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PREPARING MEMBERS AT MAYWOOD EVANGELICAL  
FREE CHURCH IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, TO REACH  
THEIR COMMUNITY FOR CHRIST

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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  
Gary Edward Kniseley  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

PREPARING MEMBERS AT MAYWOOD EVANGELICAL  
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To my wife, Adina,  
whose love and support have made this educational journey, and project, possible.

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## PREFACE

This project was an accomplishment involving many people. It was through the encouragement and support of my wife, Christian leaders, and my close friend Lyndel Lee that I stayed on course to finish the journey toward my Doctor of Ministry in Church Revitalization. I am grateful to the faculty at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for responding to the need of churches in crisis by developing a doctoral program focused on church revitalization. Words alone cannot begin to express the gratitude for this practical education that assists pastors to grow wiser in their shepherding skills, stronger in their leadership abilities, and deeper in their theological convictions concerning God's church. William Henard has been most instrumental in my development through his skilled pastoral hands and personal understanding of church revitalization. Beyond serving as a knowledgeable and gracious teacher, Dr. Henard has been a friend and support to me personally in my ministry as a pastor.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the elders at Maywood Evangelical Free Church in Rockford, Illinois. I thank them for their firm commitment to the Word of God and for serving as strong leaders of godly character. Their encouragement to me to grow in my education and their trust in my leadership to lead God's church is most humbling and honoring.

My wife, Adina, has been my greatest supporter and prayer warrior in all of my schooling. During our marriage, Adina has loved me, encouraged me, sacrificed for me, and respected me as her husband and as a minister of the gospel. Her love for Christ

has been evident in her patience and in her service to Christ with me. I am blessed to have had the gift of marriage and friendship with the love of my life.

Gary Kniseley

Rockford, Illinois

May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip Maywood Evangelical Free Church with the necessary tools to embrace their vision, to understand the clear gospel message, and to develop creative methods to share Christ with their community.

#### **Goals**

The first goal of this project was for the congregation to understand the church's vision statement. This understanding would require educating all church members.<sup>1</sup> In this process, I developed and delivered a four-week sermon series that provided the biblical rationale for the vision statement. The church's vision statement was recently branded in order for the church family to be able to state it in a concise way. The current mission statement is used to help accomplish the vision statement of the church. The training included a pre- and post-sermon series survey,<sup>2</sup> called the Vision and Mission Statement Survey (VMS), that was taken by a minimum of 80 members in order to measure the church's understanding of its vision and mission statements. The goal was to obtain at least 60 of the 80 completed surveys, representing approximately 10 percent of the church members. I assembled a strategic action team to administer the survey. This goal was considered successful when 70 percent of those trained were able to demonstrate at least 70 percent competency level on the post-survey. Although the

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<sup>1</sup>A person 18 years and older.

<sup>2</sup>See appendix 1.

entire church was trained, the 80 that completed the pre-sermon series survey also took the post-sermon series survey.

The second goal was to measure the congregation's understanding of the gospel message through the use of a survey,<sup>3</sup> called the Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS), which was conducted after the four-week sermon series. This survey was directed by me and supported by the same strategic action team that I appointed for the VMS. I wrote the survey based on the material taught in the sermon series. Four evangelical pastors in the Rockford area served to evaluate the survey responses. Part of this process included analyzing the completed surveys and comparing them to a master rubric that was used for teaching. They scored the surveys based on their subjective evaluation of the answers provided on the master rubric<sup>4</sup> used in the four-week series. This goal was considered successful after the analysis was completed and 70 percent of the 80 participants demonstrated an understanding of the clear gospel message.

The final goal was to make use of a second (and different) strategic action team that was appointed by me to develop strategic outreach ideas that could lead to church members sharing the gospel message. This team worked with the pastoral staff to develop creative ways to reach the community for Christ. The intent was to look for bridges that could serve as opportunities to share the gospel message. The expert panel of the same four evangelical pastors in the Rockford area was used to evaluate<sup>5</sup> and critique the recommended outreach ideas that could be used to share the gospel. The panel's evaluations, comments, and insights were used in the choice of outreach events to implement. This goal was considered successful after six significant onsite outreach

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup>See appendix 4.

events and six significant offsite outreach events for the purpose of sharing the gospel with the community were identified.

### **Context of the Ministry Project**

Maywood Evangelical Free Church is sixty-two years old and began as a Sunday school ministry by First Evangelical Free Church in Rockford, Illinois. It continued as a Sunday school program for young families in a part of town set up for individuals moving into the Rockford area for war-related factory work in the 1940s. After ten years, Maywood became an official church plant. The church continued to grow and moved to its current location in the 1970s. Many additions were made as the church continued to experience growth; most recently the church completed a 25,000 square foot addition that serves as the new worship center (October 2013). The church has a welcoming presence with an amazing themed children's area.

Within the last decade, due to declining attendance, the church has transitioned from six full-time pastors to four full-time and one part-time pastor. Church attendance averages approximately six hundred each week. Some of the largest ministries that take place at the church are the AWANA ministry, Tutor Club, Life Groups, Sports ministry, music ministry, and student ministries. The church has a good reputation for teaching the Word of God, the abundance of kids' programs, and community outreach. The church currently has two services, with the first being a blended service and the second a contemporary service. The church has seventeen employees (both full-time and part-time) and most recently hired a full-time pastor of worship and creative outreach. The church is financially stable and has a budget of just below 1.3 million dollars. The church sets aside approximately 20 percent for its mission's ministry.

Church life has had its ups and downs with various pastors at the helm. The former pastor served for four and a half years and brought a great deal of change to the church. He was very gifted and full of vision, although he moved faster than many could keep up. However, he followed a pastor of twenty-one years who moved very slowly and

had very little vision for the church. Because so much change was taking place so quickly, the church members were experiencing frustration and feeling devalued as if what was done in the past was not significant or meaningful. After serving for ten years in various pastoral duties at Maywood, I was elected lead pastor and officially began that role November 1, 2014. On the DISC personality profile, my personal leadership reveals itself as a high “I” (Influential Leader) and followed by a moderate “D” (Dominant Leader). I believe my personality and leadership skills are being used to bring about harmony and peacefulness as I seek to lead the people.

The church’s strengths rest in its children’s programs, life groups, new facility, music ministries, history, mission program, and commitment to a strong pulpit ministry. The weaknesses at this point are the church’s inward focus and lack of trust in leadership. A spirit of entitlement has also settled in. Too many individuals have no personal involvement in evangelism in their daily lives, although they say they believe in it. Spiritual warfare is not acknowledged as a real matter with which individuals are struggling, and the church’s prayer ministry is not the priority that it once was. The church has failed to embrace its own vision and mission statement and could probably not recite it.

The Rockford community has been suppressed for over twenty-five years. A great number of manufacturing jobs have left the area that was once a strong lure to bring people to the city. The Rockford school system has a poor reputation, a fact that has caused those moving to the area to settle outside of the city limits. The Rockford population has decreased by 10,000 people in the past ten years, although some of the surrounding areas have been growing. The church sits on the southeast side of town and has many people travel from the rural areas. The demographics of the church certainly reflect the immediate community. Next door to the church is a high school with approximately 1,700 students. The church currently has a limited partnership with the high school, but that partnership with the school has been growing over the past couple of

years. Housing is affordable in the Rockford area, and there is a growing Hispanic population.

Many things are happening at once, which have brought strength to the various weaknesses within the church. The focus of this project was to attempt to address the weaknesses of being inward focused and showing a low priority for personal evangelism. Training the church to reach neighbors for Jesus Christ rests at the heart of this context.

### **Rationale for the Project**

It was evident through conversations with the church membership and through teaching various classes that many in the congregation failed to understand the vision statement of the church. In fact, very few could actually identify the four components of the church's mission statement. Although biblical and simplistic in nature, the vision statement represents the priorities of the Great Commission found in Scripture. The church leadership was in agreement that very little had been done over the years to bring focus to ministry. It was best represented as a shotgun approach. It was imperative for the sake of sustained growth, spiritually and numerically, that the church grow in an understanding of their vision and mission.

In the past, most ministries focused on discipleship and an effort to provide a means of fellowship for the church family. New ministries launched with the primary purpose of serving the church family. At times, general church wide events would occur in hopes that a non-believer might visit. In addition, these moments provided an opportunity for a member to bring a friend to church so they might hear the gospel. Although the church body represented the general demographics of the area, it failed to connect with its next-door neighbors. The church struggled in understanding its responsibility as it related to sharing the gospel with neighbors. Most deferred to the pastors and corporate events in order to share the gospel message. With a plateaued and slowly declining membership, the church could no longer afford to depend upon transfer

growth, nor could it continue to neglect its immediate responsibilities to its neighbors. The church must learn how to connect with neighbors and understand their needs.

The congregation<sup>6</sup> must understand the gospel clearly and grow in its ability to articulate it to the lost within the community. The leadership must help the body find creative methods to share the gospel with those outside the church. In addition, the church family must daily look for opportunities to build relationships that lead to a gospel presentation. Sharing the gospel not only brings obedience to Christ and keeps the church focused on its vision, but it glorifies God and builds His church through conversion. The church must be the city on the hill in order to share the hope of Christ with its neighbors.

### **Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Various terms will be used in this paper, and in an effort not to be ambiguous or unclear they will be defined to help the reader.

*Vision.* This term refers to what the church wants to become and serves as the final destination for all ministry endeavors.

The vision of Maywood Evangelical Free Church is to become a committed community of Christ-followers. In prayerful dependence upon the Spirit of God and for the glory of God, we resolve to exalt the living God, explain the Word of God, encourage the family of God, and extend the love of God. We desire that everyone who is touched by God in our ministry will come into a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

*Branded vision statement.* This term serves as a summary of the lengthier vision statement. The intent of this project was that the congregation could state this from memory. The branded vision statement at Maywood Evangelical Free Church is “Becoming a people to reach people for Christ.”

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<sup>6</sup>A person 18 years and older

<sup>7</sup>Maywood Evangelical Free Church, “Constitution,” updated November 11, 2012.



*Mission.* This term refers to the four statements that have been developed by the church leadership as the mission for Maywood Evangelical Free Church: exalting the living God; explaining the Word of God; encouraging the family of God; and extending the love of God.

*Gospel.* The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners. People are by nature sinful and separated from God with no hope of remedying that situation. God, however, by His power, provided the means of man's redemption in the death, burial and resurrection of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Outward focus.* This term has a direct relationship to the way that Maywood Evangelical Free Church reaches out to its neighbors to help meet felt needs and to share the gospel message. This emphasis is the opposite of inward focus, which centers on church ministry and programs that serve the church body within the walls of the church and works to develop personal discipleship. An outward focused people with vibrant relationships with Jesus want to continue to reach people outside the faith.<sup>8</sup>

One limitation for this project was in determining when enough of the vision and mission statement was learned in order for the church family to act upon it. Another limitation was the subjective scoring of the definition of the gospel based on the master rubric.

The first delimitation focused on only 80 church members who participated in explaining the church's vision, mission statement, and explanation of the gospel. The second delimitation was the selection of only four local pastors to evaluate the congregation's understanding of the gospel and to rate the outreach events designed to build bridges to deliver the gospel.

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<sup>8</sup>Tony Morgan, "Outward vs. Inward Focused Churches," accessed January 13, 2014, <http://tonymorganlive.com/2013/01/31/outward-vs-inward-focused-churches>.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal of this project was for the congregation to fully understand the church's vision statement. This understanding required educating all staff and church members. The process entailed developing and delivering a four-week sermon series that provided the biblical rationale for the vision statement. I wrote and taught the material. The training included a pre- and post-sermon series survey, called the Vision and Mission Statement Survey (VMS), consisting of 80 members in order to measure the knowledge that the church had of its current vision and mission statements. This goal was considered successful when 70 percent of those trained were able to demonstrate at least 70 percent competency level on the post-class survey.

The second goal was to measure the congregation's understanding of the clear gospel message through the use of a survey, called the Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS), which was conducted after the four-week sermon series. The sermon series was developed and taught by me. The same strategic action team that was chosen for the VMS was responsible to distribute, instruct, and collect all surveys within a set time frame. After the completed surveys were collected, four evangelical pastors in the Rockford area collaborated in order to evaluate the surveys. Part of this process was analyzing the gathered surveys and comparing them to a master rubric that was used for teaching. The pastors scored the surveys based on their subjective evaluation of the answers; however, the teaching rubric was the standard for the answers. This goal was considered successful after the completed analysis revealed that 70 percent of the 80 participants demonstrated an understanding of the clear gospel message.

The final goal was to make use of a second (and different) strategic action team, that was appointed by me, to develop strategic outreach ideas that could lead to church members sharing the gospel message. This team worked with the pastoral staff in order to develop creative ways to reach the immediate community for Christ. The intent was to look for bridges that could serve as opportunities to share the gospel message. The expert panel of the same four evangelical pastors in the Rockford area was used to evaluate and

critique the recommended outreach events that could be used to share the gospel. The panel's evaluations, comments, and insights were used in the choice of outreach events to implement. This goal was considered successful after six significant onsite outreach events and six significant offsite outreach events for the purpose of sharing the gospel with the community were identified.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of this project was that Maywood Evangelical Free Church would make use of the necessary tools and embrace the necessary change to attain its vision of *Becoming a People to Reach People for Christ*. In order to obtain genuine success, the Maywood family must clearly understand the gospel message and grasp personal ownership of the mission that God has given them. The journey was one of adjusting the methodology along the way, but the same gospel remained at the center of the journey for the duration of time. Maywood is becoming and must remain an outward-focused church to its immediate community for a lifetime, for the glory of God.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS  
FOR BELIEVERS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL  
WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

It is essential that Christians understand their calling by God in order to fulfill their function as a Christian. Many church members at Maywood delight in the fact that the church is exceedingly generous toward missions when it comes to financial support. Most would even state that Maywood is very mission-minded. A disconnect, however, seems to exist in their understanding as to what a mission-minded church looks like from what a mission-minded church actually does. Most fail to understand that being a mission-minded church means that they are to live on mission each day in order to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. For many, sharing the gospel is something that they believe the pastor or a professional does for a living. The popular thought, although not biblical, is that if non-Christians want to hear the gospel then they can visit the church. What does it mean then to live on a mission for the sake of the gospel? It is becoming necessary for church leaders to explain the biblical definition of mission and the gospel as not to confuse it with every activity, event, fellowship, or ministry program that the church facilitates. This idea is not to say that an event cannot be part of the mission or focus on the gospel message; rather, many members believe that everything done at the church advances its mission and is all about the gospel.

Christians must understand that the theme of Scripture is the redemption of sinful humanity for the glory of God. God requires those who belong to him to be a part of this significant plan of redemption. Maywood is not alone; most churches would consider themselves to be Great Commission churches that build their ministries and lives around the gospel. They truly believe that they are on God's mission. The reality is

that the way that they live their lives from week to week tells another story. David Horner, in *When Missions Shapes the Mission*, expresses a similar thought: “Nearly all evangelicals love the idea of missions. Something about it is noble and shows off the best we have to offer—that is, if we get around to doing anything about the idea so that it moves from theory to practice!”<sup>1</sup>

Christian churches should be gospel-centered and gospel-driven for numerous reasons, but first and foremost because they represent the lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives (Rom 14:8-9; 2 Cor 4:5). A maturing Christian should be concerned that every thought, word, or action in his or her life advances the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:21). Another reason is that from Genesis to Revelation an overarching theme displays God’s mission to reconcile the world to himself. God worked through Israel to bless all nations in order that many would come to know him as both Savior and Lord. Christians are also given a visual example through the life of Jesus Christ to help them share and live the gospel message. During his time on earth, Christ provided clear directives and comfort for Christians as they endeavor to share the gospel. Gospel-centered Christians are to work in the power that Christ has given them since it is a spiritual battle. It is essential that they understand that the battle belongs to the Lord and that the battle is spiritual in nature (1 John 4:4; Eph 6:12). In Scripture, the early church not only prioritized sharing the gospel, but its leaders guarded the integrity of the gospel message and kept it at the center of the churches’ ministry. For these reasons, Christian churches should be gospel-centered and gospel-driven.

### **Missions Is Reflected in the Overarching Theme of Scripture**

Some Christians are led to believe that the word “mission” and “missionary” began in the New Testament after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. After

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<sup>1</sup>David Horner, *When Missions Shapes the Mission: You and Your Church Can Reach the World* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 11.

all, it would appear to make sense that there was no complete gospel message to take to the world until Christ completed the work on the cross of Calvary. God was on a gospel mission before the foundation of the world and it is spelled out from Genesis to Revelation. It has been suggested that missions in the Bible is the mission of God, a fact that can be seen in the context of the entire Bible.<sup>2</sup> One of the dangers of biblical interpretation is that of viewing one Scripture apart from all other Scripture. There is a storyline in all of Scripture, from the beginning to the end, that progressively spells out the salvation and redemption of humankind and all creation (Rom 8:18-23).

