PREACHING THE BIBLICAL PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH FROM

THE NEW TESTAMENT AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,

FAIRBURN, GEORGIA

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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

Justin Herndon Terrell

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APPROVAL SHEET

PREACHING THE BIBLICAL PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH FROM
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Justin Herndon Terrell

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To Emily,

my best friend and lifelong ministry partner

and to

Sadie,

our wonderful blessing from the Lord

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PREFACE

The past three years have been a joy and a challenge, as I have pursued the

Doctor of Ministry degree at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The program

has challenged and equipped me to be a more faithful preacher of God's word. I am

thankful for all of my professors and classmates for making the experience well worth my

time and effort. I especially want to thank Dr. Robert Plummer for being so faithful and

timely while advising me through my ministry research project.

I am most thankful for my wife, Emily. She has been a tremendous blessing to

me as a faithful pastor's wife and best friend. Without her support, encouragement, help,

and love, I would not have been able to complete this project. She is truly my best friend

and lifelong ministry partner. I thank God for her and our wonderful daughter, with

whom He has blessed us. I would also like to thank my parents, David and Vicky Terrell.

Without their love and support, I would not have been able to accomplish this lifelong

goal. They have always pushed me to be the best I can be. Thanks also goes to my

brother and his wife, Roth and Jessica Terrell; my in-laws, Chris and Pam Boyd; and my

brother-in-law Heath Boyd, along with many other family members and friends for their

continual support and prayers during this time.

I also want to thank the members of First Baptist Church, as they have

supported me and encouraged me throughout this program. Their assistance with the

ministry research project was wonderful. I am grateful for their love and support as they

continually bless me each day. Thanks also goes to the members of Black Springs Baptist Church in Milledgeville, Georgia, the first people whom God called me to serve.

Finally I want to thank God, who saved me from my sins through His grace and gave me the extraordinary call to shepherd His people. He reminds me each day of the truth revealed in Isaiah 55:11, "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." It is a joy and honor to proclaim His revealed word to both the saved and the lost. Without His power and strength I would be nothing; therefore, He deserves all the glory for this accomplishment. *Sola Dei Gloria!*

Justin H. Terrell

Fairburn, Georgia

December 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to use expository preaching to educate and

motivate the members of First Baptist Church of Fairburn, Georgia, with God's purposes

for the local church based on the teachings of the New Testament in order to strengthen

and establish a more biblical model of ministry.

Goals

This project attempted to accomplish four goals. The first goal of this project

was that church members understand God's purposes for the local church based on the

New Testament. This goal sought to refocus the local church's vision on the unique

functions of the local church as commanded in Scripture. The method for accomplishing

this goal was to preach an expository sermon series through selected New Testament

texts that display God's requirements for the local church. This goal was measured by

administering surveys before and after the sermon series in order to learn if mindsets had

changed in favor of the New Testament teachings.

The second goal was that church members recognize the personal level of

ministry involvement that God expects from all members serving in the local church.

This goal desired to encourage church members to seek opportunities to use their spiritual

and physical gifts to fulfill God's will in the church. This goal was measured by a survey

given before and after the sermon series to compare the levels of personal activity before and after.

The third goal was that church members apply these New Testament teachings to their specific areas of ministry involvement. This goal was accomplished by making specific applications in the sermon series toward the ways in which these biblical truths should guide church ministry leaders and committees.[1] This goal was measured by surveying various ministry leaders and committees on their rationale for making ministry decisions.

The fourth goal was personal. My goal as a pastor was to become a more effective preacher by strengthening the application of the sermon. In order to achieve this goal, I studied and implemented different methods of sermon application in order to be a better communicator of God's word.

Ministry Context

First Baptist Church is located in Fairburn, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta in Fulton County. Fairburn is nineteen miles southwest of downtown Atlanta and nine miles southwest of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, the busiest airport in the world.[2] According to local history, Fairburn was founded in 1833 and named for a township in

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[1]While the term "committee" is not formally recognized in the New Testament, a "committee" in Southern Baptist ecclesiology is synonymous with a ministry team assembled to carry out a specific ministry task within the church.

[2]Matt Rosenberg, "The 30 Busiest Passenger Airports in the World," March 2, 2011 [on-line]; accessed May 11, 2011; available from http://geography.about.com/od/ urbaneconomicgeography/a/busiestairports.htm; Internet.

the County of York, England.[3] The city's future and growth were assured in 1849, at

which time the Atlanta and LaGrange Railroad was chartered and a depot was

constructed in Fairburn. The railroad continues to operate through the middle of town and

is extremely active to this day. Due to Fairburn's long history of railroads, farming, and

trade, the city has been recognized as a Commercial Historic District and is listed on the

National Register of Historic Places.[4]

Fairburn is considered to be in the South Fulton area of Metro Atlanta, due to

the enormous geographical length of Fulton County. Not only does the church minister to

those in South Fulton, but due the close proximity of Coweta, Clayton, Douglas, and

Fayette counties, the church is also home to members from these areas. In recent years,

the South Fulton area and these other nearby suburban counties have exploded with

population growth. In 2000, the population within a five-mile radius of the church's

physical address was 31,719; by 2010 the number escalated to 57,225. And by 2015, the

United States Census Bureau projects the population to be 69,401, a 30 percent increase.[5]

The number of households is also expected to increase from 21,227 in 2010 to 25,648 in

2015.[6] When expanded to a ten-mile radius, there were 189,083 people in 2000; 272,641

in 2010; and an estimated 310,636 by 2015.[7] The Fairburn area is growing at a rapid

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[3]"History of Fairburn," Fairburn.com, [on-line]; accessed August 20, 2011; available from http://www.fairburn.com/history.html; Internet.

[4]Ibid.

[5]U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing. ESRI Business Information Solutions, Inc. forecasts for 2010 and 2015.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

pace.

Not only has there been a change in population, but there has also been a change in racial demographics. Fairburn has historically maintained a white majority, but in the last twenty years the population has shifted to a black majority. In 2010, the racial makeup within a five-mile radius of the church was 54 percent black (30,900) and 37 percent white (21,191), with traces of Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian residents. The difference in racial makeup expands when extended to a ten-mile radius, where 64 percent are black (174,955) and 29 percent are white (79,484).[8] The church congregation maintains a white majority, but in recent years many black residents have become active members and have been well received.

The First Baptist Church of Fairburn began when the early settlers of Fairburn felt the need to establish a place to worship. This need was met when Deep Creek Church was built in 1829. In 1853, Deep Creek Church moved to the church's present location on the corner of Malone and East Broad Street in Fairburn. A new sanctuary was constructed upon arrival, and in 1854 the name was changed to First Baptist Church of Christ at Fairburn. Since those days, the church has expanded with four major building projects, including a new sanctuary, two educational additions, and a new fellowship hall. The current sanctuary was built in 1965 with a seating capacity of 645. In 1964, the church's name was officially changed from Fairburn Baptist Church to First Baptist Church of Fairburn. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, Georgia Baptist Convention, and Fairburn Baptist Association.

In the 180-year existence of the church, twenty-nine pastors have led this

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[8]Ibid.

congregation. The most notable pastor in recent years was Oscar Cope, who led the church from 1983 to 2002. Under Cope's leadership, the church grew in number during his nineteen years as pastor. By the end of his pastorate in 2002, records indicate that the church had 732 resident members and 542 enrolled in Sunday School while averaging 400 in morning worship attendance and 315 in Sunday School attendance.[9] Cope carries the reputation of being a hardworking, caring, and lovable pastor, while being a solid preacher and teacher of God's Word. After Cope's departure in 2002, the church called Stephen Batts as pastor in 2003. During Batts' pastorate, the church hovered near the same figures in resident membership, but worship attendance dropped each year to an average of 320 in 2008.[10] After serving for five years, Batts resigned from First Baptist Church in 2008. Members remember Batts as being a lovable and caring pastor but not a great communicator of God's Word, as many of his sermons were topical and story-driven.

In December 2009, First Baptist Church called me to be their next senior pastor. Within just a few weeks of accepting the position, I began to notice several areas of the church's ministry and operation that had become very weak in recent years. The morning worship service was the most attended ministry gathering each week, but the evening service had faded to the point that a group of thirty, mostly senior adults, was meeting in a classroom. The decision to meet in the classroom was due to dwindling attendance. Similarly, the Wednesday evening prayer meeting had also resorted to the same classroom, with a small group of senior adults in attendance. Prayer meeting

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[9]Georgia Baptist Convention, Information Services. *First Baptist Church of Fairburn, Church Profile, 2002-2011*, prepared August 25, 2011.

[10]Ibid.

involved the singing of a few hymns by the group, an extensive overview of a lengthy and outdated prayer list, and a short devotion.

There were no youth or children's activities on Wednesday evening, as those activities had been moved to Sunday evening during worship. The children's ministry had been very strong in years past, as the church had employed the Awana program. The Awana program had been averaging over 100 children from the area in the mid-2000s. However, due to various reasons, the church removed the Awana program and installed Lifeway's TeamKID program on Sunday evenings. As a result, attendance and enthusiasm were much lower by the time I arrived. The youth program had also declined in recent years. In the early 2000s, attendance averaged near 50 students on Wednesday evening. However, after the youth pastor resigned, attendance had fallen to fewer than 10 by my arrival.

Although some Sunday school classes were making contacts with prospects and visitors, the church did not have an organized church-wide outreach program in place. Outside of yearly "Builders for Christ" trips, which helped distant churches physically construct or improve their ministry space, there were no yearly church-wide evangelism-centered mission trips planned or attended. The church did make great contributions to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions and to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. These offerings were managed and promoted by the church's Women's Missionary Union, which was very strong in attendance and leadership.

Like many Southern Baptist churches, First Baptist also had a plethora of standing committees, many of which never met or served a real ministry purpose. The

committees had been formed over the years to serve the needs of the church; however, several of them had been formed as ad hoc committees and never disbanded once their purpose had been completed. As a result, these ad hoc committees were submitted each year to the committee nomination council to be refilled with new members, when in reality they no longer served a purpose. Another issue surrounding the function of church committees was the absence of clear and precise definitions and job descriptions for several of them in the church by-laws. Several committees were unsure of their real purpose and goals.

In contrast to these negative areas of ministry and operation, there have also been many strengths and positive qualities. The church is a very loving and caring congregation with minimal amounts of difficulty or disunity. Since my arrival at the church, conflict has been kept to a minimum. In the event that one of the members experiences a hardship or death, church members act very quickly to provide support and encouragement. The church is also a very hardworking body of believers. If a ministry need or opportunity is ever presented, a great number of church members will always be available to help and do things professionally. The church is very eager to learn from the Bible and apply it to daily living. They have supported me and followed my leadership very well.

My responsibilities as senior pastor include weekly preaching and teaching ministries, pastoral care, home and hospital visitation, counseling, overseeing church staff, organizing local and distant missions, and overseeing discipleship programs. Since my arrival in late 2009, we have seen an increase in attendance for Sunday morning and evening worship, with evening worship being moved back into the sanctuary. We have

made Wednesday evening a family discipleship night by implementing a children's ministry called "Kids for Christ," upgrading our student ministry by hiring a new student pastor in the fall of 2010, and organizing five to seven adult discipleship classes called "Life Groups" that change every seven weeks. Wednesday evening attendance and activity have been on the rise, and spiritual growth is being observed. Last year we began a church-wide outreach ministry called "Operation Outreach," where two different groups go out monthly and visit new prospects, absent members, and those who are sick. We also completed our first church-wide mission trip in the summer of 2011 when 66 members traveled to Cookeville, Tennessee, for a multifaceted week of church ministry. Over the past eighteen months, the Lord has been at work in our congregation. During this time we have added over 30 new church members and received a steady flow of visitors each week.

While the church seems to be growing and doing ministry more effectively, an area that still needs improvement is getting every church member on board with what God has called the church to do according to Scripture. It seems that many times the people are not motivated or guided by what Scripture says but rather by what types of ministries have historically been done, whether they are biblical or not. The church needs to consider the purposes of the local church as outlined in the New Testament so that worship and ministry will be done in a way that honors God and achieves his will. Therefore, every church leader, committee person, and member must ask the question, "Is what we are doing lining up with and obeying what God has called us to do according to his word?" This question must be carefully considered by every faithful church before any endeavor.

Rationale

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus declares, "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."[11] In this passage, Jesus states four basic truths for the church to follow. First, he affirms that he is in control and deserves to be worshiped and obeyed above all as one with "all authority." Second, he commands his followers to evangelize the unsaved as they "make disciples of all nations." Third, he emphasizes the continual nature of discipleship as he urges his followers to "teach" the new converts all that he has commanded. Fourth, he declares these commands to all who become followers, implying that the entire church must be active in ministry service in order to obey this command. Commenting on these verses, John MacArthur states, "The mission that flows out of our loving fellowship, our spiritual growth, and our praise is that of being God's faithful and obedient instruments in his divine plan to redeem the world."[12] Therefore, Jesus is commanding the church to worship God alone, learn and obey his word, reach the unsaved with the gospel, and serve in roles that complete this task. These commands could be followed more closely by our members in personal living and ministry decision-making.

Just as Jesus outlines the purposes and commands for the church to follow, the New Testament is complete with details about each of these areas. In order for the church

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[11]Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture references in this work will be taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

[12]John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 331.

to fulfill its purpose, it must be careful to obey each of these basic commands found in the Great Commission. Every leader, committee person, and member must measure their roles and efforts by how well they fulfill Jesus' command.

Like many congregations, a good number of members at First Baptist may recognize these commands but not fully grasp their significance or application for everyday church ministry. For this reason the church must be educated on the Great Commission and how the rest of the New Testament expands and applies its commands. This education should serve as a lens through which every church member and ministry must look to see if it is meeting what Christ desires for his church. In an age when many churches are spiritually unhealthy and unbiblical in practice, this teaching is vital and must be embraced by the local church in order to worship and obey God most faithfully.

The method for educating and training the church to apply these biblical principles in everyday ministry will be through an expository sermon series based on selected New Testament passages that further explain and apply the truths found in Matthew 28:18-20. Hopefully this series will enlighten the church on what God expects from the local church, help members and leaders make decisions based on Scripture, and urge everyone in the church to be active in fulfilling these commands.

Definitions and Limitations

The aim of this project was to help church members understand the biblical purposes of the local church through expository preaching in order for them to apply these truths to Christian living and ministry decision-making. Millard Erickson defines the church as "the whole body of those who through Christ's death have been savingly

reconciled to God and have received new life."[13] Therefore, the local church is a gathering of those who have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. Mark Dever summarizes the purpose of the church by declaring, "The proper ends for a local congregation's life and actions are the worship of God, the edification of the church, and the evangelization of the world."[14] While in agreement with these scholars, a more simple and memorable definition is that the church's purpose is to worship God, grow in his word, serve his church, and reach his world. This definition is the foundation for the biblical purposes of the church used in this project.

The church learned these truths through the preaching of an expository sermon series based on selected New Testament passages. Expository preaching is defined by Bryan Chappell as "a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text."[15]

The limitations of this project included the following. First, the length of this project was fifteen weeks: two weeks to research the congregation's understanding of the biblical purposes of the church, eleven weeks for the expositional sermon series, and two weeks to evaluate the project.

The second limitation was that due to occasional absences by survey

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[13]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1034.

[14]Mark Dever, *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel Akin (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 809.

[15]Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 31.

participants over the course of the eleven-week sermon series, not all survey participants listened to each sermon in the series.

There were also two delimitations for this project. First, the research surveys that measured the effectiveness of the sermon series were given to a focus group consisting of 30 people. This focus group included a wide range of age groups, all above the age of eighteen.

A second delimitation is that the research surveys given to the committees were only given to only two of the church's committees. This delimitation ensured that the church's most vital and influential committees offered their opinions and views of ministry. These committees included Constitution and By-laws and Long-range Planning.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to educate church members on God's purposes for the local church based on the New Testament. At the beginning of the project, a pre-series survey was given to a focus group two weeks prior to the start date of the expositional sermon series. This survey measured the participants' knowledge and understanding of the biblical purposes of the church. After the sermon series was completed, a post-series survey was administered to see if any changes in understanding occurred.

The second goal was to help church members recognize the personal level of ministry involvement that God expects from all church members in the local church. The pre-series survey included questions regarding the participant's personal level of involvement in the church's ministry efforts. These questions were also asked on the post-series survey to indicate any changes in commitment.

The third goal was to motivate church members to apply these New Testament

teachings to their specific areas of ministry involvement. A pre-series survey were given to four selected leadership committees to measure how much the biblical purposes of the church affected their decisions and vision. A post-series survey was administered to the same committees to note any changes.

The fourth goal was personal, as I aim to become a more effective preacher by strengthening the application of the sermon. As I prepared each expository message, I paid close attention to how these biblical truths applied to leaders, committee personnel, and church members. In order to measure my progress in strengthening the application of the sermon, I chose an application feedback group of four church members to answer survey questions dealing with sermon application. This group was given a survey on the first, fourth, seventh, and eleventh weeks to understand if progress is being made.

