloway and Kathi Macias agree when they write, “A disciple is a ‘disciplined one,’ someone who has learned from a designated teacher by example, instruction, and experience over a period. As a result of discipleship, the life of the student is changed.”<sup>31</sup> Their point is that a Bible teacher sets the example of how the Bible is correctly handled, gives instruction resulting from sound hermeneutics, and shares the experience of relating accurate biblical interpretation to real life. Unfortunately, an example set by a Bible teacher as an effective means of disciple-making is obviously absent in many local churches throughout America. A 2019 Discipleship Pathway Assessment study from Nashville-based LifeWay Research conducted a survey of 2,500 Protestant churchgoers using a national pre-recruited panel. The survey revealed that a third of Americans who attend a Protestant church regularly (32%) say they personally read the Bible every day, and around a quarter (27%) say they read it a few times each week. Fewer say they only read it once a week (12%), a few times a month (11%) or once a month (5%), and about 12% admit they rarely or never read the Bible.<sup>32</sup> If the Bible were taught with godly wisdom and accuracy in a clear and compelling way in a small group setting as a ministry of a local church then there would

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<sup>30</sup> Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 72.

<sup>31</sup> Dale E. Galloway and Kathi Macias, *The Small Group Book: The Practical Guide for Nurturing Christians and Building Churches* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 14.

<sup>32</sup> LifeWay Research, “Few Protestant Churchgoers Read the Bible Daily,” July 2, 2019, [lifewayresearch.com/2019/07/02/few-protestant-churchgoers-read-the-bible-daily](http://lifewayresearch.com/2019/07/02/few-protestant-churchgoers-read-the-bible-daily).

be far less confusion about the essential beliefs and practices of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, many more Protestant churchgoers would be equipped and encouraged to personally read the Bible every day. The sound Bible teaching in a small group should occur consistently in addition to the expository preaching delivered each week by a lead pastor, and, in many ways, should be informed and motivated by the preaching of God's Word. If unhealthy or erroneous Bible teaching is happening at the small group level of a church's word ministry, then the lead pastor's preaching should correct and, essentially, rebuke the poor teaching delivered from an unfit small group Bible teacher (2 Tim 3:16). Both excellent preaching and teaching of Scripture are necessary for a local church to effectively make disciples.

Neal McBride offers an answer for how life change happens for believers as he writes, "How does a person become Christlike? How does one learn to walk in love? In what contexts does a Christian experience Christlikeness and become Christlike? Answers to these questions are not simple. Nevertheless, on close examination of the New Testament's record of the life and ministry of Jesus, it becomes clear that one key method is *small groups*."<sup>33</sup> Basically, McBride is saying the biblical model for disciple-making includes small groups, a point that needs emphasizing since the church is tasked with attaining unity in faith and seeing all parts of the body of believers mature in Christlikeness (Eph 4:13). McBride's description of small groups focuses on a designated leader who can effectively analyze a Bible passage to determine the meaning and application to teach the group.<sup>34</sup> If a local church is failing to produce mature, joyful, spirit-filled disciples, then, most likely, the small group ministry lacks competent and capable leaders. Moreover, the church could suffer from small groups that are unbalanced, spending too much time simply socializing while incorporating very little

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<sup>33</sup> Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990), 15.

<sup>34</sup> McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 82.

Bible study and teaching. Another unhealthy dynamic that can exist in a local churches' small group ministry is exclusive charitable work or "serving" the community. For example, the group's primary function is to perform maintenance or beautification projects on the church facility or property or on the homes of church members. While the tasks may be needed and appreciated, the group members can linger for years without growing in their faith and knowledge of the Bible, and, at worst, they perform service tasks to feel good about themselves or as a way of trying to earn blessings from God. The goal of small group ministry must be life change, and the small group leader must make disciples.

Historically, the problem with churches, small groups, and small group leaders who do not effectively make disciples dates back, in part, to the fifth century A.D. when the bishop of Rome became prominent in power, leading to the papal system of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The issue was the massive division and distrust created between the clergy and laity, and this led to the laity's access to Scripture being restricted with the clergy taking full authority for biblical understanding and interpretation.<sup>35</sup> The historical phenomenon of strict divisions between clergy and laity in the church was a departure from the biblical pattern for church life and opened the door for numerous heresies resulting in the spiritual decline in Western civilization known as the Dark Ages.<sup>36</sup> The reformation of these church practices in the sixteenth century led to a widespread return of practicing the priesthood of every believer and adherence to the biblical doctrine for salvation and church. In his book, *Total Church Life*, Darrell Robinson writes of this occurrence, "God-called pastors emerged from among the laity...The distinction between the clergy and the laity was removed in these churches.

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<sup>35</sup> Darrell W. Robinson, *Total Life Church: How to be a First Century Church in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 83.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, *Total Life Church*, 84.

New Testament Christianity began to spread. The vitality of the churches increased evangelism. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were characterized by a great emphasis on world missions.”<sup>37</sup> Robinson points out how God used the teaching and study of His Word among His people to advance His kingdom. Local churches suffer, to say the least, when only a lead pastor or the hired staff are seen as fit and responsible for teaching the Bible.

### **Conclusion**

For local churches, teaching the Bible in small group ministry should create a discipleship culture. Growing in knowledge of Scripture is essential for growing in zeal and obedience to Christ, and a small group Bible teacher must have a vision for making disciples through the teaching of God’s Word. However, only Bible teaching that results from sound hermeneutic principles allows group members to mature in faith. Biblical truth changes lives and only healthy exegesis of the text of Scripture exposes people to this truth. Furthermore, God is glorified as His children commune with Him through Bible study and teaching leading to the application of biblical truth. Effective Bible teaching in a small group setting can enable members of a local church to apply the Bible more faithfully and consistently to daily life, and the sought-after method for making disciples in a local church should be effective Bible teaching in small groups.

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<sup>37</sup> Robinson, *Total Life Church*, 84.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to equip leaders at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church to effectively study and teach the Bible. The first goal of the project involved assessing the current Bible study practices and biblical knowledge of small group leaders and how those practices and knowledge were applied to their teaching of the Bible in small groups. The goal served to gain an understanding of how well our small group leaders were equipped to prepare and teach Bible lessons in order to prepare a curriculum that would be of benefit to them as teachers. The curriculum would need to address areas of weakness in Bible study and teaching methods as well as reinforce strengths in this area. The purpose was to build the confidence of small group leaders in Bible teaching so group members will be consistently exposed to sound and compelling lessons from Scripture.

The seminar covering the curriculum was initially intended to be six weeks, but due to a delay in being able to host in-person groups because of the COVID-19 pandemic the curriculum was covered in four weeks. The time frame proved to be adequate allowing time to cover all the necessary material while observing consistent attendance from small group leaders. I feel four sessions, as opposed to six, was a more feasible expectation of lay leaders to attend an in-person gathering while many small groups were still not meeting in-person due to COVID. The final process included giving the small group leaders at SMRBC an initial survey, reviewing the survey results, and then writing and editing the curriculum with feedback from an expert panel. Next, the curriculum was taught over the course of four consecutive Sunday sessions followed by the final survey given to all attendees after the final session.

The project began on January 10, 2021 and was completed on May 30, 2021. The first week of the project consisted of asking SMRBC small group leaders to complete a survey on Bible study and knowledge (appendix 1). Week 2 involved evaluating the responses to the survey to inform the preparation of the curriculum. The four-session curriculum was composed during Week 3 through Week 8, and a panel of five current and former pastors utilized a rubric (appendix 2) to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The evaluation and subsequent revision of the curriculum occurred Week 9 through Week 12.

During Week 12 through Week 15 I administered a pre-survey to the small group leaders entitled “Knowledge and Confidence in Bible Study and Teaching” (appendix 3) and taught the curriculum entitled “Conviction, Clarity, and Confidence in Bible Study and Teaching” in four separate one-hour sessions. The teaching sessions were followed by administering the post-survey (appendix 3) from Week 16 to Week 17. Also, during Week 17 the pre and post surveys were compared using a t-test for dependent samples. The five leaders who demonstrated the greatest increase in confidence between their pre and post survey scores were interviewed during Week 18 to Week 19 using a post-course evaluation (appendix 4). Finally, the curriculum was revised based on the results of the post-course interviews during Week 20 to Week 21.

