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IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLEMAKING MODEL AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
IN VIDALIA, LOUISIANA

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Wesley Taylor Faulk
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IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLEMAKING MODEL AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
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Wesley Taylor Faulk

Read and Approved by:

William D. Henard III (Faculty Supervisor)

Timothy K. Beougher

Date _____

I dedicate this paper to my wife, Jennifer,
and our two daughters, Ana and Emma,
who have sacrificed greatly in this pursuit.

I also dedicate this to First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana,
the bride of Jesus Christ, for His glory.

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PREFACE

I am thankful for the investment of a host of men and women who gave me the ability and joy of working toward a Doctor of Ministry degree. I am thankful for a mother who never gave up on this dyslexic child even when the school system did. I am thankful for my wife, whose encouragement challenged me to pursue doctoral work and whose sacrifice made it possible.

I am thankful for the pastors and professors who helped to mold me. I am grateful to Don Guthrie for serving as my example in church revitalization. I am in debt to Dr. Joe Ligon; I would not be the pastor I am today without his investment in me. I have an immense gratitude to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for challenging me intellectually and setting me on a solid foundation theologically. I am thankful for the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Bill Henard, as he oversaw this project, as well as Betsy Fredrick who edited my project.

I am grateful to God for the churches whom He has used to mold me as a pastor. I am thankful for First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas, who nurtured my call to ministry and supported my education. I am thankful for Central Baptist Church of Okinawa, Japan, who called me when I had no experience and little understanding of what pastoral work entailed. I am especially thankful for First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana, that has given me the gift of time and encouragement to pursue my doctorate.

It is truly an honor to be their pastor. My prayer for FBCV is that this project might serve to build up the church for the glory of God.

Wes Faulk

Vidalia, Louisiana

May 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana, exists to connect people to God, to each other, and to the world. The mission statement reflects, in FBCV's own words, their call to accomplish the mission of God. Like many churches' mission statements, First Baptist Church of Vidalia's purpose is stated on the literature the church produces, but in reality, the statement does little to direct the ministries of the church and shape the hearts of its people. A clear and simple discipleship process should be the primary catalyst in supporting the mission of the church. God's mission is seen as being accomplished through the implementation of discipleship throughout Scripture¹ and is clearly defined in His Great Commission to the church before His ascension.² The strength of any church, in particular First Baptist Church of Vidalia, will be in its ability to reach and disciple the people within the community.

Context

First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana (FBCV), has existed as a congregation for the last seventy years. Over the last several decades, it has had relatively little conflict and has maintained the same attendance level, around 400, within a declining community of 5000 people. The focus in this project was whether the people of FBCV were equipped through the organization of the church to accomplish the Great

¹ Deut 6:5-9 emphasizes to the Jewish nation the command of God to constantly disciple the people in the fear and love of God.

² Jesus gave the Great Commission to his disciples in Matt 18:18-20, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21-23, and Acts 1:8. Mark 16:15-18 is excluded from this project due to textual variations and questions of its authenticity.

Commission of Christ articulated in their mission statement, specifically among teenagers and adults under the age of forty. If the church was ill equipped to disciple and train its young membership to accomplish the mission of the church, it then needed to determine and implement a system or program that would best equip the church to accomplish its mission. Empowering and leading FBCV to accomplish its mission would prove helpful to other churches by giving them a model by which to evaluate and build discipleship organizations within their own contexts.

FBCV maintains a small group Sunday School structure that is traditional to most Southern Baptist Churches. For most of FBCV's history, the small group structure has centered on age grading with a common curriculum as determined by either a Sunday School director or pastor. Over the last decade, the Sunday School structure at FBCV has grown disorganized due to minimal leadership guidance. The result of the disorganization is a collection of Sunday School classes that is not defined by any characteristics other than the style of the teacher and the curriculums/studies determined by the classes themselves. These classes cover a wide and inconsistent variety of Bible studies, including book studies, Lifeway curriculum, and video-driven sermon series. Classes are organized with little thought of holistic growth or long-term strategy. Neither the classes nor the structure of the church's small groups intentionally build up their members to accomplish the mission of the church. The disconnection in the small group structure is seen in the ratio of Sunday School to worship attendance. While worship attendance has risen slightly over the past three years, Sunday School maintained the same attendance levels, losing ground from 55 percent to roughly 50 percent.

Working with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 as a model for discipleship, a healthy church member should be able to both lead a nonbeliever to faith in Christ as well as lead them to spiritual maturity. A healthy church discipleship strategy, when implemented and executed correctly, would naturally equip the membership to these very tasks. At FBCV, the majority of the membership assumes that

the work of evangelism is mainly accomplished within the Sunday morning worship service. The same can be said for equipping the membership to model and lead others in following Jesus. There has not been a concentrated effort in the recent history of the church to equip the church members to share their faith or teach them to present the gospel of Christ to a nonbeliever. Within FBCV, the most natural means of equipping believers is through Sunday School. In his book on revitalizing Sunday School, Ken Hemphill stated, “The age-graded Sunday School provides the best organizational structure for organizing the church’s outreach program.”³ The organization of Sunday School is devoid of any training or strategy in this regard. Because of the lack of training, the membership of the church lacks a passion and zeal for the lost since the church has not been taught nor equipped to serve through its discipleship structures. The membership views evangelism as the job of the ministerial staff.

Another weakness of the discipleship process of FBCV is the accumulation of biblical knowledge without real life application and practice. This deficiency is largely the result of the discipleship process’s failure to define adequately what a healthy believer is and does. Most, if not all, of the Sunday School classes at FBCV study Scripture without a greater purpose or plan in place. The natural consequence of the disorganization and carelessness of such a discipleship structure is a believer who knows an immense amount of Bible knowledge but has little life change connected to that knowledge. The Sunday School classes of FBCV, with a few exceptions, do not serve to equip believers to accomplish the church’s mission or make disciples; they simply serve to educate people in the facts of Scripture without applying it to their lives.

In looking across the membership of FBCV and studying the fruit of the different generations of believers, it is abundantly clear that the majority of the young adult membership possesses an uncommon spiritual maturity and zeal for ministry. The

³ Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur: A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 94.

younger adults of FBCV have a heart to reach Vidalia with the gospel. They are a solid, core group of passionate believers who are living out Scripture, as evidenced by their desire to invest in their community through different avenues of ministry, foster parenting and adoption, and an eagerness to be led to be on mission with the church. It is important to differentiate the young adults who have joined the church recently from the young adults who were raised in the church. The core of spiritually mature believers among the young adults are not the members who have been raised in the church but those who have moved here from out of town.

Much of the young adult population raised from within the church, with exceptions, are by-products of poor discipleship with little zeal to accomplish the mission of the church. The declining attendance among adults within Sunday School at FBCV is due to the fact that they see no value in what Sunday School provides. Thom Rainer, in his study of Millennial believers, builds the case that Millennial Christians will only invest in church and programs that are of value: “A defining characteristic of Millennial Christians is their serious approach to the Bible and their faith. They are not content with their parents’ lukewarm faith.”⁴ Part of this study questioned how to raise up leaders from within the existing membership as well as reclaim many of the young adults who either dropped out of FBCV’s discipleship structure or stopped going to church all together. Those who are raised in Vidalia are generally staying in the community once they become adults.⁵ With those raised in the community staying in the community, it was imperative to rework the discipleship process to connect with this generation.

For young adults who are new to the community or the church, the existing discipleship strategy of the church, by design, frustrates their assimilation into the life of

⁴ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 263.

⁵ 2010 Census ESRI, “2010 Census Profile for Concordia Parrish, Louisiana,” (Concordia Parrish, LA: ESRI, 2010), accessed November 14, 2016, <http://esri.com>.

the church. With most groups built around personality of the teacher or leader and not around the defining features and characteristics of the group itself, new members are lost in understanding where they fit and where they might best learn. The lack of organization confuses new members, leading them to drop out of Sunday School and preventing them from establishing relationships that would further unite them to the church as a whole. When this happens, new members are slowed in their spiritual growth and run the risk of not assimilating into the life of the church. A lack of assimilation will inevitably lead to them either finding a new church or dropping out altogether.

In summary, the discipleship structure has eroded over time to its current condition of being ineffective in terms of reaching its goal. A system designed to equip believers to accomplish the mission of the church currently serves to disorganize and render believers ineffective in accomplishing much of anything. FBCV either needs to reform its Sunday School or launch a new discipleship structure that can accomplish discipleship. FBCV needs to set a clear process with clear goals. The church needs to incorporate its mission, the Great Commission, into this goal. FBCV should build a discipleship structure that will lead its people to connect to God, each other, and the world.

Rationale

Without any intervention, FBCV could very possibly squander its membership, ministries, and facilities. The church has the potential to minister to the community in a profound way and has the opportunity to see many people become followers of Jesus Christ. With the possible realignment and repurposing of its discipleship structures, the church has the potential to grow in both spiritual depth as well as numerical expansion as it sees men and women from the community come to faith in Jesus Christ.

First, FBCV was currently prepared for alignment because its membership desired to grow spiritually. They had a genuine desire to grow in their faith and see others do the same and the leadership, specifically among young adult laymen and staff, was

ready to see change in Sunday School. Beyond the membership, the general church leadership saw issues as well. As a whole, the church leaders desired to accomplish more, have a higher Sunday School to worship service attendance ratio, and see outsiders become a part of the fellowship. The church desired to grow spiritually but had not connected the Sunday School program to the mission of the church.

Second, not only did the church desire spiritual growth, but they also desired to see the unbelieving community transformed through the gospel. However, even with a desire to see lives changed, they saw minimal results because so few people in discipleship were involved in active ministry. It was my belief that most within the discipleship structure felt ill equipped for this basic Christian task.

Third, even though FBCV is a church that runs 350 to 400 people in the Sunday worship service, the church's core resided within multigenerational families who have lived in the Mississippi-Louisiana area for many generations. The deeply rooted community dynamic drove the leadership of the church. The church's ability or inability to disciple those raised in the church from the cradle directly dictated its future. If the church continued to produce consumers with little regard for ministry, the future leaders of the church would emulate a consumeristic value. If, on the other hand, the church disciplined and invested in the teenagers and young adults, leading them to depth and ministry passion, then the future of the church would rest in these values. The young adults within FBCV would be the leaders of the church. The discipleship given to them in their early adulthood would directly affect the long-term future of the church.

Fourth, studies showed that young adults who were serious in their faith would gravitate toward churches that required a greater commitment in membership than just attendance.⁶ Young adults were looking for churches whose structure accomplished true spiritual growth. They were looking for churches where ministry was more than just a

⁶ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 255.

busy schedule and churches that accomplished a greater purpose. Young adults were looking to be a part of a community that mattered. Alignment of the discipleship structure was key in gaining committed young adults. If the church was to attract younger adults who move into the community, it needed to reform its own discipleship process where the structure fostered intentional spiritual growth as well as quality evangelism and ministry.