The call for a mission mandate cannot be overlooked or ignored in the Old Testament. In the beginning of the canon is great concern for the nations to believe in the Man of Promise, the One who would appear through the seed of the woman Eve, through the family of Shem, and then through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.<sup>3</sup> The Old Testament reveals a real passion for the mission of God as seen through the lives of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets. There is no mistake that even before Abraham was called by God to be his instrument and given the first great commission, God was working with a universal audience (Gen 1-11).

The call of Abraham was a well-defined mission by God, not to be squandered, but it was to be used for the purpose of blessing others (Gen 12:1-3). God's calling of Abraham, the giving of a name, the blessing, and his being made into a great nation was for the purpose of being a blessing to all the people of the earth. This promise by God was unique in the ancient world. It was not uncommon for a deity to offer to make a king great or his family line memorable. The prospect that an individual, though, would grow

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<sup>2</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 22.

<sup>3</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 1 (1996): 3.

into a mighty nation was not common talk or even found in ancient literature.<sup>4</sup> Part of accepting God’s mission for Abraham was leaving what was comfortable and familiar (Gen 12:1). Kenneth A. Mathews explains that “Abram cut the strongest family bond by leaving his father’s domain, which provided his own household’s socioeconomic viability.”<sup>5</sup> Abraham trusted in the veracity of God’s promise and as a result he experienced the generosity of God by receiving more than he would have, had he remained in Haran. For Abraham, the solace of family and country gave way to his higher allegiance found in Yahweh. The first promise by God was Abraham’s own land, a place that was unfamiliar to Abraham at that time. It was a land that would be shown to him as he departed in faith and obedience on his new mission. Second, God promised Abraham that he would make him a great nation. This promise may seem far-fetched considering the fact that Sarai was barren and Abraham was seventy-five years old at this time; though walking by faith brought about the blessed and unexpected birth of Isaac, along with many more descendants. Isaiah’s prophecy remembers when God called Abraham: “When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many” (Isa 51:2b NIV).<sup>6</sup> Man’s feeble attempts to make a great name for himself at the Tower of Babel brought about failure (Gen 11:1-9), but God brought about a great name for Abraham through obedience to God’s mission. Abraham’s influence was widespread across generations. The fourth promise of God was that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations and families who were influenced by him on his mission (Gen 12:3). Those who would trust and turn to Yahweh as their God would experience blessings that came

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<sup>4</sup>John H. Walton, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 69.

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 111.

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

from God himself. Mathews writes, “Abram has no exclusive claim on God’s blessing; rather, God has exclusive claim on Abram and on all those who submit to his God.”<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that by placing the call of Abraham after the dispersion of the nations at Babylon (Gen 11:1-9), the author pictures Abraham’s call as God’s gift of salvation in the midst of judgment.<sup>8</sup> Make no mistake, as John Sailhamer suggests, “Abraham was to be more than just a foil for the gospel. Everything he was and did, as the current officeholder of the promise, would have both an ‘already’ and a ‘not-yet’ aspect to the message he spoke and the actions he set forth.”<sup>9</sup> This plan was all part of God’s redemptive work of salvation throughout Scripture. It would find its ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, the mission was to and for the people of all nations, and God used Israel as his elect tool. Many notable Gentiles were brought into fellowship with God through Israel such as Melchizedek, Jethro, Balaam, Rahab, Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, and many others like them who responded through the preaching of the prophets like Jonah and the major prophets. Over twenty-five chapters of their prophecies are devoted to the calling of the Gentile nations (Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32).<sup>10</sup> Even though they failed at times, it was the responsibility of the nation, the patriarchs, and the prophets to call a watching and waiting world to repentance and to a belief in the promised Messiah who would come from their offspring. There is little doubt that God was reaching out to the Gentile nations or that a mission existed in the Old Testament.

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<sup>7</sup>Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 115.

<sup>8</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 111.

<sup>9</sup>Kaiser, “The Great Commission,” 4.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.



Another supportive passage of Scripture that demonstrates the role and mission Israel fulfilled in bringing the nations to repentance can be found in Exodus 19:5-6. Victor Matthews writes, “The Israelites are identified as a ‘kingdom of priests,’ which identifies the nation as serving a priestly role among the nations, as intermediary between the peoples and God.”<sup>11</sup> Not only has Israel now been freed from bondage, but they are also given a sacred status to help free other nations through repentance to God from the bondage of their sin. Douglas Stuart states,

Israel’s assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.<sup>12</sup>

The Psalmist repeatedly encouraged Israel to declare the glory of God amongst the nations and to make God’s marvelous works known to all people (Ps 96:1-3). The command to sing a *new song* is not reserved for Israel but is a song to *all the earth* (Ps 96:1). Verses 2 and 3 share the context that God’s salvation is to be sung about *day to day*. Each day then adds a stanza to the work of God’s salvation on behalf of God’s people. The telling is also to be universal—it is to be sung and recounted to “all the nations” and “all the peoples.” The day-to-day gifts of salvation from God are newsworthy worldwide and should be celebrated by everyone.<sup>13</sup> The Psalms have been identified as Messianic in nature since approximately ninety prophetic utterances are found throughout and brought to fulfillment in the New Testament. The choirmaster in Psalm 67:1-5 stirs Israel to make God’s goodness, power, and justice known to all nations:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and

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<sup>11</sup>Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 106.

<sup>12</sup>Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 423.

<sup>13</sup>Beth Tanner and Rolf A. Jacobson, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 721.

sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

The thanksgiving of all peoples comes as the result of their knowing the “ways” of God and their experience of his “salvation.” Some would understand this to mean that the nations will come to realize how God is concerned for and protective of his own special people Israel. However, Gerald H. Wilson explains,

The continuing and growing emphasis in this psalm and in the whole group of Psalms 56–68 on the universal praise of God suggests that these verses describe the salvation of God as extending to and including those other nations (*goyim*), who learn to “fear him.”<sup>14</sup>

Once again, God is using an entire nation to accomplish his mission in the Old Testament.

There is much less dispute about the mission of God in the New Testament. Jesus Christ said in Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world *as a testimony to all nations*, and then the end will come.” Leon Morris writes, “For the third and last time in his gospel Matthew speaks of the proclamation of the *gospel of the kingdom*. He has first spoken of Jesus as proclaiming this gospel (Matt 4:23; 9:35), but now it is a task for his followers.”<sup>15</sup> The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that Jesus Christ died for sins and rose again according to the Scriptures. Jesus Christ does not say that every person on earth will hear the gospel or will respond appropriately toward the message; he does seem to indicate, however, that the gospel, known as the message of the kingdom, will be claimed widely throughout the known world and to all people groups.<sup>16</sup>

The apostle Paul quotes the Isaiah commission (Isa 49:6) in Acts 13:47. Paul acknowledges that he and Barnabas are carrying out the will of God by serving as a light

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<sup>14</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 927.

<sup>15</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 601.

<sup>16</sup>Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 356.

to the Gentiles by bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Jesus Christ, the perfect Servant of the Lord (Isa 49:6), was the ultimate light to the Gentiles who would bring salvation to the end of the earth. Revelation 5:9 indicates that the precious blood of Jesus Christ was shed in order to pay the ransom for the people of God. These saints are identified as people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. The intent is to create an all-encompassing picture of God's people coming forth from all over the earth and from different ethnic groups. The text is stressing the universal nature of the church and its mission.<sup>17</sup> Tom Constable writes, "As Israel and Christ had been lights to the Gentiles, so now were Paul and Barnabas (Gen 49:3; Luke 2:29–32)."<sup>18</sup> Missions is reflected in the overarching theme of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, and it serves to remind Christians of the priority that God places on all nations and all people.

### **Jesus Is a Visual Example of Passion for Sharing the Gospel Message**

Jesus Christ left a visual picture for the church of God to emulate when it comes to fulfilling the Great Commission. Christ demonstrated an urgency to save and to love people who were utterly lost in the darkness of their sin. It could be said that the ministry of Jesus Christ was a holistic ministry in which Christ cared for more than just the spiritual needs of people. Many churches wrestle over how to live missionally in a lost world. While resources are always limited in terms of money, people, and time, churches are most concerned that the gospel message always be told, and rightly so. Nevertheless, Christ's example provides a basis for believers to be able to continue to love and reach people even if they reject the gospel message. That would mean that resources are still given in order to continue to love people apart from the proclamation of

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<sup>17</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 136.

<sup>18</sup>Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2003).

the gospel. Certainly the greatest expression of love is the sharing of the Good News that Jesus Christ came to save sinners from their sins. The question then remains as to whether or not the verbalization of the gospel is the only means of love that Christians are called to share with those who do not know Christ as Savior. Christ's earthly ministry was characterized by a great number of days and long hours meeting personal, felt needs of those who were hurting. The majority of the people that Christ reached were the outcast and impoverished. They could be identified as the simple and unlovable by much of society. They had very little to offer Christ in return, by way of material gain. Yet Jesus' acts of love, loving individuals for who they were, and striving to meet their personal needs was a demonstration of his credibility and moral character. Striving to comfort and meet the needs of those suffering is an example of one whose life has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Redeemed people love deeply and differently. They live for a purpose much greater than themselves. Building bridges of compassion demonstrates Christ-like love and gives credence to the gospel message. It creates a platform for Christians to be heard and acknowledged. Expressions of kindness and sharing the gospel message are inseparable as demonstrated by the life of Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry. Both are needed and both characterize the love of God.

Soon after Christ's time in the wilderness, Christ moved from Nazareth to live in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. The city was one of great darkness as it welcomed a plethora of gods that would be shared and transferred, as commerce took place. Christ was indeed the great prophetic shining light that came into darkness for the sake of the lost. Scripture informs that Jesus proclaimed the message and it was consistent with the message of his forerunner John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:12-17). As Jesus' Galilean ministry got underway, he could be found preaching spontaneously to crowds in open-air preaching as well as making frequent appearances in the synagogues. The text in Matthew 4:23 denotes two different types of delivery techniques, but probably similar in content. R. T. France writes,

The mention of “proclaiming the good news” alongside “teaching” in the synagogues is perhaps not simply repetition but rather distinguishes informal preaching to gathered crowds from the more formal opportunity to speak by invitation in a regular weekly assembly; the content is however unlikely to have differed significantly.<sup>19</sup>

While Jesus had a faithful twelve disciples following him, he was never at a lack for a crowd who often wanted nothing more than to gain a quick fix from a physical ailment or cleansing from a demonic spirit.

Christ spent the majority of his time, not just with those who were sick spiritually, but those who were sick physically (Matt 9:12). His popularity grew quickly as did the demands on his daily schedule. As much as the disciples worked to protect Jesus from the thousands, he was moved with passion to meet their spiritual and physical needs. Matthew 9:35-38 says that Christ continued his ministry city to city in the region of Galilee. He made every effort to teach in the synagogues and preach the good news of the gospel of the kingdom. Verse 36 expresses the heart-felt compassion that Christ had for the people that came to see him. According to the text, the reason for the compassion was that they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” The crowds who absorbed the words of Christ and were the recipients of healings are the very ones that become the objects of his great love. What Christ expresses is not mere human pity but divine compassion for troubled people. Christ sees the vulnerable people who are unloved, trampled upon, and at the risk of any who come along desiring to abuse them further. It is important to note that the compassion Christ demonstrated moved to action by responding to their genuine needs. This is reflected in proclaiming the good news of the gospel, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and casting out evil spirits. Christ’s mission of bringing salvation to the world did not cause him to ignore or neglect legitimate needs that were pressing upon the people that he ministered to. Rather, he took time and expressed love unconditionally with no secret motive. The love of Christ cared for the

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<sup>19</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 150.

needs of the entire person. Many in church work today only minister to felt needs if they can get a chance to preach the gospel. Acting kindly and meeting physical needs are just as biblical even if a believer does not get the chance to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In this text, Christ sees the people as vulnerable and needing a genuine shepherd, which is why he petitions the disciples to pray for laborers.

Although physically and emotionally tired, the crowds were relentless in following Christ and his disciples (Matt 9:30-44) everywhere they went. Late into the evening, Christ would teach them many things, and the people marveled at his gentleness, love, and wisdom. By observation, it would appear that the disciples never disrupted Christ in his preaching, although they were ready to move the crowd along when he was done in order for the disciples to get their rest and to eat. Yet, according to Christ, their ministry to the crowd was not done. There was an obligation out of Christ-like love to meet their physical need of hunger. James Edwards writes, “The disciples make what appears to be an imminently reasonable suggestion: dismiss the crowd and allow them to disperse among the surrounding villages to buy food and provisions.”<sup>20</sup> Given the lateness of the hour and number of people, it seemed to make sense to dismiss the crowd, but dismissing the crowd would have avoided a real need and allowed a need to have escalated into a crisis. For most Christians, it would seem as if their duty of sharing the gospel of kingdom was complete. Edwards continues, “Rather than relieving the crisis, Jesus intensifies it: ‘You give them something to eat,’ he orders. To their minds that is an unreasonable, if not impossible, command.”<sup>21</sup> What better way to authenticate the message and love of Christ than to have an opportunity to live the message out before the crowds? For the Christian, ministering to the soul should only be the starting point. Christ, in an act of love, demonstrated the importance of meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual

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<sup>20</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 192.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

needs of individuals. Christ was a visualization of great passion by immersing himself with needy people who were hurting inside. His mission was to do the will of the Father, by serving as a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world. Throughout the Gospels, Christ provided an example of how to genuinely love and relate to others without discrimination. While the disciples saw their work as done, Jesus elevates the duty that they owe those who were in need. While the disciples focused upon their lack, Jesus focused upon what they possessed in order that he could work through what they had to offer. While the disciples could only see limitations, Jesus could only see possibilities as they yielded what they had as the smallest gift to God in order for him to multiply. God is capable of doing great things through little means, a healthy attitude, and a trust in him. Loving others the way that Christ modeled is advancing the gospel work and fulfilling the Great Commission. Christians must answer a genuine question: “Is there a biblical responsibility to minister to the entire person as they fulfill the Great Commission?”

### **Jesus Gives Christians Directives for Sharing the Gospel Message**

In people’s last words on this earth they often share their greatest priorities and concerns to those they love and leave behind. The same is true with Jesus Christ before he left this earth. At the close of his earthly ministry, Christ expressed his desires to those closest to him (his disciples) in order for them to continue his mission. Christ’s desire is commonly known as the Great Commission and was articulated by each of the gospel writers and in the book of Acts (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 22:44-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). On a rather sad note, the Great Commission has become the great omission for many Christians and so called *Christ-centered* churches. The tide from personal evangelism has turned to corporate evangelism giving the local church the job of proclaiming the salvific message of the cross in a formal gathering. It would appear that Christians have lost their sense of personal responsibility and the sense of urgency to share the gospel with those who do not know Christ. In *Radical*, David Platt states,

On the other hand, while some professing Christians have rejected universalism intellectually, practically they may end up leading universalistic lives. They claim Christ is necessary for salvation, yet they live their Christianity in silence, as if people around them in the world will indeed be okay in the end without Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Evangelism once again has been relegated to the professionals and those considered to have the gift of evangelism. Christ passed along the Great Commission to his disciples before he ascended into Heaven. The intent was that the gospel message would be taken to the nations through Christ's church, which is comprised of all believers. The responsibility to share the gospel message rests totally upon the shoulders of God's redeemed people. Although many solid, Bible teaching churches preach the gospel and teach classes on evangelism, it comes down to obedience to Christ's commands.

Jesus Christ said that the Father had given all authority in heaven and on earth to him (Matt 28:18). Blomberg explains, "Because of this authority, Jesus has the right to issue his followers their 'marching orders,' but he also has the ability to help them carry out those orders."<sup>23</sup> The main command that Christ gave is to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). To "make disciples of all nations" will require some people to leave their homelands, but Jesus' main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever God has placed them. Blomberg continues, "The verb 'make disciples' also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith."<sup>24</sup> Discipleship is a matter of being obedient to Christ in baptism and teaching believers to live in obedience to all that Christ has commanded. If new Christians are not encouraged to follow the Lord in baptism and are not being instructed in the revelation of God's Word, then the church is functioning in disobedience to the Great Commission. Some churches are guilty of "inreach"—they concentrate only on the biblical exposition of Scripture—while other churches only focus on "outreach"—

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<sup>22</sup>David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010), 142.

<sup>23</sup>Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



evangelization of the lost. Both can be forms of disobedience to the discipleship making process that Christ gave to his church. Christians are called to be both witnesses and disciplers.