### **Week 1**

The first week of the project was January 10, 2021 as the survey on Bible study and knowledge was distributed electronically. The purpose of the survey was to assess each small group leader’s present Bible study practices and basic biblical knowledge. The results of this survey informed the development of the curriculum to serve as a helpful guide for developing healthy Bible study and teaching practices.

I prepared the survey to send out to 45 small group leaders. The leaders consisted of current pastors, Life Group leaders (adult Sunday School), Grow Group



leaders (adult discipleship groups) as well as all the Student Ministry leaders (youth Life Groups and discipleship groups). The leaders were emailed the description and purpose of the survey as well as a link to access the questions online. 42 of the 45 leaders responded to the survey. The survey began with some basic questions such as their leadership role at SMRBC, how many years of serving in that leadership role, and how many years professing Christ as Lord and Savior. Of the 42 respondents, 33 were Life Group leaders, 4 Grow Group leaders, 3 pastors, and 2 were former Life Group leaders. 31 respondents have professed faith in Christ for 21 years or more, and 17 respondents have served as Life Group or Grow Group leaders at SMRBC for between 5-9 years.

After the general information portion, “Section I” of the survey included questions about how many hours each week the leaders spent reading the Bible for personal study and devotions and how many hours a week reading and studying the Bible for preparation to teach a small group. Five said they read the Bible 0-1 hour for personal study or devotions, 23 said 2-4 hours, 8 said 5-7 hours, and 6 responded 8 or more hours. Six people indicated they spend 0-1 hour reading and studying the Bible for preparation when teaching a small group, 21 answered 2-4 hours, 10 answered 5-7 hours, and 5 said 8 or more hours.

“Section II” of the survey consisted of six statements those surveyed were asked to respond to using a six-point Likert scale. The responses to these six statements are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Responses to Likert-criteria questions

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
S1	—	3	9	18	11	1
S2	—	—	—	—	—	42

*Table 1. continued*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
S3	—	—	—	4	18	20
S4	—	2	2	13	16	9
S5	—	1	1	7	17	16
S6	—	—	—	—	13	29

Statement 1: Memorizing Scripture is a present practice of yours.

The plurality (18) of respondents agreed with this statement. One person strongly agreed, 11 agreed, 9 disagreed somewhat, and 3 disagreed.

Statement 2: The Bible is totally true and trustworthy without any mixture of error.

All respondents (42) strongly agreed with this statement.

Statement 3: Discovering the historical setting of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.

The plurality (20) of respondents strongly agreed with this statement. 18 agreed and 4 agreed somewhat.

Statement 4: Determining the genre of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.

The plurality (16) of respondents agreed with this statement. 13 agreed somewhat, 9 strongly agreed, 2 disagreed somewhat, and 2 disagreed.

Statement 5: Determining the theology of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.

The plurality (17) of respondents agreed with this statement. 16 strongly agreed, 7 agreed somewhat, 1 disagreed somewhat, and 1 disagreed.

Statement 6: Addressing how to apply biblical truth is an aspect of sound Bible teaching in a small group setting.

The majority (29) of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 13 agreed.

“Section III” of the survey consisted of 12 questions intended to assess each small group leader’s basic biblical knowledge.

How many books are in the Bible?

42 / 42 correct responses

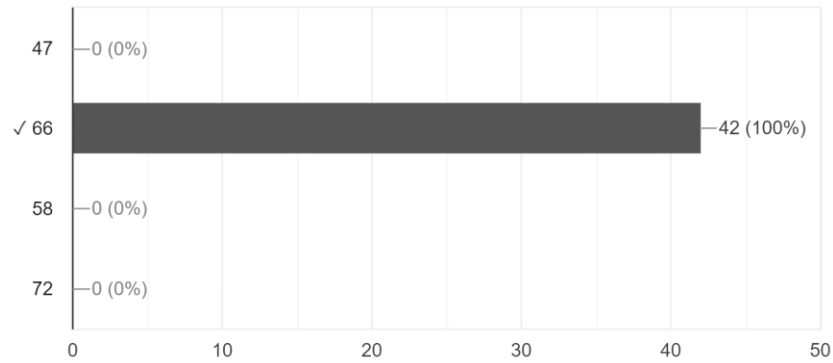


Figure 1. Books in the Bible

The majority of the Book of Genesis primarily focuses on which character?

22 / 42 correct responses

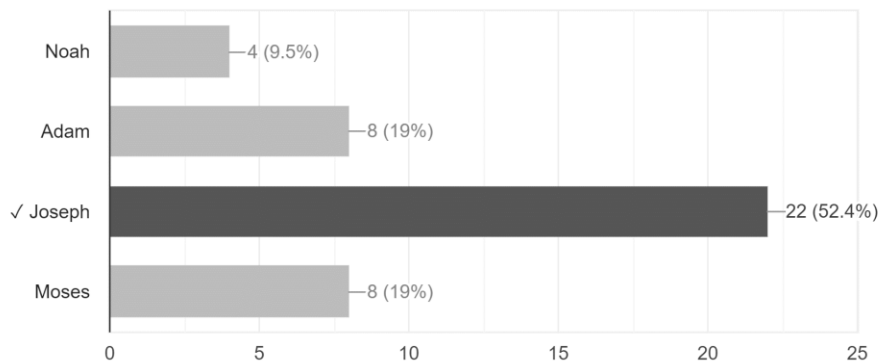


Figure 2. Book of Genesis

How long did the Israelites wander in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt?

40 / 42 correct responses

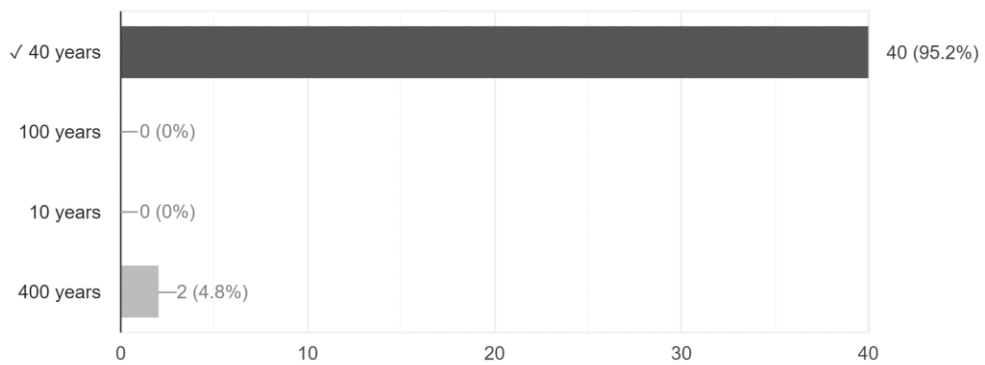


Figure 3. The Exodus

Which judge summoned Barak in the Book of Judges?

38 / 42 correct responses

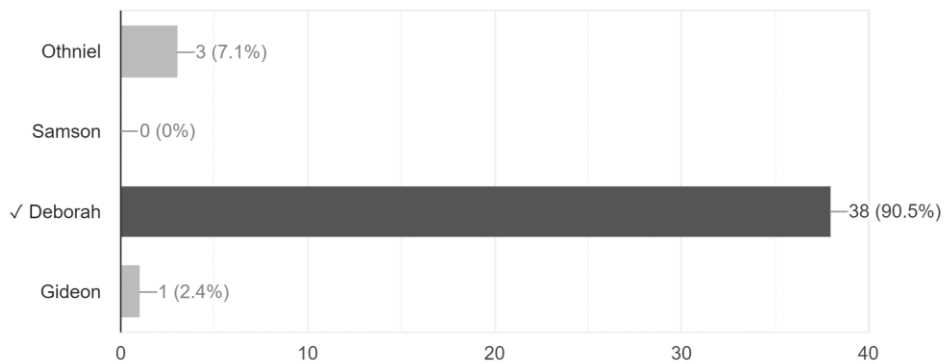


Figure 4. The Book of Judges

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!" is found in which book of the Bible?