Conclusion

The following chapters present the project's research, application, and results. It is my hope that this project will serve as a faithful guide to pastors and churches that are seeking to fulfill God's purposes for his church as outlined in the New Testament.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

A Crisis in Christian Ecclesiology

In 1987, Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, declared these words to

the National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC), "If the current evangelical renewal

in the Church of England is to have a lasting impact, then there must be more explicit

attention given to the doctrine of the church."[1] Runcie correctly observed that spiritual

renewal in the evangelical church depends upon a special attentiveness to doctrine, but in

modern times the doctrine of the church has become somewhat distorted, as more church

leaders seem to foster various and conflicting ideas concerning the purposes of the local

church. Richard Mayhue summarizes these ecclesiological differences by stating, "Few

would disagree that a call for redirection has come to the drifting evangelical church in

the early twenty-first century. However, no current consensus exists regarding which

route the church should take to get back on track."[2] Mayhue's assertion that there is little

"consensus" concerning the direction that the modern church should take is vividly

evident by the diverging principles and practices often employed by many evangelical

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[1]John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2007), 11.

[2]Richard L. Mayhue, "Editorial: Back to the Biblical Purpose of the Church," *Master's Seminary Journal* 20 (2009): 1.

churches. For example, Paul Hanson has noticed that some understand "the church as an educational institution supplementing the public school system by teaching moral values to the young, or as a place of fellowship for people subscribing to similar beliefs, or as the mediator of forgiveness and salvation."[3] Michael Horton admits that the modern church is guilty of "mission creep," which he describes as "a tendency to expand the church's calling beyond its original mandate."[4]

Therefore, there is great confusion surrounding the purposes of the church as many church leaders today are drifting in various directions of purpose and practice. Two recent attempts to cure this ecclesiological malady have been made through the pragmatic and postmodern models of ministry, but these attempts only seem to reveal what lies at the foundation of the problem.

The Pragmatic Model of Ministry

In response to this ecclesiological crisis, some pastors and theologians have employed a pragmatic model of ministry. John MacArthur defines "pragmatism" as "a philosophy that says that results determine meaning, truth, and value–what will work becomes a more important question than what is true."[5] In the context of Christian ministry within the church, MacArthur describes the pragmatic model as "an approach

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[3]Paul D. Hanson, "The Identity and Purpose of the Church," *Theology Today* 42 (1985): 344.

[4]Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Rediscovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 16.

[5]John MacArthur, "Pragmatism: Trend or Trap," *Pulpit Magazine* (2008) [online]; accessed 23 December 2011; available from http://www.sfpulpit.com/2008/07/24/pragmatism-trend-or-trap/; Internet.

driven more by marketing, methodology, and perceived results than by biblical doctrine."[6] Therefore, the pragmatic model of ministry defines church growth in terms of statistical results, even if these results require a departure from biblical requirements and guidelines.

Consequently, while the pragmatic model of ministry may offer quick results, these results are scarcely long-term because they marginalize true biblical spirituality and teaching, which are the ultimate catalysts for authentic church growth. Michael Horton observes, "So amid the whirl of spiritual movements in America today, the question is properly raised: how much of this is recognizably *Christian?* 'But it's *working!*' no longer resonates as it did only a couple of decades ago . . . . as self-described evangelicals fall away from regular church attendance and many churches themselves seem distracted from their primary calling."[7] Accordingly, it is the church's "primary calling" that seems to be at risk in the pragmatic model of ministry, regardless of how many people the model may attract. Philip Wise critiques, "Instead of trying to determine what God's mission is for their church and then developing missional objectives that flow out of that mission, many churches and pastors try to duplicate the numerical growth of another church by copying their methodologies. Not only is this strategy likely to fail, it is also a sad commentary on the spiritual depth of these churches."[8] When the principles of Scripture are marginalized to ensure fast and unhindered numerical growth, authentic

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[6]Ibid.

[7]Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 15.

[8]Philip D. Wise, "Theological Issues Raised by the Church Growth Movement," *Theological Educator* 51 (1995): 101.

spiritual growth is often the casualty.

A chief example of failure in the pragmatic model of ministry is found in one of America's largest evangelical churches, Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Willow Creek modeled itself as a "seeker friendly church" aimed at meeting "felt needs," while building its ministry around cutting edge tactics, demographic studies, marketing research, and immaculate facilities. Willow Creek's pragmatic model was fueled by million dollar budgets, enormous staffs, and thousands of people. However, after years of conducting ministry this way, pastor Bill Hybels was shocked by the results of a multi-year study on the ministry's effectiveness. He laments, "Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for."[9] It would not be a stretch to believe that the members of Willow Creek were crying out for solid Bible teaching and authentic spiritual growth. However, these elements are often the casualty of pragmatic models of ministry, which are governed and directed by perceived results rather than biblical doctrine.

The Postmodern Model of Ministry

Another response to this ecclesiological crisis is the postmodern model of ministry, which is largely represented by the emerging church movement. D. A. Carson describes this movement by stating, "At the heart of the 'movement'–or as some of its

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[9]Bob Burney, "A Shocking 'Confession' from Willow Creek Community Church," *Bob Burney Live* (November 2007) [on-line]; accessed 3 January 2012; available from http://www.crosswalk.com/news/a-shocking-confession-from-willow-creek-community-church-11558438.html; Internet.

leaders prefer to call it, the 'conversation'–lies the conviction that changes in the culture

signal that a new church is 'emerging.' Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this

emerging church. Those who fail to do so are blind to the cultural accretions that hide the

gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate

with the new generation, the emerging generation."[10] In essence, the emerging church is

an ecclesiological response to the world's changing culture, which according to its

leaders is postmodern in nature. Scott Smith adds, "[The emerging church leaders] tell us

that the culture has changed, so that if we are 'playing' by the rules of the Enlightenment,

or modernity, we are using an outdated rulebook."[11] In other words, traditional methods

of ministry are no longer able to reach those who are in need of the gospel because they

have moved past their ecclesiological expiration dates.

       Although changes in culture over time might require slight shifts and

adjustments in ecclesiological strategy, the church must never compromise biblical

principles for the sake of being culturally relevant. However, the emerging church seems

to think otherwise. Because of the postmodern idea that absolute truths do not exist, the

emerging church struggles with the truth claims of the Bible in fear that some may be

offensive to this generation. Eleonora Scott remarks, "The emerging movement

consequently de-focuses the written word and doctrinal statements in favour of

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[10]D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 12.

[11]R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 66-67.

relationships and action."[12] Mark Driscoll writes, "In some ways it seems that Emerging Christianity is essentially making up its mind again on almost every major doctrinal issue. What began as a conversation among a few people is quickly erupting into a conflict between many people over very important theological issues."[13] According to Driscoll, these issues include whether the Bible is the divinely inspired, perfect, and authoritative word of God; whether humans are conceived in sin or morally neutral; whether Jesus died as a penal substitute or as an example to follow; whether Jesus is the only way or one of many ways to heaven; and whether unbelievers will experience conscious external torment in Hell or everyone will eventually be saved.[14] These examples reveal the serious types of doctrinal uncertainty that accompany a marginalized view of the Bible as a result of trying to be culturally relevant in a postmodern world.

When the church modifies its methods and message based on the culture, the door becomes wide open for serious error and false teaching. John Hammett declares, "[The biblical] model sees the need for culture to change to conform to Christ, rather than for the church to adjust its methods and message in light of the culture."[15] Therefore, the church must seek to change the world, not the world change the church. It is now time to discuss a cure for Christian ecclesiology.

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[12]Eleonora L. Scott, "A Theological Critique of the Emerging, Postmodern Missional Church/movement," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34 (2010): 335.

[13]Mark Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (2006): 91.

[14]Ibid.

[15]John S. Hammett, "An Ecclesiological Assessment of the Emerging Church," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (2006): 40-41.

The Cure for the Crisis in Christian Ecclesiology

While the pragmatic and postmodern models of ministry are very different,
they are alike in the sense that both sacrifice biblical teaching and principles in order to
reach their desired goals. Whereas the pragmatic model of ministry exchanges biblical
teaching for methods that increase statistical results, the postmodern model of ministry
exchanges biblical teaching for what satisfies the relevant ideologies of a postmodern
generation. However, both of these popular forms of ministry reveal what lies at the heart
of the ecclesiological crisis: a departure from biblical teaching. The cure for the
ecclesiological crisis is a biblical model of ministry.

The Biblical Model of Ministry

If the church desires to fulfill its intended purpose, then an exclusive return and
commitment to the teachings of the Bible are necessary. According to Mark Dever,
"Jesus is the One who is ultimately building his church (Matt. 16:18). But he has
graciously allowed us to participate in the construction process, and it is therefore
according to his biblical blueprint that we must build the structure and life of the
church."[16] If one thinks of Christ building his church exclusively by the blueprints of his
word, then using any human generated set of instructions would lead to a building that is
not stable nor visibly reflective of the Chief Architect's grand design. John Hammett
declares, "Since the church is God's creation, it must be ordered and operated according
to his instructions. Understanding those instructions is the task of theology. It is not
entrusted to an elite group of scholars, but all Christians are commanded to love God with

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[16]Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 26.

all their minds."[17] Therefore, the biblical doctrines concerning the local church must be understood and applied not only by theologians and pastors, but by every person who belongs to the family of God. In *Comeback Churches*, a book dedicated to the revitalization of failing churches, author Ed Stetzer writes, "You cannot 'save' a church without focusing on the important things that make it a church–scriptural authority, biblical leadership, teaching and preaching, ordinances, covenant community, and mission."[18] It is no coincidence that "scriptural authority" is at the beginning of the list when it comes to healing an unhealthy church that is in the midst of an ecclesiological crisis. Therefore, while there is much confusion today concerning the purposes and practices of the local church, the church must look for the cure in the pages of the New Testament, where the Holy Spirit has revealed Christ's model and mission for his church. The church must exclusively practice a biblical model of ministry.

Christ's Model and Mission for His Church

While it has been established that the purposes and practices of the church must be structured according to God's blueprints and instructions found in the New Testament, the question now becomes, "Where does the local church look in the New Testament for these instructions to follow?" While specific commands and practices are displayed all throughout the New Testament, the most concise set of commands for the church can be found in Jesus' final teaching in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great

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[17]John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 15.

[18]Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 2.

Commission.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus declares, "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." Jesus' Great Commission provides the local church with a summary of ministry activities that are pleasing to God and vital to church growth. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert declare, "The mission of the church is summarized in the Great Commission passages– the climactic marching orders Jesus issues at the ends of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts. We believe the church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. This is our task. This is our unique and central calling."[19] While many think of the Great Commission as merely a call for the church to perform missionary work in foreign countries, the calling of Christ is far more reaching, as it relates to every area of ministry the church is called to perform. Cynthia Campbell admits, "The Great Commission has long served as a 'job description' for the church. The verb forms almost summarize the 'practical department' of a seminary curriculum; evangelism, worship, and Christian education."[20] Michael Horton states, "Everything that the church is called to do as a visible institution–not only its ministry of preaching, but its public service of prayers, singing, sacraments, fellowship, government,

[19]Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 26.

[20]Cynthia M. Campbell, "Matthew 28:16-20," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 402.

and discipline–is to be a means of delivering this gospel to the whole creation."[21]

Therefore, the Great Commission is a concise set of instructions that generally

summarizes all other New Testament commands concerning the purposes of the church.

The Great Commission provides a summary of Christ's model and mission for his

church.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to show how Christ's Great

Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 summarizes the purposes of the local church, arguing

that the Great Commission points the church toward four majors tasks: The church must

worship God alone, reach the unregenerate with the gospel, teach and obey God's word,

and serve in roles that complete these tasks. Each of these general tasks will be examined

through an exegetical study of Matthew 28:18-20 and expanded in application by other

New Testament passages.

The Church Must Worship God Alone

Jesus begins the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18 by stating, "All authority in

heaven and on earth has been given to me." According to John MacArthur, the word

ἐξουσία ("authority") "refers to the freedom and right to speak and act as one pleases. In

relation to God, that freedom and right are absolute and unlimited."[22] Grant Osborne

qualifies ἐξουσία as "a more comprehensive term than 'power,' referring to position as

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[21]Horton, *The Gospel Commission,* 88.

[22]John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 338.

well as function."[23] Craig Blomberg adds, "Jesus can make the claim in v. 18 only if he is fully God, inasmuch as the whole universe is embraced in the authority delegated to him."[24] Therefore, Jesus is testifying that as one with equality to God the Father, he has all authority and power over everything in existence.

Why does Jesus begin his Great Commission with the claim of absolute authority? William Hendriksen observes, "These apostles and those that follow afterward must demand that everyone, in every sphere of life, shall joyfully acknowledge Jesus as 'Lord of lords and king of kings' (Rev. 17:14). 'The Great Claim' is therefore a fitting introduction."[25] Thus, the "Great Claim" of the Great Commission specifies to the church that God must be exclusively worshiped, praised, and obeyed above all else in existence. The worship of God alone is at the beginning and at the heart of the Great Commission. John Piper writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. God's passion is to be known and honored and worshiped among all the peoples. To worship him is to share that passion for his supremacy among the nations. In heaven there will be no missions; only worship."[26] Therefore, the church must worship God alone. However, in what ways do the local church express their worship of God?

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[23]Grant Osborne, *Matthew*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1079.

[24]Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 431.

[25]William Hendriksen, *Matthew,* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1973), 998.

[26]John Piper, *A Holy Ambition: To Preach Where Christ Has Not Been Named* (Minneapolis: Desiring God: 2011), 148.

Corporate worship. The first way the local church expresses worship is through corporate worship while meeting together. In Colossians 3:16, Paul declares, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." While the activities of "teaching and admonishing" and "singing" are stated, the main focus appears to be the goal of these activities, which is to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Douglas Moo observes, "Probably Paul means not 'the word, or message, that Christ proclaimed' but 'the message that proclaims Christ,' 'the message about the Messiah.'"[27] In reference to the "word of Christ," Hendriksen explains that the phrase ἐνοιχείτηω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως ("dwell in you richly") implies that "the special revelation that proceeds from Christ . . . . should govern every thought, word, and deed, yes even the hidden drives and motivations of every member, and thus should be sway among them all, and this richly."[28] Therefore, the goal of corporate worship is to ignite a deep passion for God in each believer by openly declaring his truths and his authoritative will as revealed in his word.

Paul declares that one of the methods for accomplishing this purpose is by "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." It is difficult to be certain when trying to understand the differences between each of these musical forms, as Ralph Martin states, "Not much success has followed some

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[27]Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 285-86.

[28]William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon,* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1964), 160.

recent endeavors to go back to earlier ways of distinguishing these compositions."[29] However, a close study of these words delivers some understanding. According to James Dunn, "psalms" are the Psalms of David sung aloud with accompanying music; "hymns are more distinctly Christian compositions" with New Testament theology interwoven; and "spiritual songs" denote songs sung under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, as testimonies of praise.[30] While a lengthier examination of these words could be made, it is clear that Paul desired the church to magnify God and be sanctified in holiness by singing the truths of Scripture and declaring personal praise in the midst of fellow believers. Therefore, the local church must always magnify God and praise his name in a corporate worship setting.

A lifestyle of holiness and submission. Another form of Christian worship is found in Romans 12:1, where the writer declares, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." While many wrongly assume that the term "worship" only describes a group of believers singing hymns during a worship gathering, Paul reveals that worship is a sacrificial lifestyle dedicated to honoring God with one's life.

In Romans 12:1, Paul describes "spiritual worship" as believers presenting their "bodies as a living sacrifice." According to Hendriksen, the word σώματα

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[29]Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 51.

[30]James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 237-39.

("bodies") "means not only our skin and bones but the totality of which we are composed. He adopted this word that he might more fully designate all that we are, for the members of the body are the instruments by which we carry out our purposes."[31] Hiebert adds, "The expression seems most naturally to denote the readers' physical bodies as the agent through which their new life in Christ is to express itself."[32] Thus Paul is speaking about the entirety of one's being. He then declares that the wholeness of one's life be given over to the Lord as a ζῶσαν ἁγίαν ("living sacrifice"). In contrast to the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, where animals would die as they were sacrificed, this phrase indicates the living spiritual state of believers. MacArthur explains, "Sacrifices of dead animals are no longer acceptable to God. Because the Lamb of God was sacrificed in their place, the redeemed of the Lord are now to offer themselves, all that they are and have, as 'living sacrifices.' The only acceptable worship under the New Covenant is the offering of oneself to God."[33] Schreiner declares, "The word 'living' denotes the spiritual state of believers. They are now 'alive to God in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:11, 13). It is precisely those who are alive in Christ who are called to give their lives to his as a sacrifice."[34] Thus, the ultimate worship of God is denying oneself and choosing to follow God's will and commands above all else. Schreiner concludes, "The worship

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[31]William Hendriksen, *Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 401.

[32]D. Edmond Hiebert, "Presentation and Transformation: As Exposition of Romans 12:1-2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994): 314.

[33]John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 145.

[34]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 644.

described does not relate to public assemblies but to the yielding of one's whole life to God in the concrete reality of everyday existence."[35] Therefore, the local church must worship God not only in song, but also in personal sacrifice.