Finally, if nothing changed at FBCV, the church would be left with the same or even more diminishing results. The current condition of the Sunday School structure was due in part to a lack of intentional oversight. A lack of purpose to the Sunday School was a part of the dropout rates among teenagers transitioning to young adults. The simplest rationale for changing the discipleship process of FBCV was asking what would happen if nothing was changed. If nothing changed, FBCV would lose those raised in its ministries as well as fail to reach those in the community who are not believers in Jesus. In essence, a lack of change would lead to the long-term decline of this church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to implement a disciplemaking model among young adults at First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana.

Goals

Developing disciples among the young adults of FBCV required measured steps that were detailed and implemented within this ministry project. The goal was to equip young adults to accomplish the mission of FBCV, and the project was executed through both the Sunday School structure and the home groups of the church. The project sought to enable small group leaders to teach the curriculum and then equip their classes to live out the mission of FBCV.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the knowledge of basic doctrine and spiritual disciplines among young adult participants aged 18-35.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop a four-session curriculum to equip young adults in the mission of FBCV.

3. The third goal was to equip teachers to communicate and teach the curriculum.
4. The fourth goal was to implement the curriculum, utilizing the Sunday School model already in place.

Research Methodology

Four goals guided and shaped the direction and overall effectiveness of this project. The first goal of this project was to assess young adult participants' knowledge of basic doctrine and spiritual disciplines. It was vital to the project that a level of both knowledge and practice be assessed at the beginning of the process to measure the progress of each member throughout the duration of the training.⁷ The church currently has five classes where the ages of members range from adolescence into the mid-forties. Rather than limiting the range of ages in this project and risk having the results and conclusions tainted by teacher performance, this broader look gives a more accurate evaluation of the program's effectiveness. In the beginning, each participant of the study was given a basic assessment of doctrine, spiritual disciplines, and perceived comfort in evangelistic practices. This goal was measured by administering the FBCV Mission Understanding and Practice Survey (FMUPS).⁸ The goal was considered successfully met when 75 percent of attenders completed the FMUPS and the survey had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current understanding of the FBCV mission among young adults at FBCV.

The second goal of the project was to develop a four-session curriculum to equip young adults in the mission of FBCV. The intent was to connect the young adults into the life of the church. The curriculum would establish from Scripture the basic doctrines of the Christian faith with the aim of leading people to "connect with God" through an understanding of salvation and basic spiritual disciplines. Teaching for the project occurred in the small group setting, helping the young adults build meaningful

⁷ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁸ See appendix 1.

relationships around the Word of God. As members built relationships with one another, they fulfilled the part of FBCV’s mission of “connecting to each other.” It was the aim of this curriculum to teach and equip the members in understanding their own salvation from Scripture in order that they might communicate it in testimony form, so as to “connect to the world.” The goal was measured by the expert panel, consisting of a seminary professor, a pastor, and a public school administrator, who utilized a rubric⁹ to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to equip teachers to communicate and teach the curriculum. The goal was to develop the teachers as a part of the discipleship program of the church. Simply put, the main objective was to equip teachers to teach the curriculum. The focus was teaching teachers to do the work of discipling young adults in the church. Many of the teachers within the scope of this project are the parents of young, large families and have little extra time to give beyond their current service to the church. Limited availability posed the challenge of time as few of the teachers were willing to commit to an extra night away from their families. Teachers were equipped through web videos produced by me and shared through the church’s livestream. These videos contained the content of the curriculum as well as training concepts to employ within the context of their classes. The teachers were able to interact from home with me live or watch the videos on their schedule due to the demands of their jobs and families. The goal of these livestream events was to prepare the Sunday School teachers to lead their classes in the curriculum provided, and was measured by both a pre- and post-project self-evaluation using the Teacher Self Evaluation Rubric.¹⁰ Additionally, the discipleship minister of

⁹ See appendix 3.

¹⁰ See appendix 2.

FBCV observed the teachers and determined their competency using the Teacher Evaluation Rubric.¹¹ The goal was considered successful when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-Teacher Self Evaluation Rubric scores. Also, this goal was successfully met when each teacher scored at the sufficient or above level on the Teacher Evaluation Rubric.

The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of participants through the implementation of the curriculum within the small group model. As the teachers were trained to teach the curriculum, the end goal of the curriculum was to have them equip the young adults of FBCV in its mission by teaching the curriculum. The teachers of these Sunday School classes communicated the curriculum provided to them with the purpose of equipping the members of each class for knowledge and practice. Once the learners took the step from understanding the curriculum to applying the curriculum, they would be participating in the mission of the church through “Connecting with God, with each other, and with the World.” The goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey¹² that measured the student’s knowledge of the curriculum, basic spiritual discipline, and competence in evangelism. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Delimitations

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

Discipleship. The term “discipleship” expresses the process of leading a person to follow Christ.¹³ Within the context of the project, “discipleship” was defined as

¹¹ See appendix 4.

¹² See appendix 1.

¹³ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13.

leading people to “connect with God” through salvation and devotion, “connect with each other” through being equipped for service in the church, and “connect to the world” through the practice of evangelism.

Millennial. The term “Millennial” will be designated to include “young people who have birthdays that hover between the 1980s and the turn of the millennium.”¹⁴ For the purpose of this project, “Millennials” consisted of any person born between the years of 1980 to 2000. This term was used interchangeably with the term “young adults” throughout the project.

Mission. The term “mission” expresses the purpose of the church. The “mission” is what the leadership of FBCV believes an active church member should accomplish¹⁵ if they are involved in the program of Sunday School. Within the context of this project, “mission” referred to the mission of FBCV: “Connecting people to God, to each other, and to the world.”

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project focused only on the Millennial generation within the church. Many of the Sunday School classes have a mixture of Baby Boomer and Generation X members, but this project only measured and catered to the Millennial generation. Second, the project was confined to a fourteen-week timeframe. The assessment of participants, development of curriculum, training of teachers, and implementation of curriculum all fell within the fourteen-week timeframe. The placement of young adults into church service and evangelism fell outside of the timeframe and scope of the project proposed.

¹⁴ David M. Haugen and Susan Musser, eds., *The Millennial Generation*, Opposing Viewpoints Series (Detroit: Greenhaven, 2013), 14.

¹⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Conclusion

The future of FBCV is dependent on Millennial believers who accomplish the mission of the church. For the church to accomplish this purpose, it must equip its membership through discipleship, specifically among Millennial members, to understand their own salvation from Scripture, practice basic spiritual disciplines, and hold a basic evangelistic competency. When young adult believers begin to practice the mission of “connecting to God, to each other, and to the world,” they will grow to become the leaders of the church.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLEMAKING MODEL AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

A preliminary understanding of Scripture with applying doctrine is necessary for Millennials to integrate into the body of FBCV. The thesis of this chapter is that Romans provides the clearest picture of the discipleship process, which when implemented at FBCV will lead to the integration of Millennials into the body as a whole. This chapter provides the basic passages in sequential order, outlining the process which must be followed to create a successful discipleship program.

The Gospel as God's Power to Salvation (Rom 1:16-17)

The Christian life is founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the message the Holy Spirit uses to awaken the soul to God's redemption. It is a tool God uses to catalyze the believer to know and live out His righteousness, and it is the driving mission for both believers and the church. A clear understanding of the gospel is the foundation for discipleship. Paul's explanation in Romans 1:16-17 sets the foundation for the disciple's life. The following is my nuanced translation from the Greek language of Romans 1:16-17 that will serve to guide the understanding of the passage:

For I myself am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, to the Jew first and also the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God (the character of God at work in justifying the sinner and transforming him daily) is being revealed from faith (justification) to faith (daily sanctification); as it is written, but the righteous will live by faith.

Embracing the Gospel in the Midst of Cultural Shame

Paul's statement that he is not ashamed of the gospel serves as a thesis for the book of Romans. MacArthur states the significance of these verses: "These two verses express the theme of the book of Romans, and they contain the most life-transforming truth God has put into men's hands. To understand and positively respond to this truth is to have one's time and eternity completely altered."¹ With the importance of this gospel focus, it is essential to understand why Paul begins with the statement, "I myself am not ashamed." Many might overlook this simple phrase, believing it is nothing more than an introductory statement. Longenecker suggests that some view this statement as using a figure of speech, explaining, "Paul is here using a figure of speech called litotes—that is, an understatement in which one speaks affirmatively by means of a negation."² Longenecker then states that this opinion oversimplifies the meaning and then defines his idea:

We propose that Paul's "I am not ashamed of the gospel" should be viewed primarily as highly apologetic or polemical in nature and as responding to certain criticisms of his person, mission, and/or message being voiced by at least some of the Christians at Rome.³

Paul's statement of pride in the gospel was not spoken in a vacuum, but instead to the people of Rome who wrestled with the shame of living as followers of Christ.

Cranfield communicates this temptation of shame when he writes, "Paul knows full well the inevitability of the temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel in the view of the

¹ John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 49.

² Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 158. Kindle.

³ *Ibid.*

continuing hostility of the world to God.”⁴ The temptation of shame grew all the more in the center of Rome. Murray states,

But when we remember the contempt entertained for the Gospel by the wise of this world and also of the fact that Rome as the seat of world empire was the epitome of worldly power, we can discover the significance of this negative expression and the undertone of assurance which the disavowal reflects.⁵

Paul’s pride in the gospel is magnified by the realization that it is present in the context of both physical and emotional shame that he and the believers in Rome were experiencing due to their faith. This shame went farther than harsh words. The shame rebuffed in Romans 1 is in the center of a culture that actively persecuted believers for their faith in the gospel. Schreiner builds the idea that Paul believed being unashamed is to endure the persecution that came naturally with faith:

The hesitancy to “bear witness” to the Gospel was rooted in fear of suffering harm. The asseveration that Paul is not ashamed in Rom 1:16, therefore, refers both to his willingness to confess the Gospel in public and the overcoming of fear. These are not empty words in Paul’s case since he had already endured much suffering (2 Cor. 11:23-27).⁶

Paul lived out his belief in the gospel in the midst of real persecution.

Paul’s pride in the gospel is not an intellectual pride, but instead was personal. Paul was speaking through the experience of his own scars as he called the believers in Rome to an unashamed faith. As Paul used the word ἐπαισχύνομαι, he did not use it with the active voice. Instead, Paul chose to use the middle voice, which carries a personal sense, “I myself am not ashamed” or “I am not ashamed myself.” Paul knew the gospel intimately as it changed him from a persecutor of the church to a man willing to sacrifice

⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 86.

⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 26.

⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 60.

even his very life for it. Fitzmyer describes Paul's personal connection to the gospel: "For the Gospel for him is not merely a passing on of truths or a report about noteworthy events, but the word in which God's will is presently accomplished."⁷ Deep within Paul's unashamedness rest the words of Jesus in Mark 8:38: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The Gospel, Its Power and Man's Response

Paul clearly embraced and lived unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The question must be asked, what is the gospel? Murray states simply, "The gospel is a message. It is, of course, always a message proclaimed, but the gospel itself is a message."⁸ For the sake of clarity, the gospel message will be defined as God's work in rescuing man from God's own judgment by means of His Son, Jesus Christ, in Christ's death and resurrection, whereas God calls man to respond by the surrender of man's own will through faith.

God's salvation, in the gospel, is a salvation from His own judgment. Moo explains that salvation could cover a multitude of ideas: "'Salvation' and its cognates are widely used in both the Greek world and the LXX to depict deliverance from a broad range of evils."⁹ He then states firmly, "Paul uses the words only of spiritual deliverance. Moreover, his focus is eschatological: 'salvation' is usually the deliverance from

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 255.

⁸ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 27.

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 66.

eschatological judgment that is finalized only at the last day.”¹⁰ Moo is unwavering in the idea that the salvation of man is directly tied to the judgment of God.¹¹

If the gospel is a message, even a message of a powerful God who saves people from his wrath, then what gives this gospel its power? There have been powerful messages throughout history, but Paul’s statement differentiates this message of good news. Paul makes the claim that the message itself holds power. Paul, inspired by God, makes the distinct claim that the gospel is actually the power of God to salvation. Mounce iterates Paul’s claim distinguishing the gospel from other news: “The gospel is not simply a display of the power but the effective operation of God’s power leading to salvation.”¹²

Schreiner agrees with the concept that power is found in the gospel message, but adds that through preaching this power is tapped:

The δύναμις θεοῦ (*dynamis theou*, power of God) in the gospel signifies the effective and transforming power that accompanies the preaching of the gospel. . . . The preaching of the Word does not merely make salvation possible but effects salvation in those who are called.¹³

Schreiner sees the inseparable connection between the power of the message and God’s use of the messenger. The lingering question from Schreiner would be if the common layman’s person to person gospel witness would carry the same power that the traditional preaching exposition carried. Most commentators do not connect the power of the gospel to preaching solely but instead connect it to proclamation. Fitzmyer articulates the gospel’s power through any proclamation as well, though he does not limit it to the

¹⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 67.

¹¹ The concept of substitutionary atonement, that man is saved from the judgment of God, is discussed in greater detail in the later section covering Rom 5:8-9.

¹² Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 70.

¹³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 60.

formal act of preaching: “Whenever the gospel is proclaimed, God’s power becomes operative and succeeds in saving.”¹⁴

Paul clearly communicates that God’s power in saving men is through the gospel, but he does not depart from men’s responsibility. Paul expresses a clear connection in God’s power at work in the gospel coupled with humanity’s reaction in belief. Without an individual’s belief in the gospel, there is no salvation from the judgment of God.

Fitzmyer states,

Whenever the gospel is proclaimed, God’s power becomes operative and succeeds in saving. His power thus catches up human beings and through the gospel brings them salvation. This is the essential, all important theme that Paul announces: salvation comes to all by faith.¹⁵

People cannot experience salvation outside of the power of the gospel, nor can they experience the power of the gospel without responding in faith.

This gospel power is both free to all people as well as dependent on their response. The effect of the gospel’s power does not depend on whether one deserves the message. The idea that faith is a response to the power of the gospel at work undergirds the necessity that an individual does not earn the gospel. Cranfield solidifies this idea: “It is not a qualification which some men already pose in themselves so that the gospel, when it comes to them, finds them eligible to receive its benefits. Faith, in the sense in which the term is used here, can exist only as a response to the gospel.”¹⁶ Cranfield’s view that he holds the power of the gospel in such high esteem while maintaining humanity’s response can be seen in this statement:

For Paul man’s salvation is altogether—not almost together-- God’s work; and the faith spoke of here is the openness to the gospel which God Himself creates, the human response of surrender to the judgment and unmerited mercy of God which

¹⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 256.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 90.

God Himself brings about—God who not only directs the message to the hearer but also Himself lays open the hearer’s heart to the message. And yet this faith, as God’s work in a man, is in a real sense more truly and fully the man’s own personal decision than anything which he himself does of himself; for it is the expression of the freedom which God has restored to him—the freedom to obey God.¹⁷

Cranfield did not see an imbalance in God’s power and an individual’s response, but instead he communicated that God redeemed the imbalance of God’s power and a person’s response through restoring one’s ability to choose God.

The human response to the power of God is faith. Faith is more than simple belief—it is far deeper. Moo expresses the depth of faith Paul communicates in the gospel: “To ‘believe’ is to put full trust in God who ‘justifies the ungodly’ (4:5) by means of the cross and resurrection of Christ. Though intellectual assent cannot be excluded from faith, the Pauline emphasis is on the surrender to God as an act of the will.”¹⁸ Faith in Christ is a response of the whole person, from the intellect to the will, in surrender to the power of the gospel.

God’s Righteousness, His Character at Work Justifying and Continually Transforming Man

The gospel of Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit and embraced through faith is effectual in redeeming humankind. This power both displays and imputes righteousness into the believer’s life. This transformation displays the righteous character of God, justifies the sinner in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and transforms him progressively while still on this earth.

The definition of righteousness has been debated throughout historic theology, and in modern discussions. The phrase “The righteousness of God is being revealed” is

¹⁷ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 90.

¹⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 67.

taken in a multitude of ways. Two main streams of thought exist regarding this passage, with many secondary views following. Schreiner defines the two main streams:

First the “righteousness of God” refers to the believer’s status before God. This understanding of “the righteousness of God” was advocated by Luther and continues to this day. Most who adopt this interpretation understand θεοῦ to be a genitive of source—“a righteousness that is from God.”¹⁹

In defining the second stream, Schreiner states,

It is becoming increasingly common to understand “the righteousness of God” more broadly, in terms of God’s saving power. θεοῦ in this interpretation is understood as a subjunctive genitive. Those who advocate this position do not deny that a righteous status is given, but they emphasize that “the righteousness of God” is more than a righteous status. “The righteousness of God” is both effective and forensic.²⁰

The question at the heart of the two views is whether the righteousness of God is imputed only in salvation or whether God’s righteousness is continually poured into the believer’s life after the forensic righteousness is given.

Bruce holds to the solely forensic understanding of righteousness. Citing Smith’s understanding of Jewish thought, he explains, “The ideas of right and wrong among the Hebrews are forensic ideas; that is, the Hebrew always thinks of the right and the wrong as if they were to be settled before a judge. Righteousness is to the Hebrew not so much a moral quality as a legal status.”²¹ Bruce expounds on Smith’s point: “God is Himself righteous, and those men and women are righteous who are ‘in the right’ in relation to God and His law.”²² Bruce’s viewpoint is centered on the stated forensic righteousness of

¹⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

²¹ W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel and Their Place in History to the Close of the Eighth Century, B.C.: Eight Lectures* (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), 71.

²² F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 78.

a judge: “If I stumble because of my fleshly iniquity, my judgment is in the righteousness of God which shall stand forever.”²³

Bruce’s idea is reflective of Murray’s statement:

The righteousness of God is therefore the righteousness of God that is unto our justification, the righteousness which he calls later on the free gift of righteousness. . . . It is a “God Righteousness.” Because it is such, God is its author; it is a righteousness that must elicit divine approval; it is a righteousness that meets all the demands of justice and therefore avails before God.²⁴

Neither Bruce nor Murray hold a low view of God’s righteousness but instead focus on the historical Jewish understanding of forensic righteousness.

Cranfield adds necessary context as to why many protestant scholars are cautious regarding effective righteousness: “Roman Catholic scholars have generally maintained that justification includes moral renewal, though they have stated and defended the position in various ways; Protestants have generally taken the opposite view.”²⁵

Clarifying that the protestant view is often reactionary, Cranfield continues, “Protestants have put far too little emphasis on sanctification, and some have even seemed inclined to frown upon the appearance of moral earnestness as though it must necessarily be evidence of a weakening loyalty to the doctrine of sole fide.”²⁶ Cranfield, while understanding the temptation of bias, affirms, “There seems to be no doubt that δικαιοσύνη, as used by Paul means simply ‘acquit,’ ‘confer righteous status upon,’ and does not in itself contain any reference to moral transformation.”²⁷ However, he softens this statement with the

²³ Bruce, *Romans*, 79.

²⁴ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 30-31.

²⁵ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

understanding that “while sanctification is distinct from justification, the two things cannot be separated.”²⁸

Mounce suggests that Cranfield’s view is “most persuasive,”²⁹ yet sees a larger understanding of the righteousness of God:

There is no question that righteousness is an attribute of God, and God clearly is actively involved in declaring righteous those who turn to him in faith. The result is that people of faith are declared to be righteous. . . . With the major emphasis remaining on the status of the one declared to be righteous, there is no reason to deny that the other two aspects are integrally related and should not be excluded from the larger view of the issue.³⁰

Mounce attempts to balance the view of righteousness as an attribute espoused by Fitzmyer,³¹ the traditional protestant view of forensic righteousness, and Cranfield’s understanding that justification and sanctification are tied together. Mounce sees God as righteous, declaring sinful men unrighteous and transforming their lives through His righteousness.

Schreiner affirms the view that God’s righteousness is forensic but not limited to a stated righteousness: “I would suggest that it is a mistake to opt for an either-or here, and thus I conclude that the term ‘righteousness of God’ is both forensic and transformative . . . the context colors the specific nuance assigned.”³² Schreiner sees the power of the gospel accomplishing more than simply justification but instead, also, effecting the earthly life of the believer:

Those whom God has vindicated he also changes. In my opinion, it is doubtful that the term Paul features in presenting his gospel would contain only a forensic dimension. . . . Yet God’s declaration of righteousness—which is a gift of the age

²⁸ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 95.

²⁹ Mounce, *Romans*, 73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 262.

³² Schreiner, *Romans*, 66.

to come invading the present evil age is an effective declaration, so that those who are pronounced righteous are also transformed by God's grace.³³

Schreiner communicates clearly that transformative understanding does not take precedence over the forensic; rather, the forensic understanding serves as the foundation for the transformative. In other words, those who have been justified will also be sanctified by the same power and gospel. Schreiner states, "The forensic is the basis for the transformative, but the one cannot be surrendered for the other. Those who are the recipients of the ministry of the Spirit have also been transformed by the ministry of righteousness."³⁴

Schreiner's view of God's holistic work through the gospel is essential in understanding how God's salvation through the gospel is more than simple justification, but instead moves the believer toward sanctification. If the gospel is powerful in eternal salvation, it is also effectual in daily living. Stott, agreeing with Schreiner, writing, "I have never been able to see why we have to choose. . . . [I]t is at one and the same time a quality, an activity and a gift."³⁵ When Paul states that the righteousness of God is being revealed, he is affirming that God's righteousness magnifies His character, is placed forensically upon the believer eternally, and is revealed in the lives of believers as they grow from faith to faith.