37 / 42 correct responses

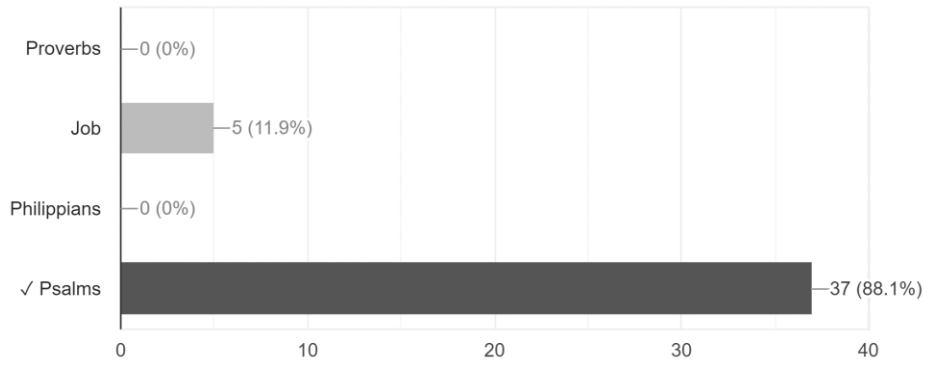


Figure 5. Psalms 139

Which prophet is often called the "weeping prophet"?

39 / 42 correct responses

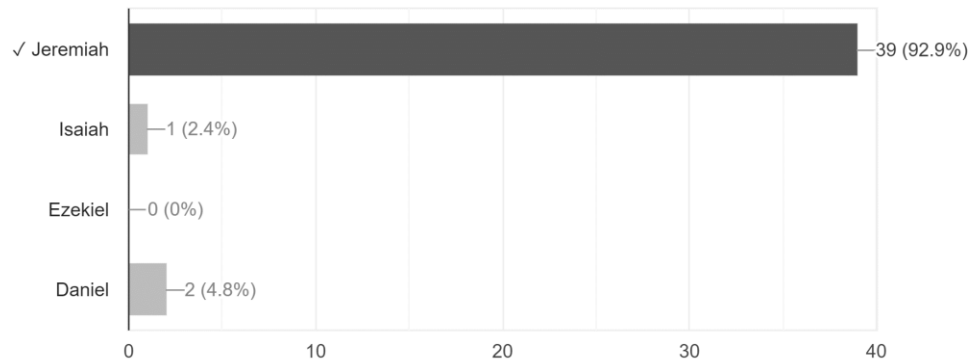


Figure 6. Jeremiah

Which of the four Gospels is addressed to "Theophilus?"

38 / 42 correct responses

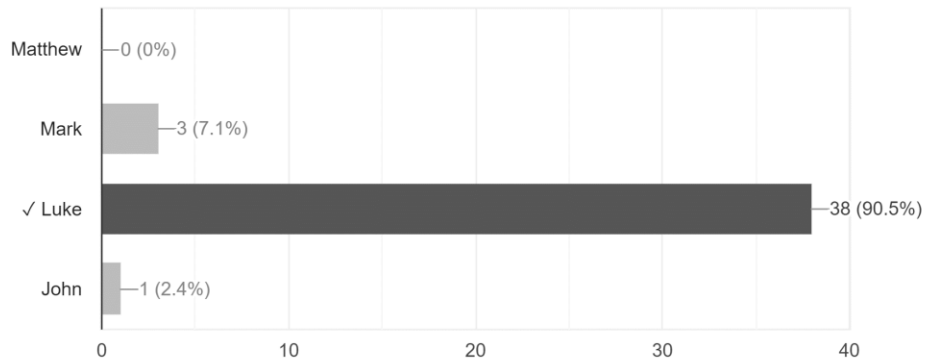


Figure 7. The Gospel of Luke

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," is found in which book of the Bible?

38 / 42 correct responses

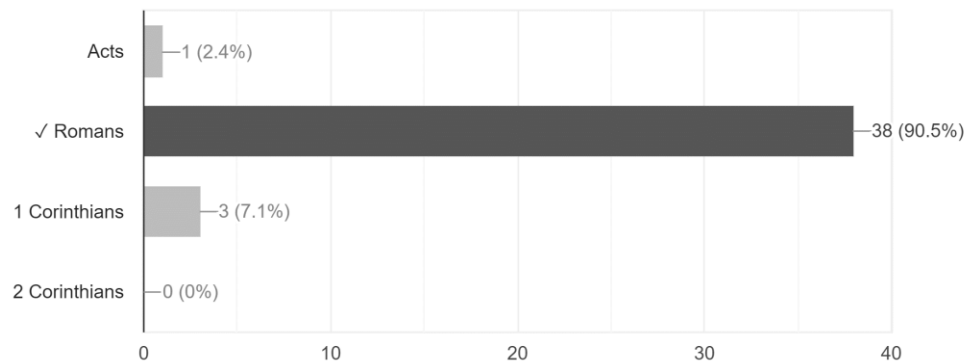


Figure 8. The Book of Romans

Who was the centurion God spoke to bring Peter to Joppa?

37 / 42 correct responses

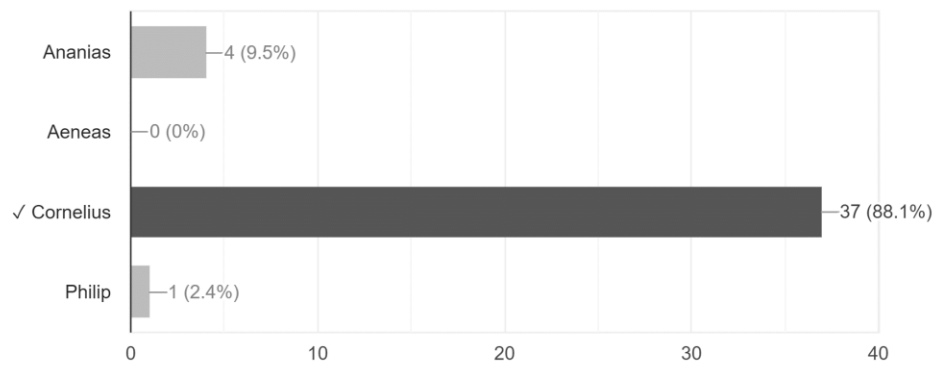


Figure 9. The Centurion

Where was the apostle John when he received the revelation of Jesus Christ?

40 / 42 correct responses

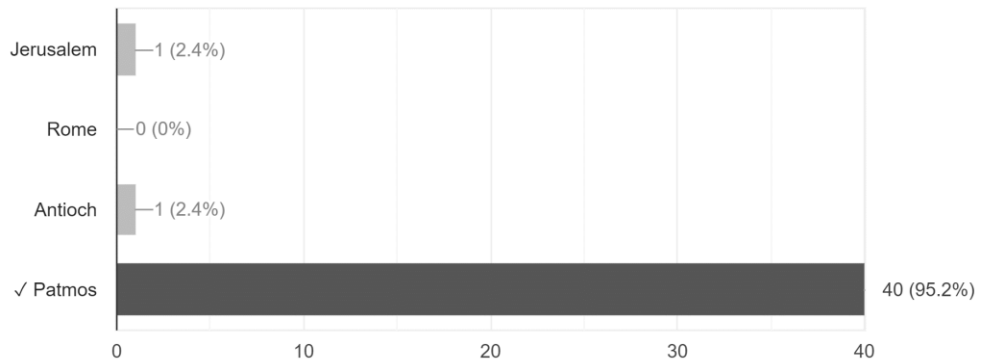


Figure 10. John on Patmos

How many years before Jesus' birth was the book of Isaiah written?