The Church Must Reach the Unregenerate with the Gospel

Jesus began his Great Commission by establishing his ultimate authority over all believers in every aspect of life, and based on this authority, he now issues his first imperative: the command for all believers to reach the unregenerate with the gospel. Jesus commands, "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" (Matt 28:19). It can be demonstrated that the imperative μαθητεύσατε ("make disciples") is the central focus of the Great Commission. D. Edmund Hiebert declares, "Only the second term 'make disciples' is an imperative, second person plural verb; the other three terms are nominative plural participles, all directly related to the plural subject of the main verb. The construction thus stresses the focal point in this commission, namely, the assignment to 'make disciples of all nations.'"[36] While it is clear that Jesus' main thrust is for believers to "make disciples," one must now understand what Jesus means by this command. This initial command can be understood by detailing the three participles: "go," "make disciples," and "baptizing them."

"Go." The first step in reaching the unregenerate is making the effort to "go."

[35]Ibid., 646.

[36]D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1992): 348.

This duty to reach out to others, whether near or afar, naturally involves the means essential to going. Osborne comments, "'Go' is the operative act, as now God's people are no longer to stay in Jerusalem and be a kind of 'show 'n' tell' for the nations but they are actively to go and take the message to the nations."[37] Therefore, Jesus is first commanding the church to physically take the gospel to the nations, rather than relying on the nations to come to the church. However, this command does not limit the church to making long distance mission work their only priority. Blomberg explains, "To 'make disciples of all nations' does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus' main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be."[38] Thus, this command emphasizes local and distant missions.

"Make Disciples." After going, the second step in reaching the unregenerate is to "make disciples." According to MacArthur, the root meaning of the word μαθητεύσατε refers to "believing and learning."[39] He elaborates by saying, "Jesus was not referring simply to believers or simply to learners, or he would have used others words. μαθητεύσατε carries a beautiful combination of meanings. In this context it relates to those who place their trust in Jesus Christ and follow him in lives of continual learning and obedience."[40] It is the first of these two meanings that will be discussed here, which is the command to share the gospel with the purpose of generating belief in Christ. Before

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[37]Osborne, *Matthew*, 1080.

[38]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

[39]MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, 340.

[40]Ibid.

someone will follow Jesus' teachings, they must first be converted to Christ by hearing

the gospel. William Hendriksen explains, "The term 'make disciples' places somewhat

more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for

God. The apostle, then, must proclaim the truth and the will of God to the world."[41] It is

for this reason that Paul declares, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not

believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how

are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14). Therefore, the church is

commanded to "make disciples" by first sharing the gospel with those who are

unregenerate in order for the Holy Spirit to enable faith and trust in the hearts of the

unreached.

"Baptizing them." The third step in reaching the unregenerate with the gospel

is "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

According to MacArthur, the phrase βαπτίζοντες αυτούς ("baptizing them") "literally

means to immerse in water . . . . and became an outward act of identification with [Christ]

through faith, a visible, public testimony that henceforth one belonged to him."[42] While

baptism is not a sacrament intended to produce faith or gain salvific merit, it is a means

by which a new believer outwardly professes allegiance to Christ and death to sin.

According to D. A. Carson, baptism by immersion is "a sign both of entrance into

Messiah's covenant community and of pledge submission to his lordship."[43] This truth is

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[41]Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 999.

[42]MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, 343.

[43]D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 597.

indicated by the phrase, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα ("into the name"), which designates to whom the

one being baptized is submitting. In the case of believer's baptism, the new believer is

showing full submission to the Godhead; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hiebert explains,

"The full expression 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,' thus

means that baptism is to be performed with express reference to the Triune God, to whom

believers have committed themselves."[44] Hendriksen concludes, "Baptism, therefore, is

very important. The one who submits to it, if sincere, is proclaiming that he has broken

with the world and has been brought into union with the Triune God, to whom he intends

to devote his life."[45]

Therefore, the first command that Jesus declares in the Great Commission is

for believers to go about continually declaring the gospel to those who have never heard

and publically baptizing those who sincerely profess faith in him. Just as the apostle Paul

declared to the Corinthians, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also

received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was

buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures," (1 Cor

15:3-4) believers must proclaim this same truth to those who are unregenerate today, thus

fulfilling the first command of the Great Commission.

**The Church Must Teach and Obey
God's Word**

The second command of the Great Commission continues the process of

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[44]Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," 351.

[45]Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 1001.

"making disciples," where Jesus declares in 28:20, "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The word διδάχοντες ("teaching") is a present tense participle, which indicates the ongoing nature of discipleship training.[46] Grant Osborne notes that the word διδάχοντες is the same word used to describe Jesus' own teaching ministry throughout Matthew (4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23; 22:16; 26:55).[47] This command provides the program for fulfilling the second part of the first command's ("make disciples") dual meanings, as "make disciples" not only means to evangelize but also to train for obedience. MacArthur declares, "The church's mission is not simply to convert but to teach. The convert is called to a life of obedience to the Lord, and in order to obey Him it is obviously necessary to know what He requires."[48] Blomberg adds, "If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus' commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part."[49]

Once Jesus issues the command to make disciples through continual teaching, he then provides the substance of this teaching by saying, "to observe all that I have commanded you." What do these commands of Christ consist of? Blomberg answers, "Jesus' words further demonstrate that Christian ethics and morality should first of all focus on Jesus' teaching, even though the Old Testament still remains relevant, as one

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[46]Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," 352.

[47]Osborne, *Matthew*, 1081.

[48]MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, 345.

[49]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

sees how it is fulfilled in Christ . . . and even though the rest of the New Testament remains relevant as further explanation of the significance of Christ and his teachings."[50] Thus, Christ not only commands the content in the gospels, but everything in the Old and New Testaments as well. According to Hiebert, the phrase πάντα ὅσα ("all things") indicates that the church "should not be selective, imparting only those aspects of Christ's teaching that an individual assembly may want to stress."[51] Paul demonstrates the reality of this command by reminding the Ephesian church in Acts 20:27, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Therefore, the local church is responsible for continually teaching and training all believers with everything that is recorded in the inspired and inerrant word of God. Paul reveals what should be the goal of every church by stating, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Col 1:28-29).

**The Church Must Serve in Roles That
Complete the Great Commission**

In the last verse of the Great Commission, Jesus issues an encouraging and empowering finale to the enormous commands just pronounced as he says, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." MacArthur explains, "As crucial as are the [preceding] elements for effective fulfillment of the church's mission, they would be useless without the last, namely, the power that the Lord Jesus Christ offers through his continuing presence with those who belong to him . . . faithful obedience to God's word

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[50]Ibid.

[51]Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," 352.

would [not] be possible apart from Christ's own power working in and through us."[52] Therefore, Jesus is promising that his power will be with the disciples as they faithfully carry out the commands that he has just given them. Without his power, the Great Commission would be unachievable and unproductive.

However, Jesus is not only making the promise of his power available to the original disciples, but to every disciple until the end. The phrase, "τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος" ("until the end of the age"), carries the apocalyptic idea of the "consummation,"[53] "or the end of history as we know it, when the kingdom will be consummated."[54] David Turner elaborates, "This makes clear that the commission is not only for the original eleven disciples but also for their disciples and their disciples' disciples in perpetuity until Jesus returns."[55] Blomberg agrees, "The disciples represent everyone in the church to which he writes and, derivatively, everyone who professes to follow Christ in any age. The Lord is now risen! He calls his people to become disciple makers, and he promises to be with them irrespective of their successes or failures."[56]

While it may not be mentioned directly, it is certainly implied that each disciple in the local church has the responsibility to serve in various roles to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus promised the church his power until the end; therefore Jesus'

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[52]MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, 346.

[53]Osborne, *Matthew*, 1082.

[54]Carson, *Matthew*, 599.

[55]David Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 691.

[56]Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

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power is intended to enable every believer to carry out the Great Commission. For this

reason, the book of Acts begins with Jesus' ascension and the church's receiving the

power of Christ through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Just as every believer

is filled with Jesus' presence and power through the Holy Spirit at regeneration, the Bible

teaches that Jesus empowers each believer to serve the church through the use of spiritual

gifts and pastoral equipping.

This truth is displayed in Ephesians 4:11-13, where Paul declares, "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, until we all attain to

the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The word καταρτισμὸν ("to equip") was

used in ancient times as a medical term referring to the straightening or setting of a joint

or broken bone, where the physician was charged to set the bone straight in order for it to

grow and function properly.[57] In this sense, the role of church leadership is to enable the

congregation to grow and function properly. What might be the goal of this function?

Paul continues with the phrase, εἰς ἔργον διακονίας ("for the work of ministry"). Harold

Hoehner contends that this phrase "conveys the idea of serving the Lord by ministering to

one another . . . . gifted individuals are given to the church for the purpose of preparing

all the saints toward the goal of service or ministry."[58] Consequently, Paul is reminding

church leaders that it is their duty to "equip" church members with the necessary tools

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[57]Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 279.

[58]Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 551.

and training to perform whatever service God would have them to do. John Stott adds, "For clearly the way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts. These gifts are so beneficial both to those who exercise their ministry faithfully and to those who receive it that the church becomes steadily more healthy and mature."[59] John MacArthur concludes, "No matter how gifted, talented, and dedicated a pastor may be, the work to be done where he is called to ministry will always vastly exceed his time and abilities. His purpose in God's plan is not to try to meet all those needs himself but to equip the people given into his care to meet those needs."[60] Therefore, the whole church is called to serve the Lord in ministry as their leaders equip them for service.

The Biblical Model of Ministry Displayed

The beginning of Acts records the events following Christ's ascension to heaven, when at Pentecost the promised Holy Spirit was poured out upon all believers and Christ's church became a reality in Jerusalem. Shortly after Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached an evangelistic public sermon aimed at reaching the Jewish population with the gospel. The results were astounding, as Acts 2:41 records "about three thousand souls" came to know Christ that day. With "three thousand souls" added to Christ's body of believers, the new church was alive and operating, just as Christ had instructed in the Great Commission. In Acts 2:42-47, Luke gives an accurate and detailed description of the biblical model of ministry being carried out according to the Great Commission. He records,

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[59]John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 168.

[60]John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 155.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In this description of the early church, one can see the purposes and practices of the local church being fulfilled as instructed by Christ in the Great Commission. *The church worshiped God alone* as they "attended the temple together," broke the bread of communion and fellowshipped in their homes, and praised God for all he was doing. *The church reached the unregenerate with the gospel* as they shared their faith and love with fellow Jews in the community, resulting in "the Lord adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." *The church taught and obeyed God's word* as Luke reports, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Finally, *the church also served in roles that completed the Great Commission* as "they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need." While these descriptions only show very small aspects of what the church was doing, it is clear that the purposes and practices of the Great Commission were at the heart of their ministry.

Conclusion

In an age when much confusion surrounds the purposes and practices of the local church, the Great Commission of Christ serves as the foundation for a biblical model of ministry. Regardless of what methods the secular world deems to

be acceptable or pragmatic, the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to his church what practices and principles are most glorifying to God and most beneficial for his people. The local church must be obedient to the four major tasks that have been outlined by this exegetical study of the Great Commission and other supplemental New Testament passages. If the church desires to be in God's will and to produce eternal rewards, then clear understanding and application of the Great Commission are needed for such an aspiration. Therefore, the biblical model of ministry based on the Great Commission is the only cure and answer for the ecclesiological crisis that looms in the world today. For this reason, the church must continue to pray, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:9-10). Amen.

CHAPTER 3

IMPROVING SERMON APPLICATION IN
EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The Necessity of Application in Expository Preaching

Preaching is the conduit through which God proclaims his truth and will

publicly to those whom he created. From the words of the ancient prophets to the voices

of pastors in pulpits today, preaching is the essential method for declaring, "Thus says the

Lord!" This truth can be seen as Paul writes to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of

God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing

and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke,

and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim 4:1-2). Paul's charge to

Timothy was not an ad hoc command for Timothy's situation, but a universal command

to all who are given the task of heralding the gospel today. John Stott captured this reality

when he declared, "Preaching is indispensible to Christianity. Without preaching a

necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a

religion of the Word of God."[1] John A. Broadus described preaching's essential nature by

stating, "Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the

regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and

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[1]John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 15.

exhortation, an integral part of divine worship."[2] Albert Mohler rightly adds, "The sermon has not earned its place in Christian worship by proving its utility in comparison with other means of communication or aspects of worship. Rather, we preach because we have been commanded to preach."[3] Therefore, the task of preaching is not something that is optional, but it is rather a divinely ordained command for declaring the words and will of God.

The Necessity of Expository Preaching

While many would agree that preaching is essential to Christianity, confusion has set in over the way it should be done. The question often arises, "Is there a right or wrong way to preach?" It was certainly apparent to the apostle Paul that there was a wrong way to preach. After Paul commanded Timothy to "preach the word," he warns, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Tim 4:3-4). Unfortunately, many such preachers exist today, namely those who preach something other than the truth of God's Word. These preachers have elected to accommodate the ungodly desires of the world by preaching a distorted version of the gospel that is pleasing to sinful ears while ignoring the righteous precepts contained in inspired Scripture. Mohler states, "In many pulpits, the Bible, if referenced at all, becomes merely a source for pithy aphorisms or convenient narratives. Moreover, the therapeutic concerns of the culture too often set the

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[2]John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, in R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 16.

[3]Ibid., 39.

agenda for evangelical preaching."[4] Ramesh Richard adds, "Some preachers believe that sermons may be made without the Bible. They pursue a contemporary parable or pulpit-worthy news event. Usually these sermons are found in erudite pulpits with illustrations drawn from sports, music, politics, and culture, but their biblical content is minimal."[5]

For the apostle Paul, and other biblical authors, any preaching that does not seek to expose the revealed word of God is not considered authentic Christian preaching. Therefore, it can be demonstrated from Scripture that the task of preaching is most faithfully conducted when the preacher prioritizes the exposition of the inspired and inerrant word of God. The faithful preacher shapes his preaching to expose what God has revealed and seeks to employ methods of communication that will best convey that revelation to those who are listening. For this reason, I believe that expository preaching is the most faithful method for the discovery and delivery of the word of God.

Expository preaching can be defined as *that form of Christian preaching which derives its message and structure exclusively from the biblical text, while explaining and applying the author's original intent in the text to see lives transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit.* Bryan Chapell declares, "As expository preachers, our ultimate goal is not to communicate the value of our opinions, others' philosophies, or speculative meditations but rather to show how God's Word discloses his will for those united to him through his Son. Truths of God proclaimed in such a way that people can see that the concepts derive from Scripture and apply to their lives preoccupy the expository

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[4]Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 50-51.

[5]Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 16.

preacher's efforts."[6] John Stott firmly contends, "In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said."[7] Therefore, expository preaching is the ultimate method for the preacher who desires to be faithful in proclaiming God's word.

The Imbalance of Expository Preaching

While all expository preachers are dedicated to proclaiming God's word, it seems that there is a great homiletical imbalance in many pulpits, as preachers often major on *explaining* the ancient text but minor on *applying* it to modern listeners. One of the most frequent complaints from congregations concerning expository preaching is that many sermons are overabundant with information but lacking in serious application. Alistair Begg describes this imbalance by stating, "One of the reasons for the disinterest in expository preaching is surely that so many attempts at it prove lifeless, dull, and even thoroughly boring. I never cease to be amazed by the ingenuity of those who are capable of taking the powerful, life-changing text of Scripture and communicating it with all the passion of someone reading aloud from the Yellow Pages!"[8] Haddon Robinson observes, "The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching. It would be fatuous, however, to assume that everyone agrees with that statement. A poll of churchgoers who have squirmed for hours under the 'expository'

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[6]Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 31.

[7]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 126.

[8]Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 28-29.

preaching that is dry as corn flakes without milk could not be expected to agree."[9] Jerry

Vines laments, "Much of the ineffective expository preaching of our day is due to the

failure to relate Bible facts to the contemporary world."[10] While expository preaching is

theoretically the most faithful approach for proclaiming the word of God, many listeners

view it as lifeless and boring, more akin to an academic lecture than a truth filled lesson

about living a life that is pleasing to God.

However, this imbalance in preaching is not only created by those who preach

in pulpits each Lord's Day, but also by those in academia. Howard Marshall admits,

"Discussions on biblical hermeneutics have given us a fair amount of guidance on how to

elucidate what the text said—its original meaning and significance for its original

readers. But they have done little to move from what the text said to what is says

today."[11] Haddon Robinson adds, "Preachers want to be faithful to the Scriptures, and

going through seminary, they have learned exegesis. But they may not have learned how

to make the journey from the biblical text to the modern world. They get out of seminary

and realize the preacher's question is application: How do you take this text and

determine what it means for this audience?"[12] Jack Kuhatschek laments, "Many books on

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[9]Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20-21.

[10]Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 96.

[11]I. H. Marshall, "The Use of the New Testament in Christian Ethics," in Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 3.