From Faith to Faith, Justification to Sanctification

The understanding that the righteousness of God is both a justifying righteousness and a sanctifying righteousness then determines Paul's next line of thought, that this righteousness "is being revealed from (ἐκ) faith to (εἰς) faith." There is not

³³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 63.

unanimity of thought regarding what Paul means when discussing the phrase “from faith to faith.” Most interpretations of this small phrase seem to be driven from their definition of the righteousness of God in the beginning of verse 17.

Looking to the overall context of the passage, Paul is encouraging the believers to unashamedness regarding their faith. He is driving the idea that the gospel’s power goes beyond justification by empowering the believer to display the righteousness of God in their lives. The passage is bookended by quoting Habakkuk 2:4, where Habakkuk differentiates true believers (in Israel) by stating, “The righteous shall live by His faith.” With this direct context, the natural understanding of the passage should see a progression of justifying faith to sanctifying faith.

Schreiner notes the different understandings of “faith to faith,” pointing out the understanding of progression:

Most interpretations include the idea of progression from one kind of faith to another: from the faith of the OT to the faith of the NT; From the faith of the law to the faith of the gospel; from the faith of preachers to the faith of hearers. . . . The weakness of all the above interpretations is that they attempt to squeeze more meaning out of the phrase than is warranted.³⁶

Schreiner’s view is that “the simplest interpretation discerns human faith as the subject throughout.”³⁷ He iterates that Paul’s point was not to differentiate types of faith, but instead to show that a believer’s standing and living in the gospel is only by faith. Schreiner, within his view of a simple understanding of the text, uses the context of Habakkuk to explain that “a canonical reading of Habakkuk itself suggests that faithfulness and faith are inseparable.”³⁸ Even though Schreiner does not believe progression is necessary in the understanding of “faith to faith,” he notes that the emphasis of “faith” is directly tied to the faithfulness of the believer’s life.

³⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 71-72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

Schreiner's understanding reflects the same understanding of Cranfield, where the interpretation of faith cannot be divorced from Paul's intent in using Habakkuk: "Against all of these interpretations there is a serious objection that they involve taking ἐκ πίστεως in a different sense from that which it has in the Habakkuk quotation as used by Paul."³⁹ Moo would also agree that Paul's intent is in expressing the centrality of faith: "Probably, however, in light of the only clear NT parallel to the construction, the combination is rhetorical and is intended to emphasize that faith and 'nothing but faith' can put us into right relationship with God."⁴⁰ Paul's intent, whether with a progressive understanding or not, was to underscore the centrality of faith both in the justification of the believer as well as his daily life.

Just as many protestant writers have limited the understanding of righteousness to justification alone (a forensic view), many have also avoided a progressive view of faith in these verses, which is traditionally a more catholic understanding. Fitzmyer defines the catholic understanding as "God's economy of salvation is shared more and more by a person as faith grows: from a beginning faith to a more perfect or culminating faith."⁴¹ Fitzmyer asserts that a progressive understanding, both of salvation and of the interplay of Paul's use of two faiths in these verses, is the best understanding: "'Through faith' would express the means by which a person shares in salvation; 'for faith' would express the purpose of the divine plan. In either case Paul would be suggesting that salvation is a matter of faith from start to finish, whole and entire."⁴² Fitzmyer sees the concept of "faith to faith" covering the whole of a believer's life. Though he sees an

³⁹ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 99-100.

⁴⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 76.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 263.

⁴² *Ibid.*

economy of grace connected to faith dispensed over time within the understanding, he still captures the understanding that Paul’s use of “faith to faith” as a concept that leads the believer to live by faith.

Dunn sees no escape from the progression, “ἐκ . . . εἰς . . . ‘from . . . to . . .’ This idiom is clearly denoting some sort of progression, where ἐκ refers to the starting point and εἰς the end.”⁴³ Dunn defines Paul’s concept of faith, suggesting that

πίστις for Paul has the two fold sense: both of *belief that*—acceptance of the truth/reliability of what has been said; but also of consequent *trust in*, reliance upon, as expressed particularly in the initial act of being baptized, that is, identifying himself with Jesus in his death and placing oneself under His lordship.⁴⁴

Faith is more than belief; faith leads to action. Faith places the believer under the authority of God in life. Looking to the progression of “faith to faith,” it is clear that a believer must grow not only in their belief in God, but also in obedience and submission.

Paul’s understanding of faith saw progression. One cannot live unashamed of the gospel without progressing in faith. The justification of God showed itself in that a believer, a righteous one, lived by faith. Paul’s intent in stating “from faith, to faith” is to lead a believer from being declared righteous to living righteously by faith. Mounce states this concept simply: “Most probably it points to faith as the origin of righteousness and the direction in which it leads.”⁴⁵ Faith is not static, it is ever growing. Faith moves the believer deeper and deeper into the righteousness of God seen in the progressive submission of a believer’s life.

⁴³ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Mounce, *Romans*, 73.

The Gospel, Humanity's Sinfulness, and God's Love (Rom 5:8-9)

The gospel message of which Paul is unashamed is communicated and unpacked in the first nine chapters of Romans. In Romans 5, Paul gives a concise explanation that can sum up the holistic understanding of the gospel. Within this chapter, Paul outlines the world's opposition to God, God's character of love, the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, and people's reconciliation to God in avoidance of his wrath. It is essential in understanding the gospel that one understand from what a person is saved. The gospel clearly teaches that God saves individuals, unconditionally of their works, from God's own wrath. People are reconciled to God because God's wrath is removed.

Humanity's Futility in Salvation

Paul's aim in explaining God's work in the gospel begins through contrasting how God is different from humankind: "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die" (Rom 5:7). In this verse, Paul's aim is to bring contrast between individuals and God. His desire is to highlight the character of God by contrasting it with human character. Dunn summarizes how odd the idea of self-sacrifice is from verse 7: "The effect of v7 is to remind the Roman audience of how unusual self-sacrifice is even when the beneficiary is an attractive person. The point is simply underscored by reemphasizing that God's love is not determined by such considerations."⁴⁶ This contrast between humankind and God is the underscoring theme of chapter 5. Paul wanted to leave little doubt that salvation was driven by the character of God and not the character or works of humanity.

Paul uses three terms to describe the character and work of people: helpless, sinners, and enemies. Paul contrasts the character of God by showing his works. In response to human helplessness, "Christ died for the ungodly" (v. 6). In response to

⁴⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 256.

human sinfulness, “God demonstrated his love for us” (v. 8). In response to humanity’s place as God’s enemies, “We are saved by His life” (v. 10). Paul is clearly building a contrast in the readers’ eyes of how different an individual is before God. Looking at the differing terms, Schreiner states, “The reason for using these various terms is clear. Paul wants to underscore the greatness and distinctiveness of God’s love in sending Christ to die for those who are wicked and rebellious, who hate him.”⁴⁷ MacArthur summarizes these verses: “When we were powerless to escape from our sin, powerless to escape death, powerless to resist Satan, and powerless to please Him in any way, God amazingly sent His Son to die on our behalf.”⁴⁸ Just as Paul saw it necessary to understand the distinctiveness of God from humankind, it is necessary to look at humankind’s condition in their own righteousness.

In the latter part of chapter 1, through chapter 3, Paul builds the argument that humankind is utterly sinful and condemned by their own actions. This understanding comes to a culmination in 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” From chapters 3 through 5, Paul leads the reader to understand faith in God through His perfect work in Jesus Christ. In chapter 5, Paul describes how God works, despite humankind, to accomplish their salvation. Mounce describes God’s benevolence in spite of humankind’s broken condition:

The remarkable thing about the death of Christ was that it took place “while we were still sinners.” God did not wait until we had performed well enough to merit his love before he acted in love on our behalf. Christ died for us while we were still alienated from him and cared nothing for his attention and affection.⁴⁹

God did not work because of humankind; He worked despite them. Hendrickson magnifies the disparity between man and God: “The death was unparalleled with respect to the

⁴⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 261.

⁴⁸ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 285.

⁴⁹ Mounce, *Romans*, 136-37.

marvel of the implied condescending and pardoning grace. Christ died for those who were bad, bad, bad! In them there was no goodness that could have attracted this kind of love.”⁵⁰ Romans 5:8-9 clearly illuminates man’s sin and God’s love. Fitzmyer highlights that God’s work through Jesus had nothing to do with humankind’s actions: “It makes clear that there is no quid pro quo in the love manifested: divine love is spontaneously demonstrated toward sinners without a hint that it is repaying a love already shown.”⁵¹ The theme of Romans 5, specifically summarized in verse 8, is that God did not save humankind through any of their own work but only through the love that is inherent in his own Character.

God’s Demonstration of Love

The love of God is most clearly seen by his work on the cross. That is a historical fact that God willingly sent his son to suffer and die on the cross. Romans 5:8 is odd in that it describes this act in the present tense. In lieu of stating “God *demonstrated* his love,” Paul uses the present tense, “God demonstrates his love.” The completed work of the cross is a continuing demonstration of God’s love.

Moo sees the dichotomy of tenses in Paul’s embrace of the gospel in that Paul’s identity in Christ was found in the active salvation brought forward by the historical act:

We notice also that Paul finds a basic unity, even identity between the love of God as it is shown in the objective factual event of Christ’s death on the cross and as it is experienced “in the heart” by the believer. . . . An emotional feeling of God’s love, in itself, is little comfort to the person who is lost, condemned or doomed for hell. But a cold, sober historical interpretation that indeed God “loved the world” on the cross is of little benefit to a person until that love is experienced, is received, by faith in Christ.⁵²

⁵⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 173.

⁵¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 400.

⁵² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 309.

Moo argues that the believer must hold to both the historical event of the cross and the current demonstration of God's love through faith to truly understand and embrace the wonder of the gospel.

Cranfield differs slightly on the understanding of the tenses. He writes, "The use of the present tense is noteworthy: the event of the cross is a past event, by the fact that it occurred remains a present proof."⁵³ Cranfield does not hold to the experiential application that Moo applied, but instead sees the present expressing "present proof" of God's continual love. Answering the same question on tense, Dunn falls close to Cranfield citing the context of verse 5: "The present tense compliments the perfect of verse 5 and probably reflects the perspective of the preacher who referred back to the death of Christ as a timeless proof of God's love."⁵⁴ With either understanding, the overall point is clear: the cross is greater than a simple historical event, it is the timeless picture of God's love which continues to affect believers' lives in the present.

With the understanding of God's historic work on the cross effectual in the lives of believers in the present, Dunn then fleshes out the argument:

That Christ's death thus benefits us as 'sinners' confirms (1) the character of Christ's death as sacrifice (sin offering), (2) provided by God to deal effectively with the sinner qua sinner; (3) that is, not merely with his inadvertent sins but also to cover the 'lawlessness' which put us outside the law and thus, in the typical Jewish perspective, outside the scope of the atonement.⁵⁵

Dunn highlights that Jesus establishes his character as love as well as remedy the greater problem of the sin nature. God's demonstration of love was greater than simply confirming His character; it transformed the lives of those for whom he died by dying in their place. Schreiner further defines God's love at work through the cross: "Christ died both as our

⁵³ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 265.