39 / 42 correct responses

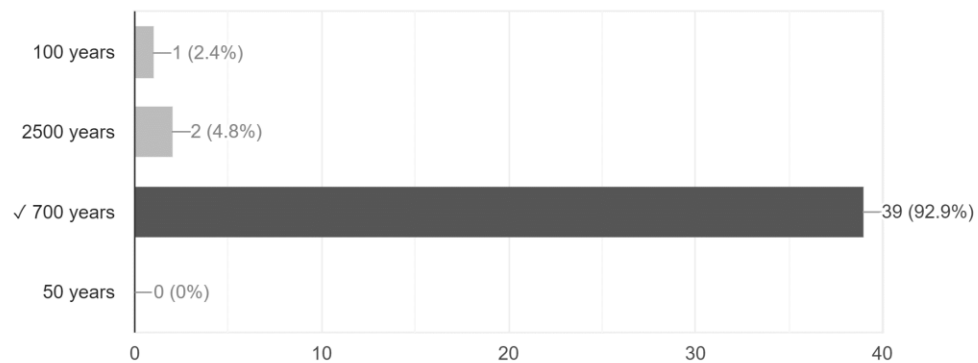


Figure 11. The date of Isaiah

When was the book of Revelation written?

42 responses

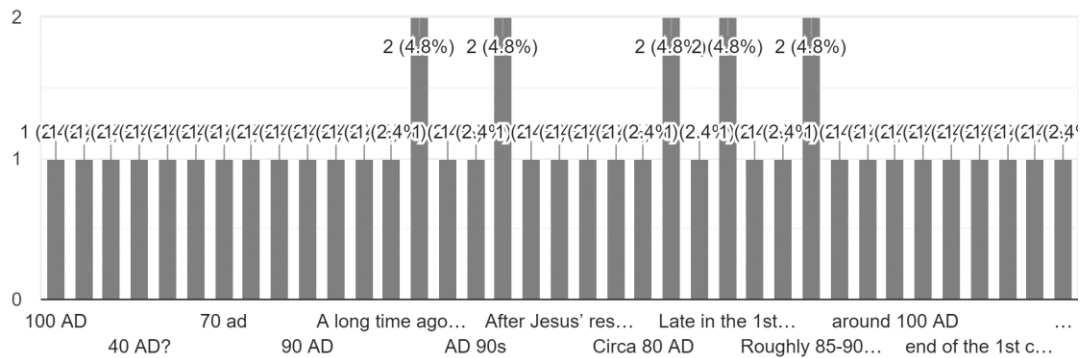


Figure 12. The date of Revelation

## Week 2

During the second week of the project, the responses to the survey were reviewed. After receiving feedback from those surveyed it was determined that Question 2 of Section III confused many. The wording of the question was not clear, and the use of the word “majority” was incorrect making it impossible for the reader to give an accurate response. I decided to disregard the responses to that question.



### **Week 3-Week 8**

The next six weeks of the project consisted of preparing a four-session curriculum aimed at helping SMRBC's small group leaders gain confidence in Bible study and teaching. The curriculum was entitled "Conviction, Clarity, and Confidence in Bible Study and Teaching." The contents of the curriculum were as follows:

- (1) Introduction and answering the question, "What are we doing here?"; the accuracy and authority of Scripture.
- (2) Session 1: Hermeneutics 101- Historical context and literary context
- (3) Session 2: Hermeneutics 101- Theological context and biblical theology
- (4) Session 3: Detailed Bible Study- grammar, syntax, observation, interpretation, application
- (5) Session 4: Preparing and Teaching Effective Bible Lessons- main idea presented, asking good questions, Christ as center, application.

As the curriculum was covered over four sessions, additional examples were given and questions from attendees led to discussion of issues that occasionally diverted from the specific topics covered in the curriculum. Also, the homework assignments for Sessions 1, 2, and 3 were covered at the beginning of the last three sessions.

### **Week 9-Week 12**

The initial version of the curriculum was emailed to 3 current and two former pastors who are all members of SMRBC. Each one was asked to evaluate the curriculum utilizing a rubric (Appendix 2). The rubric provided for evaluation of the following criteria: biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and the practicality of the curriculum. Some points of attention came from the pastors' evaluation including some correction of footnotes as well as providing more explanation for how to find main themes for a Bible passage. One evaluator gave feedback for me to consider providing a sentence diagram using a didactic passage as opposed to a narrative passage. That was valuable feedback with the necessary revision reflected in the final draft of the curriculum. Further feedback was given on how to teach the curriculum. Specifically, one

of the former pastors encouraged me to allow small groups of two to four individuals an opportunity to discuss questions and new concepts to introduce aspects of each session in the curriculum. This was also valuable feedback that I implemented as the curriculum was presented. Overall, the evaluations gave me confidence that the curriculum would be helpful for the small group leaders of our local church.

### Week 12-Week 15

During Week 12 the pre-survey was given to each small group leader at the beginning of Session 1. The pre-survey entitled “Pre-Post Survey for Knowledge and Confidence in Bible Study and Teaching” (Appendix 3) used a six-point Likert scale to measure each small group leader’s present knowledge of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis as well as sound Bible teaching methodology.

Table 2. Responses to Likert-criteria questions (pre)

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
S1	—	—	—	2	11	5
S2	—	—	—	1	4	13
S3	—	—	2	4	4	8
S4	—	—	—	3	6	9
S5	—	1	3	7	5	2
S6	—	—	—	—	8	10
S7	—	—	—	1	6	11
S8	—	2	1	2	8	5
S9	—	—	—	1	5	12
S10	—	1	2	3	9	3

Statement 1: I am confident in my ability to interpret Scripture.

Eleven people agreed with this statement. Two people agreed somewhat and 5 strongly agreed.

Statement 2: The historical setting of a given passage of Scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.

Thirteen people strongly agreed with this statement. Four people agreed and 1 person agreed somewhat.

Statement 3: I am confident in my ability to discover the historical setting of a given passage of Scripture.

Eight people strongly agreed with this statement. Four people agreed, 4 people agreed somewhat, and 2 people disagreed somewhat.

Statement 4: The grammar and syntax of a given passage of Scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.

Nine people strongly agreed with this statement. Six people agreed and 3 agreed somewhat.

Statement 5: I am confident in my ability to understand the grammar and syntax of a given passage of Scripture.

Seven people agreed somewhat with this passage. Five people agreed, 3 disagreed somewhat, and 1 person disagreed.

Statement 6: The Bible teaches the importance of sound interpretation.

Ten people strongly agreed with this statement, and 8 people agreed.

Statement 7: Determining the genre of a given passage of Scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.

Eleven people strongly agreed with this statement. Six people agreed and 1 person agreed somewhat.

Statement 8: I am confident in my ability to determine the genre of a given passage of Scripture.

Eight people agreed with this statement. Five people strongly agreed, 2 agreed somewhat, 2 disagreed, and 1 person disagreed somewhat.

Statement 9: Determining the theology of a given passage of Scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.

Twelve people strongly agreed with this statement. Five people agreed and 1 person agreed somewhat.

Statement 10: I am confident in my ability to determine the theology of a given passage of Scripture.

Nine people agreed with this statement. Three people strongly agreed, 3 agreed somewhat, 2 disagreed somewhat, and 1 person disagreed.

### **Week 12 (cont.)**

The first session of the curriculum was taught on the afternoon of Sunday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, from 4-5pm. The session began with answering the question, “What are we doing here?” This introductory section included information about what Southern Baptists believe about the Bible, the Bible’s essential nature for teaching and discipleship, the biblical writers’ awareness of writing God’s words, as well as how a local church can be faithful and obedient to the Bible. The purpose of this section of the curriculum was to remind each small group leader of the amazing gift of God that is the Bible and the seriousness of the task of teaching the Bible to others.

After the introductory material was covered, Session 1: Hermeneutics 101 was taught. This session’s outline is as follows:

1. What is hermeneutics?
  - a. Hermeneutics refers to the study of the methodological principles of interpretation of the Bible.
  - b. The reason why we spend time and effort to interpret Scripture correctly is that it shows love for God and helps us love him more (Deut. 6:5) as well as

knowing that the truth of God's Word sets us free (John 8:31-32).