[12]Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: An Interview with Haddon Robinson," *Leadership* 4 (1997): 21.

hermeneutics (principles of interpretation) devote hundreds of pages to interpreting the Bible but spend only five or ten on how to apply it."[13] Therefore, this imbalance in expository preaching resides in both pulpit and lecture hall.

The Necessity of Application

While an imbalance in expository preaching between ancient meaning and modern application has been demonstrated, it is the preacher's task to add more weight to the side of relevance on the homiletical scale so that each sermon has a meaningful balance of doctrine and application. Keith Willhite observes, "Relevant biblical preaching not only tastes great, but it also satisfies the nutritional longings of the soul. Like a good recipe, however, relevant biblical preaching must mix the right ingredients in the correct proportions and sequence."[14] If the modern preacher desires to proclaim the ancient truths of God's word with modern relevance, then he must learn to *explain* and *apply* the text with good execution. Therefore, a greater emphasis must be placed on sermon application in expository preaching today.

In order to correct the imbalance of expository preaching by improving the applicational needs of each sermon, the remainder of this chapter will focus on how to apply the ancient truths of Scripture to modern audiences today. First, the purposes of sermon application will be presented in order to see the need and urgency of applying the text. Second, the path to sermon application will be presented, displaying how sermon

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[13]Jack Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible: A Practical, Down-to-Earth Guide to Helping You Get More Out of Your Bible Reading Than You Ever Imagined!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 8.

[14]Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 15.

application arrives from choosing, exegeting, and bridging the text. Finally, the practice of sermon application will be examined, which includes the practical aspects applying biblical truth to a modern audience.

Improving Application in Expository Preaching

The Purposes of Sermon Application

In the realm of expository preaching, sermon application is not an optional exercise but an essential component. Bryan Chapell declares, "Without application, a preacher has no reason to preach, because truth without actual or potential application fulfills no redemptive purpose. This means that at its heart, preaching is not merely the proclamation of truth but truth applied."[15] John A. Broadus wrote, "The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but the main thing to be done."[16] Sermon application is the practical expression of the truth contained in a biblical text.

However, not everyone agrees with the purpose and practice of sermon application. In *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, Hershael York describes an encounter with a student in his preaching class who was resistant to the method of preaching being taught. York recalls, "Like many others, he was convinced that it was the preacher's job just to preach the biblical facts and let the Holy Spirit do the rest . . . . He shared with me that he had already been a pastor for fourteen years and that he was convinced that if people only knew the content of the Bible well enough, they would act on it in ways

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[15]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 210.

[16]John A. Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, in Michael Quicke, "Applying God's Word in a Secular Culture," *Preaching* 17 (2002): 7.

revealed to them by the Spirit."[17] It seems that this preacher's response is typical of many preachers today who do not understand the purpose and importance of sermon application. Mohler admits that there are "preachers who never get to the task of application at all, arguing that application is an attempt to do the work of the Holy Spirit"[18] Even Karl Barth, the prominent theologian, "questioned whether it was possible for any human being to apply Scripture . . . . He insisted that being faithful to the text and also true to life in this age is 'a serious difficulty' that has 'no solution.'"[19] Barth contended that "the task of bridging the gap between the Bible and life today remains in the hands of God alone."[20] Therefore, some believe that sermon application is best left to the work of the Holy Spirit, eliminating any responsibility for the preacher other than just presenting the facts of the Bible. While this logic may seem plausible, due to the tremendous and vital power of the Holy Spirit in the preaching event, it appears that there are several fundamental purposes for making personal application in sermons today.

Sermon application bridges ancient truth with modern culture. In John Stott's homiletical work, *Between Two Worlds*, he uses the metaphor of "bridge-building" to describe the action preachers must take in order to connect "the deep rift

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[17]Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 13.

[18]Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 68.

[19]Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 3 (1999): 70.

[20]Ibid.

between the biblical world and the modern world."[21] Because the Bible was written in ancient times, the truth and application of Scripture can often be clouded behind the ancient culture in which it was written. Kuhatschek admits, "People wonder what benefit we can possible derive from a two-thousand year old book written in an obscure corner of the Middle East."[22] Since Scripture was originally written to address an ancient context, the modern reader or listener is at a disadvantage unless someone explains and applies the significance of the ancient meaning for today's context. Kuhatschek explains, "Consider 1 Corinthians 8, Paul's thrilling passage about food sacrificed to idols. After reading that chapter, we are convinced that we should never eat idol meat around a 'weaker brother.' Then it dawns on us that no one sells idol meat today. . . . The problem simply does not exist in our culture."[23] For this reason, Stott declares, "It is across this broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture (more still in the case of the Old Testament) that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. Our task is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today."[24] In order to proclaim God's word, the preacher must discover the truth of Scripture according to the author's ancient intent, and then bridge that truth to the modern world by applying it to human lives.[25] The goal of "bridge-building" is not to change or distort the ancient message, but to apply the truth contained in the ancient message to

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[21]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137-38.

[22]Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible*, 28.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 138.

[25]This hermeneutical process will be discussed more closely in a later section.

today's changing culture. York declares, "The expository preacher does not need to make Scripture relevant. He must, however, demonstrate its relevance."[26] Stott concludes, "The preacher's task is faithfully to translate the Word of God into modern language and thought-categories, and to make it present in our day."[27] Therefore, without sermon application, the modern listener would be at a loss when it comes to understanding the ancient significance of God's word for today.

Sermon application is utilized by the Holy Spirit. One of the criticisms of sermon application is that the preacher attempts to play the role of the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit actually utilizes the preacher's application to reach the heart of the listener. In *Spirit-Led Preaching*, a book dedicated to the critical role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, Greg Heisler argues that the sermon applied to the ears opens the door for the Spirit's application to the heart. Heisler states, "What we are doing in application is displaying how the truth of the Word of God shows up in real life. So we paint pictures of what this truth looks like in real life. We give examples. We ground the truth in specifics and stay away from the abstract. The Spirit of God contextualizes our application and specifies it for each listener, calling to remembrance some episode or some need, and then places the needed response upon the heart of the people."[28] Therefore, rather than sermon application seeking to play the role of the Holy Spirit, sermon application is actually utilized by the Holy Spirit. John Bisagno states, "As an

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[26]York and Blue, "Is Application Necessary," 78.

[27]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 149.

[28]Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 123.

expositor, you will assist, but here, more than anywhere, the Holy Spirit does His work of application."[29]

An example of this truth is found in Peter's famous sermon following the events of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-41. Peter begins his sermon by quoting Scripture from Psalm 16:8-11, where King David prophesies about the death, burial, and resurrection of the coming Messiah. After Peter quotes this Scripture, he explains the text to reveal that it was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. Following this explanation, Peter applies the text to the local Jews by stating, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). With this statement of application, the listening Jews know that Peter is speaking to them about their actions, as they crucified Christ. After they heard *Peter's word of application*, the text immediately states, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37-38). Therefore, in Peter's sermon, the text was read, explained, and applied, and then the Holy Spirit supernaturally applied the message of Scripture to the hearts of the listeners, causing spiritual change to take place. In this sense, Peter's application prompted the Spirit's application. Phillip Jensen writes, "The New Testament itself shows the apostles passionately reasoning, arguing, pleading, persuading, and appealing to people to be reconciled to God . . . . Yet only God can open the eyes of the blind and draw the sinner

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[29]John Bisagno, *Principle Preaching: How to Create and Deliver Purpose Driven Sermons for Life Application* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 15.

to himself."[30]

Consequently, it is misguided to think that sermon application infringes upon the work of the Holy Sprit. According to Stott, "It would be quite inadmissible to use the perpetual relevance of the gospel and the up-to-date ministry of the Holy Spirit as an excuse for avoiding the communication problem."[31] York declares, "Some believe that application . . . is [exclusively] the work of the Holy Spirit. Such reasoning is disingenuous at best. Why would the Holy Spirit require a preacher to explain the meaning of the text, but not apply it? What biblical or moral principle makes exegesis the work of the preacher and application the exclusive province of the Spirit?"[32] Therefore, no serious preacher of God's word should ever assume that application has no place in the sermon. The Holy Spirit utilizes sermon application for life change.

Sermon application is a form of practical shepherding. In the New Testament, the pastor is metaphorically described as the shepherd of the local church. The apostle Peter instructs, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you . . . . And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet 5:2, 4). One of the ways that a faithful pastor shepherds his flock is by applying God's word to their specific needs and life situations to ensure proper spiritual growth and maturity.

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[30]Philip Jensen, "Preaching the Word Today," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 161-62.

[31]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 141.

[32]York and Blue, "Is Application Necessary," 72.

Only the local pastor knows his people well enough to teach and apply God's word in this way on a regular basis. For example, Paul declares to the Colossian church that he came "to make the word of God fully known" (Col 1:25). Peter Adam comments, "Paul's relationship with his hearers is not one of remote academic isolation . . . [but one] of deep personal commitment, indicating the style of servanthood and service Paul has in mind."[33] John Calvin contends, "Let us note well that they who have this charge to teach, when they speak to a people, are to decide which teaching will be good and profitable so that they will be able to disseminate it faithfully and with discretion to the usefulness of everyone individually."[34] Thus, if a pastor desires to shepherd his flock in a way that brings honor to the chief Shepherd, he must teach and apply God's word according to their needs.

For this reason, Daniel Doriani argues that pastors must not only exegete the Bible to ensure proper interpretation, but they must also exegete their congregations to ensure proper application. Doriani explains, "To exegete the congregation is to know its heart, its status before God. Preachers should take the joys and troubles of their congregation to the Bible. They can mentally survey a congregation and ask the questions they would ask, and those they may not dare to ask, without projecting their own concerns onto the congregation."[35] It is essential for pastors to know their congregations well, in order to teach and apply God's word in a way that is meaningful and timely.

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[33]Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 131.

[34]John Calvin, *Forty-Nine Sermons on Job*, in Adam, *Speaking God's Words,* 132-33.

[35]Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work,* 37.

Therefore, application is a form of practical shepherding.

While there may be some who deny or dispute the purposes and practices of sermon application, it has been made clear that sermon application bridges ancient truth to modern culture, is utilized by the Holy Spirit for internal application, and is a form of practical shepherding by pastor's today. Therefore, sermon application is an essential part of any sermon that desires to produce changed lives.

The Path to Sermon Application

Now that several fundamental purposes of sermon application have been established, it is time to consider the path one must take in order to discover the truth that is to be applied. According to the present definition of expository preaching, sermon application is strictly based on the author's original intent contained in the message and structure of the biblical text. Thus, the preacher should never seek to apply his own thoughts, wisdom, advice, or opinions to his listeners but apply only the truth contained in Scripture. In order to discover and present the truth that must be applied, the preacher must be disciplined in properly choosing, exegeting, and bridging the ancient text.

Choosing the text. Before one can exegete and bridge the text to be applied, the preacher must first choose a biblical text to be preached. While this decision may appear to be less important, it is crucial to insure that the preached message is parallel to God's message in the Bible. One danger into which many preachers fall today is topical preaching. According to Richard Mayhue, "Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. The topical . . . method [does not] represent a serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God's truth in the

context of the Scripture(s) used."[36] The problem with topical preaching is that this form merely adapts selected Scriptures to reinforce the ideas, concerns, and opinions of the preacher. Alistair Begg relates, "Young pastors . . . begin to preach sermons that have their genesis in what people want to hear rather than what God has chosen to say and command."[37] While there are certain occasions, such as holidays and ceremonies, where topical preaching might be considered, by and large the topical sermon is not one that produces a message completely driven by the text of Scripture. Therefore, any application presented from a topical sermon may not be parallel to Scripture.

In an effort to present sermon application that is parallel to Scripture, the preacher must employ a method of text selection that will complement his desire to preach exclusively the message that God originally intended. One such method is known as *lectio continua*, where the preacher presents "lessons from texts in consecutive sequence (e.g., preaching through a book in a series, also known as 'consecutive preaching') instead of choosing diverse selections week to week."[38] The benefits of this method are numerous, but they include the ability to introduce the congregation to the entire Bible, to expose the congregation to passages and topics that are often avoided, to help the congregation understand the grand structure of a book, and to remove pressure

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[36]Richard Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically,* ed. John MacArthur, Richard L. Mayhue, and Robert L. Thomas, *The John MacArthur Pastor's Library* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 7.

[37]Begg, *Preaching for God's Glory*, 24.

[38]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 65.

from the preacher to decide what text to preach each week.[39] However, some disagree

that this model is limited to preaching entire books of the Bible, as some have chosen to

preach through lengthy sections of a book in the interest of time.

Another method is known as topical exposition, where a topic of interest points

the preacher to a specific text that addresses the issue. John Stott highlights this method

by giving examples of a doctrinal and topical series through which he preached using ten

to fifteen sermons. He states, "Doctrinal courses have included the character of God, the

life of Christ, the Cross, the Resurrection appearance, God's family and the Bible."[40] This

approach is not a form of topical preaching, but it uses topics to select the biblical

passages that will be expositionally preached. The goal is to provide the church with

more balance in their biblical diet. Bryan Chapell explains, "Although master expositors

make exceptions, it is usually best for sermon series to last a few months at a maximum.

People want to study their Bibles in depth, but like vacationers wanting more than one

view of the Grand Canyon, they generally like to move along."[41] While the text selection

methods of *lectio continua* and topical exposition are slightly different in length and

approach, they both share the common goal of allowing the preacher to derive the

application of the sermon from the biblical text alone, which is the source of true biblical

application.

Exegeting the text. Once a particular text has been selected, the preacher must

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[39]Derek W. H Thomas, "Expository Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 44-48.

[40]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 217.

[41]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 66.

then seek to interpret the text according to its original meaning so the basis of proper

application can be determined. With the substance of the sermon being Scripture alone,

the preacher must engage the text to understand the author's original intent. The selected

text must not be a point of departure for the preacher to express his agenda, but the sole

resource for all of the content being presented. Chapell contends, "Expository preaching

solemnly binds the preacher to the task of representing the precise meaning of a text as

intended by the original author or as illuminated by another inspired source within the

Bible."[42] According to Robert Thomas, "If the explanation of what the author meant is

missing, so is the heart of Bible exposition."[43] In order to get a clear perception of the

author's intent, a meticulous and comprehensive study of the text is required. Thomas

concludes, "[The preacher] must have a thorough understanding of the passage to be

preached before devising the mechanics for conveying his understanding to the

congregation. If at all possible, he must be a trained exegete with a working knowledge

of the biblical languages and a systematic method for using them to analyze the text."[44]

Therefore, the preacher who wants real biblical application must begin with the exegesis

of the text.

Chapell defines exegesis as "the process by which preachers discover the

precise definitions, grammatical distinctions, and literary character of the words and

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[42]Ibid., 75.

[43]Robert L. Thomas, "Exegesis and Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically,* ed. John MacArthur, Richard L. Mayhue, and Robert L. Thomas, *The John MacArthur Pastor's Library* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 107.

[44]Ibid., 108.

phrases in a text."[45] Goldsworthy explains, "Exegesis is the formal analysis of the passage in which we seek to uncover what the author was saying. It involves us in a close reading of the text, a concern for its literary characteristics including linguistics and genre, and a general concern for its immediate historical and theological context."[46] While there are many different methods for exegetical study, the method that seems to be the most solid for conservative biblical interpretation is the grammatico-historical method. John Stott describes exegesis as "'grammatico-historical,' because it signifies the interpretation of a text in accordance with both its historical origin and its grammatical construction."[47] In order to understand the grammatical construction of the original text, a language study in the original Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic is necessary. This study provides the preacher with the correct meaning of the ancient words and how they were used together to convey ideas. Once the preacher has discovered the meaning and usage of the original words, he then must ascertain the historical situation in which those words were written. Walter Kaiser explains, "The historical sense is that sense which is demanded by a careful consideration of the time and circumstances in which the author wrote. It is the specific meaning which an author's words require when the historical context and background are taken into account."[48] Since the biblical authors were not writing in the present era, the exegete must study the ancient situation to grasp how the

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[45]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 108-09

[46]Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 127.

[47]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 127.

[48]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 88.

text was originally understood. While a more detailed description of the grammatico-historical method is beyond the scope of this work, it is needless to say that exegesis based on the grammatico-historical method will ensure that the central proposition of the biblical text is clearly derived. Once the solid foundation of the ancient meaning has been discovered, then the preacher can move forward in the process of properly applying the text to modern culture.

Bridging the text. After the text is chosen and its ancient meaning is discovered through exegesis, the preacher must then bridge those ancient truths to the modern audience for application. According to Grant Osborne, "The static study of the original meaning of a text dare never be an end to itself but must at all times have as its goal the dynamic application of the text to one's current needs and the sharing of that text with others via expository teaching and preaching."[49] This goal is accomplished by what Richard describes as "contemporizing" the text. Like "bridging the text" he explains, "Contemporization is the main task of the expository preacher. He takes what was written centuries ago and contemporizes it for present-day audiences."[50] Wayne McDill agrees, "[The] concept revealed in the text must be carried safely across the chasm of language, culture, and history so that it may be heard again today in its intended meaning."[51] Therefore, the task at hand is to relate the truth of the Bible to the modern audience in

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[49]Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 410.

[50]Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 19.