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 256.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

representative and as our substitute. The suffering of Christ was not only exemplary but accomplished atonement for sinners, in that he took the punishment we deserved.”⁵⁶ Jesus’ death is substitutionary for sinners. He demonstrated the love of God through hanging on the cross to take the penalty men deserved. Romans 5:8 communicates God’s love where Christ Jesus becomes the substitute for leading the reader to Romans 5:9 where he understands the fullness of Christ’s substitution.

Justification through the Death of Jesus

As Romans 5:8 points the reader to the historic event of the cross, it also communicates the present application of that event. Romans 5:9 then moves the reader to understand the present and future implications of God’s love displayed on the cross. Paul states that the believer is justified. Alister McGrath explains that justification “denotes God’s powerful, cosmic, and universal action in effecting a change in the situation between sinful humanity and God, by which God is able to acquit and vindicate believers, setting them in a right and faithful relation to himself.”⁵⁷ This justification is the forensic righteousness communicated in 1:16-17. Justification is “a past event, with present implications (sanctification).”⁵⁸ In other words, God makes humankind righteous in his sight through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.

Paul’s use of the word *blood* was meant to point the reader to the necessary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Schreiner underscores this idea:

⁵⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 260.

⁵⁷ Alister McGrath, “Justification,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 518.

⁵⁸ McGrath, “Justification,” 518. Justification and sanctification are intertwined in application. For the sake of clarity, God’s work in sanctification will be further discussed in the discussion of Rom 12.

The means of justification was the blood of Christ. The word αἷμα (haima, blood) recalls 3:24-26 and signifies that Christ's death was sacrificial in nature. Selecting the word αἷμα was hardly due to the nature of Christ's death, for little blood is shed during a crucifixion. The reference to blood is included because of its sacrificial dimensions, recalling the bloody animal sacrifices of Leviticus. Justification, therefore, was free but not cheap. It was obtained at the cost of Christ's blood.⁵⁹

Something, or better someone, had to pay the punishment for the sins of humankind. Under the old covenant, animals were sacrificed to make humans clean in the eyes of God, but they were simply a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ Jesus Christ was and is the perfect substitute for justifying humankind. This substitution highlights the love of God. Illustrating God's love, MacArthur writes,

The God who hates every sinful thought and every sinful deed nevertheless loves the sinners who think and do those things, even while they are still hopelessly enmeshed in their sin. Even when men openly hate God and do not have the least desire to give up their sin, they are still objects of God's redeeming love as long as they live.⁶¹

As Jesus Christ's death covers the sins of men, they are justified in God's sight. Moo expresses the change of believers' status before God: "As in v.1 'being justified' alludes to the past declaration of acquittal pronounced over the sinner who believes in Christ. But the 'now' adds the nuance of the continuing 'just' status of those so acquitted."⁶² Being justified by the blood of Jesus, humankind is acquitted from the previous sins and declared just, or righteous, in the sight of God presently. Salvation is not just a clean start, justifying a sinner to their present, but makes the sinner righteous in his/her future.

⁵⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 263.

⁶⁰ Heb 10:1-7 communicates that animal sacrifice was not effective in taking away sin. Instead, the animal sacrifices, according the author of Hebrews, were simply a reminder of sin and foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus Christ.

⁶¹ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 286.

⁶² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 310.

Saved from God's Wrath

Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice for humankind, taking their place and declaring them righteous. It is essential to understand that Jesus did more than rescue humans presently; he rescues them eternally from the wrath of God. This rescue is only possible because Jesus became the actual substitute for humankind (2 Cor 5:21). Paul communicates that with the work of Christ complete, the removal of wrath becomes easy to God. Looking at the words “much more” in the text, Schreiner states, “In both verses 9-10 Paul argues from the greater to lesser. Since God has already removed the greatest obstacle to future glory, the guilt and enmity of believers, then he will surely see to it that believers will be spared from his eschatological wrath.”⁶³ Moo describes this same idea:

The argument in each of the verses takes the form of a popular logical sequence, called by the rabbis *qal wayyomer* (“light and heavy”) and in the western tradition a *minori ad maius* (“from the minor to the major”). In this case, however the “how much more” in Paul’s transition suggests that the argument proceeds from the “major” to the “minor”: if God has already done the most difficult thing—reconcile and justify unworthy sinners—how much more can he be depended on to accomplish the “easier” thing—save from eschatological wrath those who have been brought into such relationship with him.⁶⁴

Neither author is stating that the removal of God’s wrath was easy. Their point is that Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished the far more difficult task by bearing the weight of pain and wrath. With the justification of Jesus’ sacrifice in place, the removal of God’s wrath was easy. Cranfield applies the “how much more” in expressing this case:

The point made is that, since God has already done the really difficult thing, that is justified impious sinners, we may be absolutely confident that He will do what is by comparison very easy, namely, save from His wrath at the last those who are already righteous in His sight.⁶⁵

It is important to understand the danger believers are being rescued from.

Understanding wrath should serve to both produce worshipful gratitude toward God as

⁶³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 262.

⁶⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 309-10.

⁶⁵ Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 266.

well as catalyze the believer to live unashamedly of the gospel. Dunn rightly highlights the seriousness of God's wrath: "The imagery invoked is that of rescue from a situation fraught with danger. The peril here is the same 'wrath' described by Paul in 1:18-32, particularly in its final expression ('the day of wrath'—2:5)."⁶⁶ The imagery described in 2:5 is of God "storing up wrath" so that his "righteous judgment" might be seen. Following in verses 7-8, Paul states that God gives to people what they deserve, either "glory and honor" or "wrath and indignation." On the cross, Jesus became the substitute for humankind, taking their "wrath and indignation" and giving them his "glory and honor." Bruce celebrates this grace when writing, "Those who have been pronounced righteous by God can rejoice already in their deliverance from his wrath."⁶⁷ Hendrickson underscores the future hope as people are forgiven of their sins: "The deliverance from this wrath by Christ's mediatorial work, and therefore by Christ himself, refers to our not having to endure the outpouring of the divine vengeance on the day of the final judgment."⁶⁸ Stott affirms the believer's freedom from judgment:

Of course we have already been rescued from it in the sense that through the cross God has himself turned it away from us, so that we now have peace with him and are standing in his grace. But at the end of history there is going to be a day of reckoning which Paul has called the day of God's wrath, "when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5) and his wrath will be poured out on those who have rejected Christ (2:8). From that fearful coming wrath we shall be saved, for, as Jesus put it, the believer "will not be condemned; he has [sc. already] crossed over from death to life."⁶⁹

God sees those whom have faith in the gospel as righteous because Jesus became their substitute, taking God's wrath and declaring them righteousness.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 258.

⁶⁷ Bruce, *Romans*, 124.

⁶⁸ Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 174.

⁶⁹ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 164.

Schreiner summarizes the full work of God in justifying man, and removing his wrath eschatologically:

The righteousness already accomplished by Christ's death sets up the main point of the verse, If the obstacle of our sin has already been removed so that we now stand not guilty before him, then we can be confident that we shall be saved through Christ from God's wrath. The salvation mentioned here is doubtless eschatological, as the future tense shows. Those who have been justified will be rescued from God's wrath on the day of judgment.⁷⁰

Humankind is declared righteous through the substitutionary death of Jesus, by which they do not fear the future because God's wrath has been removed. With this salvation as a foundation, the question becomes, how does God change humankind and sanctify them while they are still on the earth?

The Gospel: Redemption Transformed (Rom 12:1-2)

Paul's gospel message is not limited to eschatological hope alone, it leads to a transformed life while believers still live in this world. The gospel is more than a message that garners salvation, it transforms the believer through faith. Paul clearly stated that the result of the gospel's power was "the righteous will live by faith" (Rom 1:16-17). In Romans 12, Paul turns his explanation of the gospel to build how the gospel transforms the life of the believer while he/she is still living on this earth.

Mounce articulates this transition: "It marks the transition from the theology of God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus to the ethical expectations that flow logically from that theological base."⁷¹ With this transition, though, the redemptive act in Christ is not abandoned. The gospel work of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the ethics of believers. Mounce continues, "The practical, however, must of necessity rest upon a solid theological foundation. Otherwise it is little more than advice about how to get along in a

⁷⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 263.

⁷¹ Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

religious community.”⁷² Mounce sees the need for both the theocentric first eleven chapters of Romans and their application following: “Theology in isolation promotes a barren intellectualism. Ethics apart from a theological base is impotent to achieve its goals.”⁷³

Moo expresses this transition as well: “‘Therefore’ must be given its full weight: Paul wants to show that the exhortations of 12:1-15:13 are built firmly on the theology of chaps 1-11.”⁷⁴ The interconnection of the Christian life and the redemption of Christ is essential. Moo continues, “‘Through the mercies of God’ underscores the connection between what Paul now asks his readers to do and what he has told them earlier in the letter that God has done for them.”⁷⁵ Fitzmyer summarizes the transition of chapter 12 by stating, “It is not we who bring about that the gospel transforms our lives, but God’s mercy that transforms our lives.”⁷⁶ The power of the gospel leads to transformation of the life. This fact is not without the effort of humankind, but the effort of humankind would be meaningless if it were not founded and empowered by God’s work in salvation.

A Living Sacrifice

A life transformed by the gospel will inevitably be different. A heart that has been saved by God’s grace will lead to actions that match the character of God. Even though the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is complete, declaring the sinner as righteous and removing the eschatological wrath from him/her, Paul still sees a place for practiced sacrifice. The works of the body are intertwined with the change God has worked in the

⁷² Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 748.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 749.

⁷⁶ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 639.

heart. MacArthur, looking the unregenerate man, illustrates the connection of heart and works:

The unregenerate person cannot give God his body, his mind or his will, because He has not given God himself. . . . Because an unbeliever's soul has not been offered to God, he cannot make any other sacrifice that is acceptable to Him. The unredeemed cannot present their bodies to God as living sacrifices because they have not presented themselves to God to receive spiritual life.⁷⁷

Looking at a person who has been given mercy from God, MacArthur then applies the same logic: "Such soul-saving mercies should motivate believers to complete dedication."⁷⁸ An unbeliever cannot produce a sacrifice pleasing to God, and a believer will produce works in accordance to their faith. The actions of a person's life will match the work God has done within their heart.

Paul understands that a visible form of worship is essential in the expression of faith, so he communicates a new way of life through an older understood concept. Dunn explains Paul's use of sacrificial language: "He takes up cultic terms in order to redefine them too. The sacrifice God looks for is no longer that of beast or bird in temple, but the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world."⁷⁹ The sacrifice Paul is referring to in Romans 12:1 is not effectual in cleansing from sin, but instead is a response of faith-based action in the already completed redemption found in Jesus Christ.