The apostle Paul is very clear in Romans 10:17: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Verse 17 is a summarizing conclusion to what was said in preceding verses. Those who call upon the Lord for salvation must be able to hear the good news from a believer who is exercising obedience to Christ’s Great Commission. In other words, the gospel message must be proclaimed in order for others to believe and place their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul now launches into a series of rhetorical questions. The first is found in verse 14: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?” Paul does not define his *they*. The word *they* would appear to be a term with wide application and may be seen as equivalent to “all people.”<sup>25</sup> Paul develops his argument: “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” The point is that Christ is present in the gospel message and unless non-believers hear the gospel they will never know of Christ. Paul’s third question is, “And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” The lost will come to know Christ through the message of the gospel as God’s people faithfully proclaim it. It is important to see the impossibility of hearing without someone preaching. God chooses to work through his people to make the glorious gospel known to the world. The climax to what Paul builds can be found in verse 15: “And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” The word “preach” in this context should not be confused with the Sunday morning sermon. It is important to see the impossibility of hearing without someone preaching.<sup>26</sup> God has given a divine commission to his people and has provided them with a message to herald (v. 15). The notion of a higher authority is implicit in this context. According

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<sup>25</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 389.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 390.

to Paul, Christians who bring the good news of the gospel are a welcoming sight to the perishing: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news?” (Rom 10:16). It is interesting that the messengers who typically travelled by foot would have sweaty, dirty, and smelly feet. Nevertheless, to those who eagerly awaited the good news of salvation, they were beautiful feet.<sup>27</sup>

The proper response to the proclaimed message of the gospel is “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38). The message of the kingdom that Jesus Christ consistently preached throughout his lifetime was the message to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). Christ is now sending his believers into the world in the same manner that his father sent him (John 20:21). The message has not changed even though the work of salvation is now complete. Christians should live their lives on a daily mission and they would do well to remember that God is glorified and heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents and turns to him (Luke 15:7). Christ assures those who turn to him that “everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven” (Matt 10:32).

### **Jesus Provides Christians with the Power for Sharing the Gospel Message**

Christians can offer many reasons for not sharing their faith with others, but in essence it is a lack of obedience and trust in God’s abilities. Some have admittedly stated that they are embarrassed to talk about spiritual matters with others and that matters of religion should be kept personal. For Paul, salvation was the saving power of God that was initiated by God and carried out through his saving power (Rom 1:16). The gospel is God at work, and it is his doing. To hear and to respond to the gospel is to experience the power of God. Robert Mounce writes, “The gospel is not simply a display of power but

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<sup>27</sup>Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 390-91.

the effective operation of God's power leading to salvation."<sup>28</sup> The gospel has the power to justify sinners, sanctify them for God's use and glory, and to glorify them on that day when they stand before God bearing the full image of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2). Man's faith is not meritorious but a response to the gospel message. The only responsibility a sinner has is to respond in faith. Scripture is clear that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). Great comfort should be taken in that God is in full control of salvation and that he always has been. Before the foundation of the world, Christians were chosen by God to be holy and pure (Eph 1:4). "In love" God predestined adoption as sons "through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Comfort comes in knowing that the gospel truly is the power of God that leads to salvation. God's Spirit is the drawing agent that works through God's Word—salvation belongs to the Lord (John 6:44; Rom 10:17; Rev 7:10)! Paul depended on prayer for direction in who to share with and for the wisdom of knowing what to share when it came to the gospel message. He asked the Ephesians to keep in prayer in order "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." Paul understood that the work of God would bring about results and blessings.

Early ministry was furthered through the work of the Holy Spirit in the use of miraculous sign gifts, such as divine healings, exorcisms, speaking in tongues, and prophesying (1 Cor 12:7-11). Paul encouraged his young protégé Timothy that God did not give the spirit of fear when it came to doing gospel ministry, but God gives a spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7). All the provisions to do gospel ministry have been made in advance by God and through Christ. Christians are now to be used as God's conduit to accomplish his ministry. Scripture is clear that believers are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). Believers have been ransomed for the purpose

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<sup>28</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995). 71.

of glorifying God and they do it when they disclose the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. In efforts to establish the early church and help further the gospel ministry, Christ assured his disciples that when he left to be with the Father they would not be alone in the work of the gospel. In Matthew 28:20 he told his disciples that he would be with them “always” to the very “end of the age.” Morris states, “Christ does not say ‘I will be with you,’ but ‘*I am with you*’ and his *I* is emphatic, ‘no less than I.’”<sup>29</sup>

### **The Early Churches’ Reaction toward the Gospel Ministry**

Christ chose to utilize his church to multiply and advance the work of the gospel to reach communities, and ultimately the world, for himself. He called upon his followers to become a functioning part of his organized church that would be responsible for the evangelization of all creation (Mark 16:15). The gospel is of such importance that it was ordained for “all creation,” resulting in the disciples being sent “into all the world” to make it known. The word “all” is emphatic and implies that the gospel message is not for the Jews apart from the Gentiles or for the Gentiles apart from the Jews, but rather for all creation.<sup>30</sup> As a response to Jesus’ words, the first disciples began to carry out the Great Commission by preaching, baptizing, and teaching all that Christ commanded. As believers came to know Christ, more local churches were established to carry out the Great Commission. These local churches were manifestations of the universal church that Christ said he would build (Matt 16:18).

Prior to Christ’s ascension into heaven, he asked his disciples to gather and wait in Jerusalem for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that would come upon them. Acts 2 gives a vivid picture of the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the first church in Jerusalem. While Peter was exercising obedience to the proclamation of the gospel,

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<sup>29</sup>Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 749.

<sup>30</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 506.

approximately 3,000 souls came to know Christ in one day and were added to the church. The first church experienced uncommon unity, brotherly fellowship, and a sense of responsible care for one another. The very gospel that had redeemed the hearts of these believers shaped how they prioritized and lived their lives with others. One might say that they were so busy taking care of God’s business that they had no time to develop spirits of entitlement within this new church. The mission that God had given them captivated them and they had little time for squabbles amongst themselves. “God’s kindness to these believers bound them wholeheartedly to himself and to one another in a fellowship of generous self-giving. They expressed their gladness and devotion to God by constantly *praising* him and caring for one another.”<sup>31</sup> They literally took time from their schedules to eat and pray with one another. Discipleship was happening through quality time spent with one another. Christ’s commands were being taught and the believers were in awe of how God was working in their midst. Worship was taking place in the temple and in their homes on a daily basis. Christ was already building his church and God was adding to their numbers day by day as people were being saved.

Not only did the early church saturate their community with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ, they started sending Christians out to areas that were in need of hearing the gospel. These were pioneer missionaries blazing the way with the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God that leads to salvation. Paul and Barnabas provide wonderful examples of obedience as ones who traveled “to the ends of the earth” and spoke boldly “the Word of God” that led to eternal life (Acts 13:46-47). A spiritually healthy church is vital in keeping the gospel mission alive and at the heart of all ministries. Paul regularly expressed the priority of ongoing unity in the body of Christ as was evidenced in the first church at Jerusalem (Acts 2). Ephesians 4 places a call upon the church “to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

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<sup>31</sup>David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 164.

Healthy churches understand that their mission is the *same mission* that was shared by Christ and lived by the early church. The church functions best when all of its members work together making use of every gift that God has given them in order to complement and further the work of the gospel (Eph 4:12-13). Paul explains that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts at the time of salvation for the building of the body of Christ (Eph 4:7). Not only are believers cautioned to guard the unity, but they are encouraged to contribute to the team in order to maximize the impact of the team. Each member must use those gifts to help fulfill the Great Commission that Christ has given his church. It is critical that church members understand their responsibilities toward one another and Christ when they join a local church. Membership at a church cannot be a country-club mentality where members seek out their own perks, but a place where they seek to be a servant and a place where they can be used to further the work of the ministry. It is the church leadership's responsibility to teach biblical discipleship that results in servant leader. God is honored and worshipped through the smallest acts of service practiced toward others in the name of Christ (Matt 10:42).

### **Church Leadership as It Relates to Carrying Out the Gospel Ministry**

What type of church leaders characterize those who can successfully lead in the fulfillment of the Great Commission? Gentleness and humility characterize Great Commission leaders (Phil 2:5-8). It is by these traits that they are able to lead others best. Great Commission leaders are astute students of God's Word and they represent Christ-like maturity that serves to advance Christ's agenda for his church (1 Tim 3:1-7). They understand that they must live a life above reproach in order not to nullify the message of the cross or hinder the spread of the gospel. Great Commission leaders understand that God will hold them to a higher standard for how they teach and shepherd the hearts of God's people (Jas 3:1; Heb 13:17). Great Commission leaders seek to guard the unity of the church and protect against heretical doctrine that dilutes and minimizes the impact of

the gospel ministry (Eph 4; Acts 15:1-2). The leader seeks to keep the flock of God spiritually healthy in order to promote the work of the Great Commission (1 Pet 5:1-4). Christ has given his church the gift of leadership through the offices of elder and deacon. It is not to say that no one else within the church is a Christian leader, but these two distinct offices are identified in the early church to provide order and leadership (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). Those serving in these specific leadership roles should understand that their contribution to the ministry should serve to advance and not hinder the Great Commission endeavor. It is more than a title of prestige and honor; it is a role with great responsibility and accountability. It is a role of great sacrifice for the calling that Christ has placed upon his church (Rom 12:1-2; Matt 28:19-20).

Accountability and evaluation of ministry should be a regular practice of all local churches in order to make sure that they are still on task in fulfilling their mission. Godly leadership is absolutely essential in providing this oversight, evaluation, and accountability. Mission is accomplished through intentionality and cooperation of an entire team. If only a portion of the team vaguely understands the mission, then they are bound to fail in accomplishing the desired mission. In Acts 20, Paul is traveling to Jerusalem to do ministry and will probably not see the Ephesian elders any longer. His conversation is recorded in verses 17-38 in which he expresses great appreciation to these elders for their partnership and faithfulness in serving God together. Paul reviewed his ministry with these elders and identified where he felt he placed his energy and priorities in ministry. Paul explained that he built his ministry based on the calling that he received from God. As a Great Commission leader, Paul refused to shrink back or water down the Word of God that he was faithfully sharing as he went house-to-house and town-to-town. The language in the text also implies that he not only refused to shrink down, but he did not fail to preach the entire council of God that needed to be heard without apology.<sup>32</sup> He

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<sup>32</sup>Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 567.

encouraged the church leaders to continue to stand firm in God's truths (Acts 20:20, 27). The content of Paul's preaching message remained the same over the years, namely "repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Paul cautioned the leaders to guard their own personal walk with Christ and to spiritually guard those whom they were entrusted to shepherd. He reminded them that their appointed job was given to them by the Holy Spirit and made possible only through the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Great Commission leaders must be aware that there is a spiritual battle raging to diminish the impact of the church and to cause the work of God to eventually cease. This battle comes about by deception and heretical teachings against which must be guarded (Acts 20:29-30). Paul reminds these Great Commission leaders that it will be through the power of God and the words of his grace that they are able to walk strong and lead others (Acts 20:32). This admonition is why Paul instructs believers with the imperative to stand strong and to do so in the power of God's might (Eph 6:10-18). Paul stated earlier in Ephesians 3:21 that Christians would be empowered to do ministry through the power of God's Spirit.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps one of the greatest dangers of a Great Commission leader is attempting to do ministry in their own power apart from the Spirit of God. In Christ's earthly ministry, he was clear that "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the Christian life and Christ's church is to glorify God by carrying out the Great Commission. The gospel must remain at the center of everything the church does. The challenge is that many, if not most, churches have very little idea why they truly exist. Some may attempt to answer correctly theologically; though, practically, most are failing to carry the gospel message forward to their own communities.

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<sup>33</sup>Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 460.



It may be because they have never been instructed to do so or they cannot personally define the gospel themselves. If the church is going to be the church that Christ intended, then it must recognize that Christ set the course many years ago. The mission and the message have not changed at all. The methods used to take the message to the world are not necessarily defined in Scripture and may even be culturally driven. Although subjective, some methods have actually tarnished and even weakened the integrity of the gospel message.

In order for Maywood Evangelical Free Church to reach their community with the gospel of Jesus Christ, they must understand the clear gospel message that Christ gave to his disciples. Maywood must also get to know the community in which they live. They must understand that it is their personal responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those they meet along life's way. It is also essential that they understand that Christ chose to use his church, made up of believers, to make the glorious gospel of Christ known to the world. The spiritual health of each member of Christ's church, the strong unity that they share through the Spirit of God, and the clarity of the gospel will transform the community in which they live.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED  
TO EQUIPPING CHURCH MEMBERS TO REACH  
THEIR COMMUNITY FOR CHRIST

For one reason or another, most church members struggle to reach their neighbors with the gospel of Christ. Christians, intentionally or otherwise, often adopt certain negative attitudes, social behaviors, or lifestyle patterns that prevent effective ministry to their neighbors. Some have come to believe that evangelism is the job of the pastor since he is paid staff and has gone to school for theological training. Some would insist that they just do not know any lost people, while others explain that they just do not go to the same types of places that the lost do. Busy Christian lives lead to decreased opportunities to share the gospel with others. Fear of rejection, a godless culture, lack of training, and even the absence of love for the lost contribute to reasons not to reach one's neighbors for Christ.

It is difficult to believe that church outreach can be accomplished on the Lord's Day alone. God loves the New Testament Church and it is his desire to see it grow through the addition of new converts. Sadly, each week between fifty and seventy-five churches close their doors. Research tells that in the United States more than 80 percent of churches have plateaued or are declining. It is estimated that 340,000 Protestant churches in America have an average attendance of less than one hundred people.<sup>1</sup> It would appear that churches are beginning to experience a new normal in low attendance and less than productive outreach to their lost community. Though there is no magic pill to increase church attendance, some Christians have failed to understand that they are to

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<sup>1</sup>Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *Nuts & Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando: Renovate, 2015), 1.

live their life on a mission, and that mission is the Great Commission. Christians must begin to focus on reaching their neighbors for Christ, and the tool to be used is the gospel message. Passivity in sharing the gospel not only minimizes growth for churches, but also fails to impact the local culture for good. Programs and methods that once worked to attract the lost to the church are not necessarily effective today. Programs foster a *come and see* mentality of ministry while Christians are to *go and tell* the Good News. It is critical that churches re-focus and begin to see their own community as the way to build God's church.<sup>2</sup>

As purported by some church growth experts, if outreach and evangelism fail to be the top priority of the church, then it typically fails to be a priority at all. When churches are absorbed with the task of building credible relationships with their community in order to share the life-changing gospel, then they can expect to see numerical growth within their churches. Many churches need to fall in love again with their community and seek to view them through the eyes of Jesus Christ and ask, "What can I do to build a credible platform with my neighbor in order that they would allow me to share the gospel message with them?"

### **What Worked in the Past May Not Be Working Today**

Many pastors feel that they are swimming upstream, and they lead their churches paralyzed by fear from bullies in the congregation or strong-armed board members. They understand that they are at a critical crossroad in which they must move the church toward their community in order to reach them or remain on a downward spiral toward death.<sup>3</sup> Many churches are stuck in a maintenance mode and can only do what they have done in the past. The problem is that the maintenance mode is leading to

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<sup>2</sup>Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts & Bolts*, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:VISION* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 29-31.

decline. Dying churches often live in the past and refer to the past as the good-old days. Many churches long for their next pastor to help them to return to the good-old days, but the programs and culture of the good-old days are not truly effective today. The overemphasis on traditions haunts many churches and at the same time those traditions keep many members comfortable with what is familiar. Thom Rainer says that the most pervasive common thread of dying churches is that the *past* was their hero.<sup>4</sup> Many churches feel that in order to be prosperous again they must resurrect the past to jump-start the future. A wise pastor, however, “will respect and learn from the past in order to live in the present so that the church can change the future.”<sup>5</sup>

Many churches refuse to see the reality of their decline and their own failure in reaching out to their neighbors. Sadly enough, church members have grown comfortable with the status quo and are blinded by the slow erosion taking place. Over the years, many church members have allowed their churches to become a fortress where they take shelter and invite the lost in on certain occasions.<sup>6</sup> The church’s focus has been on self-preservation and has stopped reaching and caring for the community. The problem is that no church can sustain an inward-focused ministry indefinitely because it will dwindle and die, spiritually and ultimately physically.<sup>7</sup> The heart of the issue is that members of dying churches do not really want growth unless that growth meets their preferences and allows them to stay comfortable. Some church members accuse their pastors of wanting to focus too much on numbers while other members of these dying churches would welcome the growth of the yesteryears; however, they are unwilling to put forth the effort

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<sup>4</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 18.

<sup>5</sup>Harry L. Reeder III and David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 38.