- c. Context is key for sound biblical interpretation
2. 3 Types of Contexts
- a. The historical context is determining the historical setting of the passage and identifying relevant cultural background issues.
  - b. The literary context is determining the literary genre of the text and interpreting accordingly as well as understanding a passage in the context of the whole of Scripture.

### **Week 13**

Session 2: Hermeneutics 101 (Cont.) was taught on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from 4-5pm.

The session began with reviewing the homework from Session 1 with the attendees. The homework focused on answering three questions dealing with the context of James 2:14-26. After reviewing the homework, the session focused on determining the theological context of a text.

Session 2: Hermeneutics 101 (Cont.) followed this outline:

- 1. Why is understanding the theological context important?
  - a. The theological context is determining the theological theme of the text and how it contributes to understanding the character and plan of God in dealing with his people.
  - b. According to Jesus, the Old Testament was written about him, and his followers will proclaim the truth of salvation in Christ alone everywhere.
- 2. What is biblical theology?
  - a. Biblical theology allows the reader to see the hero of the Bible and each individual book of the Bible as Jesus.
  - b. Acts 17:2-3, 11 reveals that believers in Christ should follow the example of the Bereans by examining the Scriptures every day to confirm the truth of Jesus as the central theme of the Bible.

3. How do we go about doing biblical theology?
  - a. The focus for doing biblical theology must be historical.
  - b. Biblical theology allows Scripture to be understood on its own terms. We can trust the words given by God will lead us to understand how he wants us to think about truth centered on the good news.<sup>1</sup>
  - c. The New Testament develops many Old Testament themes to reveal Christ, and this is helpful for the Bible teacher (included Edmund Clowney and Sidney Greidanus examples).

### **Week 14**

Session 3: Detailed Bible Study was taught on May 16, 2021. The session began with reviewing the homework from the previous week. The homework assignment consisted of answering specific questions about Deuteronomy 26:12-15 in order to proclaim Christ from the text if this was the central passage taught in a small group Bible study. After the homework review, the focus of the session was on a specific approach to studying the Bible.

The session followed this outline:

1. Understanding grammar and syntax
  - a. Grammar is defined as the set of structural constraints on a speaker's or writer's composition of clauses, phrases and words, and syntax is defined as the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.
  - b. The awareness of what needs to be interpreted when it comes to studying a passage of Scripture is vital and a general knowledge of grammar and syntax eases the burden of the teacher's task.

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Roark and Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 29.

## 2. Observation, Interpretation, and Application

- a. Phase 1: Observation- This phase is an explanation of a system of marking the text to determine the author's flow of thought and use of vocabulary as well as to determine major themes and questions about the text that need to be answered.
- b. Phase 2: Interpretation- This phase involves using the context, comparing multiple translations, defining key and repeated words, studying cross-references, and looking up background information to answer the questions from the observation phase.
- c. Phase 3: Application- This phase requires listing principles stated or implied from a particular passage and finding ways to specifically apply those principles to one's life.

### **Week 15**

Session 4: Preparing and Teaching Effective Bible Lessons was taught on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. The session began with reviewing the homework from Session 3 which required each attendee to apply the skills addressed for detailed Bible study to James 1. Based on the observation, interpretation, and application study of the passage, the attendees were asked to list the main idea(s) found in James 1 that could be used to formulate an effective Bible lesson. A teaching method for Bible lessons followed the homework review.

Session 4 outline:

1. The first step following detailed Bible study when preparing to teach.
  - a. Avoid simply reading or reciting your study notes of the Bible passage to be taught.
  - b. The goal of Bible teaching is the worship of Jesus.
  - c. Facilitating discussion and providing revealed truth from personal Bible study

that allows group members to know God more is effective Bible teaching in a small group setting.

2. Why should we prepare and teach effective Bible lessons?
  - a. Paul indicates the reason for consistent, effective Bible teaching is to conform hearers to the likeness of Christ (Col. 1:28-29).
  - b. Jesus indicates that the eternal life that comes through faith in him and his atoning work is realized as you “know” God (John 17:3).
3. How do we go about preparing and teaching effective Bible lessons?
  - a. Step 1: Main Idea is Presented
  - b. Step 2: Developing Good Questions
  - c. Step 3: Christ as Center
  - d. Step 4: Application because of reverence and adoration

### Week 16-Week 17

During Week 16 Following the four teaching sessions the post-survey was given to each small group leader during Week 16. The post-survey entitled “Pre-Post Survey for Knowledge and Confidence in Bible Study and Teaching” (Appendix 3) used a six-point Likert scale to measure each small group leader’s present knowledge of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis as well as sound Bible teaching methodology.

Table 3. Responses to Likert-criteria questions (post)

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
S1	—	—	—	—	7	7
S2	—	—	—	—	1	13
S3	—	—	—	—	5	9
S4	—	—	—	—	5	9
S5	—	—	—	5	4	5



Table 3. continued

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
S6	—	—	—	—	1	13
S7	—	—	—	—	4	10
S8	—	—	—	3	5	6
S9	—	—	—	—	3	11
S10	—	—	—	1	8	5

During Week 17, I was able to compare the pre-post surveys for all participants who took the survey prior to the four instruction sessions and who took the same survey following the four instruction sessions. Not all participants were able to attend all four sessions. Therefore, their surveys were not used in the t-test for dependent samples. To assess the overall change in response to the pre-post survey for each participant, I gave a total sum for the survey based on the six-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree= 1, Disagree= 2, Disagree Somewhat= 3, Agree Somewhat= 4, Agree= 5, and Strongly Agree= 6

Table 4. T-test for Dependent Samples

	Before	After
Participant 1	51	52
Participant 2	60	60
Participant 3	45	51
Participant 4	44	54
Participant 5	60	60
Participant 6	50	50
Participant 7	49	53
Participant 8	50	60

*Table 4. continued*

Participant 9	56	60
Participant 10	52	56
Participant 11	54	56
Participant 12	56	59
Participant 13	46	50
Participant 14	37	53

### **Week 18-Week 19**

During the two weeks following the four sessions of teaching, the five leaders who demonstrated the greatest increase in confidence were interviewed using the post-course evaluation (Appendix 4). This evaluation intended to help me identify the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and teaching sessions. The following are some examples of responses to these evaluation questions:

(1) Has this training proved helpful to you? If so, how?

“Yes! The last session on developing good questions and the purpose of application was especially helpful.”

(2) What area of your Bible study and teaching has improved the most? How?

“The observation emphasis forced me to slow down when I’m reading.”

(3) How has your understanding of hermeneutics and exegesis changed from the start of the course?

“I believe I could now give you the definition of each and a cursory overview of their importance, whereas before I had never even heard of those terms.”

(4) What topic covered in the course was most interesting to you? Why?

“Preparing your own lesson. I have relied heavily on pre-arranged materials and this allowed me to see how that work was done so I can personally grow.”

(5) How could the course be improved to benefit the Bible study and teaching of small

group leaders at SMRBC?

“More application and breaking this down into smaller chunks and allow for more exercises of application, having more resources available like commentaries and lexicons.”