[51]Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 121.

such a way that biblical truth is deeply applied to the life of the listener.

However, reaching this goal does not come without difficulty, as there are many texts in the Bible that are not literally applicable today. Robinson concurs by stating, "In application we attempt to take what we believe is the truth of the eternal God, which was given in a particular time and place and situation, and apply it to people in the modern world who live in another time, another place, and a very different situation. That is harder than it appears."[52] For example, the ceremonial and dietary laws of the Old Testament and the restrictions concerning meat offered to idols in the New Testament fit into this category. However, since Paul affirms that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16), the preacher must never discount or overlook such texts, as they are equally valid for godly instruction today. Therefore, the preacher must unwrap the truth in these texts from their cultural shroud and apply that truth to various contexts today. York contends, "The principles that Paul established [in ancient times] remain relevant and applicable guides for Christian conscience and behavior. But we must lead our listeners to identify with them and apply them to the same kind of issues that we face today."[53] This task is known as "principlization." According to Richard, "Principlization is the theory of preaching that takes a passage, extracts a universal command, and applies it to the contemporary context . . . . Principlization is a popular means of re-presenting the 'truth' of a passage."[54]

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[52]Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 22.

[53]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 79.

[54]Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 160.

A great method for principlizing the text is what Robinson refers to as the "ladder of abstraction."[55] He explains, "I picture a 'ladder of abstraction' that comes up from the biblical world and crosses over and down to the modern setting. I have to be conscious how I cross this 'abstraction ladder.' I want to make sure the biblical situation and the current situation are analogous at the points I am making them connect."[56] The "abstraction ladder" is a method for discovering the universal truth behind whatever cultural restriction or teaching is presented in the ancient text and finding an analogous point of connection to the modern culture. Once the universal truth is discovered by climbing up the ancient side of the ladder (from specific to general), it is then carried across and brought down on the modern side of the ladder (from general to specific) for relevant application today. In a similar way, Kuhatschek illustrates this method as a pyramid. He explains,

> The Bible contains many levels of application. These levels are like a pyramid, with only two commands (love for God and neighbor) at the pinnacle and all other commands at various levels between the pinnacle and the base. The principles near the top of the pyramid are fewer in number because they are more general and abstract. The commands nearer the base of the pyramid (such as "Do not murder your ox") are more numerous because they are more specific, detailed and concrete. The commands near the base sometimes seem pointless or obscure until we move up to higher levels on the pyramid to discover the principles or reasons for the commands. Conversely, the principles near the top of the pyramid often seem vague and abstract until they are fleshed out by the more concrete principles near the base.[57]

In order to understand how this method draws culturally relevant truth from non-culturally relevant texts, Robinson offers the following example.

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[55]Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 23.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible*, 54.

Sometimes as I work with a text, I have to climb the abstraction ladder until I reach the text's intent. Leviticus says, 'Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk.' First, you have to ask, 'What is this all about?' At face value, you might say, 'If I have a young goat, and I want to cook it in its mother's milk for dinner tonight, I should think twice.' But we now know the pagans did that when they worshiped their idolatrous gods. Therefore, what you have here is not a prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk, but against being involved in the idolatry that surrounded God's people or bringing its practices into their religion. If that's the case, it does no good for the preacher to bring this text straight over. You must climb the ladder of abstraction a couple of levels until you reach the principle: You should not associate yourself with idolatrous worship, even in ways that do not seem to have direct association with physically going to the idol.[58]

Therefore, by using Robinson's "ladder of abstraction" or Kuhatschek's "pyramid" method, the preacher will be able to locate the inspired truth in any passage of Scripture, no matter how culturally obscure or irrelevant it may seem to be today. Once the truth is located, it can be bridged over and applied to the specific needs and issues of modern listeners today.

In summary, the truth of God's word can be accurately applied by the preacher to his listeners when he faithfully chooses to preach from a single biblical text, discovers the meaning of the text through exegesis, and locates the modern relevance of the text by bridging the ancient truth to contemporary life. This formula forms that path to sermon application.

The Practice of Sermon Application

Once the meaning of a passage is discovered and its modern relevance is established, the preacher must then decide how to present this truth in a way that will effectively impact his audience. Here, the question now becomes, "How does the preacher practically apply the truth of Scripture in a way that is clear and significant to

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[58]Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 23.

his listeners?" In order to apply the truth of Scripture practically, the preacher must understand the needs of his listeners, create effective sermon introductions and conclusions, and utilize sermon illustrations. In this section, these crucial elements of sermon application will be discussed.

Understanding the needs of his listeners. If the preacher desires to plant the truth deep into the hearts of his listeners, it is imperative that he understands their needs, desires, temptations, misunderstandings, and challenges they face each day. Richard warns, "Application that is not pertinent and oriented to the audience can lead to a dangerous notion. The audience leaves with the idea that the Bible does not relate to them or that it is good only for isolated instances in life."[59] For this reason, Michael Fabarez advises, "The fact remains, keeping a finger on the pulse of the church is critical to effective preaching. Becoming an office-bound hermit may result in a great tract ministry, but preaching will always be a face-to-face venture. If the preacher loses touch with his congregation, the gulf between them will become far greater than the distance between pulpit and pew."[60] Likewise, Osborne states, "The problem is that [pastors] never get to know their flock, its needs and interests. At best they receive it secondhand from the staff or board . . . [and] the specific needs of the congregation remain untouched–at least in the pastor's pulpit ministry. Pastors and missionaries must know their flock and take time to discover their specific situation in life."[61] Therefore, the

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[59]Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 180.

[60]Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 93.

[61]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 346-47.

preacher who desires to apply the truth of the Bible to his audience must understand their needs.

In an effort to understand the needs of the congregation, Richard argues that preachers must exegete culture.[62] He explains, "Exegeting culture is as much a discipline as exegeting Scripture . . . We must see life's details and interpret those details to give us the context for our preaching (and theologizing)."[63] Doriani states, "Exegeting the congregation means knowing that its history, social strata, age, region, and ethnicity create unique traits and recognizing that the thought world of the pastor and congregation may differ. Exegeting the congregation means posing questions as modern local people do."[64] David Read concludes, "It remains an axiom of Christian preaching that the road from study to pulpit runs through a living, demanding, interrupting manse; out into the noisy street; in and out of houses and hospitals, farms and factories, buses, trains . . . For the living Word there is no by-pass road from study to pulpit."[65] Therefore, the preacher must spend time with those he serves, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, understandings and misunderstandings, successes and failures. This effort will result in knowing how to apply the truth of a given text specifically to the everyday lives of listeners, resulting in a greater impact and challenge. The preacher will be able to apply the truth to his people through a custom-made sermon designed to address their needs.

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[62]Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 180.

[63]Ibid., 180-81.

[64]Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 38.

[65]David H. C. Read, *The Communication of the Gospel*, in Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 191.

Creating effective introductions and conclusions. In order to communicate and apply these truths to the needs of the congregation, hearers must be mentally persuaded to listen to what the preacher has to say. The preacher must effectively introduce his message so that the listener will have high expectations that what the preacher is about to say will apply to his or her life. York warns, "With the first few moments of seeing and hearing us, listeners will subconsciously decide whether or not they find us credible, whether they will allow our information in. If we botch those first moments, if we do not seize their attention and draw them into our own passion, we stand in danger of losing them."[66] Consequently, it is imperative to introduce the sermon in such a way that listeners will automatically be drawn in to hear how God's word applies to their lives. Similarly, the preacher must also conclude his message in a way that challenges listeners to apply what they have heard. According to Robinson, "You should conclude, and the conclusion should produce a feeling of finality. Like an able lawyer, a minister should ask for a verdict. Your congregations should see your idea entire and complete, and they know and feel what God's truth demands of them."[67] Therefore, making an effective conclusion is a major means for applying the text to believers' lives. In this section, several functions of effective sermon introductions and conclusions for application will be discussed.

One of the most vital functions of a sermon introduction is to attract the listeners' attention and generate interest toward the final application. Stott declares, "A

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[66]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 174.

[67]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 176.

good introduction serves two purposes. First, it arouses interest, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely 'introduces' the theme by leading the hearers into it."[68] Chapell contends, "An introduction should present listeners with an arresting thought that draws them away from apathy or competing interests and makes them say, 'Hey! I need to hear this.' An introduction may pique curiosity, concern, mirth, or wonder, but no matter what avenue the preacher takes, the task remains the same: Get their attention!"[69] For this reason, sermon introductions must contain elements that quickly draw the interest of those listening. According to York, these elements include (1) *Novelty*, the use of something new and different, or out of the ordinary; (2) *Concreteness*, using vivid and concrete details that stand out to things that are abstract and general; (3) *Familiarity*, awakening a sense of common experience and knowledge; (4) *Suspense*, intentionally leaving out a few pieces of the puzzle to draw interest; (5) *Humor*, offering a funny look at life and self.[70] Robinson adds that attention can be gained through a paradoxical thought, a rhetorical question, a factual statement, or a provocative comment.[71] Nevertheless, whichever way a preacher uses to draw his listeners' attention, the goal must always be to generate interest toward the topic at hand. Preachers who use such attention-getting tactics without pointing their listeners to the main application of the message are not truly introducing the sermon. Chapell cautions, "An introduction must indicate what a message will be about. An introduction that

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[68]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 244.

[69]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 239.

[70]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 180.

[71]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 167.

arouses interest but does not focus attention on the subject actually gives listeners a false lead. Confusion and resentment can result."[72] Therefore, the introduction must employ communication methods that will draw the listener's attention and generate interest toward the biblical subject at hand.

While the introduction must attract the listener's attention, it must also help the listener understand what the entire sermon is seeking to accomplish. Mayhue states that the introduction should "create audience interest in and anticipation of the body of a message and demonstrate the biblical importance of the message … [and] make the preacher's intended course of discussion clear to his audience so that they can follow along and not get lost on the preaching journey."[73] York adds, "The proposition is the core truth, the central idea that we want our listeners to leave with . . . . The best place for the proposition to emerge is at the end of the introduction, just as we move into the body of the sermon. The introduction sets it up while the body of the sermon proves it."[74] The introduction should provide the listener with a preview of the biblical content about to be proclaimed, leading to an increased interest in the teaching and application. Therefore, the preacher must not only draw the listeners' attention to a specific topic or issue, but he must also introduce how the Scriptures address that topic or issue. For these reasons, a sermon's introduction plays a major role in generating interest and anticipation for the sermon's application.

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[72]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 240.

[73]Mayhue, "Introductions, Illustrations, and Conclusions," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically,* ed. John MacArthur, Richard L. Mayhue, and Robert L. Thomas, *The John MacArthur Pastor's Library* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 201-02.

[74]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 182.

On the opposite end of the preaching event, the sermon's conclusion serves as a vital function for summarizing the main application of the message and challenging the listener with the truth that has been applied. One of the errors made in many pulpits today is merely treating the conclusion as a short recap of the sermon's points, followed by a closing prayer. However, the conclusion must be more than a short summary of the message. York contends, "When the word is preached and the Holy Spirit uses that word, people feel a need to respond. A sermon that does not tell them how to apply the truth and respond to it will only frustrate them."[75] Chapell declares, "In a conclusion, a preacher exhorts people to act on the principles or concepts the sermon has already made clear. Thus, the primary purpose of a conclusion is motivation . . . . [an] effort to mobilize the wills of the listeners to conform to previously specified imperatives."[76] For this reason, Mayhue instructs, "The idea of conclusion should be in mind all the way through the preparation process. A pertinent question is, 'As a result of this message, what changes does God want in my life and the lives of those who hear it?'"[77] Therefore, an effective conclusion is one that summarizes the application made throughout the sermon and then challenges listeners to apply these truths to their lives.

In order to effectively conclude a sermon, the preacher must seek to reach the listener's heart with one final application and appeal to the truth. Chapell professes that a powerful conclusion is one that "engages the heart, stimulates the will, excites the mind,

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[75]Ibid., 185.

[76]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 255.

[77]Mayhue, "Introductions, Illustrations, and Conclusions," 209.

and elevates the soul concerning eternal truths at this most crucial stage."[78] Robinson

suggests several ways that a preacher can reach his listeners' hearts during the

conclusion. One way is through the use of a powerful *illustration*, which is "an anecdote

that summarizes the idea or better shows how it works out in life."[79] A concluding

illustration can be powerful if it drives home the application in a vibrant way. A second

way to conclude is through a *quotation*. Robinson professes, "Sometimes a well-chosen

quote used in your conclusion can state the sermon idea in words stronger and more vivid

than you can craft yourself."[80] These quotes can come from Scripture, famous hymns, or

Christian authors, given that they relate directly to the main message being preached. A

third method is by asking a penetrating *question*. Robinson declares, "An appropriate

question, or even a series of questions, can conclude a sermon effectively."[81] These

questions must be designed to cause the listener to search within and respond

accordingly. A final way to make a powerful conclusion is by giving *specific directions*.

According to Robinson, "Your preaching will more likely be incorporated into the

structures of people's lives when you offer practical suggestions on how to translate

scriptural truth into life experience."[82] By offering specific directions, the listener will be

forced to think about the application that has been presented and hopefully choose to

respond according to God's will.

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[78]Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 257.

[79]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 176.

[80]Ibid., 177.

[81]Ibid., 178.

[82]Ibid., 179.

While these methods are all aimed at reaching the heart of the listener, they are only used under the ultimate heart penetrating power of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Spirit's work, no method for concluding sermons has any life changing power. However, the preacher who effectively desires to apply the text must make his sermon conclusions a top priority. York concludes by stating, "When we fail to draw the net and challenge listeners to commit to obedience, we fail in our calling. As surely as we make time for our exegesis, we must reserve adequate time for our conclusion, including that required to draw the net through illustration, summarization, and appeal."[83]

Utilizing sermon illustrations. While understanding the listener's needs and crafting effective sermon introductions and conclusions are important for application, the use of sermon illustrations is also a powerful way to reach the heart of the listener with the application of the biblical text. Stott declares, "In order to see, we need light. And the word 'illustrate' means to illumine, to throw light or lustre upon an otherwise dark object."[84] Because some truths of Scripture are more difficult to understand and apply, an illustration enables the listener to see the truth in a practical and exemplary way. Chapell contends, "Illustrations are not supplemental to good exposition; they are a necessary form of exposition in which biblical truths are explained to the emotions and the will as well as to the intellect. Illustrations will not allow mere head knowledge. They exegete Scripture in the terms of human experience to create a whole-person understanding of

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[83]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 193.

[84]Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 239-40.

God's word."[85] According to Robinson, "Well-chosen, skillfully used illustrations can do just about everything – restate, explain, validate, or apply ideas by relating them to tangible experiences." However, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns, "Stories and illustrations are only meant to illustrate truth, not to call attention to themselves. … It is a means of leading and helping people see the truth that you are enunciating and proclaiming still more clearly."[86] Therefore, when illustrations are used correctly, they are critical and necessary for assisting listeners in grasping the biblical truth and applying it to their lives.

Since sermon illustrations are vital for applying biblical truth, it is important that preachers use them correctly. York offers several reminders for creating great illustrations. First, "*Use only illustrations that relate to your text.*"[87] It can be tempting for preachers to hear a good story and try to fit it in their text when it really does not belong. Illustrations must be used only when they directly relate to the text at hand. Second, "*Use illustrations relevant to your culture.*"[88] Preachers must keep in mind where they are preaching and to whom they are preaching when using illustrations. Illustrations must be culturally relevant, or else the application will be missed or confused. A sermon preached in a foreign country would not benefit from illustrations about life in the United States. Third, "*Make them vivid.*"[89] Preachers must do a good job

[85]Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 14.

[86]Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 232-33.

[87]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 163.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Ibid., 165.

of making the illustration lifelike and engaging, not dull or lifeless. York declares, "The more specific, the more intensely focused the details of a story, the more you pull the audience in, creating 'involuntary listening' and drawing them into the story and ultimately the application and meaning."[90] Fourth, "*Make them personal*."[91] While stories found in newspapers or magazines can be interesting, sometimes the most engaging illustrations are those that are personally experienced by the preacher. York declares, "Other kinds of stories and anecdotes may work fine, but you will be amazed to discover that the people who give you their time every Sunday morning are most interested in your personal stories."[92] Of course, personal illustrations must always be true. A preacher who illustrates his message with bogus stories or quotes is doing nothing short of lying to his congregation. These are all important reminders for applying a text by using illustrations.

Therefore, if the preacher desires to produce outstanding sermon application, he must be aware of the specific needs of his congregation, be able to attract and challenge the listener's heart by effectively introducing and concluding each message, and clearly expose the application by using vivid and touching sermon illustrations.

Conclusion

All throughout Scripture, God has commanded men to publically proclaim his word to a lost and sinful world. It is the task of the preacher to use the gifts and abilities that God has bestowed upon him to make the Scriptures known. However, if the preacher explains only the content of the Bible without applying its truth to the lives of those who

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[90]Ibid.

[91]Ibid., 166.