<sup>6</sup>Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 27.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

and unwilling to accommodate for new methods of ministry.<sup>8</sup> Some churches even feel that they are alive because church attendance is somewhat stable and because they are almost meeting budget.<sup>9</sup> The reality is that some are stagnant, plateaued, and on life-support. The past has become the hero and there is no room for new ideas.

One danger of worshipping the past is that many churches wait too long to adapt to their culture, making it no longer viable to change.<sup>10</sup> Through extensive church case studies, it has been found that vibrant and living churches are those that demonstrate a serious and genuine concern for their communities. These churches were not focusing on self-preservation,<sup>11</sup> but understood that Christ's church existed to take the gospel to a dying community and that the community was not knocking down the doors of the church in order to worship with them. In thriving churches, the staff led the church into the community to do the gospel work—they were willing to stop serving themselves and took an interest in serving the community to the point of adjusting how they did things. Henard characterizes this type of outreach as “servant evangelism.”<sup>12</sup> The past did not dictate the present, but these thriving churches understood their biblical purpose and were willing to adjust their sails according to the times. They understood that living in the past would lead to the ministry's demise. No program or method is timeless—old programs, such as the AWANA ministry, continue to re-work their curriculum and graphics every few years in order to be relevant to the times. In fact, other parachurch ministries have reached out to AWANA to help give a facelift to their own dated materials in order to persevere.

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<sup>8</sup>Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 44.

<sup>9</sup>Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 138-39.

<sup>10</sup>Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts & Bolts*, 13.

<sup>11</sup>Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 28-29.

<sup>12</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 190-91.

Many churches have a bad reputation of doing nothing but taking up space on prime property. The test of their value to the community is whether or not they would be missed if they were gone tomorrow. Due to worshipping the past, many churches cannot relate to the ongoing movement of their society and they fail to find a portal to reach in and effectively minister to their society. Excellent elements of the past should be brought into the future and yet they may be modified to fit the present. Although the past was foundational at one time, the past can also serve as the biggest obstacle for stepping into the future.

### **Fear of Change Can Bring about Paralysis and Death to a Church**

Gary McIntosh writes, “Faithful churches become effective not simply because they do the right things but because they understand why the right things need to be done.”<sup>13</sup> The thought of change can be crippling for many people, especially when change is occurring faster than people can keep up. As church leaders attempt to moderate change for the sake and health of the congregation, it must be remembered that many people would consider change more readily if they understood why the change needed to take place. Traditional methods of worship and the way things have been done in church have become sacred to many members. Although progress is impossible without change, it must be remembered that people embrace change differently. Gary McIntosh quotes, “Methods are many; principles are few. Methods never last; principles always do.”<sup>14</sup> Although people may not like change, some would be willing to work with change if they knew they were working from deep-rooted principles that brought about something that honored Christ. The tragedy occurs when people fail to see the tension if

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<sup>13</sup>Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 25.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

they do not change. Henard shares, “The fact that church members resist changing the current ministry structure only exacerbates the problem.”<sup>15</sup>

Todd Hudnall presents five reasons churches are so resistant to change. First, churches are tradition keepers and tend to be preservers of the past. Second, churches tend to avoid issues of change that raise the potential for conflict. Third, many churches are not in touch with their bottom line; churches are muddy about their real growth and effectiveness and fail to see the need for change. Fourth, change-weary people see the church as one of the last places they can find security. Fifth, churches in general tend not to be leader led. Many pastors actually foster the status quo and seek to keep peace; hence, no true change or progress is made.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that culture impacts churches differently. Some Christians view culture as evil, which is not necessarily the case. Although culture is not always good, it does not mean it is inherently evil. Culture is not a product of the fall and it is not just temporal. Malphurs and Penfold write, “Revelation 7:9-10 clearly reveals that people’s cultural distinctives, which are unique expressions of their beliefs and values, such as ethnicity and language, will be present in heaven.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Malphurs defines church culture: “A church’s organizational culture is its unique outward expression of its shared beliefs and values.”<sup>18</sup> Since culture itself is always changing, it is critical that churches learn to adapt and cope to the constantly changing environment. Churches must understand culture in order to continue to minister more effectively to their lost community. For individuals within the church who feel they reflect the community, it would be valuable to evaluate the building, technology, dress, language,

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<sup>15</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 179.

<sup>16</sup>Todd Hudnall, *Church Come Forth* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2014), 103-4.

<sup>17</sup>Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:VISION*, 171.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

organizational structure, kids' area, and even their parking lot. A good question would be, "Does a guest understand what the church is trying to accomplish or convey by the way it conducts its business?" A healthy church must nurture an atmosphere of change and expect change as part of church life. Churches cannot separate themselves from culture. Hudnall writes, "A compelling argument could be made that leading change in a turnaround church is a greater event than in a turnaround business."<sup>19</sup>

A good shepherd must work to develop and teach the church the theology of change from Scripture.<sup>20</sup> Education is the first step in preparing the people that change is acceptable and biblical. This type of training will help foster the expectation that change will occur at their church. Many pastors are just as fearful as their people to enter the process of change or to suggest change to their congregants. Change can often bring about criticism that can be completely unfounded and very defeating to the leadership.

There is always the fear of loss of members or financial giving to the church when change occurs. This fear can ultimately slow the process or cause turmoil between the congregation and the leadership. It should be noted that some criticism can be good. It may be necessary for the leadership to bring greater clarity to the changes they want to implement. Negative criticism can occur, but it cannot be allowed to shut down the process of change if the leadership is working out of conviction about what must be done.<sup>21</sup> The purging of some members may be necessary and positive for the sake of the future of the church. In Scripture, many spoke against Nehemiah when he was called to rebuild the wall, but he worked with conviction and pressed on to accomplish what he was called to do (Neh 6:3). The result was that many rejoiced with him in their accomplishment. Solomon also spoke about the constant complainer in Proverbs 27:15:

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<sup>19</sup>Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 103.

<sup>20</sup>Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:VISION*, 207.

<sup>21</sup>Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 128-29.



“A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike.” Some will gripe and complain until they believe they can get their way. Healthy leaders do not back down to the loud minorities but they walk with the conviction that they must lead the entire congregation forward.

A good leader must look beyond the immediate criticism and work to shepherd the flock of God. It is critical that a leader stays the course during change, even if the temptation is to flee. Preparing for the transition and conveying the rewards for changing is essential. Celebrating wins and helping people understanding what will not change gives reassurance that not everything will be changed.<sup>22</sup> Investing in the right leadership to help develop and carry the change to fruition is indispensable. Churches must know that thriving churches are changing churches. New generations in the church expect and demand new approaches to worship and relevant ways to do ministry.<sup>23</sup> Once again, it is not to say that principles and biblical convictions have changed. Pastors must keep in mind who the real enemy is, and that enemy is not the flock of God. Most members truly want God’s best for the church. In navigating through the maze of change, members need a pastor whom they can trust and is in tune with the needs of the body. Necessary change that is resisted, stalled, or even stopped by others could very well be the decision to end the ministry of the church, especially if that church is already in decline.

### **Effective Leaders Stimulate Change**

Gary McIntosh writes, “There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.”<sup>24</sup> The decline and grave situations that many churches find themselves in are typically the direct result of inept pastors who worked to

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<sup>22</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 180-81.

<sup>23</sup>Gary McIntosh, *There’s Hope for Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 129.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

maintain the status quo and to keep church members satisfied. Malphurs suggests, “The state of the church reflects the state of the church leadership in America.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, if 80-85 percent of churches are struggling, what does that say about those who are pastoring those churches? There is a direct correlation. Many pastors are so busy putting out fires that they have no time to strategically plan for the future. The problem is not necessarily a lack of pastors, but a lack of visionary pastors who do not know how to take the next step forward. Most pastors have never been trained to see the dream, say the dream, or pursue the dream.<sup>26</sup> Pastors typically have not been trained for visionary planning in seminary and are not wired to successfully turn around a declining or dying church.<sup>27</sup> In all fairness, as with the medical practice, not all doctors are suited to work in the emergency or operating rooms as it may not be their skill set. Yet, many young men have been thrown into the lion’s den right out of seminary and then end up leaving ministry permanently due to lack of practical ministry preparation. Through much study it has been learned that pastors who experience success in turning around declining churches are *dominant* or *influential* leaders, as identified on the D.I.S.C. profile analysis.<sup>28</sup> Gary McIntosh is correct in that there are no hopeless church situations since the church belongs to Jesus Christ and he promised that he alone would build his church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18).<sup>29</sup>

It is critical to understand that the enemy is not the church member who struggles with impending change. Satan desires to obstruct the church from advancing into his domain and to keep the gospel from removing the blinders from those who do not

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<sup>25</sup>Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:VISION*, 26.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-33.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>29</sup>McIntosh, *There’s Hope*, 17.

know Jesus Christ. The battle is spiritual and the battle belongs to the Lord. Therefore, revitalization and church renewal must be a work of God. With this understanding, God oftentimes works through human means to accomplish the work of ministry.<sup>30</sup> According to studies of rapidly growing churches in America, the foundation for that growth was a burden for the lost and a fervent prayer ministry to the lost. The vision then came from God as to how to reach their community for Christ. One deadly danger is when a pastor or church becomes so skilled in ministry and gifted with resources that they no longer feel a need to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish ministry.<sup>31</sup> The reminder from Jesus Christ is, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, *for apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

It is often necessary for a new pastor to come to a dying church in order to bring new energy and fresh ideas. The old adage that “a new broom sweeps clean” bares some truth. New pastors can often bring fresh hope and innovative ideas toward doing ministry. The challenge is that a new pastor on the scene must be willing to take the time to study the people and the church culture in order to identify the necessary change. Church growth experts continue to say that it is through prolonged tenure and journeying life with the church family that credibility and trust are developed, which are vital for implementing change. It is also the pastor who walks and works with a high degree of personal humility and integrity that gives credence to the message of change. A pastor will begin to gain the attention and confidence of those he leads when he becomes the example of *servant* leadership. Servant leadership is best characterized by Jesus Christ who sought no glory or fame for himself but directed the glory to his Father in heaven

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<sup>30</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 13.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

through serving others—even to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:5-8).<sup>32</sup> Once personal character and love for the church is established, then a pastor will find the necessary latitude to begin to stimulate the necessary change, even if it is painful change. Most turnaround efforts, even in the world of commerce, are led by a new leader who changes up the status quo and offers hope to the people.<sup>33</sup> Many church members would welcome new life, but it is often measured by the glory days of old. Most glory days of almost any organization are initiated during the time of one leader who had vision, foresight, determination, tenacity, and the trust of the people.<sup>34</sup> New leaders also come with clean slates but personal character must be established with those they lead. Though there are many challenges to turning around a dying church, it is necessary to begin with bringing the right leader in order to foster the need for change and to initiate that change. Turning around a church requires a high level of commitment. It includes a great deal of emotional pain and there are many temptations and opportunities to abandon the work prematurely. A pastor must have a strong belief in his calling by God and exercise a daily commitment to stay until God’s purposes and measure of ministry is accomplished.<sup>35</sup> A pastor who is willing to establish tenure and credibility is then able to cast vision and integrate necessary change toward growth. A visionary pastor can make a great difference to a dying church if he is willing to maintain God’s vision well beyond the first three years, which are often times the most difficult years of ministry.<sup>36</sup>

Effective leadership must understand that no two churches change in the same way or at the same pace. Church culture varies from place to place as does the church’s

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<sup>32</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 13-15.

<sup>33</sup>Cheyney and Rials, *Nuts & Bolts*, 120.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 55.

<sup>36</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: B & H, 1993), 193.

history. Effective leaders work with a positive and right attitude toward the people and the process. They respect the past but do not revere the past. Good leaders learn to incorporate certain victories of the past into the present as they prepare for the needed change leading into the future. Although the church may not be uniform at times in all decisions, an effective leader works diligently to remain unified in spirit and to maintain a household of honor within God's church. Part of honoring the church family is communicating well about the necessary change to come. It involves preparing the people with the necessary mindset and training in order to adjust to impending change. An effective leader may need to replace some existing leaders who fail to step up to the plate and remain unified during the change process. The reality is that not all church leaders are leadership material, but they may be great people to support and follow true leaders. It is imperative to place the right leaders on the bus in order to move forward and to routinely invest in them as a valuable resource. Moving forward will demand building a strong coalition of leaders who have bought in to the needed change and can impact people within their sphere of influence. Some may always resist and it may be necessary to personally confront problem people who continue to create friction. Keep in mind that it was often during the lack of leadership in the past that a vocal minority arose to power. Effective leaders will make the hard decisions, including financial decisions, which will communicate to others that nothing is so sacred within the church that it will not be removed, especially if it is a matter of accomplishing the church's vision.<sup>37</sup>

Through the change process, success can also be determined by how the leader or pastor chooses his words and communicates change. Evaluating the impact and helping those who will be affected most will prove most beneficial. Others will better support the change when the leader himself is staying positive and is seeking to boost the morale of his followers. It is necessary for a leader to look for the silver lining and to

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<sup>37</sup>McIntosh, *There's Hope*, 111.

celebrate even the small accomplishments made by the church. Good leaders focus on the big rocks that must be moved first and refrain from concentrating on details that really do not matter or contribute toward the big win.

Two of the biggest dangers for pastors are failure to maintain a daily walk with Christ and moving too rapidly with change. In the busyness of pursuing ministry, prayer time and God's Word can seem like interruptions. Everything can be lost if the pastor fails in his spiritual journey as the leader of God's people. Second, pastors have to know when and what pace to change. If a leader waited for everyone in the church to buy into the vision, then the vision would never become a reality and change would never take place. Those who resist change may even attempt to stall the change in order to kill the change. Rainer states, "Visionaries can envision more ministry and programs than there are people to fill those ministries and programs. Visionaries tend to get so far out in front of their people that the people often mistake them for the enemy."<sup>38</sup> This type of pastor ends up going to battle with no troops to follow him.

Effective pastors of declining or plateauing churches must initiate the change process to renewal and revitalization or watch their church exist on life-support until its death. Coasting or remaining on cruise control may get the pastor into his retirement years, but it will often kill the church in the process.<sup>39</sup> A healthy and effective pastor cannot bring about change alone, he must delegate and share the ministry with others. Staying the course will be difficult, which is why it must be done by the power of God alone. God calls and places leaders in places where they can make a difference for His glory. That difference may even be a time of healing and transition until the next man of God arrives to lead the church.

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<sup>38</sup>Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 189-90.

<sup>39</sup>Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:VISION*, 29.

## **Vision Driven Churches Understand Why They Exist**

There appears to be a common thread with dying churches: some time in their history they lost sight of their vision and why they exist. Attitudes slowly shift from being a gospel-centered and others-centered church to a self-centered church that focuses only on the needs of the church family. Routines, traditions, and rituals replace their original purpose of being a gospel-driven people. Their obsession was no longer an outward focus to reach their community with the gospel.<sup>40</sup> It was replaced with comfort, the familiar, and self-satisfaction. Studies continue to reveal that dying churches became cocooned from their communities and have even lost touch with their communities. On the other hand, the healthiest churches with great expectant vision statements were highly evangelistic and had strategies to reach communities with the gospel.<sup>41</sup> The leadership fostered opportunities for outreach and built bridges to the community in order to share the gospel message. The community knew that the church existed and they had an appreciation for what the church was accomplishing. The vision statement was not only written down but it was understood and communicated to the congregation regularly.<sup>42</sup> The membership embraced the vision set before them and trusted the leadership in moving toward accomplishing that vision. They understood that ministries would be changed and resources would be spent in order to accomplish their vision.

Vision is essential to any ministry, whether a church or parachurch organization. Ministries that exist without a clear God-inspired vision are futile because they fail to actualize what God has called them to do. It is imperative that pastors and members of re-envisioning churches clearly understand where they are headed. To begin

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<sup>40</sup>Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 75.

<sup>41</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 206.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.

to revitalize a dying church and fail to set the sails in the right direction with a clear and compelling vision from God is like a surgeon attempting to operate without a scalpel or a carpenter to build a house without a hammer: it cannot happen.<sup>43</sup> Rainer writes, “If laypeople become excited about what they can do for God and for their church then the sky is the limit.”<sup>44</sup> It is the leader’s responsibility to identify and develop the vision for the church. One danger during this process is a false perception of who is responsible to carry out the vision of the church. Rainer explains, “The idea of paying for ministry as opposed to doing ministry is still the paradigm of many church goers.”<sup>45</sup> Pastors must equip the church to do the work of ministry if it is to fulfill its vision (Eph 4:11-12). Rainer continues, “In order for revitalization to take place and become a reality, new roles for both the pastor and people must be accepted.”<sup>46</sup> It is necessary to begin to define roles and expectations as to who will be responsible for what at the church.