### **Conclusion**

Both the Bible Study and Knowledge Assessment (appendix 1) and the Pre-Survey (appendix 3) revealed most study participants had a basic knowledge of the Bible and a substantial amount of ability and confidence in Bible study and teaching. As the project moved forward to the final survey, it became apparent that some leaders had never been exposed to teaching on hermeneutics and some enjoyed a fresh reminder of some key principles with studying Scripture and preparing to teach a small group. The project served to help small group leaders better utilize a small group Bible study curriculum as well as how to not rely too heavily on a curriculum that can lead to hastily preparing a lesson week after week. A thorough evaluation of the project will be offered in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The ministry project began on January 10, 2021, and was completed on May 30, 2021. The integral aspects of the project included three surveys given to small group leaders and a four-session curriculum taught to attending small group leaders. The project had a focus on accomplishing a specific purpose comprised of four essential goals. This chapter consists of an evaluation of the project fulfillment of its purpose, meeting the four goals, as well as an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Finally, reflections will be explained pertaining to changes to be made, theology, and personal ministry.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to increase the confidence of leaders at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church in effective Bible study and teaching. The small group leaders had to understand the need for further training on how to study the Bible as well as teaching it to a small group to achieve this purpose. The project was conducted to serve as an effective way to equip small group leaders to serve the church well. The small group leaders who participated in the project now have a basic knowledge of Bible study and teaching methods and a resource in the form of the four-session curriculum to refer to as needed.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

The goals for my project served to achieve the stated purpose of equipping leaders at SMRBC to effectively study and teach the Bible. Each of the four goals were measured for success.

## **First Goal**

The stated purpose of the first goal was to assess the current Bible study practices and knowledge of small group leaders at SMRBC. The Bible Study and Knowledge Assessment (appendix 1) was used to assess each leader's current Bible study practices as well as knowledge of Scripture. At the time the project was conducted SMRBC had 45 small group leaders. Out of the 45 leaders, 15 are adult leaders in the Student Ministry and 30 are leaders in adult small groups, current pastors, or adult discipleship group leaders.

Chapter 1 stated the goal would be considered successful if at least 66 percent of the current small group leaders complete the inventory. The inventory was delivered to the 45 leaders in digital format and 42 leaders responded. Therefore, the stated goal was successfully met.

Chapter 4 included an overview of the survey results, but an in-depth evaluation is needed. Twenty-nine of the 42 respondents were male and 13 were female. Six of the female respondents are small group leaders in the student ministry, 5 are leaders in all-female discipleship groups, and 2 are small group leaders in co-ed adult groups. The median age of the respondents was 43 years old with the youngest being 22 years old and the oldest 79.

After the general information portion of the survey, "Section I" sought to gather information about the respondents' spiritual background and Bible study habits. Thirty-one respondents indicated professing Jesus as Lord and Savior for 21 years or more and 17 have served as small group leaders at SMRBC for 5 years or more. These responses indicate that the majority of the small group leaders at SMRBC are experienced in leading and should have a mature knowledge of Scripture. The fact that many of the respondents were experienced Bible teachers and have followed Jesus for many years made the results of "Section III" unsurprising. "Section III" consisted of 12 questions dealing with various basic Bible facts intended to assess familiarity with the Bible. Perhaps the only surprising incorrect responses were two answers that the

Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 400 years and 5 respondents thinking a familiar verse from Psalms 139 was from the Book of Job.

“Section I” also included some questions about how much time the respondents spend each week studying the Bible. Twenty-three responded they spend between 2 to 4 hours each week in personal Bible study and 21 indicated they spend between 2 to 4 hours each week in Bible study to prepare teaching a small group. Also, 14 responded that they had received some formal training in Bible study and teaching ranging from seminary degrees to Vacation Bible School teacher training. These questions lead into “Section II” dealing with various aspects of spiritual disciplines and Bible teaching methods. Eighteen respondents indicated they “Agree Somewhat” that memorizing Scripture was their present practice. Twenty-nine responded they “Strongly Agree” that how to apply biblical truth was an aspect of sound Bible teaching in a small group setting while 16 responded “Strongly Agree” that determining the theology of a given passage is important and a significant emphasis when preparing to teach. The first goal was met by giving necessary information needed to assess the current Bible study practices and knowledge of 42 small group leaders.

## **Second Goal**

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that will equip small group leaders to faithfully study and teach the Bible. First, it was determined that the curriculum would need to be covered in 4 sessions instead of 6. The timing was such that in-person gatherings were still infrequent for SMRBC due to pandemic regulations in the state of Virginia. The sessions had been delayed to offer in-person instruction using the curriculum as opposed to virtual sessions. Also, the judgment was made to ask small group leaders to attend 4 sessions instead of 6. The curriculum was prepared and delivered to three current pastors and two former pastors, all members of SMRBC, to evaluate the curriculum using a provided rubric (appendix 2). The details of the scope of

the rubric and this evaluation process were detailed in Chapter 4. The goal was considered met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. The initial version of the curriculum was evaluated with 95 percent of the criterion meeting or exceeding the sufficient level. However, there were several revisions made to the curriculum based on the evaluators' feedback. Based on the feedback provided by the evaluators and the finalized version of the curriculum, the second goal can be counted as met.

### **Third Goal**

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of Bible study and teaching among small group leaders at SMRBC. This goal was measured by administering a pre-post survey used to measure the change in knowledge of biblical teaching (appendix 3). The pre-survey was given to each small group leader registered for and attended Session 1 of the four-session seminar. The decision was made to give this survey in paper format to those who were physically present for Session 1 as opposed to the original plan of electronic delivery two weeks prior. This change helped secure accurate responses from only those who were attending with no time lapse from the beginning of instruction. Also, the post-survey was given to each attendee at the conclusion of Session 4 as well as delivered electronically to those who attended at least two sessions but were not present for the fourth and final session.

The pre-post survey included five statements pertaining to each respondent's self-assessed knowledge of biblical teaching. The specific wording of the statements included in the survey was detailed in Chapter 4. Observing an increase in "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses as the measure of a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-survey responses. For Statement 2 dealing with the significance of the historical setting, there were 4 fewer to responses from the pre-survey to the post (18 to 14) and 3 fewer "Agree" responses (4 to 1), the same number of

“Strongly Agree” responses (13), with no other response being given on the post-survey. Statement 4 measured the respondents feeling about the significance of grammar and syntax regarding biblical interpretation. There was no positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post survey scores for this statement. For Statement 6, three more respondents indicated they “Strongly Agree” that the Bible teaches the importance of sound interpretation on the post-survey that the pre-survey, a 30 percent increase. The importance of determining the genre of a given passage for accurate biblical interpretation was detailed in Statement 7 and the respondents were all in agreement on some level on the pre-survey and did not indicate notable different responses on the post-survey. Finally, Statement 9 referred to the theology of a passage as an important dimension of accurate interpretation. This goal was unsuccessful because the t-test for dependent samples did not demonstrate a positive statistically significant difference for the pre and post survey responses for all the statement regarding knowledge of Bible study and teaching.

#### **Fourth Goal**

The fourth goal was to increase the confidence of the small group leaders as it relates to preparing and teaching a Bible lesson. This goal was measured by using the pre and post survey responses for the statements regarding the confidence of the small group leader (appendix 3). The pre-post survey included five statements about the small group leaders’ level of confidence in specific fundamental aspects of Bible study and teaching. Statement 1 simply asked the respondents to rate their confidence in interpreting Scripture. The pre-survey responses to Statement 1 were as follows: 2 “Agree Somewhat,” 11 “Agree,” and 5 “Strongly Agree.” The post-survey included four fewer total responses with 7 respondents choosing “Agree” and 7 respondents choosing “Strongly Agree.” Responses to Statement 3 were as follows for the pre-survey: 2 “Disagree Somewhat,” 4 “Agree Somewhat,” 4 “Agree,” and 8 “Strongly Agree.” The



post-survey revealed 5 responding “Agree” and 9 responding “Strongly Agree.” The most significant difference in the responses for Statement 5 was the 5 “Strongly Agree” responses on the post-survey while only two “Strongly Agree” responses were given on the pre-survey. Statement 8 responses included one more “Strongly Agree” on the post-survey (5 to 6) and Statement 10 responses included two more “Strongly Agree” when comparing the post-survey to the pre-survey (5 to 3). The fourth goal was considered successful as the number of “Strongly Agree” responses for the five statements regarding confidence in preparing and teaching a Bible lesson increased by 40% from the pre to post surveys even with four fewer respondents to the post-survey. In addition to the survey results, the “Post-Course Interview of Five Students who Increased Their Confidence Level in Bible Study and Teaching the Most” (appendix 4) revealed an increase in confidence as detailed in Chapter 4.