[92]Ibid.

hear, he has missed his calling. The preacher must find an effective balance between explanation and application in order to communicate God's word successfully. For this reason, all preachers must be sure they are faithful to know their people and discover ways to apply God's word to them each week. While the preacher is responsible for explaining and applying God's word, it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who draws souls and conforms hearts to God's will. Therefore, all who preach God's word must effectively apply the Scripture from the pulpit and completely rely upon the Holy Spirit to empower application in the pew.

CHAPTER 4

AN ACCOUNT OF THE MINISTRY
RESEARCH PROJECT

In March 2012, I began a ministry research project based on an eleven-week

sermon series on the New Testament purposes of the church. Each of the sermons

focused on a specific New Testament text that highlighted one of the four purposes of the

Great Commission according to Matthew 28:18-20. The research elements for measuring

the effectiveness of the sermon series consisted of pre-series and post-series surveys

given to a focus group and two influential church leadership committees. Another

research element for measuring the effectiveness and improvement of sermon application

was given to four trusted church members on four different occasions. These elements

were grounded in the project's four goals: (1) that church members understand God's

purposes for the local church based on the New Testament; (2) that church members

recognize the personal level of ministry involvement that God expects from all members

serving in the local church; (3) that church members apply these New Testament

teachings to their specific areas of ministry involvement; (4) that I would become a more

effective preacher by strengthening the application of the sermon.

Project Schedule

The sermon series began on March 25, 2012, and concluded on June 24, 2012.

Three weeks during this period were devoted to Easter, personal vacation time, and a

mission trip, resulting in an eleven-week series. The elements of the project were

completed according to the following schedule:

1. March 11–Pre-series surveys were distributed to the focus group, Long-range Planning Committee and Constitution and By-laws Committee.

2. March 18–Pre-series surveys were completed and returned by the focus group and committees.

3. March 25–Began sermon series and distributed the first sermon application survey to four-member application feedback group.

4. April 15–Preached the fourth message in sermon series and distributed the second sermon application survey to the four-member application feedback group.

5. May 20–Preached the eighth message in the sermon series and distributed the third sermon application survey to the four-member application feedback group.

6. June 24–Finished the sermon series and distributed the fourth sermon application survey to four-member application feedback group. Post-series surveys were distributed to the focus group, Long-range Planning Committee and Constitution and By-laws Committee.

7. July 1–Post-series surveys and sermon application surveys were completed and returned to be analyzed.

The total length of the project was eighteen weeks.

The Sermon Series Focus Group and Leadership Committees

The sermon series focus group consisted of 36 church members from various age ranges. In the selection process, I wanted to find a nearly equal number of men and women, with ages ranging from 20 to 90. The average age of the focus group was 60. By questioning men and women from various age groups, I felt that the research would represent a more accurate assessment of the church as a whole. I excluded members under the age of 20 to ensure maturity and full understanding.

The leadership committee surveys were given to the Constitution and By-laws

Committee and the Long-Range Planning Committee, reaching a total of nine participants. Each of these committees is composed of men and women from various age ranges. These two committees were selected based on their high potential to impact the direction of the church. The Constitution and By-laws Committee is responsible for developing church policy and practice for ministry and operation. This committee has a major influence on how the church operates, which needs to be done according to Scripture. The Long-Range Planning Committee is responsible for discerning God's will in the future of our church. This committee seeks to understand what direction God is leading the church in for the future, thus making suggestions to church members about future visions and goals. Both of these committees have a major impact on the ministries and goals of our church; therefore, they were chosen to participate in this research project.

The Pre-Sermon Series Surveys Administered

The focus group and leadership committees were selected and given surveys on March 11, 2012, two weeks before the sermon series began. (A copy of each survey is included in Appendix 1 and 2.) Each survey consisted of a number of statements aimed at different elements of the church's purpose and function according to the New Testament. These statements were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement by each participant. Each participant was instructed to complete the survey within one week. They were given the option of returning their surveys in person or by email. Each of the participants returned their surveys by March 18, 2012, a week before the sermon series began. The surveys were then collected and recorded.

The Sermon Series Application
Feedback Group

In order to measure the progress of my personal goal of improving sermon application, I chose four trusted and mature leaders from our congregation to complete surveys aimed at measuring my progress as a preacher in this area. I issued each participant an application feedback survey on the first, fourth, eighth, and eleventh weeks of the sermon series. (A copy of the application survey is included in Appendix 3.) The spacing of these surveys allowed time for personal assessment and reflection so that improvements could be made based on the feedback and advice. Each survey consisted of six statements aimed at different elements of sermon application. These statements were measured by using a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement by each participant. There was a final question that asked for written comments or suggestions concerning the application presented in the sermon. Each participant was asked to return the survey by the end of the following week.

A Summary of the Sermon Series

The sermon series originated from a desire to help the congregation understand the biblical purposes of the church as given in the New Testament. As shown in chapter two, I argued that Jesus' Great Commission displayed four basic functions of the church: worship, spiritual growth, service, and missions. These functions were explained in greater detail by choosing additional New Testament texts from which to preach throughout the series. Each purpose received at least two sermons describing its importance and application. The sermons are summarized as follows.

Sermon 1

   The first sermon in the series was titled "The New Testament Purposes of the Church," based on Matthew 28:18-20. This sermon served as an introduction to the series, as it detailed the four main purposes of the church that the remainder of the series emphasized. The text revealed four purposes: (1) The church must worship God alone (28:18); (2) The church must reach the world with the gospel (28:19); (3) The church must teach, learn, and obey God's word (28:19); (4) The church must serve in roles that complete the Great Commission (28:20). The sermon informed the church of these purposes and called the church to apply these purposes to all activities. The sermon concluded with Jesus' words, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age," to remind the congregation that the church's purposes are impossible without the presence and enablement of Christ. A gospel invitation was made to invite unbelievers into a relationship with Christ and spiritual membership into his church.

Sermon 2

   The second sermon in the series was titled "Worshiping God with Our Lips" and was preached from Colossians 3:15-17. The sermon revealed three truths from the text: (1) We must worship God as one body (3:15); (2) We must worship God by singing his truth (3:16); (3) We must worship God with all of our hearts (3:17). The previous sermon established that worship is the church's number one purpose. Therefore, this sermon focused on the reasons and proper methods for God-honoring corporate worship. This sermon encouraged the church to worship together, to sing scriptural songs, and to worship sincerely. The message closed with an invitation to believe the gospel in order to begin a life of true worship.

Sermon 3

The third sermon in the series, titled "Worshiping God with Our Lives," was based on Romans 12:1-2. The text exposed four truths for worshiping God with our lives: (1) Worshipful living is dependent on God's mercies (12:1a); (2) Worshipful living is daily sacrificing oneself to the Lord (12:1b); (3) Worshipful living requires a regular renewal of the mind (12:2a); (4) Worshipful living results in a life that is pleasing to God (12:2b). Where the previous message focused on worshiping God corporately through singing, this message focused on worshiping God through the attitude, actions, and decisions of ordinary life. This message emphasized that God desires his church to worship him with every minute of their lives, no matter the location or situation. The congregation was also reminded that worshipful living is not possible unless God is renewing the mind daily through the Holy Spirit. The sermon concluded with a gospel invitation that stressed that worshipful living is only possible after one is born again in Christ.

Sermon 4

The fourth sermon in the series was titled "Growing to Spiritual Maturity in Christ" and was preached from Ephesians 4:11-16. This was the first of three sermons highlighting the second purpose of God's church, sanctification through spiritual growth. The text revealed three truths about spiritual growth: (1) Spiritual growth must be promoted by church leaders (4:11-12); (2) Spiritual growth results in Christian maturity (4:13-15); (3) Spiritual growth is empowered by the Holy Spirit (4:16). This message revealed from Scripture that it is God's will for his people to grow to spiritual maturity.

The sermon challenged listeners to examine their lives for signs of spiritual growth and never to become stagnant or apathetic toward growing into the image of Christ. The sermon concluded with a gospel invitation to begin growing in Christ by being born again.

Sermon 5

The fifth sermon in the series was titled "Growing Spiritually by Protecting Christian Doctrine" and was preached from Jude 3-4. The text offered two truths: (1) The church is called to protect Christian doctrine (Jude 3); (2) The church is called to recognize those who distort Christian doctrine (Jude 4). This sermon was focused on the church's mandate to grow in godliness by recognizing false teaching and protecting the Christian faith from evil corruption. The only way for the church to experience authentic spiritual growth is to learn from pure doctrines. In this message, listeners were challenged to guard their hearts and minds from all unbiblical teaching in culture and to recognize what false teaching looks like based on Jude's description. The sermon concluded with a gospel invitation to leave a life of unbelief and embrace the true gospel.

Sermon 6

The sixth sermon in the series was titled "Growing Spiritually by Practicing Church Discipline" and was presented from 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. This text offered the following four truths about church discipline: (1) The church must discipline members by rejecting sinful living (5:1-2a); (2) The church must discipline members to ensure personal spiritual growth (5:2b-5); (3) The church must discipline members to maintain congregational purity (5:6-8); (4) The church must discipline members by keeping them

accountable (5:9-13). The main idea in this message was to show from Scripture that church discipline and spiritual accountability are necessary and biblical to generate spiritual growth. The church was challenged not to be indifferent to sinful living and to approach and restore sinning members through love. The message also gave specific directions from Matthew 18 concerning the biblical way to administer church discipline. The sermon concluded by reminding believers of the severe consequences of allowing sin to go unchecked and by reminding unbelievers of the eternal consequences of not confessing sin and embracing Christ.

Sermon 7

The seventh sermon in the series was titled "Christian Service: Assisting Christ in Ministry" and was preached from Romans 12:3-8. This sermon transitions to the third purpose of the church, Christian service. The Scripture selection displayed three characteristics of a Christian servant: (1) A Christian servant maintains a humble attitude (12:3); (2) A Christian servant recognizes the gifts of others (12:4-5); (3) A Christian servant faithfully serves Christ (12:6-8). The main idea of this sermon is to show that every believer must serve Christ through the spiritual gifts and abilities that God has bestowed upon them. It was shown that church growth is enabled when God's people work together and serve in the ministries of the church. The message challenged all members to identify and use their spiritual gifts by serving in Christian ministry. The message concluded with a gospel invitation that reminded unbelievers that serving Christ only begins once a person is born again.

Sermon 8

The eighth sermon in the series was titled "Serving Christ Through Generous Giving" and was preached from 2 Corinthians 8:1-8. The text provided three truths: (1) Generous giving is blind to circumstances (8:1-2); (2) Generous giving is enabled by a close relationship to God (8:3-5); (3) Generous giving is necessary to be a complete Christian (8:6-8). The main aim of the message was to show that God expects believers to serve him by giving generously to support local and distant ministry. Each listener was challenged to serve Christ by giving financially on a regular basis. Christian giving was emphasized as an act of worship and service. The sermon concluded with a gospel invitation that reminded unbelievers that no amount of giving would ever be enough to satisfy God for salvation, but only by trusting in God's Son.

Sermon 9

The ninth sermon in the series was titled "Reaching the World by Showing the Gospel" and was preached from 1 Peter 2:9-12. The text offered three principles: (1) We must remember our calling as God's people (2:9-10); (2) We must resist influences that corrupt our souls (2:11); (3) We must resemble Christ in the presence of the world (2:12). This message was the first of two highlighting the final (but not least important) purpose of the church, missions. The main goal in this sermon was to challenge each listener to live a life that testifies to the power of the gospel. In order for the world to see the reality behind the gospel message, a believer must make the gospel visible through a faithful and authentic born again lifestyle. The sermon concluded by emphasizing that in order to show the gospel, one must first be born again through faith in Christ.

Sermon 10

The tenth sermon in the series was titled "Reaching the World by Sharing the Gospel" and was preached from Acts 1:6-11. The text offered three reminders about the mission of the church: (1) The mission of the church centers on transforming lives (1:6-8); (2) The mission of the church reaches the entire world (1:8b); (3) The mission of the church begins immediately. In this message, the main idea was that the church has been sent out by Christ to bring spiritual transformation by sharing the gospel with those who have not heard or believed. The church was challenged to share the gospel with the lost, while relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. The message concluded with an explanation of the gospel and a call for unbelievers to place faith in Christ.

Sermon 11

The final message of the series was titled "The New Testament Purposes of the Church Displayed" and was preached from Acts 2:42-47. The text revealed four reminders for functioning according God's purposes for his church: (1) The church must be active in ministry (2:42-43); (2) The church must be unified in fellowship (2:44-45); (3) The church must be consistent in function (2:46); (4) The church must make a social impact (2:47). Being the final message of the series, I wanted to preach from a passage that modeled the purposes of God's church being lived out. The early account of the church provided such an example for the modern church to follow. The sermon emphasized being active in each of the four New Testament purposes: worship, spiritual growth, service, and missions. Church unity and fellowship were also highlighted as important factors for church growth. The sermon concluded with a gospel invitation by

reminding unbelievers that being a part of the true church begins by being born again in Christ.

The Post-Series Surveys Administered

On June 24, 2012, the post-series surveys were handed out following the final sermon in the series. On July 1, 2012, the surveys were collected, and the data was recorded to be analyzed and compared with the pre-series data to reveal the project's measured results.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of the ministry research project was to use expository preaching

to educate and motivate the members of First Baptist Church of Fairburn, Georgia, with

God's purposes for the local church based on the teachings of the New Testament in

order to strengthen and establish a more biblical model of ministry. This project was

aimed to accomplish four major goals: (1) That church members understand God's

purposes for his church based on the New Testament; (2) That church members recognize

the need to be personally involved in fulfilling God's purposes for his church; (3) That

church members apply and implement these New Testament teachings to their specific

areas of ministry involvement; (4) That I would become a more effective preacher of

God's word by strengthening the application of my sermons. In order to accomplish these

goals, an eleven-week sermon series was preached concerning the New Testament

purposes of the church. The project's success was measured by administering specific

surveys (see Appendices 1, 2, and 3) to three different groups of church members before

and after the sermon series, as outlined in chapter four.

In this final chapter, the results of the analyzed data are presented to reveal

how well the project's goals were met. This chapter will also evaluate the project's

strengths and weaknesses, reviews elements that could have been done differently, and

concludes with theological and personal reflections concerning the project as a whole.

Evaluation of Project Goals

The success of the ministry research project was measured by analyzing the data collected from the completed surveys given to the focus group, leadership committees, and sermon application feedback group. The surveys given to the focus group and leadership committees contained a collection of statements based on the biblical purposes of the church. By using a Likert scale, each participant was asked to "strongly agree," "agree," remain "undecided," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with each statement presented. The same surveys were administered before and after the sermon series to measure if attitudes and convictions had changed in favor of the biblical teaching. Once the data was collected, any changes that were greater than 10 percent were noted as significant changes. Changes that resulted in less than 10 percent were not deemed to be significant enough to indicate a major change in attitude or conviction. Therefore, not all survey results will be presented in this chapter (all results can be viewed in Appendix 4 and 5), but only those deemed significant.

The surveys given to the sermon application feedback group contained statements that were directly related to how well the pastor applied each sermon to his listeners. By using a Likert scale, each participant was asked to "strongly agree," "agree," remain "undecided," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with each statement presented. Each participant was also given additional space for any personal comments or suggestions that related to each sermon's application. These surveys were administered on the first, fourth, eighth, and eleventh weeks of the sermon series. The results of each survey (see Appendix 6) and additional comments by the participants were reviewed and

analyzed to determine if the goal of improved sermon application had been reached. The results of the research are presented below to determine if the project's goals were met.

The Focus Group Results

The first statement given to the focus group declared, "I believe the whole Bible is God's word, completely true, without any error." This statement appeared first because the inspiration and inerrancy of God's word must be agreed upon before any of the other New Testament purposes will be understood as authoritative. To my great delight, 92 percent responded with "strongly agree" and 8 percent with "agree" in both surveys, with no one disagreeing or undecided (see Table A1 in Appendix 4). It was comforting to know that everyone agrees that the Bible is inspired and inerrant.

In the second statement, "I believe the New Testament contains everything that First Baptist Church needs to know about God's purposes for the church and how it should function," 64 percent strongly agreed and 22 percent agreed, while 11 percent were undecided and 3 percent disagreed in the pre-series survey (see Table A2 in Appendix 4). These results suggested that there might have been a small amount of skepticism regarding the sufficiency of the New Testament for completely guiding the church in ministry. However, the post-series surveys revealed that these numbers had shifted positively with 83 percent strongly agreeing and 11 percent agreeing, indicating that some who were previously undecided moved to agree with this statement after hearing the sermon series.

Statement 4 proved to be somewhat controversial, as the results were much more scattered. The statement declared, "I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are proven to work, even if they are not completely

biblical." This statement was used to estimate the number of people who valued a more pragmatic model of ministry, even at the cost of biblical principles. In the pre-series survey, 36 percent strongly disagreed and 36 percent disagreed, with 23 percent agreeing, and 6 percent undecided (see Table A4 in Appendix 4). The post-series survey revealed very similar responses, which indicates that some people are still not in favor of being completely biblical rather than pragmatic (see chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion). While two-thirds of the people disagreed in the end, this result did not achieve my intended goal.