There are multiple benefits to vision. It clarifies the direction that the ministry is headed and provides the leadership with the ability to properly navigate into the future. Vision also motivates people to serve, sacrifice, and give to something that they understand and support. Vision has a way of creating energy and causing people to rally together for a greater good. Without vision, many people are less likely to be willing to take risks or change current traditions. Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of vision is that it sustains ministry for the long haul.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of vision statements are based off of similar passages of Scripture, which focus on the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Acts

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<sup>43</sup>Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:VISION*, 147-52.

<sup>44</sup>Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 195.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 147-52.



1:4-4; John 20:19-21). Henard writes, “The big picture of vision for the Body of Christ found in Scripture never changes but how churches put that vision into practice adjusts as years pass, as they achieve parts of the vision, and as leadership grows, matures, or shifts.”<sup>48</sup> At times, church members may even express discrepancies as to how the vision needs to be carried out. It may need to be adjusted as the surrounding culture changes. A good vision statement must be clear, challenging, and provide a clear mental image as to where the church is headed.<sup>49</sup> Vision should be about developing the present in order to obtain the future. It must be measureable and attainable. Since culture is constantly changing at an ever increasingly rapid pace, it is necessary for the church to be prepared to adjust its vision or perhaps its methods, in order accomplish its vision.

Hudnall writes, “For the church leader vision is a divine dissatisfaction with the way things are, a divine insight into the way things could be, a divine imperative toward what should be and a divine urgency to implement change.”<sup>50</sup> Theologically, vision is gained by hearing from God as to what should be taking place in churches. McIntosh states, “We must get a vision of God before we can get a vision from God.”<sup>51</sup> Although many pastors understand the direction a church is supposed to head, they have received very little instruction in the practical elements of leadership. For many, vision is a new concept and they have never been responsible for forming, casting, or cultivating vision in any organization. Bill Hybels explains:

Vision is at the very core of leadership. Take vision away from a leader and you cut out his or her heart. Vision is the fuel that leaders run on. It’s the energy that creates action. It’s the fire that ignites the passion of followers. It’s the clear call

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<sup>48</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 163.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>50</sup>Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 71.

<sup>51</sup>McIntosh, *There’s Hope*, 73.

that sustains focused effort year after year, decade after decade, as people offer consistent and sacrificial service to God.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, many lay people have no clear understanding of the terms *vision* or *mission* in the church. Vision is what God wants his church to become as the mission is fulfilled. Mission is what God has called the church to be doing for God's glory. The mission focuses on what the church must do in order to accomplish its vision.<sup>53</sup> Since this is new language for many, it is critical that the pastor work to enhance communication in order to gain trust and support from the people. The senior pastor should be the key communicator of this vision and the vision should be driven from the pulpit downward to all ministries.<sup>54</sup> The same vision statement should be used for the entire church, although it may be worded differently for the student and youth ministries in their vernacular. It must be recited again and again in order to be recognized as the church's top priority. Malphurs writes, "Vision casting is like fishing for men."<sup>55</sup> It has to be said over and over again until the congregation takes it.

When the pastor and church leadership understand the direction for the church, then several questions should be asked prior to launching. It is wise to know what the congregation will want to understand ahead of time. Identifying the reason and purpose of this new direction is foundational. Who is the church trying to reach with this new direction? Why does the current model not appear to be working? Who are key people who can help advance this new vision? For a new pastor launching new vision, it would be wise to consider whether or not he has been at the church long enough—does the church trust his leadership and is he willing to stay long enough to finish the task. It would also be wise to consider if the timing is right or if the church is at risk. Some

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<sup>52</sup>Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 31.

<sup>53</sup>Reeder and Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame*, 128.

<sup>54</sup>Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 63.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

churches are spiritually unhealthy and are not prepared to reach out to their own communities.<sup>56</sup> The finest of intentions and plans fail due to poor implementation and management. Even the best plans need to be evaluated and modified midstream. Ongoing dialog, church surveys, affirmation, and celebration of even small victories will be used to advance and strengthen the church family as they pursue their new vision.

### **Establishing Evangelism as a Top Priority Is Fundamental for Building God's Church**

Many churches cannot understand why they are not experiencing church growth outside of the occasional transfer of a Christian from another church. Most churches would consider themselves faithful to the Word of God and deem themselves friendly churches. The cold reality is that evangelism no longer remains the top priority for many churches. Perhaps the greatest favor that a church could do is to recover the joy of sharing the gospel and to pray for a genuine love for their lost community. Churches naturally become stagnant in their growth and become inwardly focused when they lose sight of winning lost souls to Christ. Many churches give large amounts of money to missionaries overseas, which is necessary. Unfortunately, as a result of that giving, some churches are calling themselves mission-minded but they truly fail to live on mission by sharing the saving gospel themselves. Some pastors hoping to revitalize their churches have attempted to do so by teaching only. Some believe that if you just grow people enough then they will naturally evangelize the lost. This type of thinking does not automatically produce evangelizing Christians. Spiritual growth happens when Christians, in love with the gospel and their community, are compelled by the love of Christ to share with their lost neighbors. As quoted by Gary McIntosh, "You evangelize to revitalize; you don't revitalize to evangelize."<sup>57</sup> McIntosh feels that pastors must get

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<sup>56</sup>McIntosh, *There's Hope*, 67.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 63.

the church involved in outreach and evangelism as steps towards revitalizing the church.<sup>58</sup> For years, the church has failed to understand that it is necessary to verbalize the gospel message in order for others to understand and accept the message. Kind deeds apart from sharing the gospel will not build the church of God. Others love to share but fail to build any credible bridges or acts of love in order to gain a platform to be heard. Both outreach and evangelism are necessary in order to reach the lost. Outreach can be characterized by service-orientated tasks to the community, such as assisting public schools or working in the community. Outreach serves to create a caring presence with the community and to develop a credible platform to deliver the gospel. Evangelism, on the other hand, is conversion orientated. The church must continue to look for more ways to cultivate outreach in order to share the gospel message.

Churches that are growing today through gospel conversion are churches that are truly embracing the Great Commission as their personal responsibility. The gospel remains at the forefront of all they do and they are driven as *debtors* to Jesus Christ (Rom 1:14). They work to advance the gospel unashamedly (Rom 1:16). These Great Commission churches understand they are not in competition with other Great Commission churches and yet are actually working on the same team. These churches are typically seen as church planting churches that see ministry beyond the walls of their own physical building. There are several characteristics of Great Commission churches. First, these types of churches cultivate an atmosphere of discipleship—it is more than just a religious duty of showing up on Sundays, they also foster many life groups. Second, Great Commission churches cultivate a culture of evangelism—the gospel radiates to every aspect of the church and the church family understands that they are to *go and tell*. Third, Great Commission churches work to reach the unreached through missions. Last,

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<sup>58</sup>McIntosh, *There's Hope*, 63.

they work to strengthen other churches involved in the Great Commission ministry. They understand they can do more together for the glory of God.<sup>59</sup>

Churches must return to the full preaching of God's Word. The gospel is not driving all churches and the message of sin and repentance is too harsh for some to proclaim. Some churches, identified as *tolerant churches*, are experiencing some growth. The problem with these churches is that truth is seen as relative, and their focus is love—sin does not matter and the focus is more on self-help and self-satisfaction; feelings have become much more important than Scripture. In fact, biblical truth and theology are rivaled with psychology. Most evangelical churches today, identified as *traditional churches*, are doing an inadequate job when it comes to evangelism. Many of these churches are large, pleasant, and boast state of the art technology. They offer some of the best programs led by multiple paid staff members. They demand large offerings to keep operating, which means they must draw many people to the campus each week. They have the tendency to count nickels, noses, and numbers. These churches have failed to demonstrate a *go and tell* mentality toward evangelism for years. Churches that are truly gaining momentum in the United States today are churches that are willing to risk the traditional way that church has been done. They are identified as the *multiplying church*, focusing on a *go and tell* mentality when it comes to the gospel. Although they welcome the lost to visit them, they understand the lost are not waiting at their doors. These churches are committed to the Scriptures as absolute truth and are very relational in the discipleship process. They seek to be in the community and live relational lives in order to share the gospel. They often have multiple worship locations and are active in

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<sup>59</sup>Mark Dever, *Understanding the Great Commission* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 33-34.

branching off with new church plants. In a nut-shell, these churches are intentional about evangelism and dedicated to deliberate discipleship.<sup>60</sup>

When it comes to evangelizing, Peter Wagner calls church planting “the single most effective evangelistic method under heaven.”<sup>61</sup> Denominations experiencing the greatest growth are involved with church planting. New churches appear to have both a higher growth rate and a higher conversion rate. Rainer writes, “Regardless of the location, a new church will attract a segment of the unchurched that existing churches cannot.”<sup>62</sup> Many existing churches struggle with the concept of church planting for fear of losing both money and members. Peter Wagner shares that people are highly attracted to churches that are involved in church planting. He noted that sponsoring churches usually replace the people sent to the new church and the funds within six months.<sup>63</sup> Next to church planting, churches that are investing in small groups are experiencing increased growth. For the existing church, there is probably no greater evangelistic tool for developing relationships than small groups. It is through the platform of personal relationships that evangelism happens most often.<sup>64</sup> Churches must see small group ministries as perhaps the single largest opportunity to reach communities with the gospel. Establishing evangelism as a top priority is fundamental for building God’s church.

### **Outward Focused Churches Look for Opportunities to Build Bridges to Share the Gospel**

One of the contributing causes for so many parachurch ministries is the neglect of the church to rise up and reach out to a hurting community. The church certainly

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<sup>60</sup>Bob Nieuwendorp, *God’s Plan for Church Multiplication* (Minneapolis: Next Step, 2014), 123-27.

<sup>61</sup>Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth*, 205.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 221

cannot be the only set of hands that shows kindness; however, much more could be done to build inroads to people's lives. Christ modeled building credible relationships and practicing acts of kindness toward others, which authenticated the message of the gospel that he preached. Most declining churches have developed an inward focus that is much more concerned with itself rather than its community's concerns. Developing an outreach-focused church will require a heart-felt conviction that the church is the only hope for a lost and broken world. It was the church that was commissioned by Jesus Christ. Pastors must work diligently to connect people with the community.<sup>65</sup> One of the ways pastors can exegete the community better is by making use of the denomination's demographic studies, which can help identify top needs in the community. Many churches look nothing like the community in which they live; therefore, they fall short in their ability to reach out and meet needs.<sup>66</sup>

Through the use of special events, self-help topics, children's functions, private tutoring, ESL, building usage, child daycare, and other acts of kindness with no strings attached, the community will begin to understand that the church is there for them. It is important to not just provide an occasional event but to do the best job possible, as often as possible, and work to overwhelm the community with kindness. The community should talk about the church's radical kindness so that it would cause them to want to visit or enter a conversation with church members. Start small but stay constant in the effort of showing acts of love. Even though a church may be plateaued or suppressed does not mean that the opportunities are gone; more are actually provided for the church to step up and be the arms of Christ.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Hudnall, *Church Come Forth*, 68-69.

<sup>66</sup>Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 129-33.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 152-56.

If isolated, churches cannot be fishers of men. Pastors must get out of the office and get to know community leaders. The church family must first see their pastor loving on the community. When a church begins to open its eyes to see the hearts of the lost then they can creatively look through the barrier of culture to enter in safely and seek to be effective. Anytime a church interfaces with culture there is risk. A faithful church must be relevant to the society it is reaching and enter into its culture. Thomas Jefferson said, “In matters of style, swim with the current. In matters of principle, stand like a rock.”<sup>68</sup> McIntosh writes, “Churches that appropriately work to communicate the unchanging message to a changing culture have a greater chance of seeing biblical church growth occur.”<sup>69</sup> Churches must be committed to building relationships with the community, both corporately and personally. Churches that are changing and growing are obeying God’s call upon them to serve the poor and get involved in broken lives. They are not afraid of strong engagement with their community because they understand that they are building necessary bridges to cross the divide.<sup>70</sup> They pray and look for safe places for gospel conversations. Churches that are experiencing growth have members that understand that God provides divine encounters each day to share the gospel.

### **Conclusion**

Most churches have severed relationships with their own communities for the sake of comfort and self-preservation. Christ can open the eyes of his church in order for them to love others again. Through prayerful outreach and faithful evangelization the church can experience renewal and growth. God provides the vision, opportunities, and empowerment to accomplish great ministry. It may demand letting go of what worked in

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<sup>68</sup>McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth*, 132.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 105-7.



the past for the sake of the future. Fear of making the needed change will only exasperate the problem and bring about the death of the church. Churches truly become effective when they understand the right thing that must be done and then they choose to implement it. Effective leaders study change and carefully invest in the right people who can help that change become a reality. As church leaders help the congregation to understand the vision, the church is able to move in the right direction more clearly and confidently. Clear vision stimulates excitement and moves the church closer towards its goals.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This ministry project was designed to develop a Great Commission culture at Maywood Evangelical Free Church. The task involved identifying the current understanding of the church's vision and mission statements from the membership. It was important to identify why the church thought that they existed in order to make sense of the existing ministries. It also meant that the church must have a clear understanding of the biblical gospel in order for the church to fulfill its vision. The final endeavor was to identify both corporate and personal ways for the church to fulfill its vision by building bridges with the immediate community in order to share the gospel of Christ. Through all of this, the hope was to develop an outward focused church that was driven by the gospel for the glory of God.

One of the first steps in the process was to measure the membership's knowledge of the church's vision and mission statement by a pre- and post-sermon survey, called the Vision and Mission Statement Survey (VMS).<sup>1</sup> The training and biblical rationale regarding the vision statement came through a four-week sermon series delivered by me during this project. Included in the sermon series was a sermon that specifically focused on the biblical gospel as found from Scripture. This sermon was not the first time that the vision of the church had been addressed or discussed publicly. Since I became lead pastor, each year in August, all the pastors join me on stage on a Sunday morning to talk about the vision collectively as a church and how the congregation can expect to see the vision come to life in the various ministries. The hope

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

has always been for the membership to see that the leadership makes decisions and creates change based on the church's vision statement. Change is then seen as an essential part of any living and growing organism that remains healthy, including the church. Another and different post-sermon survey was taken in order to evaluate the membership's understanding of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this survey was to assess the biblical knowledge of the membership as it relates to the gospel and for the sake of future membership training. Through proper training, the church can be better equipped to build bridges to the community and speak competently as they articulate the gospel message. The desire is for the entire membership to walk uniformly with one another while understanding their marching orders from Christ. This process will remain ongoing for the life of the church.

One last endeavor in this project was to create a strategic outreach team from the church membership in order to identify ways to both individually and corporately reach out to our neighbors to build credible relationships that the gospel might be shared. Not all of these outreach events would be implemented, but they would all be evaluated by a panel of pastors for their subjective evaluation of effectiveness.

### **Project Timeline**

The ministry project began on September 25 and continued through December 30, 2016. A timeline for the project's sections is described next.

In week 1, eighty VMS Surveys were mailed out to a cross section of members from the congregation (college age through senior adults) in order to measure the congregation's knowledge and understanding of the current vision and mission statements. The hope was to have a minimum of sixty of the VMS surveys returned.

In weeks 1-3, preparations were made for the four-week sermon series that focused on the church's vision and mission statements. The final sermon of the series

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

dealt strictly with the gospel message. The VMS pre-sermon series surveys were returned in these weeks also. Sixty surveys out of the eighty were returned, which met the minimum number desired.

In weeks 5-8, the four-week sermon series was delivered on Sunday mornings. The following points of the mission statement were addressed: Exalting the Living God, Explaining the Word of God, Encouraging the Family of God, and Extending the Love of God.

In weeks 9-11, the VMS post-sermon survey was sent to the same sixty people who responded to the VMS pre-sermon survey. Once again, these surveys were identical, but the hope was to ascertain learning that had taken place.

In week 9, the GAS post-sermon survey was sent to a group of eighty people immediately after the last sermon in the sermon series. These individuals were different than those who received the VMS survey. The surveys were numbered in order to identify which surveys were returned.

In week 10, a strategic outreach team was created to brainstorm both personal and corporate events that could be implemented to build relational bridges with the hope of sharing the gospel of Christ.

In weeks 12-14, the GAS Survey and Strategic Outreach Ideas were evaluated by a panel of pastors. In these weeks I also scored and evaluated the VMS surveys.

### **Pre-Project Survey**

The survey was composed of twenty-one questions.<sup>3</sup> The survey was designed to measure the church's understanding of the current vision and mission statements. The survey also provided an understanding of the participants' commitment to these statements and whether or not they felt they were biblical in nature. The survey was sent to a random sampling of both male and female as well as older and younger adults.