Paul never means to insinuate that a believer should become a literal sacrifice. Instead, Paul's intent is to use the sacrifice to communicate what God is calling the believer to. Stott communicates the figurative nature of Paul's statement:

⁷⁷ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 140.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 716.

He represents us as a priestly people, who in a responsive gratitude for God's mercy offer or present our bodies as living sacrifices. These are described as both holy and pleasing to God, which seem to be the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a fragrant aroma.⁸⁰

Stott clarifies that the sacrifice is not literal and defines the sacrificial act: "What, however, is this living sacrifice, this rational, spiritual worship? It is not to be offered in the temple courts or in the church building, but rather in home life and in the marketplace. It is the presentation of our bodies to God."⁸¹ The sacrifice of self is the application of redemption into the daily life of the believer.

This call to action where Paul calls the believer to give his body is the call to give all of himself to the service of God. The word *body* should not limit the believer to think that his mind or soul is unconnected. Paul's use of *body* points holistically to all of oneself. Not everyone agrees with a holistic view. Murray argues that Paul is talking specifically of the body:

It has been maintained that he uses the term "body" to represent the whole person so that the meaning would be "present your persons." Undoubtedly there is no intent to restrict to the physical body the consecration here enjoined. But there is not good warrant for taking the word "body" as a synonym for the whole person. Paul's usage elsewhere would indicate he is thinking specifically of the body.⁸²

Murray maintains Paul's specificity of the body is intentional in pointing to just the body. Murray's point is that the body is central in the exercise of worship called for in Romans 12: "It is not without necessity that he should have placed in the forefront of practical exhortation this emphasis upon consecration of the body."⁸³ One could not exercise the practical application of the following chapters in Romans if the physical body was not given in sacrifice to Christ. Murray states, "Paul was realistic and he was aware that if

⁸⁰ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 321.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 110.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111.

sanctification did not embrace the physical in our personality it would be annulled from the outset.”⁸⁴ Though it is my belief that Paul is speaking from a holistic understanding of the word *body*, Murray’s reasoning for the use of the physical body must underscore it. Without the sanctification of the physical body, the sanctification of the whole would be void.

While holding to a holistic viewpoint of the body, Schreiner understands that the physical body is essential in the worshipful sacrifice: “One cannot consign dedication to God to the spirit and neglect the body. Genuine commitment to God embraces every area of life, and includes the body in all of its particularity and concreteness.”⁸⁵ Schreiner holds firm in his belief that the body refers to the whole person, stating that “the word ‘bodies’ here refers to the whole person and stresses that consecration to God involves the whole person.”⁸⁶ Paul’s use of the word *bodies* was not to single out the body but instead to help readers understand that they needed to offer more than an intellectual understanding of redemption, or a spiritual decision, but also a holistic physical commitment as well. Moo summarizes Paul’s view: “It is not only what we can give that God demands; he demands the giver.”⁸⁷

Spiritual or Reasonable

Paul defines the sacrifice of oneself as living, holy, and acceptable to God. The giving of oneself completely to God is not a secondary substitute but instead the full picture of worship God purchased when Jesus died on the cross and rose again. Paul helps the Romans see the greatness of this obedient act as he calls it spiritual or reasonable worship.

⁸⁴ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 110.

⁸⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 644.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 750.

Many scholars have attempted to understand whether Paul intended the reader to understand worship as spiritual or reasonable. Moo summarizes the differing viewpoints of this argument:

Considering this background and context, we arrive at four main possibilities for the connotation of *logikos* here: (1) “spiritual,” in the sense of “inner”: a worship that involves the mind and the heart as opposed to a worship that simply “goes through the motions”; (2) “spiritual” or “rational,” in the sense of “appropriate for human beings as rational and spiritual creatures of God”: a worship that honors God by giving him what he truly wants as opposed to the depraved worship offered by human beings under the power of sin; (3) “rational,” in the sense of “acceptable to human reason”: a worship that “makes sense” as opposed to the “irrational worship” of God through the offering of animals; (4) “reasonable,” or “logical,” in the sense of “fitting the circumstances”: a worship that is appropriate to those who have truly understood the truth revealed in Christ.⁸⁸

Moo’s definition of the differing views serves to guide the discussion of Paul’s meaning in the text.

Schreiner leans toward Moo’s definitions 3 and 4. His position rests in the clearest definition of word *logikos*. Schreiner’s focus on the specific word is central to his argument. From his perspective, Paul would have used a more natural word for spiritual if he had intended that definition. Instead, Paul used the word *logikos* to highlight the logical nature of man’s bodily worship. Schreiner argues, “If Paul had simply wanted to write πνευματικην, he would presumably have done so since πνευμα word group is exceedingly common in Paul and the term λογικος occurs only here . . . spiritual sacrifices are ‘rational’ and ‘reasonable.’”⁸⁹ Schreiner’s understanding of the word is derived from the basis that worship of one’s life, fully and bodily, is the logical outworking of God’s work in redemption: “Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one’s life to him is the height of folly and irrationality.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 753.

⁸⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 645.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Bruce takes the opposite viewpoint. Bruce, looking toward cultic temple worship, sees the contrast of dead worship and spiritual worship cited in Romans 12: “Here ‘spiritual worship’ is probably to be preferred, in contrast to the externalities of Israel’s temple worship.”⁹¹ Moo, looking at his definitions, sees each one as limiting the definition. He in turn looks to build consensus between the definitions. He sees *logikos* as being defined spiritual, rational, and reasonable. Referring to his definitions on the previous page, he writes,

The last connotation, whole probably implied, does not go far enough, ignoring too much of the rich background of the term that we have sketched. The third is also a questionable explanation, assuming as it does that the OT sacrificial system, for instance, was, or would have been, viewed as an irrational form of worship. Choosing between the first two alternatives is difficult and perhaps not necessary.⁹²

Though Moo’s argument is compelling, it is difficult to move beyond the textual evidence that *spiritual* would have been easily defined through using the term *pneuma*. Schreiner’s case is that Paul’s specificity in using *logikos* points to reasonable/rational as a better definition. Not only that, but the movement of the book from spiritual in chapters 1 to 11, to practical application in chapters 12 and beyond, insists that Paul is leading the reader to a rational or logical understanding of the daily sacrifice of one’s life.

Be Transformed

The Christian life will be holy and acceptable to God. It will be distinctly different from the world in which it lives. Living for Christ makes sense. If one’s heart belongs to the sin of this world, it will match the ways of the world. If, on the other hand, one’s life belongs to Christ, it will match the character of Christ. The reasonableness, or rationality of applied faith, is simple. To whatever the heart belongs will be tied to the thoughts and actions it possesses.

⁹¹ Bruce, *Romans*, 226.

⁹² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 753.

In Romans 12:2, Paul distinguishes between two worlds. It is understood that the current world is evil. Whether through the temptations it lays before humankind or the constant presence of death, this world is not the world God intends to define his children. Many translations define the term *age* as world, but *age* is the sense that Paul intends. The term *age* is important because it helps the believer remember that the present evil world is temporary. This temporal nature leads the believer to still live in the temporary, while being defined by the greater age to come. Bruce defines this tension: “While it is called ‘this present evil age’ and is dominated by ‘the god of this age’ who blinds the minds of unbelievers, yet it is possible for people belonging to ‘this age’ to live as heirs of the age to come, the age of renewal and resurrection.”⁹³ This tensional living is essential in understanding how to reasonably worship through sacrificial living. Paul saw Christians living in two ages/worlds at the same time. Fitzmyer explains this tension:

Paul alludes to the Jewish distinction of “this world/age/aeon” and the “world/age/aeon to come,” a distinction that was adopted by the early church and given a Christian nuance. For Paul, the “world/age/aeon” has already begun; because the “ages” have met at the start of the Christian dispensation. Hence Christians, though in ‘this world’ must live for God and not be conformed to any other standard.⁹⁴

Murray iterates the same idea:

The term used for this “world” is “age.” Its meaning is determined by the contrast with the age to come. “This age” is that which stands on this side of what we often call eternity. It is the temporal and transient age. Conformity to this age is to be wrapped up in the things that are temporal, to have all our thought oriented to that which is seen and temporal. It is to be a time server. How far reaching is this indictment!⁹⁵

Though Murray highlights the indictment of living temporally, he sees the greatest conformity as one to evil, explaining, “Besides, this age is an evil age and if our fashion

⁹³ Bruce, *Romans*, 226.

⁹⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 640-41.

⁹⁵ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 113.

is that of this age then the iniquity characteristic of this age governs our lives.”⁹⁶

One cannot miss the definition of the world/age man now lives in. Moo describes this age: “‘This world’ literally ‘this age’ is the sin-dominated, death-producing realm in which all people, included in Adam’s fall, naturally belong.”⁹⁷ The world that humans live in is not neutral. Its god blinds all. It brings death. It pursues humankind’s conformity to its way of life and sin. Schreiner highlights that Paul is speaking of this age in terms of concern. He desires for his readers to understand what this world is, writing, “He (Paul) is worried that their adaptation to this world will shape them in every dimension of their lives.”⁹⁸

Paul is showing the conflict that logical gospel transformation will enable the believer to live in this world without being shaped by it. The only way for this transformation to happen is through the Spirit-empowered, self-sacrificing renewal of the mind. It is to allow, through God’s power, the mind and actions to be defined by the age to come. Moo states,

Christians are to adjust their way of thinking about everything in accordance with the “newness” of their life in the Spirit. This “reprogramming” of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think.⁹⁹

Reprogramming captures the idea of what must happen. Before Christ, the mind and actions are programmed for this world. When Christ saves the sinner, an initial reboot occurs and daily reprogramming must occur as one moves more and more to think and act in accordance to the will of God. Though not stated in the verse, this transformation must be rooted in the Word of God.

⁹⁶ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 113-14.

⁹⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 754.

⁹⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 647.

⁹⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 756-57.

The natural result of the reprogramming, as Moo alludes, is that the people of God look less and less like the world while still living in the world. God's design is for the church to be the model of the age/world to come while still having roots in the current world. Mounce highlights this difference: "The church should stand out from the world as a demonstration of God's intention for the human race. To be culturally identified with the world is to place the church at risk. Believers are to be salt and light, purifying and enlightening contemporary culture."¹⁰⁰ In calling the church to live counter worldly, Paul does not abandon the gospel. The renewal only comes through the power of the gospel through the Spirit of God. Mounce communicates that moralism does not produce transformation. He argues that moralism devoid of gospel transformation is powerless:

From without there is a continuing pressure to adopt the customs and mind-set of the world in which we live. Although that influence must be rejected, that alone will never create the kind of change God has in mind for his followers. Real and lasting change comes from within. We must "let ourselves be transformed."¹⁰¹

The gospel leads the believer to sacrifice himself, find transformation in God's spirit, and know how to live out God's will in a sinful world/age.