### **Strengths of the Project**

The project can be considered somewhat successful as 3 of 4 stated goals were met. One strength of the project which I consider the most significant is the final version of the Bible study and teaching curriculum. The curriculum consists of a teaching guide including four sessions covering basic lessons on hermeneutics, detailed Bible study, and preparing and teaching effective Bible lessons. The format of the curriculum included some fill-in-the-blank portions, homework assignments, and quotes from cited resources that gave the attendee a substantial reason to be present for the teaching sessions. While the curriculum is of some benefit as a stand-alone resource used to gain a basic understanding of Bible interpretation, study, and teaching, the maximum benefit of the curriculum can only be gained by utilizing it as a guide to the teaching sessions. The teaching sessions provide the missing terms for the fill-in-the-blank portions, answers and group discussion for the homework assignments, as well as elaboration on the cited resources. The curriculum was a significant strength of the project as it provided the

small group leaders of SMRBC with either an approach to Bible study and teaching they had not previously been exposed to or a refreshing reminder of a sound method for biblical interpretation and teaching. Also, the curriculum, once completed, serves as a lasting resource for small group leaders as they teach the Bible on an ongoing basis.

Another strength of the project was the post-course evaluation (appendix 4) given to the five leaders who demonstrated the greatest increase in confidence. The leaders' responses provided helpful feedback for ongoing development of the curriculum as well as the indication of the need to offer the course again for the purpose of having more small group leaders in attendance.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One weakness of the project was the lack of attendees for all four teaching sessions. Only 9 of the 18 small group leaders present attended all four sessions. Therefore, the post-survey results were based on an incomplete experience of the content for some of the respondents. The schedule of the four sessions was made known to the small group leaders well in advance and encouragement was given to attend each one, but schedule conflicts and other commitments were, perhaps, unavoidable. The attendance issue led to suboptimal post-survey results.

A second weakness of the project was not giving enough attention and time to having course attendees practice the Bible interpretation and teaching skills that were introduced during the teaching sessions. The homework assignments gave the opportunity to practice some of these skills. However, a portion of time during each of the four sessions devoted to practicing how to identify the literary and theological context of a passage, grammar, syntax, as well as developing good discussion questions would have been helpful for the small group leaders.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

The first thing I would do differently would have been to offer each session

multiple times. I feel I could have increased attendance by offering each session at least at two different times. Not only would this accommodate the schedules of some small group leaders wanting to attend but it would also offer an opportunity to make-up a missed session. I wanted as many small group leaders at SMRBC as possible to receive the instruction found in this project and I should have given more opportunities to do so.

Also, I would have given an additional question in the Bible Study and Knowledge Assessment (appendix 1) for respondents to provide a detailed description of how they go about studying the Bible and preparing to teach. The questions asked only focused on the amount of time spent each week in Bible study and lesson preparation. I was surprised that 15 of the 42 respondents indicated they spent at least five hours studying and preparing to teach their small group. It would have been helpful for the finalization of the curriculum to have a description of each leader's process.

Finally, I would change the timing of each session to last an hour and a half instead of just one hour. I feel additional time would have solved the weakness of not allowing for the practice of learned skills. The one-hour sessions caused me to not spend as much time on discussion and practice on the topics introduced in the curriculum. I moved too quickly through the content to cover each session of the curriculum. I would not re-format the curriculum or add sessions because this would possibly lead to more problems with attendance, but an additional 30 minutes for each session would have been helpful.

### **Theological and Personal Reflections**

I am thankful for having the experience of implementing this ministry project. I have benefitted greatly as a Bible teacher because of preparing the curriculum and teaching others. As I reflect on the experience of this project and the results there are several primary impressions that I am left with. First, training lay small group leaders in the context of a local church on the foundations of Bible study and teaching is essential

for a healthy word ministry. The Bible is the absolute truth God intended to serve as the authority for the life of his church. Therefore, sound Bible teaching in small group settings in addition to the preaching of God's Word during the corporate gathering of a local church is necessary. As a pastor who teaches the Bible to various small groups multiple times each week I am constantly reminded of the importance and difficulty of preparing and teaching effective Bible lessons.

One key principle my project aimed to inform the small group leaders of is the interpretation of the biblical author's original intent as the foundation for effective Bible study and teaching. This project offered an introduction and a basic overview of the complex subject of hermeneutics. My hope was to introduce these basic concepts of biblical interpretation to small group leaders or to provide a helpful reminder of concepts some experienced leaders may have forgotten. While the purpose was to help the small group leaders gain confidence in biblical interpretation once equipped with a basic understanding of hermeneutics, I also desired for the small group leaders to gain an interest in the realm of biblical interpretation that would lead them to further study. Likewise, I wanted this project to offer the small group leaders basic instruction on detailed Bible study (Session 3). I offered one sound approach to studying Scripture, but I know there are different approaches to Bible study that are responsible and yield appropriate results. I feel there was the possibility of various responses and applications to the teaching sessions and the curriculum. Some leaders may have learned a better approach to Bible study and teaching and are applying what they learned while others may have already been practicing the concepts included in the curriculum and they had their approach reinforced. There could be other small group leaders that have a different approach to Bible study and teaching, and they did not change their approach yet have the same outcome of determining the biblical author's original meaning. I am satisfied with any of these outcomes if the timeless truth of Scripture is sought out and taught.

Also, my project offers small group leaders the necessary information to

develop the skill of biblical interpretation and lesson preparation, so they are not totally reliant on a small group curriculum. One assumption I had leading to the development of this project was that many small group leaders at SMRBC were only reading a small group curriculum to prepare to teach as well as primarily reading the curriculum to their group as a form of teaching. The curriculums used in our small groups are biblically sound and helpful, but the small group leader is missing a key opportunity to commune with God if he is not spending time in Bible study without the use of the curriculum as a means of uncovering truth that is to be taught. I feel the curriculum prepared and delivered during my project provides the necessary information for a small group leader to use only the Bible as the first step in lesson preparation and then the small group curriculum and other resources such as commentaries and study Bibles can be used to confirm or contradict her conclusions. This feeling was confirmed as one attendee responded to this question from Appendix 4: How has your understanding of hermeneutics and exegesis changed from the start of the course? He responded, "I feel it will encourage me to think more on my own preparation and presenting lessons rather than depending so heavily on commentaries and other sources." My desire is that the small group leaders of SMRBC will use the small group curriculums as a guide to their Bible study and teaching, but not as the exclusive resource. I want them to have the Holy Spirit teach timeless truth to them as they study God's Word before they read what the Spirit has taught someone else.

Finally, the response of some attendees to the project indicates a renewed enthusiasm for Bible study and teaching. One responded to the question from Appendix 4 about the area of Bible study and teaching that has improved the most by writing, "The simple act of finding repeated words and underlining, highlighting, etc. had greatly helped me capture main themes." The equipping of small group leaders can invigorate a desire for God's Word and helps them equip others to handle the Bible correctly. Small group leaders in a local church should not serve as placeholders, meaning they

inadequately fill a role. Also, they should serve in this capacity only if the role is in line with spiritual giftings and this type of ministry is life-giving to the individual. I feel it is the responsibility of church leaders to ensure the small group leaders are growing to love Jesus and the Bible more and more. One project participant responded to the question about the most interesting topic covered in the course saying, “Preparing your own lesson. I have relied heavily on pre-arranged materials, and this allowed me to see how that work was done so I can personally grow.” My project addressed the spiritual growth of the small group leaders knowing that will lead to the spiritual growth of our church’s small group members.

### **Conclusion**

This project allowed me to grow in my understanding of Bible study and teaching. Throughout the process I became fully aware of my own shortcomings as a Bible teacher, and it has drawn me closer to God and caused me to depend more on the Lord. My hope and prayer is those who attended the sessions and those who may attend in the future will have the same experience of growing in dependence on our Heavenly Father through seeking to hear him speaking through the Bible. As a church I know we will never exhaust the bounds of knowing God through His Word. As Jesus prayed for his disciples, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17, ESV). God’s Word is true and serves as the means for Christ followers to grow in holiness. The personal holiness of church members is essential for effective disciple-making. Therefore, God’s Word must be taught continually and effectively.