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<sup>3</sup>See appendix 1

Numbers were assigned to each survey as a way of managing the return of the surveys. I sent a personal letter with the surveys expressing the importance and relevance of this survey along with the needed return date. Of the initial eighty surveys mailed out, sixty surveys were returned, representing approximately 10 percent of the weekly Sunday attendance. It was necessary to extend the return date for some participants and make special drop off arrangements, otherwise the number of returned surveys would have been fewer. I had hoped for sixty returned surveys as a minimum in order to evaluate the church.

The VMS survey measured the participants' level of familiarity with these statements, whether or not they fully agreed with these statements, their personal commitment level, the leadership's effectiveness in communicating the vision and mission, whether or not they should be re-written, and the leadership's responsibility to lead by a biblical vision. The final questions on this survey asked the membership to write the church's vision and mission statements the best that they could. These two final questions were scored on a percentage basis according to how much the participants were able to recollect. Apart from the last two questions on the survey that asked the membership to write the vision and mission statements of the church, the questions were based on the Likert scale.<sup>4</sup> They were requested to not look up any information on the church website or make use of any other resources. The surveys were then mailed back directly to the church in a prepaid envelope. It was extremely important to get the right number of surveys back prior to the sermon series in order for the proper evaluation of learning. No VMS surveys were accepted after the sermon series began.

The VMS survey sought to find the personal awareness, level of support, and current personal involvement of its participants. The church leadership needed to understand the membership's knowledge in order to evaluate where the church was

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<sup>4</sup>M. K. Trochim, "Research Methods Knowledge Base: Likert Scaling," accessed October 18, 2016, <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/citing.php>.

headed and why they were doing the things they were doing in ministry. The survey intended to serve as a tool to provide the leadership with a greater understanding of the membership's support and involvement of ministry. Understanding the congregation's perception and acceptance of the church vision statement allows the leadership to set the course and adjust ministry as needed. An established and accepted church vision helps the leadership determine ministry direction and even eliminate unnecessary programs that ought not to be a part of the church.

### **Development and Implementation of the Sermon Series**

The sermon series was developed from the four-point mission statement of the church: Exalting the Living God; Explaining the Word of God; Encouraging the Family of God; and Extending the Love of God. The mission statement explains how the church works toward attaining the vision of the church. Each ministry that exists at Maywood contains the majority of these mission components. The lengthier vision statement of the church is as follows,

Maywood Evangelical Free Church is a community of committed Christ-followers. In prayerful dependence upon the Spirit of God and for the glory of God, we purpose to: Exalt the Living God; Explain the Word of God; Encourage the Family of God; and Extend the Love of God so that everyone who is touched by God through our ministry will come into a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ!<sup>5</sup>

On the survey, the majority of the participants did not know and could not recite the church's vision statement. In an attempt for the membership to understand and recite its vision statement, a branded and an abbreviated statement was created. The branded (or abbreviated) vision statement of the church is, "Becoming a people to reach people for Christ." The goal for the leadership was that the church membership would understand where they were headed and why they were doing what they were doing in ministry. In

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<sup>5</sup>Maywood Evangelical Free Church, "About," accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.mefc.us/new/about>.

essence, the mission statement is simple discipleship in which believers are growing in their faith and reaching out to others in order to share the gospel. Both the vision and mission statements are wrapped around the Great Commission given by Christ as in Matthew 28:19-20.

The first sermon focused on the believer's primary responsibility of glorifying God in all of life. The title of the first sermon was "Created for His Glory," and the text was from Isaiah 43:1-7. The text establishes that humanity was created for God's glory, not the other way around. God's glory then becomes the focus of everything that is done at the church. This message served as the foundation for the following three messages.

The second message was entitled "God's Sufficient Word" and the text was Psalm 19:7-11. The big idea was, "God's Word is entirely trustworthy and sufficient to provide all the answers and comfort necessary to live this life and prepare us for the next life," which is also the second point in the mission statement. At Maywood, the Word of God is central in providing direction, rationale, standards, accountability, and making known the will of God for his church in all matters of life. From infant classes through adult classes, God's Word remains the foundation of authority and instruction for all righteousness.

The third message in this series was entitled "Empowered to Encourage," and the text was taken from Romans 12:1-8. The big idea was, "As Christians, we must change the way that we think in order to grasp biblical worship and service." Lives that are surrendered to God are to be lived in holiness for His glory and in service toward others in order that Christ's church might be built up.

The last sermon in this four-week series focused on extending the love of God through sharing the gospel of Christ, which is the greatest act of showing love. The title of the message was "Living on a Gospel Mission," and the text was from Philippians 1:12-18. The big idea was, "Our adverse circumstances in this life can serve as the best vehicle to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ." This message was key in spelling out the

details of the gospel according to Scripture. The apostle Paul was resolute to make the most of every moment in order to advance the gospel and the name of Jesus Christ.

It was through these four sermons that each mission statement was substantiated. By acting upon the church's mission statement, the church moved closer to fulfilling its vision of "Becoming a people to reach people for Christ." The first three out of the four points in the mission statement focus on the believer's relationship to God and other Christians. All four points are truly necessary for healthy discipleship. The fourth point, Extending the Love of God, focuses on evangelism. It imitates the life of Jesus Christ by doing acts of mercy and kindness, which provide a credible platform in order to share the gospel message. This last sermon was critical in order for the church to understand the undiluted gospel that must be shared and taught as being the gospel of Jesus Christ. As pastor of Maywood, I struggle with those who share *easy-believism* and fail to explain the entirety of the gospel message.

### **Post-Project VMS Survey**

Following the sermon series, the second VMS survey was sent out to evaluate the growth and understanding of the church's vision and mission statement. The second survey was mailed to the sixty people who responded from the first VMS survey. A letter was also sent with the second survey expressing the importance and urgency to follow through on completing this second VMS survey and returning it in order that I could complete the project. Of the sixty surveys that were sent out the second time, fifty-six surveys were returned completed. The second survey was the same as the first survey apart from intentionally being printed on a different color of paper. It was necessary for the facilitator (paid staff member) of this survey to call and encourage some members to return the second survey. One member was a snowbird and did not receive the second survey. Another was in the process of moving, and another opted to decline the second



time through. One member did not express a reason for not following through the second time. Overall, the response was fairly successful.<sup>6</sup>

### **Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS) Implementation**

The Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS) was also taken in order to gain an understanding of what the membership truly understood as the gospel message according to Scripture. As noted earlier, many Christians in American evangelical churches fail to evangelize for one reason or another. Apart from fear, many fail to understand what should and what must be shared with others in order to obtain salvation. Knowing and being able to recite the vision and mission statement of the church is not sufficient because it truly does not reveal an accurate knowledge of the gospel. The GAS survey was comprised of eight questions pertaining to the gospel. It was written as a short answer survey that required and allowed for freedom of expression from the objective truth of God's Word. As noted, the last message in the sermon series just prior to the GAS survey served as a theological foundation for the GAS survey. The hope was that it would serve as a refresher for some and a tool to educate those who truly did not understand the gospel.

Eighty surveys were mailed out to various people, but not to those who already received the VMS survey. The intent was not to overwhelm the membership with numerous surveys but to allow as many members as possible to be a part of the project. Those surveyed were from college level to senior adults and the spectrum reflected both young Christians and mature Christians. I granted just over two weeks to complete the survey once they received the survey. I wrote a letter that was mailed out with the surveys explaining the nature of my project and the vital role that they each played. Upon completion of the survey, I asked them to return it in the prepaid envelope by the

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<sup>6</sup>The results of the survey are located in appendices 5 and 6.

date indicated in the letter. I received sixty-two surveys back in the mail, representing more than 10 percent of the weekly Sunday morning attendance.

The participants were told that they could use their Bibles and to even include Bible references in their answers if they could. I encouraged them not to go to other resources for their answers, such as the Internet, theology books, or other Christians. My intent was to see what Bible knowledge they had in the event they had the opportunity to share Christ with a lost person and all they had was their Bible. The survey was intended to take approximately twenty minutes to fill out and I asked other pastors to review it for the amount of time that they sensed it would take. There was general agreement that 15-20 minutes would be fair and adequate. Although sufficient space was available to answer the questions adequately, some wrote very small and a few added sheets of paper to the survey.

It was most important for me to understand from the membership how they would define the gospel. In that definition, I asked them to include any important biblical words that they felt should be communicated to a non-Christian in order for them to understand the true gospel message. After they provided their definition of the gospel and included the necessary biblical words, I then asked them to define specific biblical words that were used and defined in the last message of the sermon series.

With many evangelical churches today not addressing humanity's sinful condition or their total depravity, I believed it important to begin with the biblical definition of *sin*. The survey participants were asked to define God's *grace* as it relates to the gospel message and man's sinful condition. Since it is difficult to ascertain the genuineness of one's salvation decision, it is important for Christians to truly understand and be able to share what it means to *repent* from one's sinfulness. The individuals were also asked to explain what it means that Jesus *redeems* sinners. I asked them to answer how the *wrath of God* was satisfied in Christ Jesus. In one of the last questions, I asked

about the necessity and importance of the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ and why it was important for Christians today.

One passage, Romans 10:9-10, was chosen upon which the participants were to elaborate and expound. I simply asked them to explain this verse in their own words and I allowed for additional space to answer this question. The hope was to see more than just *easy believism* (just pray this prayer). The desire was that the membership would see the need for a genuinely repentant heart followed by confession of Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father. I longed to hear that both heart experience and head knowledge are necessary for salvation. From this verse, people inwardly come to agreement with who Christ is and they outwardly express that faith in their lives.

It was necessary to utilize a panel of four evangelical pastors in the Rockford area to evaluate the GAS survey in order for me not to create a bias toward my own people. Most pastors would like to think that they are training their people exceptionally but this fact is not always the case. The pastors were provided a master teaching rubric along with all of the answers. They were asked to adhere to the answers but to give grace on the word usage of the members; in other words, to allow for individuality in their answers, yet the answers must be biblically sound. The men received an equally divided number of surveys to score. They scored the question either right or wrong. Although this process can be seen as a harsh grading system, with one's eternity in view, it is of the utmost importance that I as a pastor train God's people well and not allow the blinders of Satan to remain on people who think they are walking in Christ and yet remain in darkness. The graded surveys were returned to me upon completion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See appendix 7 for tabulated results from the GAS Survey. In appreciation for their contribution, I committed lunch with them and a review of my findings once completed.

## **Corporate and Personal Strategic Outreach**

Part of a missionally-minded church is preaching and teaching to live each day of life on a personal mission for the glory of God. The mission can be seen in God's people as they live each day in such a way that their primary concern is to glorify God by advancing the gospel through their own lives. Unfortunately, many Christians are negligent and assume that the church can manage this task in a corporate setting. The fulfillment of the Great Commission was given to Christ's church, but it is often called the great omission. In efforts to live as a biblical church, God's people ought to be consumed with the gospel in order that the world may come to know and glorify God's holy name.

The church has the responsibility to welcome the lost, but proper ecclesiology helps Christians to understand that God's people gather primarily to worship and bring him adoration and praise. The lost cannot genuinely worship, so how does one reach out to them? It can be done corporately, but it is probably most effective individually, when the troops enter the field of battle.

I worked with the Pastor of Creative Outreach at the church and he formed a strategic action team of approximately twenty people to brainstorm ideas that individuals and the church could do to facilitate better outreach to our neighbors. The Pastor of Creative Outreach provided a lunch for this strategic action team after church on a Sunday. After the lunch, for approximately two hours, the team worked on writing ideas on a white board. They understood that there was absolutely no commitment on the part of the church leadership to implement any of the ideas. It was reiterated to the team that the pastors and church leaders were striving to do everything in keeping with the vision as a church. It was explained that evangelism is the hardest task and it is everyone's job. Many in the group naturally thought of the church leading the cause and they had many more ideas for corporate outreach than for themselves as individual members.

Both whiteboards were filled up with ideas for corporate and personal outreach. There were perhaps twice as many ideas for corporate outreach over personal

outreach. In fact, many things that the members identified as personal were truly corporate in nature. The idea of personal outreach is something a member does totally independent of the church. It was important to write these ideas down because it was important for the people to understand that the church has a real responsibility to reach neighbors for Christ, and that it is everyone's responsibility. In addition, it was important for the people to see that building bridges and loving on neighbors can be fun and exciting. Including them also placed ownership upon them and got them thinking about doing ministry differently.

These strategic outreach ideas were given to the same panel of pastors who evaluated the GAS surveys. They were asked to identify what they believed to be the six best corporate outreach events that could be implemented in order to build bridges to the lost community for Christ. Additionally, they were asked to identify what they felt would serve as the best personal outreach events to one's own community in order to hopefully share the gospel. These ideas will be used as input to the pastors at Maywood in order to evaluate future opportunities for outreach.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

I learned much by striving to ask the right questions and by listening to people respond. The challenge with these surveys may be that one may be forced to listen to the answers to questions that he wished he had not asked. These answers may be indicative of poor teaching and training by the pastor. It may reveal a real lack of preparation for ministry by both the pastor and the church family. These surveys were intended to be a tool for assessing the health of where the church was in relation to the gospel, its neighbors and its vision. There is always room for improvement and no one church has attained completion of this task.

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<sup>8</sup>See appendix 8 for tabulated results of the Creative Outreach Survey.

Observing the implementation of both the VMS and GAS surveys reinforced to me that training as it relates to the vision of the church and the message of the gospel is continuous. Improved results will come with improved training. Launching surveys for the sake of a project compared to launching surveys for the sake of product improvement and development can potentially produce different results. Time is of essence when working on a school project so surveys are not always launched within the best timeframe in order to obtain the best results. Spring time may be the best time for launching these types of surveys for many churches. In launching these surveys, I realized that the best evaluation could come about by sending a final survey to all of the participants a year from the previous surveys in order to evaluate true retention and learning. A pastor who is able to give tenure to one church improves the opportunity for a church to fulfill its vision and to bring the people to maturity as it relates to a proper understanding of the gospel.

The Creative Outreach Analysis could serve as an ongoing endeavor for all churches. Churches that engage their communities with the gospel will regularly need to evaluate ways and methods to make this happen, both on a personal and corporate level. As communities grow and change, so do the methods of the local church. Building bridges into the lives of those who do not know Christ as Savior is an endless endeavor, but it fulfills the Great Commission and the Great Commandments by Christ.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINAL EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

The evaluation and analysis serve as the final chapter of this project. The first section of this chapter is an evaluation of the project's purpose and goals. The next section focuses on the project's process along with an attempt to identify the project's strengths and weaknesses. The following section considers how I would do things differently if I were to repeat this project at another time. The last portion of this chapter identifies theological reflections of what I learned about God and how he is working at Maywood Evangelical Free Church. Lastly, I shared how this project has impacted me as a leader and how I will lead differently in the future as a result of this project. I conclude with the ways this project impacted the church and its leadership.

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

The purpose of this project was to equip Maywood Evangelical Free Church with the necessary tools to embrace their vision, understand the clear gospel message, and develop creative methods to share Christ with their community. As the lead pastor, it is my responsibility to serve as the "vision caster" for the church. This idea means articulating the vision repeatedly and clearly enough so that the membership can understand the vision and pursue the vision. As the shepherd, I must help the flock of God understand where they are going and how they are to get there. Developing the vision means working strategically with the pastoral staff, elders, and other influential ministry leaders in a common endeavor. This project brought about clarity concerning the importance of understanding our purpose of existence as a church. It has been through this common understanding of our purpose as a church that the congregation has been

able to work together to take the gospel forward. This common understanding also allows a willingness to make the needed changes in order to fulfill the church's vision, which has not always been easy for our church.

Having gospel clarity was a significant purpose for this project. As a church, we cannot afford to build a ministry with a fabricated gospel that fails to point the lost to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The numerous questions asked of the participants in this project concerning the gospel were essential and necessary to identify an accurate understanding as to how the leadership in the church has been doing with discipleship. Depending on the church and its commitment to biblical training, there appears to be a spectrum in defining what the gospel is and how sinners are to respond toward that gospel. This evaluation was most essential to identify what the membership at Maywood understood as the biblical gospel. It would serve most churches well to evaluate their membership's understanding of the gospel, especially if their desire is to be a Great Commission church.

Most churches naturally have an inward focus and fail to consider how to take the gospel to their community both corporately and individually. Although not all of the ideas developed in this project are worthy of implementing, it demonstrated that the membership is capable of identifying ways to reach out to their community in order to build bridges to share the gospel of Christ. When Christians truly believe that they have the greatest gift from God in their possession, which can bring life and hope to a dying soul, they can then become creative in the possibilities to deliver this message. Although this project is practical in nature, it has served Maywood well and can help other churches to evaluate their purpose, their product, and their processes. Churches have been given a vision statement by Christ in the Great Commission. They have been given the gospel message to distribute, which includes going into the world in order to reach the lost where they live.