The Will of God

God desires for His will to be known and be lived out. The end of God's will for those living in this present age is that they be saved through the power of the gospel and transformed through the daily sacrifice of one's life. The application of this daily transformation only occurs through the renewal of the mind. This process begins by discerning the will of God. The mind of one living in the evil age is blinded through sin and the ruler of this age. The gospel frees the mind from sinful blindness. The process of daily renewal and sacrifice leads one to remove the sinful inclinations from the mind and find the intent of God. Mounce states,

¹⁰⁰ Mounce, *Romans*, 232.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The mind renewed enables us to discern the will of God. Released from the control of the world around us, we can come to know what God has in mind for us. We will find that his will is “good, pleasing, and perfect.” It is good because it brings about moral and spiritual growth. It is pleasing to God because it is an expression of his nature. It is perfect in that no one could possibly improve on what God desires to happen.¹⁰²

God desires to transform his people and the mind is central in this transformation.

Within this process of renewal, one comes to ascertain God’s will; not a mystical unknown but an application of His character and desires into one’s life. The will of God is foreign to many because sin clouds the mind from understanding the things of God. Schreiner states, “The renewal of the mind is the discernment of God’s will.”¹⁰³ Schreiner’s use of the word *discern* is helpful in understanding this passage. God’s will is understood more than absorbed. MacArthur affirms Schreiner’s view of application:

When a believer’s mind is transformed, his thinking ability, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding are able to properly assess everything, and to accept only what conforms to the will of God. Our lives can prove what the will of God is only by doing those things that are good and acceptable and perfect to Him.¹⁰⁴

The direction, as shown by Paul’s move from redemption to application in Romans 12, helps in understanding that God’s will is the application of God’s already revealed character and desires into the lives of gospel-changed believers.

As God’s will is applied through the renewal of the mind, it should naturally flow into the actions of the believer. Fitzmyer states, “Knowledge of what God desires becomes norm in Christian conduct.”¹⁰⁵ If the renewal of the mind does not lead to application of God’s will applied into the believer’s life, then gospel transformation is not taking place. Moo communicates the intent of the verse—God’s will is that Christians

¹⁰² Mounce, *Romans*, 233.

¹⁰³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 648.

¹⁰⁴ MacArthur, *Romans 1-8*, 151-52.

¹⁰⁵ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 641.

know how to sacrifice their lives in worship through the renewal of their minds. He states, “But Paul’s vision, to which he calls us, is of Christians whose minds are so thoroughly renewed that we know from within, almost instinctively, what we are to do to please God in any given situation.”¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

The book of Romans serves as more than a systematic theology for the early church. Paul wrote the book to both illustrate why he lives unashamed of the gospel and show what an unashamed, gospel-changed life looks like. Both the theocentric first eleven chapters of Romans as well as the outworking last five paint a picture of God’s hand at work in saving the believer and move the reader to experience the outward life change complicit with salvation. In Romans 1, Paul shares his unashamedness toward the gospel, with the end view that the righteous shall live by faith. In Romans 5, Paul teaches that God saves humanity despite their sin, with the view that humanity’s salvation does not end in conversion but continues through the last judgment. Romans 12 serves as the turning point of the book, teaching that all humanity who is saved by God would offer themselves as living sacrifices. Romans is more than a systematic theology, it is a pastoral letter written to lead early believers to live a life matching the work of Christ’s salvation.

The postmodern world in which the church now stands is struggling with antinomianism, which is the belief that a person does not connect their own salvation to the sanctified life described in Scripture. The rise of the Millennial generation and postmodernism, which is discussed in chapter 3 of this project, has disconnected their understanding of salvation from the works that follow. It is necessary for young adults of the Millennial generation to see not only the essential doctrines of salvation but also how

¹⁰⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 758.

those doctrines are inseparably tied to the life change emblematic of a believer. Scripture is clear that the righteous do more than believe by faith; they live by faith.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROMISE, REALITY, AND HOPE FOR MILLENNIALS

The Millennial generation, as they were coming of age, offered promise and hope for the declining American church but eventually furthered its decline. This generation walked into the twenty-first century with promise, but their reality left the church in abandonment and empty chairs. Understanding both the initial optimism of the Millennial generation and their current reality is essential to restoring this generation back to the church. In reaching and restoring Millennials, the church must be strategic and intentional in its focus.

A Generation of Hope

Millennials entered the twenty-first century with the expectation that their generation would restore the ethics and beliefs of previous generations. Born into a broken world, this generation offered hope. Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer describe the early hope of this generation: “They know not all is well with the world. The boomer Generation knew that and protested it. The Gen X knew that and was depressed about it. And the Millennials know that, but they believe they can have a role in changing it.”¹ Overwhelmingly, Millennials followed the pessimistic Generation X with a promise of a better tomorrow.

¹ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 18.

Early research on Millennials spoke glowingly about this coming generation. Neil Howe and William Strauss wrote the definitive guide to understanding this hope as Millennials were stepping into college:

As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. Only a few years from now, this can-do youth revolution will overwhelm the cynics and pessimists.²

As shown in this research, Millennials were on the precipice of a generational shift back to the ethics of the Greatest Generation. Howe and Strauss explain further: “Millennials have the capacity to become America's next great generation.”³ The outlook for this generation from the authors’ perspective could not have been brighter: “By the time Millennials reach old age, deep into the twenty-first century, their accomplishments and reputation could compare with those of other children who began life similarly, including today's much-heralded G.I. ‘greatest generation.’”⁴ Millennials ushered in a century of hope and promise.

Rainer and Rainer’s *The Millennials*, published eleven years after *Millennials Rising*, saw much of the same promise. The co-authors envisioned a selfless generation who desired to serve: “The young men and women we surveyed are, as a rule, not focusing as much on self as they are on how they can make a difference.”⁵ Beyond those

² Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), locs. 79-82, Kindle.

³ *Ibid.*, loc. 639.

⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 663-65.

⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 7.

ideas, they describe a generation who “need to be getting our hands and feet dirty. We need to be personally involved as well as giving.”⁶

Regarding Millennials’ faith, the future was bright. Leaving high school, the church strongly influenced the Millennial generation. Regarding this influence Howe and Strauss assert, “In one poll, teens cited religion as the second-strongest influence in their lives, just behind parents, but ahead of teachers, boy/girlfriends, peers, and the media.”⁷ Looking to the turn of the century, Millennial church attendance showed signs of hope: “A recent Gallup poll showed that 55 percent of teens go to church regularly, versus 45 percent of Americans as a whole.”⁸ Howe and Strauss’s applied these statistics, saying, “Like Gen Xers before them, Millennials see church as a way to cut through the clutter of contemporary life, to find relief from the pop culture, to meet like-minded members of the opposite sex, and to do good civic deeds.”⁹ Howe and Strauss believed church to be the organization Millennials would use to filter the massive amount of information their generation absorbed on a daily basis. One idea of note in their research on Millennial faith was what churches taught: “When Millennials do get to church, they are preached at to behave more than to believe—a message they are taking to heart.”¹⁰ This concept will bear fruit as the deterioration of the Millennial Generation’s faith begins to blossom.

Rainer and Rainer address the decline of Millennials, while still looking for the positive traits of the generation. They see those Millennials who are genuinely saved living radically transformed gospel-centered lives. Looking toward hope, Rainer and

⁶ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 266.

⁷ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, locs. 5555-56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, locs. 5558-59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, locs. 5613-14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, locs. 5559-60.

Rainer emphasize, “But if this generation is ever convinced that churches are serious about a radical commitment to Christ, we have good reason to be hopeful to connect with both the Christians and Non-Christians of this generation.”¹¹ As time passes, even in the six years between Rainer and Rainer’s book and today, Millennials have grown farther and farther away from the church. Much of the hope with which this generation entered the century has dissipated.

Hope Dispelled

Though once lauded as the next great generation, Millennials do not match or even resemble the early expectations of their generation. The pattern of research on Millennials moves pessimistically from the year 2000 forward. The hopes of Millennials restoring the church are especially empty as this generation has abandoned the church, and many have abandoned religious practice altogether.

Jean Twenge began her research looking forward from Howe and Strauss’s early work. Her conclusion was that Howe and Strauss’s study did not accurately depict Millennials’ beliefs and attitudes less than twenty years after the book was written.

Arguing against Howe and Strauss’s work, Twenge states,

There is little evidence that today’s young people feel much attachment to duty or to group cohesion—high school students in the 2000s and 2010s are significantly less civically engaged and less trustful of government and other large institutions than Boomers were in the 1970s. Instead, young people have been consistently taught to put their own needs first and to focus on feeling good about themselves.¹²

Twenge’s theory is that Millennials rejected the early predictions of community involvement, whether in civic or religious practice for individualistic pursuits.

¹¹ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 274.

¹² Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2014), 9, Kindle.

Regarding religious involvement, Twenge shows the rapid dropout of Millennials in church: “The number of entering college students who named ‘none’ as their religious affiliation tripled between 1983 and 2012 (from 8% to 24%) and doubled among 12th-graders (from 10% in the late 1970s to 20% in the 2010s).”¹³ Twenge is not shy in her application of these statistics, stating, “Assuming that earlier generations were just as religious as those in the 1970s, Generation Me is the least religious generation in American history.”¹⁴ Adding to this conclusion, Twenge continues,

The number of high school students who said that religion is “not important” in their lives increased 56% (from 14% in 1976 to 22% in 2012). Belief in God has also taken a hit. In 1994, 56% of 18-to-29-year-olds said they were sure that God exists; by 2012 that had shrunk to 44%. Between GenX and GenMe, belief in God went from winning the election to losing it. So it’s not just that GenMe has moved away from religious institutions; they are also moving away from private religious belief and practice.¹⁵

Twenge’s application of these statistics is that semi/non-committed families are producing dropout Millennials:

Two mechanisms seem to be at work. First, more teens are being raised by nonreligious parents. For example, four times as many college students in the 2010s (versus the early 1970s) said their mother did not affiliate with a religion. Second, young people are leaving religion as they grow into young adulthood, and this tendency grew stronger over the generations.¹⁶

From her perspective, churches are not losing those whose families are committed but are losing Millennials who were nominally involved or whose parents were not involved in church. The freedom of adulthood, mixed with the shallow foundation of faith at home, has produced a generation who has abandoned the faith.

¹³ Twenge, *Generation Me*, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

Samantha Henig looks at the dropout of Millennials from a different perspective. With the rise of the digital age, decisions have become more complex to new generations. She believes where Christian faith once was unchallenged among emerging young adults, it now must compete against all other worldviews: “Being twentysomething has always been about making commitments and closing some doors. But doing so might be especially hard for Millennials because of how many doors are out there these days.”¹⁷ Her theory is that the plethora of choices paralyzes the Millennial thinker. Instead of making a commitment to one worldview/faith, Millennials are choosing no worldview whatsoever.