## APPENDIX 1

### BIBLE STUDY AND KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Bible Study and Knowledge Assessment.

Some general questions will be followed by a twenty-question survey on general Bible knowledge. The instrument's purpose is to assess each small group leader's present Bible study practices and basic biblical knowledge.

## BIBLE STUDY AND KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

### Agreement to Participate

Staples Mill Road Baptist Church's motto is "Rooted in Truth. Reaching in Love." Therefore, we are committed to preaching and teaching God's word. We desire, as a church family, to know biblical truth and to apply biblical truth to our lives. A primary way we fulfill this commitment is the teaching of scripture by small group leaders in various small group settings, and we want to equip our small group leaders to grow in confidence as they prepare and teach the Bible. This survey for SMRBC small group leaders will help us assess the current Bible study practices of our small group leaders as well as assessing current biblical knowledge.

The assessment is being conducted by Adam Nuckols for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Because ministry is relational, we prefer that you include your name below, rather than completing the survey anonymously. If you prefer to be anonymous, however, please use the last four digits of your social security number or phone number for future reference.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (or 4 digit code):**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**Leadership role at SMRBC (circle one or both):**

**Life Group Leader / Grow Group Leader**

### Section I.

#### General Questions:

1. How many years have you professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?  
 0-5     6-10     11-20     21 or more
2. How many years have you been a member in a Bible-believing church?  
 0-5     6-10     11-20     21 or more
3. How many years have you been a Life Group or Grow Group leader at SMRBC?  
 0-2     3-5     5-9     10 or more



4. How many hours a week do you read your Bible for personal study or devotions?  
 0-1     2-4     5-7     8 or more
5. How many hours a week do you read and study your Bible for preparation for teaching in a small group setting?  
 0-1     2-4     5-7     8 or more
6. Have you received formal training in Bible study and teaching?  
 Yes     No  
 If “yes”, where and when: \_\_\_\_\_

**Section II.**

Directions: The questions in this section 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.

1.	Memorizing Scripture is a present practice of yours.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2.	The Bible is totally true and trustworthy without any mixture of error.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3.	Discovering the historical setting of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4.	Understanding the grammar and syntax of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5.	Determining the genre of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6.	Determining the theology of a given passage is important when preparing to teach the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

### **Section III.**

#### **General Bible Knowledge (please respond without using a copy of the Bible):**

1. How many books are in the Bible?
  - a. 47
  - b. 66
  - c. 58
  - d. 72
  
2. The Book of Genesis primarily focuses on which character?
  - a. Noah
  - b. Adam
  - c. Joseph
  - d. Moses
  
3. How long did the Israelites wander in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt?
  - a. 40 years
  - b. 100 years
  - c. 10 years
  - d. 400 years
  
4. Which judge summoned Barak in the Book of Judges?
  - a. Othniel
  - b. Samson
  - c. Deborah
  - d. Gideon
  
5. “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” is found in which book of the Bible?
  - a. Proverbs
  - b. Job
  - c. Philippians
  - d. Psalms
  
6. Which prophet is often called the “weeping prophet?”
  - a. Jeremiah
  - b. Isaiah
  - c. Ezekiel
  - d. Daniel
  
7. Which of the four Gospels is addressed to “Theophilus?”
  - a. Matthew
  - b. Mark
  - c. Luke
  - d. John

8. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," is found in which book of the Bible?

- a. Acts
- b. Romans
- c. 1 Corinthians
- d. 2 Corinthians

9. Who was the centurion God spoke to bring Peter to Joppa?

- a. Ananias
- b. Aeneas
- c. Cornelius
- d. Philip

10. Where was the apostle John when he received the revelation of Jesus Christ?

- a. Jerusalem
- b. Rome
- c. Antioch
- d. Patmos

11. How many years before Jesus' birth was the book of Isaiah written?

- a. 100 years
- b. 2500 years
- c. 700 years
- d. 50 years

12. When was the book of Revelation written?

APPENDIX 2  
BIBLE STUDY AND TEACHING CURRICULUM  
EVALUATION

The following evaluation will be sent to an expert panel of six current and former pastors at SMRBC. This panel will evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Bible Study and Teaching Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Faithfulness</b>					
The content of the curriculum is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.					
The content of the curriculum is theologically sound.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers the basics of hermeneutics.					
<b>Methodology</b>					
The curriculum sufficiently addresses the methodology Bible study and teaching.					
The curriculum makes use of various learning approaches such as lecture, discussion, modeling, and homework.					
<b>Practicality</b>					

The curriculum includes opportunities to practice Bible study and teaching.					
At the end of the course, participants will be confident to study the Bible and teach others effectively.					

Please include any additional comments regarding the curriculum below:

### APPENDIX 3

#### PRE-POST SURVEY FOR KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE IN BIBLE STUDY AND TEACHING

The following survey measures each small group leader's present knowledge of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis as well as sound Bible teaching methodology. Some general questions will be followed by a twenty-question survey on general Bible knowledge. The survey will be completed by each participant before and after the curriculum is taught.

In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions after the last session of the course.

Directions: The questions in this section 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.

1.	I am confident in my ability to interpret scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2.	The historical setting of a given passage of scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3.	I am confident in my ability to discover the historical setting of a given passage of scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4.	The grammar and syntax of a given passage of scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5.	I am confident in my ability to understand the grammar and syntax of a given passage of scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6.	The Bible teaches the importance of sound interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7.	Determining the genre of a given passage of scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	I am confident in my ability to determine the genre of a given passage of scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	Determining the theology of a given passage of scripture is an important dimension of accurate interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	I am confident in my ability to determine the theology of a given passage of scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA



## APPENDIX 4

### POST-COURSE INTERVIEW OF FIVE STUDENTS WHO INCREASED THEIR CONFIDENCE LEVEL IN BIBLE STUDY AND TEACHING THE MOST

All participants who complete the course will complete the following post-course evaluation. They will evaluate whether the course is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How many sessions did you attend (maximum = 4): \_\_\_\_\_

### **Bible Study and Teaching Course Evaluation**

1. Has this training proved helpful to you? If so, how?
2. What area of your Bible study and teaching has improved the most? How?
3. How has your understanding of hermeneutics and exegesis changed from the start of the course?
4. What topic covered in the course was most interesting to you? Why?

How could the course be improved to benefit the Bible study and teaching of small group leaders at SMRBC?

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## ABSTRACT

### INCREASING THE CONFIDENCE OF SMALL GROUP LEADERS IN BIBLE TEACHING AT STAPLES MILL ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH IN GLEN ALLEN, VIRGINIA

Adam Ryan Nuckols, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Oren R. Martin

This project seeks to increase the confidence of small group leaders at Staples Mill Road Baptist Church in Glen Allen, VA in Bible teaching. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of SMRBC and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of five passages of Scripture (Eph 4:11–12; 2 Tim 2:15; 2 Tim 2:1–2; Matt 28:18–20; Heb 13:7) to show that training believers in Bible study and teaching is necessary for discipleship in a local church. Chapter 3 presents the abundance of resources available to train small group leaders to effectively study and teach the scriptures. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. The fulfillment of this project will increase the confidence of small group leaders at SMRBC to study and teach God's word so that the members of our church will know the truth of God and love others according to his truth.

## VITA

Adam Ryan Nuckols

### EDUCATION

BS, Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, 2004

MDiv, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Central Baptist Church, College Station, Texas, College Ministry  
Intern, 2003

Kingsland Baptist Church, Katy, Texas, College/Singles Ministry  
Intern, 2009

Charlottesville Community Church, Charlottesville, Virginia,  
Family Life Pastor, 2012-2015

Staples Mill Road Baptist Church, Glen Allen, Virginia, Associate  
Pastor for Student Ministries, 2015-