Statement 6 asserted, "I believe the pastor's main role is to preach, teach, and model God's word and to equip church members for the work of ministry." The pre-series survey indicated that 69 percent strongly agreed and 22 percent agreed, while 6 percent disagreed, and 3 percent were undecided (see Table A6 in Appendix 4). However, the post-series survey revealed a 22 percent change toward a "strongly agree" position (92 percent), with no one disagreeing or undecided. These numbers are very encouraging, as they indicate that ministry should be carried out by all members as the pastor leads.

Statement 8 mentioned, "I believe that worship only takes place when the church is gathered together, singing songs to the Lord." This statement was reflective of the teaching that worship takes place through a believer's everyday lifestyle, not merely when singing congregational songs. However, the results showed a 14 percent drop from a "disagree" position to an "agree" and "undecided" position (see Table A8 in Appendix 4). These results were unfortunate because the sermon series proclaimed that worship takes place mainly through the actions and decisions of everyday life.

Statement 9 declared, "I believe that it is God's will for me to continue learning and growing in my faith, even after many years of being a faithful Christian." In this statement, the preconceived notion was that many lifelong church members feel that once a peak is reached in personal growth, there is no more room to climb. While 92 percent strongly agreed with this statement in the pre-series survey, a perfect 100 percent strongly agreed in the post-series survey (see Table A9 in Appendix 4). It was comforting to see that every person surveyed believed that God was still molding them into his image through sanctification.

Statement 10 read, "I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not making sure that every member is being discipled (i.e., Being trained to follow Christ)." The post-series survey revealed that an 11 percent increase had been made toward a position of "strongly agree" (see Table A10 in Appendix 4). It was a good sign to see such positive movement, because the need to make disciples was at the heart of the sermon series.

Statement 12 declared, "I believe that once a church member has served in a ministry in which he or she is gifted, he or she is free to be relieved of that ministry after a certain number of years." The intention of this statement was to see how many people felt that they could retire from a particular ministry after serving, even if their gifts lie dormant and unused. The post-series survey revealed a 17 percent drop from those who held a "disagree" position to a 14 percent increase toward an "agree" position (see Table A12 in Appendix 4). This 31 percent swing reveals that more people actually feel that they can give up their ministries after a certain number of years, even if God is still giving them the ability to serve according to their gifts. The sermon series indicated that

all believers should continue to serve in particular ministries as long as they are gifted and able. Therefore, the desired results were not met regarding this statement.

Statement 13 read, "I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not active in local and distant missions." This statement was used to measure the church's feelings toward active participation in missions, home and abroad. While the statistics did not change a great deal, it was outstanding to see that 78 percent strongly agreed and 19 percent agreed in the post-series survey (see Table A13 in Appendix 4). These results were very encouraging as they indicated that 97 percent of the participants agreed that we should be doing local and distant missions.

Statement 15 also emphasized missions by stating, "I believe that I am personally responsible for telling the lost about Jesus." The post-series survey revealed that 89 percent strongly agreed and 8 percent agreed, which indicates that 97 percent of those surveyed felt "personally responsible" to tell unbelievers about Jesus (see Table A15 in Appendix 4). While there was not a significant change from the pre-series survey, it was exceptional to see that the vast majority of those surveyed sensed the call to do personal evangelism with those around them.

In the final analysis concerning the focus group, it is fair to say that there were significant changes toward the biblical teachings that were presented in the sermon series. Several of the statements revealed strong answers in both surveys, indicating that many of the participants already held biblical views of the church. However, a small number of the responses showed slight changes for the worse. Overall, I feel confident that the project's goals were achieved based on the responses of the sermon series focus group.

The Leadership Committees Results

The leadership committee surveys (see Appendix 2) were given to the Constitution and By-laws Committee and the Long Range Planning Committee to measure each committee's knowledge and commitment for making decisions based on God's purposes for his church. Since these two committees were selected based on their high potential to make major ministry decisions affecting the life and health of the church, it was imperative to see strong results from the research analysis to ensure that the church was being led by people committed to following God's word.

In statement 1, "I believe the whole Bible is God's word, completely true, without any error," the goal was to ensure that each committee member believed in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Such a view is of extreme importance for anyone who is in a church leadership position. Both surveys revealed that all participants held a "strongly agree" position (see Table A16 in Appendix 5). Therefore, each committee member fully understands the authoritative nature of God's word for all ministry decisions.

Statement 3 declared, "I believe First Baptist Church is out of God's will if it does not seek to follow and obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament." This statement emphasized the importance of not only believing that the Bible is authoritative, but also practicing what the Scriptures say. While the pre-series survey indicated that all participants were in favor of this statement (67 percent "strongly agree" and 33 percent "agree"), the post-series survey revealed an 11 percent increase toward a "strongly agree" position (see Table A18 in Appendix 5). Therefore, the sermon series was influential toward this change.

Statement 4 proclaimed, "I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are proven to work, even if they are not completely biblical." In the pre-series survey, 56 percent strongly disagreed and 22 percent disagreed, while 11 percent were undecided and 11 percent agreed (see Table A19 in Appendix 5). The post-series survey showed that there was an 11 percent change toward an "undecided" position. This result was unfortunate, as it revealed that some might not be sure if ministry results based on unbiblical practices are acceptable. When comparing the results of statements 3 and 4, it was revealed that while all agree that the church must "obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament," some were also open to using practices that may not be "completely biblical." While this contrast seems like a contradiction, it may reveal that some in local churches are fine with a Bible-plus formula for growth.

Statement 7 read, "I believe that my committee is out of God's will if we do not go to the Lord in prayer before making every decision." The pre-series survey indicated that 89 percent affirmed the position (78 percent "strongly agree," 11 percent "agree"), but the post-series survey showed a 22 percent decrease in the "strongly agree" position and a 22 percent increase in the "undecided" position (see Table A22 in Appendix 5). It makes no sense why anyone would move to an undecided position on such a clear and vital issue, unless they misinterpreted the question to include all decisions, even trivial matters that may not be specifically prayed over. Nevertheless, it was disappointing to see these results.

Statement 10 declared, "I believe that every ministry activity in the church should have a spiritual emphasis." This statement aimed to ensure that the biblical

purposes of the church are being carried out in every church activity. In the pre-series survey, only 44 percent held a "strongly agree" position, but in the post-series survey, 78 percent strongly agreed with the statement, a 33 percent increase (see Table A25 in Appendix 5). This result indicated that the sermon series proved to be effective in this area.

Statement 11 read, "I believe that the church should not make major changes to how ministry has been done in the past, even if there are more biblical and effective ways of operating." This statement desired to measure the willingness of committee members to change their minds and practices when a more biblical method was presented. In the pre-series survey, a collective 89 percent did not agree (33 percent strongly disagreed, 56 percent disagreed); however, in the post-series survey, there was an 11 percent shift toward an "agree" position (see Table A26 in Appendix 5). These results indicate that some actually became unwilling to move toward a more biblical approach in order to uphold past decisions and practices. Such a result is not encouraging because many churches have issues with changing practices that are not biblical or no longer effective. However, the majority (77 percent) affirmed that they would be in favor of changes if biblically necessary.

Statement 13 declared, "I believe that my committee should utilize various church members in fulfilling tasks." This statement was aimed at measuring the openness of committee members to utilize more church members in ministry than just the same group of people for everything. While all participants affirmed the statement, the post-series survey indicated a 33 percent increase in those who held a "strongly agree" opinion (see Table A28 in Appendix 5). Whereas some may have been willing to agree, there are

more who feel much stronger about using more people in ministry. This response is a direct reflection of the preached material in the sermon series.

Finally, statement 14 read, "I believe that my committee should always seek to promote the gospel in whatever decisions are made." In the pre-series survey, 89 percent affirmed the statement (78 percent "strongly agree", 11 percent "agree"), while 11 percent disagreed (see Table A29 in Appendix 5). However, in the post-series survey, a perfect 100 percent held a "strongly agree" position. These results were very encouraging, knowing that everyone on these committees feels the need to include a gospel emphasis in all decisions.

In conclusion, the two selected leadership committees showed signs of being more biblical in their approach to leadership and decision making. I feel that the desired goals were met and the committees are much more equipped to make stronger biblical decisions regarding the ministries and direction of the church.

The Application Feedback Groups Results

The purpose of the sermon application feedback group was to measure my personal goal of improving sermon application. The feedback survey (see Appendix 3) consisted of only six statements, but also included additional space for personal comments and observations to be made concerning the application of the sermon. These six statements and comments were analyzed to see if any improvement had been made.

The first statement declared, "The main idea of the sermon was stated clearly in the sermon's introduction." This statement ensured that the sermon's main applicational emphasis was made from the beginning. All four participants indicated that they "strongly agreed" in each of the weeks. This result was important for me because I

wanted to capture the listeners with the main application point at the beginning of each sermon. One comment stated, "His introduction was very clear about the reason, length, and purpose of the eleven week sermon series." Another comment critiqued, "For future consideration, Justin might want to revisit the comment during his introduction when he said we were going to 'try' to answer the question about what are the purposes of the church today." This advice was helpful, because I would never want to give the impression from the beginning that the sermon's goal may not be met.

The second statement read, "The preacher presented the main idea of the sermon through several applicational points."[1] In the first two surveys, three men selected "strongly agree" and one man selected "agree" (see Table A31 in Appendix 6). However, in the eighth week survey, all four men chose "strongly agree." It appears that my sermon points improved in application toward the end of the series.

The third statement declared, "The sermon's application was driven by the biblical text, not the preacher's opinions." This statement was used to ensure that all application made was biblical, rather than personal ideas or convictions. In week one, three men chose "strongly agree" and one man "agree" (see Table 32 in Appendix 6). In weeks 4, 8, and 11, all four men held a "strongly agree" position. I was delighted that all four men eventually affirmed without doubt that the sermon applications were completely biblically driven. One comment said, "Throughout, Justin interjects other Scriptures to support his points. This shows preparation and connection to others parts and authors of the Bible." I am pleased to know that these men understand that my sermons exclusively

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[1]When speaking of an "applicational point," I am referring to sermon points that contain a reference to the application being made, not merely a statement that divides the text. For example, "Believers must share their faith on a daily basis" vs. "Jesus shared the gospel with people every day."

come from God's word.

Statement 4 read, "The preacher spent too much time explaining the text's meaning rather than telling me how it applies to m life." In the first week, one responded with "strongly disagree" and two with "disagree" (see Table 33 in Appendix 6). However, there was one response of "agree," indicating that I spent too much time in explanation compared to application. The responses improved in weeks 4 and 8, but in week 11 it was reported again that too much time was spent on explanation. One of the sermon application goals outlined in chapter 3 was for preachers to spend an equal amount of time explaining and applying the text, because many preachers treat sermons more like commentaries on the Bible than life-changing messages. These results show that I still have room to improve in this area.

Statement 5 declared, "The preacher used effective illustrations and examples to help me apply the sermon to my own life." The week 1 survey yielded one "strongly agree" response and three "agree" responses (see Table 34 in Appendix 6). In week 4, the "strongly agree" response moved to 2. By weeks 8 and 11, the "strongly agree" response improved to 3. This gradual increase in agreement revealed that improvements were being made when it came to using illustrations and examples to apply the text. One comment from the fourth week stated, "He led off with an example that most all could relate to . . . [which] brought laughter and set the stage for the sermon." Another comment from week 11 said, "Justin opens his sermons with a personal or currently relevant illustration." There was one critical remark made concerning a statistical example, "Use more current stats than 2009. Move forward in time instead of going backwards to 2004 . . . and quote your source." This comment was very important and

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well received for future improvement. It is very important that preachers use illustrations and examples to apply their points, and I feel that I made improvements in these areas.

Statement 6 concluded the survey by declaring, "The sermon helped me understand what God desires for me to do according to what is written in his word." In week 1, two responded with "strongly agree" and one with "agree," with one person responding as "undecided" (see Table 35 in Appendix 6). By week 11, all four participants responded with "strongly agree." One comment said, "Congratulations on another inspired, challenging sermon . . . . You blessed me." If the preacher is determined to be applicational, he must help everyone understand what God desires from him or her according to his word. An improvement was made in this area according to the goals of the project.

For the most part, a measured improvement could be noticed from the sermon application feedback surveys as the weeks passed. Not only were the survey results beneficial, but the personal comments were helpful as well. I feel that my personal preaching goals for the project were met as I improved the application of the sermon in all areas throughout the weeks.

Strengths of the Project

Like many traditional American churches, it can be easy to slip into a routine and lose focus on what God has called his church to do according to Scripture. This project allowed First Baptist Church of Fairburn to take a step back and reexamine what the Bible says concerning the purposes and practices of the local church. As a result, I feel that the church has a renewed interest in making sure we are obeying Scripture and God's will. The church seems much more eager to engage in local and distant missions.

The church also seems more excited about spiritual growth in the Lord.

A second strength of the project is that it has served as a strong foundation upon which to build our ministry for the future. Each of the four purposes that were discovered in Matthew 28:18-20 (see chapter 2) has been used to create our church's new purpose statement. The statement reads, "Worshiping God, Growing in His Word, Serving His Church, and Reaching His World." We have designed a logo that is color-coded to reflect each phrase in the purpose statement. Hopefully the content of this project will always be displayed through our purpose statement for years to come.

A third strength of the project is that it has allowed me to understand what the church believes concerning key ecclesiological issues. The surveys and personal interaction have provided me with a greater understanding of what our people need to hear and understand concerning God's purposes for his church.

A final strength of the project is that through researching many books and journals concerning church growth, preaching, and Christian life, I am now more equipped to be a better pastor and preacher. Some of the resources I used would not have been items that I would have normally read or researched. I feel that I am a better pastor and preacher as a result of this project.

Weaknesses of the Project

While there were several strengths of the project as previous mentioned, there were also several weaknesses that must not go unnoticed. One weakness was the difficulty in preaching on a topic such as the New Testament purposes of the church in just eleven weeks. While a lot of New Testament teachings were covered, there were still a lot of things that were left out due to time. Such a sermon series might take between six

months and a year to cover all of the topics adequately.

A second weakness was the possibility of the "halo effect" when conducting surveys. The "halo effect" occurs when survey participants try to answer questions based on how they perceive the surveyor would expect them to answer. While I feel that the majority of the people answered based on their own knowledge and opinion, I am sure that some tried to answer in a way that would give me the results I desired. There is really no way to prevent this, other than reinforce people to answer according to their own hearts. However, it is a weakness.

A third weakness is that not all of the survey participants were in attendance each week for the complete sermon series. Without being in attendance, vital truths could have been missed that would have led to different survey results if the people heard the sermon. However, it is extremely difficult and unlikely for any group of church members to have perfect church attendance for eleven straight weeks.

What I Would Do Differently

After completing the project, I would have done several things differently to improve the project's results and effectiveness. If I were doing the project again, I would have scheduled the sermon series during a different time of the year. I began the series in the late spring and concluded in the summer. The issue with this time frame was that the sermon series had several interruptions due to Easter, personal vacation, and our church mission trip. I feel that the sermon series would have been more effective if our people could have heard the entire series without any interruptions. Therefore, the sermon series would be much more effective if it were started in the early spring or early fall, when fewer events are on the church calendar.

A second difference would have been to include two additional leadership committees or groups, such as the Finance Committee, Personnel Committee, Deacon body, etc. While some of these committee members were included in the thirty-six member focus group, it would have been beneficial to see how all of these leaders would have responded to the statements issued on the survey.

A third change would have been in the way that I distributed and collected the surveys. While many people had no issue with the mode of distribution and collection, there were some who had a difficult time getting their responses back for different reasons. If I were giving the surveys again, I would try to utilize a web-based survey engine. There are different websites that allow users to create and administer surveys over the Internet. These websites are easy to use and report data. This option would have saved time and money, as printing costs would have been less and participants would not have to worry about handing in their forms. This type of surveying would be beneficial for anyone doing another project.

A final change would have been scheduling a time to meet with the focus group. While looking at ministry research projects done at other churches, I noticed that many of them included a group meeting with those they researched. It would have been a good idea to meet with the group before and after the sermon series to field questions and hear vocal responses. I feel that there were some people who were confused about different statements on the survey and how to respond properly. If I were doing the project again, I would have had a focus group meeting to explain and administer the survey at one time. This effort would have cleared up any questions on the spot. I would

have also been able to collect all of the surveys at one time, rather than having to track them down.

Theological Reflections

The ministry research project challenged First Baptist Church to reexamine the way we do ministry in light of the clear teachings of the New Testament. In an age when pragmatism and false teaching appear to be gaining more interest and numerical results, it was refreshing to present our congregation with the truth of God's word concerning the biblical purposes of the church. Our congregation was challenged with many different topics that often go un-preached, such as church discipline and sacrificial giving. It was important for the congregation to understand the reason why certain ministries are necessary and how they should be done. The project reinforced the truth that God has a clear and precise will for his church to follow, and if the church desires to please him they must follow his word.