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

The majority of this project's evaluation comes from the analysis of the three goals established in the project's proposal. A separate evaluation mechanism was used for each of the goals established. The first goal utilized a pre- and post-sermon survey, called the Vision and Mission Statement Survey (VMS) that measured the membership's understanding of the church's vision and mission statements. The second goal made use of a Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS) in order to understand what the congregation defined as the biblical gospel message. The third goal utilized a strategic action team to identify creative outreach opportunities that could be implemented by the church corporately and the congregation individually. These three goals were established in order that the church membership may clearly understand its purpose of existence, the clarity of the gospel, and develop creative outreach methods with the hope of sharing the gospel of Christ. These goals are consistent with biblical discipleship and can serve to help develop ministry techniques and priorities for all churches.

### **Goal 1**

The first goal of this project was for the congregation to understand the church's vision statement fully. This understanding required educating all church members through a four-week sermon series that provided the biblical rationale for the vision and mission statements. The church's original vision statement, although biblical, was too lengthy for the membership to retain and grasp. Through the shorter, branded vision statement, the membership began to hear me say it over and over again. I would have the church family recite it with me throughout this process. Two months prior to the VMS pre-sermon survey, I chose to have a Vision Sunday that detailed the upcoming fall ministries. I invited the other pastors on stage with me and we discussed together how our vision, "Becoming a people to reach people for Christ," would impact the various ministries that each pastor oversaw. The intent was to show unity in the leadership and that the vision of the church would impact the way that we did ministry. It also allowed the membership to

understand that change will be a part of following the vision. The time with the pastors on stage allowed for the church to see itself as having a common vision statement and provided an invitation for everyone to work together toward this vision.

After sending 80 VMS pre-sermon surveys out to the membership, 60 were returned for the initial survey. From the 60 VMS post-sermon surveys sent out to the membership, 56 returned. The first survey identified that almost 85 percent of participants were able to recite the vision statement perfectly compared with 93 percent on the second survey.<sup>1</sup> Most people felt they knew it well until the end of the survey when they were asked to write it out completely. The majority of those who participated, 93 percent in the first survey and 96 percent in the second survey, indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were in support of the vision statement. The few others who answered were in the “somewhat agreed” category. There were good signs of agreement and strong agreement in the biblical support of the vision statement (first survey was 95 percent and the second survey was 100 percent). There was also strong agreement that the vision statement currently drives the ministries at Maywood and that it would be dangerous operating without a vision statement. I found agreement from 92 percent of the first survey and 95 percent of the second survey that it would be reckless for the church to not have a vision statement as it relates to its choice of ministries that it implements. They strongly felt that the vision statement should steer the church in its daily activities.

The mission statement, which expresses how the church will attain its vision, was seen as equally biblically rooted in comparison to the vision statement. Most of those surveyed felt that they could recite the four components of the church’s mission statement, which are Exalting the Living God, Explaining the Word of God, Encouraging the Family of God, and Extending the Love of God. The first VMS survey revealed that 65 percent could write the mission statement fully. The second VMS survey revealed that

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<sup>1</sup>See appendices 5 and 6 for responses from VMS 1 and VMS 2.

84 percent could now write the mission statement fully. I found that after the first survey, 88 percent could recite more than half of the mission statement compared to 98 percent after the second survey.

There was agreement in both surveys that it was the leadership's responsibility to keep the church focused and on its mission (97 percent first survey and 96 percent second survey). It is currently the pastors and elders who provide, drive, and oversee the vision of the church. The existing vision and mission statements have given shape and direction to the ministries currently taking place. These current statements continue to refashion ministries and give birth to new ministries at the church. Perhaps the disheartening survey question was whether the leadership needed to do a better job explaining and instructing about the vision and mission of the church. Although there were many replies all over the spectrum on this question, the first survey revealed that 49 percent felt that the leaders were doing a good job and the second survey revealed that 62 percent of the leaders were doing a good job. Regardless, the vision and mission of the church cannot be emphasized enough. The statements need to continue to be developed in order that the image of the vision being fulfilled can be better comprehended in the mind of each member. It is worth noting that the vision and mission discussions at Maywood really never developed until this past year throughout my coursework at Southern. Had there not been any prior discussion with the church membership concerning vision and mission of the church, it is doubtful whether this first goal could have proven as successful as it did.

## **Goal 2**

The second goal was to measure the congregation's understanding of the gospel message using the Gospel Analysis Survey (GAS) and was conducted after the four-week sermon series. I directed this survey and it was supported by the same strategic action team that I appointed for the VMS. I wrote the survey based on the material taught in the sermon series. The last sermon specifically focused on a clear gospel presentation and

included select words used in the GAS survey. The survey was reviewed and scored by a panel of four pastors who evaluated the answers from a master answer key that I provided. This goal was critical in order to gain an understanding from the congregation about their knowledge of the gospel as taught in Scripture.

The first question was to define the gospel in their own words and to include any important components that a non-Christian should know in order to come to salvation in Christ. Of the 63 surveys, only 8 failed to define a clear biblical gospel. Only 2 surveyors failed to define sin from a biblical perspective and 3 failed to explain how the wrath of God has been satisfied. They attempted to describe sin and the wrath of God but were unsuccessful in defining it according to what was taught in the sermon series. Seven participants could not define grace or repentance properly or sufficiently. The intent of the survey was not to be too technical and search for evangelical jargon that made no difference. I was determined to find out if the membership had a biblical understanding of the gospel versus a gospel that comes through “easy-believism.” It was disappointing to have 16 (25 percent) surveyors incorrectly explain what it meant that Christ redeems sinners. The desired answer was that Christ paid the necessary price through his shed blood on the cross for forgiveness of sin. Some may have made too much of the answer and some softly described what it meant. The panel of pastors attempted to hold the surveyors to the standard set on the answer key provided to them. The final question on the survey was to explain Romans 10:9-10. A total of 24 individuals failed to answer this verse sufficiently, which represents 38 percent. Four individuals wrote nothing at all. I believe some respondents wanted to be done with the surveys and this question demanded extra thought. Several wrote only a few words but did not dive into the context. The desired answers were that a person believes and confesses Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father. Both repentance and faith are necessary; the heart and the

head come together. Inwardly, men come to agreement with who Christ is and they outwardly display that faith in their life.<sup>2</sup>

### **Goal 3**

The third and final goal was to make use of a second (and different) strategic action team that I appointed to develop creative outreach ideas that could lead to church members sharing the gospel message. I asked the Pastor of Worship and Creative Outreach at the church to spearhead this team and facilitate the discussion. The intent was to look for bridges that could serve as opportunities to share the gospel message. The strategic action team had a larger number of young couples from 20 to 40 years old. The team brainstormed numerous ideas for outreach to do both corporately as a church and for individuals to accomplish independent of the church.<sup>3</sup>

In personally evaluating the list of creative outreach ideas, it appeared that most of the participants often identified outreach events that included the church's assistance. My intent was to create ideas that members could facilitate independent of the church. Maywood plans to always develop outreach events in order to reach out to the community, but the most efficient use of the collective membership is when the membership impacts its own immediate community by living and sharing the gospel message as individuals.

The panel of four pastors reviewed and identified the six most doable and productive outreach events for both corporate and personal outreach. The six corporate events chosen were: a Float in a Local Parade, Outside Movie Night, School Supplies Giveaway, Local Authority Appreciation Dinner, Batteries for Smoke Detectors, and a Small Craft Building Night. These events are certainly subjective, but most pastors have a good idea of whether or not a congregation is capable of making them happen and if

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix 7 for results of GAS survey.

<sup>3</sup>See appendix 8 for the list of corporate and personal creative outreach ideas.

they would reap some type of benefit. The six personal events chosen were: Serve the City, Welcome Wagon, Adopt a Family, Grocery Night, Selfless Day, and a Friday Night Dinner. Many people do not feel as if they have creative ideas to reach out to their neighbors. The intent was to help the membership see that, as they live life in their community, opportunities abound all around them. Not all the pastors selected the same creative outreach events, but the results listed in appendix 8 were chosen most often.<sup>4</sup>

The pastors were asked to rate the quality of the events given by the strategic action team, and the pastors responded favorably overall. The pastors believed that the events had an appeal to the general public. They also believed that the identified events appeared to be welcoming to the community and non-threatening in nature. There was strong agreement by the pastors that the events demonstrated generosity and hospitality toward the community. They also acknowledged that the events did not come across as second-rate in nature. There was common agreement that the events created a conducive atmosphere for interacting with people and sharing the gospel. Lastly, it was agreed that the nature of the events honored Christ and did not violate his Word.<sup>5</sup>

### **Strengths of the Project**

A major strength of the project was that Maywood gained a greater understanding of its purpose and existence. The work of branding the vision statement and the process of casting the vision has been most rewarding. Through much prayer, reading, education, and ongoing dialog with the leadership of the church, God has cemented his plans for us as a church, and it is defined for us in our vision statement. Our vision is then carried out through the use of the mission statement. This project challenged me as a leader in how I must continue to cast the vision week after week before the membership. The journey forced me, along with the other pastors and elders,

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<sup>4</sup>See appendix 8 for the list of Creative Outreach Ideas.

<sup>5</sup>See appendix 9 to view the Community Outreach Evaluation Results.

to evaluate current ministries in light of the vision statement. The value of understanding our vision has been refreshing as it allows the leadership to decide how to spend time, ministry dollars, and utilize people. The people at Maywood continue to grow in their excitement as our vision continues to grow with a strong outward focus toward the community. The church has witnessed souls coming to know Christ and they are seeing changed lives regularly. Although difficult, change is always shaped and directed by the vision of the church.

Gospel clarity is perhaps the greatest strength gained through this project. As lead pastor, I have been personally challenged to make known the clear gospel as represented in Scripture. I cannot afford to miss the mark and misrepresent what the Word of God teaches pertaining to sin and salvation through Christ alone. This action is my most significant task as a minister of the gospel of Christ. Those who know Christ as Savior must be consumed in sharing the gospel message and must be able to verbalize it in such a way that others are led into a meaningful and genuine relationship with Christ. The people at Maywood hear the gospel preached and taught regularly and are regularly growing in their ability to defend and share the gospel. A genuine conversion is best testified in godly living.

Through this project and ongoing teaching, there is a growing understanding by the people at Maywood that all Christians are to live their lives on mission for God. Being gospel focused means looking for opportunities to genuinely love on people in hopes of sharing the glorious gospel of Christ. My hope is to heighten the priority of evangelism at Maywood, especially as it relates to personal outreach by each church member.

Lastly, another strength of this project has been for me to see my personal leadership skills stretched and challenged. My personal walk with Christ and my love for His church places me on a mission each day. Considering the biblical mandates

throughout Scripture for God's people to be the light to the world, I have a great deal of work and responsibility in helping God's people fulfill God's calling on their lives.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

There were certainly areas for improvement in order to have allowed for a smoother project and perhaps even stronger results. First, the panel of four pastors who scored the GAS survey and the Creative Outreach Evaluation had to utilize a good amount of subjective judgment. The master answer key I gave to each pastor was used to grade the GAS survey; it was necessary, however, for the pastors to interpret what the surveyors wrote in light of the master answer key. Not everyone writes the same when striving to convey their thoughts. It was necessary for the pastors to make subjective calls on the various answers especially since each answer was in a short essay form. I instructed the pastors to expect good solid answers and to work closely within the guidelines of the master answer key. After reading through the answers that were marked wrong, I would have personally given more grace on some of the answers provided by the participants. Perhaps a team of pastors could have worked together in grading the surveys in order to have given more latitude with the answers provided. I do believe, however, that the pastors all worked with integrity, which is what I wanted. Evaluating the six best corporate and personal creative outreach ideas was purely a subjective grading by the pastors. Once again, there may have been some value had the pastors worked as a team and discussed the merit of each of the events together rather than individually.

The planning of the sermon schedule was difficult and could have worked better in the springtime of the following year. My hope was to attach it on the backside of our Vision Sunday, which occurred early in the fall, but the pre-sermon VMS surveys were not complete and mailed out. The sermon series ended up being stuck in the middle of a holiday schedule, but it was necessary to go ahead and begin the series in order to keep the process moving. If it were not for writing deadlines, I would have shifted the time in order to gain the best results possible.



I would have desired a greater participation, especially with the GAS survey. I also wish that more people had elaborated on their answers because, at times, it caused some to get questions marked wrong. The GAS survey was sent out just after Thanksgiving and returned a few days before Christmas. I made a bold move to make this process happen, but due to my writing schedule, time was of essence. I was truly thankful to have received the surveys back that I did, but it did require a great deal of effort to connect and follow up with those surveyed. I believe some of the surveys were filled out minimally because of the busyness at this time of the year. Overall, there was a good response that represented approximately 10 percent of the weekly attendance.

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

The first thing that I would do differently is develop a prayer team that would meet with me once a month to share how my writing project was going and to spend time in prayer together. This prayer would have prepared my heart for the journey, sustained me along the way, and allowed the church to be more engaged in this chapter of my life. The church family could have experienced a deeper sense of what was taking place. In addition, the prayer team could have prayed specifically with me during each phase of the project.

Second, I would have managed my writing calendar differently, even if it meant shifting the project six weeks one way or the other around the holidays. The cumbersome schedule at the end of the project created an unnecessary weight and the results could have been stronger and more satisfying had I changed the schedule.

A third change would be the inclusion of more people from the congregation in the samplings. A much better sampling would have been 20 percent of the weekly attendance; this change, however, would have meant a better explanation to the church about the project in order to provide greater connectedness on their part to my project. I believe this would have been possible, but I saw the project as a disruption at times to

current ministry taking place. I was not sure how much cooperation I would receive from the congregation, but I would try for a greater percentage next time.

Last, I would have made use of life groups to help facilitate the surveys. The life groups are more than capable and I believe they would have been willing. It would have allowed them to have greater buy-in of the church vision and a deeper understanding of the gospel endeavor. Choosing to make use of paid staff to help facilitate the surveys made it easy and productive, but more people in the church could have been recipients of this understanding. The participation of life groups, if established earlier on, could have made lighter work for me.

### **Theological Reflections**

Building a strong biblical foundation for the project was invaluable. Seeing the mission of God throughout the Old and New Testaments was critical because it helped put the work of the church in proper perspective. All churches have been given the same Great Commission, yet churches function differently. Some churches willfully and some unintentionally have missed the calling God has given them to share the gospel with the world. As a church belonging to God, Maywood cannot sit idle or rest in self-preservation mode only to exist to entertain itself.

Vision is also God-given, and he leads through the work of his Spirit and according to his objective Word. My responsibility is to shepherd through the truths of God's Word. As a godly leader, I must work and walk with conviction in order to be a credible leader who can move people closer to God's calling on their lives. I am learning that as a vision caster it is much easier to cast vision when God's people see it as his vision and his priority for his church. I continue to see and appreciate the privilege it is to lead others into a deeper relationship with Christ, even to the point of evangelizing their lost community.

The largest theological lesson learned from this project is the priority of a pure gospel as taught in Scripture. At times, I assume too much what people should know

about God's Word and especially about the gospel message. The gospel rests at the core of God's calling upon his people. Delivering the wrong or incomplete gospel is to deliver an empty gospel. My commitment during this program and project has been to passionately teach about God's plan of redemption that comes through the gospel. My desire as pastor of Maywood is to be biblically rooted, driven by the gospel, for the glory of God.

### **Personal Reflections as a Minister**

I learned several things about myself during this project. For the reasons I am about to list, I would be willing to do this program and project all over again. I learned that as a leader I must lead others well. Not all who want to lead are capable of leading. My personal character must be above reproach and I must demonstrate a personal confidence toward others that I know where I am going and why they must move toward that end together. Trust in my character and ability is essential, so it means that I must keep growing in my faith and in my knowledge of ministry. As a leader, I must keep developing other leaders who can help lead others. Through this process, God has taught me the extreme value of tenure as a pastor at the same church.

I have been reminded of how important it is that I be the primary teacher of God's people at Maywood. I cannot assume that all of the people at this church are steeped in pure theology or that they are competent to share the biblical gospel with others. Ongoing training and development will always be a part of the discipleship process at Maywood. My longing and desire is that God's people at Maywood would always be able to testify of ongoing conversions because they are faithfully and personally sharing the gospel with others.

Last, this project has helped me see the need to continue to stimulate and develop creative thought as to how to share the gospel message with our community. My enthusiasm and initiative, along with the other pastors on staff, will serve as a catalyst for the congregation in order for more creative ministry to occur or develop and to build

bridges to deliver the gospel to the community. I cannot assume that just because the people at Maywood understand and can articulate the gospel that they are sharing the gospel. I need to live this personally, celebrate the victories, and nudge God's people forward to be involved in the Great Commission.