The project also increased our congregation's awareness of the important part that we all play in God's kingdom. Through our worship, spiritual growth, service, and mission, we are actively participating in establishing God's kingdom upon this earth. This sermon series made our congregation aware that we are involved in something much bigger than merely getting together each week to sing, pray, and hear a sermon. The church is God's chosen people to declare his glory and grace to those who have not heard, and our mission is not finished until Christ returns. Everything we do should make an impact for God's kingdom. We are a church with a purpose that contains eternal significance.

Finally, the project strengthened my confidence in expository preaching, as I

witnessed the Holy Spirit using the preached word to change hearts and minds in favor of biblical truth. As the surveys revealed, a good number of the participants changed their minds and practices after hearing the sermon series. Scripture is clear that only God has the power to change hearts and minds to conform to his will; therefore, it was the power of God that changed lives through the preaching of his word.

Personal Reflections

The Doctor of Ministry degree, along with the ministry research project, has been a relatively long and demanding journey. While my previous seminary work was also difficult, I was not under the pressure of being the full-time pastor of a church. However, God has used this experience to teach me faithfulness, perseverance, trust, and patience. I feel like I have grown toward spiritual and professional maturity as a result of being in this program. This program has led me to a greater understanding of ministry and preaching by exposing me to many books and resources that I would have otherwise not consumed. I have also been introduced to some gifted professors and faithful friends along the way. The degree and accompanying project has been a blessing in my life.

The ministry research project also allowed me to gain a good assessment of where my people stand when it comes to biblical knowledge and ministry goals. It was a joy to hear comments after the sermons regarding something new that was learned or a challenge that was being applied. I feel that the congregation grew and benefited from this project.

This project also sharpened my skills as a preacher. One of my goals was to improve personal application in my preaching. Through reading many books and articles, and getting advice from other pastors, I feel that my personal goal was reached. While I

will always have room for improvement over the years as a preacher, this project set me off to a good start.

Conclusion

In March 2012, I set out on a journey with the First Baptist Church of Fairburn, Georgia, to understand and apply the New Testament purposes of the church. After preaching for eleven weeks over the topics of worship, spiritual growth, service, and missions, the research indicated that the church made significant improvements in understanding and practice. As a pastor, I feel that I also achieved my personal goal of improving the application in my sermons. I feel very confident that our church is committed to being the biblical church that God desires us to be. While the entire ministry research project took place over the course of fifteen weeks, it is my prayer that the results will continue until our Lord returns, as we aim to accomplish his will in our church for years to come.

APPENDIX 1

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY

Agreement to Participate
The survey in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your understanding of the biblical purposes of the church and how these purposes affect your current level of ministry participation and service. Thank you for your participation.

Age_____

Using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes your feelings on the following questions.

  1 = Strongly Disagree
  2 = Disagree
  3 = Undecided
  4 = Agree
  5 = Strongly Agree
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1. I believe the whole Bible is God's Word, completely true, without any error.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

2. I believe the New Testament contains everything that First Baptist Church needs to know about God's purposes for the church and how it should function.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

3. I believe First Baptist Church is out of God's will if it does not seek to follow and obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

4. I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are proven to work, even if they are not completely biblical.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

5. I believe regular church attendance is vitally important for my relationship with Jesus Christ.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

6. I believe the pastor's main role is to preach, teach, and model God's Word and to equip church members for the work of ministry.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

7. I believe that I am out of God's will if I do not worship God with fellow church members on a weekly basis.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

8. I believe that worship only takes place when the church is gathered together, singing songs to the Lord.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

9. I believe that it is God's will for me to continue learning and growing in my faith, even after many years of being a faithful Christian.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

10. I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not making sure that every member is being discipled. (i.e., Being trained to follow Christ)
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

11. I believe that every church member has an obligation to serve in at least one of the church's ministry activities.
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

12. I believe that once a church member has served in a ministry in which he or she is gifted, he or she is free to be relieved of that ministry after a certain number of years.
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

13. I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not active in local and distant missions.
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

14. I believe that the pastor, staff, and deacons are the main people God expects to tell the lost about Jesus.
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

15. I believe that I am personally responsible for telling the lost about Jesus.
    (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

APPENDIX 2

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES SURVEY

Agreement to Participate
The survey in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your
understanding of the biblical purposes of the church and how these purposes affect
your current level of ministry participation and decision-making. Thank you for your
participation.

Age_____

Using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes your feelings on
the following questions.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

----

1. I believe the whole Bible is God's Word, completely true, without any error.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

2. I believe the New Testament contains everything that First Baptist Church needs
   to know about God's purposes for the church and how it should function.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

3. I believe First Baptist Church is out of God's will if it does not seek to follow and
   obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

4. I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are
   proven to work, even if they are not completely biblical.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

5. I believe the pastor's main role is to preach, teach, and model God's Word and to
   equip church members for the work of ministry.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

6. As a committee member, I'm always open to God's will when making ministry decisions, even if God's will is different from my personal feelings.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

7. I believe that my committee is out of God's will if we do not go to the Lord in prayer before making every decision.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

8. I believe that every ministry decision should be in accordance with God's purposes for the church as described in the New Testament.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

9. I believe that the overall goal for every ministry decision is to do whatever brings the most glory to God.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

10. I believe that every ministry activity in the church should have a spiritual emphasis.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

11. I believe that the church should not make major changes to how ministry has been done in the past, even if there are more biblical and effective ways of operating.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

12. I believe that every ministry decision should consider how it could be used to cause church members to grow closer in their walk with Christ.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

13. I believe that my committee should utilize various church members in fulfilling tasks.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

14. I believe that my committee should always seek to promote the gospel in whatever decisions are made.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

SERMON APPLICATION SURVEY

Agreement to Participate
The survey in which you are about to participate is designed to measure the usage and effectiveness of sermon application. You are also free to make any written comments or advice for the preacher. Thank you for your participation.

Age_____

Using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes your feelings on the following questions.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree
----

1. The main idea of the sermon was stated clearly in the sermon's introduction.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

2. The preacher presented the main idea of the sermon through several applicational points.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

3. The sermon's application was driven by the biblical text, not the preacher's opinions.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

4. The preacher spent too much time explaining the text's meaning rather than telling me how it applies to my life.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

5. The preacher used effective illustrations and examples to help me apply the sermon to my own life.
   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

6. This sermon helped me understand what God desires for me to do according to what is written in his word.

   (1)　　　　　　(2)　　　　　　(3)　　　　　　(4)　　　　　　(5)

7. Please write any additional comments or suggestions below or on the back of this sheet concerning the application of the sermon you just heard. Be honest and do not be afraid to be critical.

APPENDIX 4

FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

Table A1. Focus group responses to statement 1

Statement 1: I believe the whole Bible is God's Word, completely true, without any error.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	33	92%	33	92%	0%
Agree	3	8%	3	8%	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A2. Focus group responses to statement 2

Statement 2: I believe the New Testament contains everything that First Baptist Church needs to know about God's purposes for the church and how it should function.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	23	64%	30	83%	19%
Agree	8	22%	4	11%	-11%
Undecided	4	11%	1	3%	-8%
Disagree	1	3%	0	0%	-3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	1	3%	3%

Table A3. Focus group responses to statement 3

Statement 3: I believe First Baptist Church is out of God's will if it does not seek to follow and obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	25	69%	32	89%	19%
Agree	10	28%	4	11%	-17%
Undecided	1	3%	0	0%	-3%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A4. Focus group responses to statement 4

Statement 4: I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are proven to work, even if they are not completely biblical.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	2	6%	0	0%	-6%
Agree	6	17%	6	17%	0%
Undecided	2	6%	5	14%	8%
Disagree	13	36%	10	28%	-8%
Strongly Disagree	13	36%	15	42%	6%

Table A5. Focus group responses to statement 5

Statement 5: I believe regular church attendance is vitally important for my
relationship with Jesus Christ.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	28	78%	28	78%	0%
Agree	5	14%	6	17%	3%
Undecided	2	6%	0	0%	-6%
Disagree	1	3%	2	6%	3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A6. Focus group responses to statement 6

Statement 6: I believe the pastor's main role is to preach, teach, and model God's
Word and to equip church members for the work of ministry.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	25	69%	33	92%	22%
Agree	8	22%	3	8%	-14%
Undecided	1	3%	0	0%	-3%
Disagree	2	6%	0	0%	-6%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A7. Focus group responses to statement 7

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Statement 7: I believe that I am out of God's will if I do not worship God with fellow church members on a weekly basis.					
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	17	47%	20	56%	8%
Agree	10	28%	9	25%	-3%
Undecided	4	11%	0	0%	-11%
Disagree	4	11%	4	11%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	3%	3	8%	6%

Table A8. Focus group responses to statement 8

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Statement 8: I believe that worship only takes place when the church is gathered together, singing songs to the Lord.					
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Agree	2	6%	4	11%	6%
Undecided	2	6%	4	11%	6%
Disagree	15	42%	10	28%	-14%
Strongly Disagree	17	47%	18	50%	3%

Table A9. Focus group responses to statement 9

Statement 9: I believe that it is God's will for me to continue learning and growing in my faith, even after many years of being a faithful Christian.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	33	92%	36	100%	8%
Agree	2	6%	0	0%	-6%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	1	3%	0	0%	-3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A10. Focus group responses to statement 10

Statement 10: I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not making sure that every member is being discipled. (i.e., Being trained to follow Christ)

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	21	58%	25	69%	11%
Agree	13	36%	8	22%	-14%
Undecided	2	6%	1	3%	-3%
Disagree	0	0%	2	6%	6%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A11. Focus group responses to statement 11

Statement 11: I believe that every church member has an obligation to serve in at least one of the church's ministry activities.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	15	42%	13	36%	-6%
Agree	13	36%	13	36%	0%
Undecided	5	14%	6	17%	3%
Disagree	3	8%	0	0%	-8%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	2	6%	6%

Table A12. Focus group responses to statement 12

Statement 12: I believe that once a church member has served in a ministry in which he or she is gifted, he or she is free to be relieved of that ministry after a certain number of years.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	3	8%	3	8%	0%
Agree	6	17%	11	31%	14%
Undecided	5	14%	6	17%	3%
Disagree	13	36%	7	19%	-17%
Strongly Disagree	9	25%	9	25%	0%

Table A13. Focus group responses to statement 13

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	27	75%	28	78%	3%
Agree	6	17%	7	19%	3%
Undecided	2	6%	1	3%	-3%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	1	3%	0	0%	-3%

Statement 13: I believe that First Baptist Church is out of God's will if we are not active in local and distant missions.

Table A14. Focus group responses to statement 14

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Agree	2	6%	4	11%	6%
Undecided	1	3%	1	3%	0%
Disagree	12	33%	12	33%	0%
Strongly Disagree	21	58%	19	53%	-6%

Statement 14: I believe that the pastor, staff, and deacons are the main people God expects to tell the lost about Jesus.

Table A15. Focus group responses to statement 15

Statement 15: I believe that I am personally responsible for telling the lost about Jesus.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	30	83%	32	89%	6%
Agree	5	14%	3	8%	-6%
Undecided	1	3%	0	0%	-3%
Disagree	0	0%	1	3%	3%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

APPENDIX 5

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEES SURVEY RESULTS

Table A16. Leadership committees responses to statement 1

Statement 1: I believe the whole Bible is God's Word, completely true, without any error.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	9	100%	9	100%	0%
Agree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A17. Leadership committees responses to statement 2

Statement 2: I believe the New Testament contains everything that First Baptist Church needs to know about God's purposes for the church and how it should function.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	7	78%	0%
Agree	2	22%	2	22%	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A18. Leadership committees responses to statement 3

Statement 3: I believe First Baptist Church is out of God's will if it does not seek to follow and obey the purposes and practices of the church as described in the New Testament.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	6	67%	7	78%	11%
Agree	3	33%	2	22%	-11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A19. Leadership committees responses to statement 4

Statement 4: I believe First Baptist Church should use ideas and strategies for growth that are proven to work, even if they are not completely biblical.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Agree	1	11%	1	11%	0%
Undecided	1	11%	2	22%	11%
Disagree	2	22%	2	22%	0%
Strongly Disagree	5	56%	4	44%	-11%

Table A20. Leadership committees responses to statement 5

Statement 5: I believe the pastor's main role is to preach, teach, and model God's Word and to equip church members for the work of ministry.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	8	89%	11%
Agree	2	22%	1	11%	-11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A21. Leadership committees responses to statement 6

Statement 6: As a committee member, I'm always open to God's will when making ministry decisions, even if God's will is different from my personal feelings.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	8	89%	7	78%	-11%
Agree	1	11%	2	22%	11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A22. Leadership committees responses to statement 7

Statement 7: I believe that my committee is out of God's will if we do not go to the Lord in prayer before making every decision.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	5	56%	-22%
Agree	1	11%	2	22%	11%
Undecided	0	0%	2	22%	22%
Disagree	1	11%	0	0%	-11%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A23. Leadership committees responses to statement 8

Statement 8: I believe that every ministry decision should be in accordance with God's purposes for the church as described in the New Testament.

Possible Responses	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	7	78%	0%
Agree	2	22%	2	22%	0%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A24. Leadership committees responses to statement 9

Statement 9: I believe that the overall goal for every ministry decision is to do whatever brings the most glory to God.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	9	100%	8	89%	-11%
Agree	0	0%	1	11%	11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A25. Leadership committees responses to statement 10

Statement 10: I believe that every ministry activity in the church should have a spiritual emphasis.

	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	4	44%	7	78%	33%
Agree	2	22%	2	22%	0%
Undecided	1	11%	0	0%	-11%
Disagree	1	11%	0	0%	-11%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A26. Leadership committees responses to statement 11

Statement 11: I believe that the church should not make major changes to how ministry has been done in the past, even if there are more biblical and effective ways of operating.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Agree	0	0%	1	11%	11%
Undecided	1	11%	1	11%	0%
Disagree	5	56%	3	33%	-22%
Strongly Disagree	3	33%	4	44%	11%

Table A27. Leadership committees responses to statement 12

Statement 12: I believe that every ministry decision should consider how it could be used to cause church members to grow closer in their walk with Christ.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	8	89%	11%
Agree	2	22%	1	11%	-11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A28. Leadership committees responses to statement 13

Statement 13: I believe that my committee should utilize various church members in fulfilling tasks.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	4	44%	7	78%	33%
Agree	5	56%	2	22%	-33%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

Table A29. Leadership committees responses to statement 14

Statement 14: I believe that my committee should always seek to promote the gospel in whatever decisions are made.					
	Pre-Series Survey		Post-Series Survey		
Possible Responses	Responses	Percentage	Responses	Percentage	Change
Strongly Agree	7	78%	9	100%	22%
Agree	1	11%	0	0%	-11%
Undecided	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Disagree	1	11%	0	0%	-11%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%	0	0%	0%

APPENDIX 6

SERMON APPLICATION SURVEY RESULTS

Table A30. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 1

Statement 1: The main idea of the sermon was stated clearly in the sermon's introduction.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	4	4	4	4
Agree	0	0	0	0
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Averages	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

Table A31. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 2

Statement 2: The preacher presented the main idea of the sermon through several applicational points.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	3	3	4	3
Agree	1	1	0	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Averages	4.8	4.8	5.0	4.8

Table A32. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 3

Statement 3: The sermon's application was driven by the biblical text, not the preacher's opinions.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	3	4	4	4
Agree	1	0	0	0
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Averages	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.0

Table A33. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 4

Statement 4: The preacher spent too much time explaining the text's meaning rather than telling me how it applies to my life.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	0	0	0	0
Agree	1	0	0	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Disagree	2	1	1	0
Strongly Disagree	1	3	3	3
Averages	2.3	1.3	1.3	1.8

Table A34. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 5

Statement 5: The preacher used effective illustrations and examples to help me apply the sermon to my own life.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	1	2	3	3
Agree	3	2	1	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Averages	4.3	4.5	4.8	4.8

Table A35. Sermon application group: weekly responses to statement 6

Statement 6: This sermon helped me understand what God desires for me to do according to what is written in his word.				
Possible Responses	Week 1	Week 4	Week 8	Week 11
Strongly Agree	2	4	3	4
Agree	1	0	1	0
Undecided	1	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Averages	4.3	5.0	4.8	5.0

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING THE BIBLICAL PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH FROM
THE NEW TESTAMENT AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
FAIRBURN, GEORGIA

Justin Herndon Terrell, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

This project aimed to educate and motivate church members with the New Testament purposes of the church through expository preaching. Chapter 1 presented the purpose, goals, context, rational, definitions, limitations, and methodology for the project.

Chapter 2 exposed the modern crisis in Christian ecclesiology and provided a cure through a renewed understanding of God's purposes for the local church as indicated in the Great Commission.

Chapter 3 aimed to improve sermon application in expository preaching. This chapter revealed the necessity of application in expository preaching and offered solutions for improvement.

Chapter 4 outlined the sermons used in the project, described the various surveys and feedback groups, and presented the project's schedule.

Chapter 5 offered an analysis of the project's goals, data, survey results, strengths and weaknesses, things done differently, and theological and personal reflections. This project contends that church members are more committed to the biblical purposes of the church after hearing them preached through expository sermons.

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