### **Conclusion**

This project has made an impact on the church leadership as well as myself. The church at large has never talked about our vision as much as we do today. I understand that vision casting, gospel training, and creatively reaching out to neighbors are a never-ending job. It cannot be the work of the pastors alone to make these things happen. Leadership development and training are essential to the success of becoming a Great Commission church. As ministries, resources, and people align with the current vision statement, we will be much closer to fulfilling what God has called us to do, "Becoming a people to reach people for Christ." My desire is that the name of Jesus Christ would be glorified as he builds his church through us as a disciple making people. May we live to the praise of his great glory!

## APPENDIX 1

### VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT SURVEY (VMS)

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to identify the current understanding and familiarity with the vision and mission statements of Maywood Evangelical Free Church. Gary Kniseley is conducting the survey for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research you will be asked to answer questions before a four-week sermon series about the church vision and mission statements. After the four-week sermon series you will be asked to answer the same questions as in the pre-class survey. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this survey.

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

- |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I know the vision statement of Maywood EFC.                        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I can recite the majority of the vision statement from memory.     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I am committed to the vision statement of Maywood EFC.             | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. The vision statement is founded on Scripture.                      | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. The vision statement needs to be rewritten.                        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. The vision statement is not communicated well to the congregation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I am personally involved in fulfilling the vision of Maywood EFC.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Others in the church really don't know the vision of Maywood EFC.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. Others in the church grasp the vision of Maywood EFC.              | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 10. The vision statement drives the ministry and programs of Maywood EFC.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. Vision statements are important to a church ministry.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. Without a vision statement people tend to do what they feel is important.                                      | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I know the difference between a vision and mission statement.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I can verbalize the four E's of Maywood EFC's mission statement.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. The mission statement should steer the church to fulfilling its vision.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. Each ministry within the church should possess each component of the mission statement.                        | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Each component of the mission statement is of equal value.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. The mission statement is biblically rooted.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. I support the vision and mission statements of the church.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. Church leadership needs to do a better job explaining and speaking about the vision and mission of the church. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. Church leadership is responsible for striving to keep the church focused on its mission.                       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Please write the church's vision statement:

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What are the four E's that explain the church's mission statement?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 2

GOSPEL ANALYSIS SURVEY (GAS)

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to identify your understanding of the gospel message as taught in Scripture at Maywood Evangelical Free Church. Gary Kniseley is conducting the survey for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Please complete the questions as thoroughly as possible and use added paper if necessary. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this survey.

*Note:* Any Bible verses that you can use to support your answers would be helpful.

1. Define the **gospel** in your own words. Please indicate what the gospel should be comprised of in order to be shared completely and properly with a non-Christian.

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2. Define **sin**:

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3. Define **grace**:

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4. What does it mean to **repent** of one's sins?

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5. What does it mean that Christ **redeems** sinners?

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6. How has the **wrath of God** been satisfied?

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7. Why is the **resurrection** important to the gospel message?

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8. **Explain** Romans 10:9-10? “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

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## APPENDIX 3

### MASTER RUBRIC ANSWER KEY FOR GOSPEL ANALYSIS SURVEY (GAS)

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

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

*Note:* Members were encouraged to provide Bible verses to support their answers, as they were able to do so.

1. Define the **gospel** in your own words. Please indicate what the gospel should be comprised of in order to be shared completely and properly with a non-Christian.
  - Man is a sinner by nature and by choice and cannot save himself (Rom 3:10; 23)
  - Man is condemned to an eternal Hell as his just reward for his sin. (Rom 6:23)
  - The gospel is the good news that God loved the world enough to give his only son to die for our sin and in our place. (Rom 5:8)
  - The gospel involves Jesus' death on the cross as the sin offering to fulfill God's righteous demands. (Rom 8:3-4)
  - Through repentance and belief in Jesus Christ, as the only way to the Father, one can have eternal life with God. (John 3:16; 14:6; Rom 10:9-10,13)
  - The gospel is the good news that we who were once enemies with God were reconciled by Christ's blood, forgiven, and adopted into God's family. (Rom 5:10; 1 John 1:12)
  
2. Define **sin**:
  - Sin is a violation and a transgression against the laws of God. (1 John 3:4)
  - Sin is a direct violation against God's holy standards. (Rom 7:12-14)
  - Sin is the opposite of God's righteousness. (Rom 3:10)
  
3. Define **grace**:
  - Grace is receiving from God what could never be earned. (Eph 2:8-9)
  - Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. (John 3:16)
  - Grace is a gift from God. (Eph 4:7)
  - Grace defines the character of God.
  - Grace is God granting forgiveness and favor instead of judgment and damnation. (Rom 5:8-10)

4. What does it mean to **repent** of one's sins?
  - Repentance is turning from one's sin and turning to God. (Luke 3:8-14; Acts 26:20)
  - Repentance is changing one's mind concerning Jesus Christ and placing their faith in him for salvation. (Acts 2:38)
  
5. What does it mean that Christ **redeems** sinners?
  - Christ has purchased our freedom from the bondage of sin and slavery through the shedding of his blood. (Rom 3:24; Gal 3:13)
  - Jesus paid the price for the release from our sin and its consequences. (Mat 20:28)
  - Christ's death was in exchange for our life.
  
6. Redemption is only possible through Christ's death and his blood. (Col 1:14)  
How has the **wrath of God** been satisfied?
  - God's wrath was satisfied in the death of his Son and the blood that he shed for our sin. (Rom 3:23-24; 1 John 4:10)
  
7. Why is the **resurrection** important to the gospel message?
  - The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees our future resurrection. (1 Cor 15:54-55)
  - If Christ had not been risen then he was not who he said he was. (1 Cor 15:12-19)
  - If Christ was not raised then we are still stuck in our sins and salvation would not be possible. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)
  - If Christ was not raised then there is no gospel to be preached. (1 Cor 15:12-19)
  - Christ's resurrection authenticated his own claims that he would be raised on third day. (Mark 8:31)
  
8. **Explain** Romans 10:9-10? "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."
  - A person believes and confesses Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father.
  - Both repentance and faith are necessary for salvation.
  - Inwardly men come to agreement with who Christ is and they outwardly display that faith in their life.
  - Both a heart experience and a head knowledge are necessary in salvation.

APPENDIX 4

COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVALUATION

Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Church-wide and Individual Event Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=great potential					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The events identified have an appeal to the general public.					
The events identified appear welcoming and non-threatening in nature.					
The events identified demonstrate generosity and hospitality.					
The events do not appear to be second-rate events.					
The events appear to provide ample opportunity for people to interact with one another.					
The events appear to lend themselves to sharing the gospel.					
The events appear doable by the church and by individuals.					
The events honor Jesus Christ and His Word.					

Identify Your 6 Top Choices for “Onsite” Outreach:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Identify Your 6 Top Choices for “Offsite” Outreach:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 5

PRE-SERMON RESPONSES TO VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT SURVEY

Table A1. Pre-sermon responses to Vision and Mission Statement Survey

Statement	Agreement					
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I know the vision statement of MEFC.	1	1	1	7	16	34
2. I can recite the majority of the vision statement from memory.	1	5	0	7	13	35
3. I am committed to the vision statement of MEFC.	0	0	0	4	17	37
4. The vision statement is founded on Scripture.	0	0	0	3	12	44
5. The vision statement needs to be rewritten.	24	24	5	3	0	0
6. The vision statement is not communicated well to the congregation.	22	20	3	7	6	0
7. I am personally involved in fulfilling the vision of MEFC.	0	1	1	8	28	20
8. Others in the church really don't know the vision of MEFC.	2	14	17	15	2	2
9. Others in the church grasp the vision of MEFC.	0	0	3	16	30	5
10. The vision statement drives the ministry and programs of MEFC.	0	0	0	7	21	31
11. Vision statements are important to a church ministry.	0	0	1	8	19	31
12. Without a vision statement people tend to do what they feel is important.	0	2	3	13	28	13
13. I know the different between a vision statement and a mission statement.	1	8	7	15	20	8
14. I can verbalize the four E's of MEFC's mission statement.	0	7	4	26	9	10
15. The mission statement should steer the church to fulfilling its vision.	0	0	1	6	20	31
16. Each ministry within the church should possess each component of the mission statement.	1	2	3	6	25	20
17. Each component of the mission statement is of equal value.	1	2	3	11	21	17
18. The mission statement is biblically rooted.	0	0	1	1	20	38
19. I support the vision and mission statements of the church.	0	0	0	3	17	39
20. Church leadership needs to do a better job explaining and speaking about the vision and mission of the church.	3	16	11	14	14	1
21. Church leadership is responsible for striving to keep the church focused on its mission.	0	0	2	5	25	28

## APPENDIX 6

### POST-SERMON RESPONSES TO VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT SURVEY

Table A2. Post-sermon responses to Vision and Mission Statement Survey

Statement	Agreement					
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I know the vision statement of MEFC.	0	1	0	2	17	36
2. I can recite the majority of the vision statement from memory.	1	2	1	4	20	28
3. I am committed to the vision statement of MEFC.	0	0	0	2	19	35
4. The vision statement is founded on Scripture.	0	0	0	0	12	44
5. The vision statement needs to be rewritten.	24	25	2	4	1	0
6. The vision statement is not communicated well to the congregation.	18	28	4	3	3	0
7. I am personally involved in fulfilling the vision of MEFC.	0	0	0	7	25	22
8. Others in the church really don't know the vision of MEFC.	2	19	12	11	4	0
9. Others in the church grasp the vision of MEFC.	0	0	2	12	35	4
10. The vision statement drives the ministry and programs of MEFC.	0	0	0	2	23	31
11. Vision statements are important to a church ministry.	0	0	0	3	23	30
12. Without a vision statement people tend to do what they feel is important.	0	3	0	7	31	15
13. I know the different between a vision statement and a mission statement.	0	6	2	9	27	11
14. I can verbalize the four E's of MEFC's mission statement.	0	0	2	17	23	14
15. The mission statement should steer the church to fulfilling its vision.	0	0	0	5	29	22
16. Each ministry within the church should possess each component of the mission statement.	1	1	0	6	26	21
17. Each component of the mission statement is of equal value.	1	4	0	8	25	18
18. The mission statement is biblically rooted.	0	0	0	1	18	37
19. I support the vision and mission statements of the church.	0	0	0	1	18	37
20. Church leadership needs to do a better job explaining and speaking about the vision and mission of the church.	5	18	11	13	8	1
21. Church leadership is responsible for striving to keep the church focused on its mission.	0	2	0	8	22	24

## APPENDIX 7

### GAS RESULTS: INCORRECT ANSWERS

Table A3. GAS results: Incorrect answers

GAS Survey Questions	Incorrect
1. Define the gospel in your own words. Please indicate what the gospel should be comprised of in order to be shared completely and properly with a non-Christian.	8 (13%)
2. Define sin.	2 (03%)
3. Define grace.	7 (11%)
4. What does it mean to repent of one's sins?	7 (11%)
5. What does it mean that Christ redeems sinners?	16 (25%)
6. How has the wrath of God been satisfied?	3 (04%)
7. Why is the resurrection important to the gospel message?	5 (13%)
8. Explain Romans 10:9-10	24 (38%)

## APPENDIX 8

### CREATIVE OUTREACH IDEAS PROVIDED BY STRATEGIC ACTION TEAM

#### **Personal Outreach Ideas**

- Grocery Night: Purchase & deliver groceries to a family in need or a new family that moved into your neighborhood.
- Life group: Deliver care packages to shut-ins, college kids, or military personnel.
- Life group: Christmas caroling in a nursing home or local neighborhood.
- Life group: Friend Night—everyone invites at least one friend to attend.
- Tail gating party: Show up at sports events, offer food and games, free to everyone passing by.
- High School Tutoring.
- Big Brother: One on one mentoring ministry.
- Adopt a Family: Shuttle kids to church, go to lunch, get to know families personally and celebrate life with them.
- Serve the City: Staff an event or serve on a local board.
- Welcome Wagon: Help people who move to the area to get settled. Share a house-warming gift, take dinner to them, and welcome them into the community).
- Clean up Day: Families initiate a clean up day in the community.
- Neighborhood Cook Out: Invite a couple of neighbors over for a cookout. Consider inviting another church family over to help host the event.
- Community Sports Night: Host another family and take them to a sports event or watch it on your own big screen, and have a party with them.
- Friday Night Dinner: Invite another family over for dinner to cultivate a relationship with them.
- Free Lawn Service: Provide free lawn care to someone who had surgery or a set back.
- Free House Cleaning: Help an elderly person with spring-cleaning.
- Leaf Raking and Gutter Cleaning for the elderly.
- Selfless Day: Take a full Saturday or extended weekend to help a neighbor with a big project they are trying to accomplish.

#### **Corporate Outreach Ideas**

- Maywood Ice Cream Truck: Play Christian music such as Chris Tomlin.
- Event in the Park (play music, distribute school supplies, have a baseball game).



- Fun Fest: Games for kids, free event, cookout hamburgers and hot dogs!
- Outdoor Movie: Show in a parking lot or local park and provide free snacks.
- Evolution Debate: Local school or from a private sector.
- Big Brother or Big Sister: Mentoring for one year.
- Field Games: Host on Maywood property (soccer, baseball, etc.).
- Special Needs: Minister to a family with special needs.
- Oil Change Ministry: Change oil in cars and lawn mowers and offer blade sharpening.
- House Repair Ministry: Simple repairs for those in desperate need.
- Music Bus: Arrive at parks, Ice Cream, Games, Tie-dye t-shirts, & Gospel sharing.
- Concert & Meal: Appreciation for local authorities (police, fire, teachers and politicians)
- Haunted House: Share about a life lived apart from Christ and present the gospel.
- Smoke Detectors: Change out batteries in the local neighborhood.
- Computer Assistance: Training on programs such as Facebook, Skype, Microsoft Office, and offer minor repair.
- School Supplies: Distribute at a public gathering such as a community market.
- Caroling and Cookie distribution in a local mall or park.
- Music Workshop for Kids: Teaching instruments and voice lessons for children.
- 5 K Run: Sponsor and orchestrate.
- Blood Drive: Sponsor through Red Cross
- Local Parade: Build float, share candy, and Maywood paraphernalia such as children ministries material.
- Maywood Square (Countdown like Times Square).
- Free Car Wash on church property.
- Local Café and Sushi Night at the church café.
- Small Craft Building & Training: For men, women, and Children.

APPENDIX 9

COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVALUATION RESULTS

<b>Church-wide and Individual Event Evaluation</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=great potential</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The events identified have an appeal to the general public.			4		Each event meets different needs. Good variety. Some have limitations.
The events identified appear welcoming and non-threatening in nature.			4		
The events identified demonstrate generosity and hospitality.			1	3	
The events do not appear to be second-rate events.			4		Most are great NEW ideas.
The events appear to provide ample opportunity for people to interact with one another.			3	1	There is much opportunity but only if members take advantage of it.
The events appear to lend themselves to sharing the gospel.				4	There are many relationship-building opportunities. Gospel delivery must be thought through for each event.
The events appear doable by the church and by individuals.			4		Some may be limited by the abilities of the elderly. Some may be limited by costs.
The events honor Jesus Christ and His Word.			1	3	

**Identify Your 6 Top Choices for “Corporate” Outreach:**

1. Float in a Local Parade
2. Outside Movie Night
3. School Supplies Giveaway

4. Local Authority Appreciation Dinner
5. Replacing Batteries in Smoke Detectors
6. Small Craft Building Night

**Identify Your 6 Top Choices for “Personal” Outreach:**

1. Serve the City
2. Welcome Wagon
3. Adopt a Family
4. Grocery Night
5. Selfless Day
6. Friday Night Dinner

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## ABSTRACT

### PREPARING MEMBERS AT MAYWOOD EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, TO REACH THEIR COMMUNITY FOR CHRIST

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Chapter 1 is an introduction to the project, containing information about the current state of the church and providing rationale for the project. Included are the ministry context and demographic information of the Maywood community. The goals of the project and the methodology are also provided.

Chapter 2 establishes the biblical basis for the project. The basis for the project centers on the Great Commission to “Go and make disciples,” as found in Matthew 28:19-20. The over-arching theme of Scripture is God’s redemption of mankind for His glory. Both Old and New Testaments provide the foundation for God’s mission as it is accomplished through Christ.

Chapter 3 provides the current methods and changes that effective leaders and churches are making in order to develop an outward focused ministry to their community. The intent is to show that adapting a new church culture is necessary in most cases in order to reach their community with the gospel.

Chapter 4 gives the details of the project along with the implementation of the goals of the project. The goals of the project work together to foster an outward focused church that is compelled to share the gospel with its immediate community.



Chapter 5 evaluates the effects of the project in determining whether or not Maywood understands its vision, mission, and the gospel message. It identifies ways that Maywood will work toward fulfilling the Great Commission both personally and corporately.

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