The lack of commitment is driven by the Millennials’ fear of closing themselves off to separate, and in their eyes, valid worldviews. Their choice is to simply not choose. Henig believes the multiplicity of choices leads the Millennial into paralyzing fear: “The result is that the decisions of the twenties crossroads are now being made in a distinctive swirl of anxiety and fatalism.”¹⁸ Millennials, from her perspective, would rather refuse commitment than lose his/her options. In her opinion, the regret of losing an option far outweighs the comfort and clarity of a decision:

Regret is a bitter emotion, so painful that the urge to avoid it often drives decision-making strategies. Regret avoidance can be a reason to forestall any kind of commitment—to a job, a girlfriend, a religion, a place to live—out of fear that you’ll want to revisit one of those options the instant it disappears.¹⁹

Deep within the Millennial worldview is a desire to not lose any options of belief.

Paul Taylor looks specifically at the group Henig describes, defining them as “nones.” “Nones” are Millennials who have preferred not to choose a religion and instead embrace no religious affiliation whatsoever. Looking at their growth, Taylor states,

¹⁷ Robin Marantz Henig and Samantha Henig, *Twentysomething: Why Do Young Adults Seem Stuck?* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2012), 8, Kindle.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Despite the relative stability in church membership, the number of Americans who do not identify in surveys with any religion—the “nones”—has been growing at a dramatic pace. As of 2014, more than one-fifth of the US public—and more than a third of Millennials—were religiously unaffiliated, the highest percentage ever in Pew Research Center polling. From 2007 to 2014 alone, the unaffiliated increased from just over 16% to just under 23% of all US adults.²⁰

Taylor is not alarmed by the numbers, but instead offers an explanation:

How can church membership, self-reported attendance at religious services, and other key measures of religiosity in America be holding fairly steady or declining only modestly while disaffiliation is rising dramatically? The answer is that the growth of the unaffiliated is mostly among people who are already at the low end of the religiosity spectrum. In the past many of them might have retained a connection to a religious tradition, even if it was only nominal. Now they identify as ‘nones.’²¹

Taylor agrees that the dropouts of the church are not coming from devoted attendees but instead from nominal believers falling away as they see no need to remain in the church.

Taylor answers the questions of whether these dropouts are religiously curious by stating, “Another common misperception is that religiously unaffiliated Americans are ‘seekers’ who haven’t yet found the right church for them. In fact, very few are in the market.”²²

Taylor affirms both Rainer and Rainer’s conclusion that those who embrace church are looking for genuine Christianity, as well as Twenge’s idea that churches are not losing genuine believers but nominal ones whose families are not committed to the faith.

Addressing the “nones,” Rainer and Rainer assert, “In summary we can say that the church’s challenge is not overcoming an adversarial attitude from the Millennials. The true challenge is overcoming apathy.”²³ Rainer and Rainer’s thoughts work in step with Henig’s theory of Millennials settling in apathy. They state emphatically,

²⁰ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), locs. 3135-39, Kindle

²¹ *Ibid.*, locs. 3193-97.

²² *Ibid.*, locs. 3282-83.

²³ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 244.

“Millennials are the least religious of any generation in modern American history.”²⁴ This apathy toward religion, specifically Christianity, is a defining mark: “They are not antagonistic against religions and religious people; they simply see them as unimportant and irrelevant.”²⁵ The question arises: how then does the church respond to the apathy of Millennials? The generation of hope has transformed into a generation of apathy. Few that have fallen away are interested in the church and more importantly in Christ and salvation.

Restoring Hope

God’s call for the church is not to abandon Millennials to apathy but to instead restore them through genuine faith in the gospel and intentional discipleship from the church. In the process of restoration, the church must understand the moralism that Millennials have adopted as their own and build a gospel-centered worldview through discipleship to replace that false worldview. This process will not be quickly accomplished, nor will this work adequately describe all that it entails. The goal of this research will be to introduce a starting point in Millennial restoration.

Moralism: An Empty Worldview

Howe and Strauss’s research shows that the great majority of Millennials have been influenced by the church during their teenage years, yet Millennials, as a whole, have dropped out of church and have become apathetic to God and His ways. Perhaps the easiest explanation to this phenomenon is the worldview these Millennials grasped from the church. Before the Millennial exodus, Howe and Strauss stated, “They are preached at to behave more than to believe.”²⁶ As Millennials are interviewed regarding their church experiences, many cite moralism as a cause that led them away from the church. Many

²⁴ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 244, 229.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁶ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, loc. 5560.

Millennials who walked through the doors of the church did not encounter the gospel but instead found the emptiness of moral lessons. Carson Nyquist, looking back on his experience, affirms,

Good intentions abounding, we have received a faith that values perception over reality. Mature Christians need to have their life in order. Mature Christians need to look good on Sunday morning. My generation has been taught this set of values. But such an attitude does not validate our struggles, doubt, or frustration. We learned that life is about having everything together . . . or at least playing the part.”²⁷

Nyquist illustrates the struggle many Millennials have in the church. For them, the church is about behaving a certain way, with little understanding of the gospel.

David Stark highlights the struggle Millennials have with moralism. Stressing the worldview many Millennials observed in the church, Stark explains,

Unfortunately, many Christians—often older ones—believe the most important part of following Jesus is to avoid sin rather than, say, bear fruit (love, joy, peace, etc.), love their neighbors, or seek God’s will. Their focus is on becoming morally better. As a consequence, they wrongly think outsiders will not follow Jesus because they cannot or will not change their moral lives.²⁸

Stark understands that moralism has left Millennials empty and is clear on what is necessary in restoring them:

I cannot say it forcefully enough: KEEP THE MAIN THING, THE MAIN THING (to put it in Stephen Covey language). For Christians, the Good News of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will always be the main thing! Sadly, much of the church does not keep this the center of what their church is about, and this misstep is picked up by the attuned radar of younger generations.²⁹

Ravi Zacharias, while speaking at a conference on preaching to post-modern Millennials, reiterates the necessity of moving beyond the moralistic worldview:

I challenge you: when you are preaching righteousness, when you are calling a people to goodness, do not stop with morality alone, because a nation can be

²⁷ J. Paul Nyquist and Carson Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian: Dealing with the Generational Baggage of Our Faith* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 19.

²⁸ David Stark, *Reaching Millennials: Proven Methods for Engaging a Younger Generation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), locs. 351-54, Kindle.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, locs. 428-31.

morally lost just as easily as immorally lost. What you have to point to ultimately is the centerpiece of righteousness, our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁰

A great majority of Millennials are now disenchanted and apathetic to the church because of their experiences with churches that preached moralism. If the church is to reach the Millennial generation, it must embrace and teach a gospel-centered worldview.

A Gospel-Centered Worldview

The church must build a discipleship model with the assumption that Millennials do not fully understand the gospel and that they are not working from a Christian worldview. Most Millennials the church will seek to restore will be working from a postmodern worldview, having rejected the moralistic one of their youth. This worldview does not give faith an elevated platform but instead treats scriptural truth as one of many biblical truth claims to be weighed against all other truth claims. Elizabeth Sbanotto express this idea: “For a generation that has never collectively felt as if there was a place to turn for trusted information, facts, or truth, the thought that one religious belief system could claim such authority is almost beyond comprehension.”³¹ Millennials do not understand the world through any essential truth but instead begin with the assumption that there are many truths. Where once the Christian church could begin evangelism and discipleship from a Christianized worldview, it no longer enjoys such luxury. Instead, the task of evangelism and discipleship is to build a worldview with the understanding that Millennials do not see the world through the Christian faith.

The loss of a Christianized worldview and an increasingly pluralistic culture present a great challenge to the church. Collin Smith expresses the difficulty of reaching

³⁰ Ravi Zacharias, “The Touch of Truth,” in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 21.

³¹ Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 196.

the postmodern thinker:

The problem in trying to reach postmodern people is that there is no clothesline. So when we try to hang our texts, they fall to the ground in a messy heap. The great challenge before the preacher is to put up the clothesline. Our task is to present the big story and to persuade postmodern people that it is true.³²

This same struggle is shared by Sbanotto: “As a professor who works primarily with Millennials, I am especially struck by the truth of this awareness that Millennials have a lot of information available to them but lack the skills or knowledge to adapt to it or decipher it.”³³ These struggles with postmodern thought match Henig’s view that the overload of information has paralyzed Millennials. Sbanotto highlights why the void of a gospel-centered worldview has paralyzed Millennial thought: “They were confronted with a fire hose of information and accessibility and had to learn how to accurately sift through legitimate and trustworthy sources rather than being given foundational truth upon which to build their worldview.”³⁴ Without the gospel as the center of one’s worldview, the world cannot make sense.

Sbanotto, who expressed the lostness of the postmodern worldview, also provides the solution:

Millennials have products of all kinds promising to make their life better; what they lack is something bigger than themselves that gives their lives meaning, purpose, and significance. Our strategy in discipleship (and evangelism) is to remember the radical nature and power of the gospel and to not be afraid to communicate that to this generation. In a world where everything is centered on them, their souls cry out for something bigger, something greater, something that gives purpose and meaning that extends beyond this life.³⁵

The beginning place of restoring Millennials and forming their worldview in discipleship must be the gospel. This process will not be quick.

³² Collin Smith, “Keeping Christ Central in Preaching,” in Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 96.

³³ Nesbit Sbanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 173.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

Building a worldview requires the church to deal with difficult thoughts and ideas formed when the Millennial is working from a postmodern perspective. If the church is not able to deeply discuss complex issues of the world from a gospel-centered perspective, then it will struggle to build the Millennial's worldview. Advocating for the Millennial, Stark states, "I often get simple answers in this complex world that convince me they are not dealing with the deep reality of most issues."³⁶ To restore Millennials back to the church, the church must rebuild a broken worldview through intentional discipleship. The question for the church is how that goal is accomplished.

Communicating the Gospel

In building the gospel-centered worldview, one must be intentional both in keeping the message of the gospel central as well as communicating in a way that fosters understanding among Millennials. The challenge of communicating to Millennials will be to lead them to embrace the truth of the gospel while at the same time allowing them space and time to wrestle through false understandings of faith. The church must create room for Millennials to express their opinions, even when wrong, so that Millennials can grapple with their false truth while coming to understand the truth of the gospel. Susan Hecht describes the environment necessary in reaching the Millennial: "Creating a safe environment means, then, that we need to resist the temptation to correct every comment and settle every issue unanimously by the end of the conversation."³⁷ To engage Millennials in conversation and lead them to the gospel, the teacher must be humble enough to listen, while not compromising the core truth of the gospel. In this, the message of the gospel is presented, not in a lecture format, but instead through a humble

³⁶ Stark, *Reaching Millennials*, locs. 1114-15.

³⁷ Susan Hecht, "Faithfully Relating to Unbelievers in a Relational Age," in Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 236-37.

conversation. The spirit of the gospel presentation is just as essential as the message. Hecht describes this tension: “We do not have all the answers, and if we appear to have them, we lose credibility and an ability to relate to others.”³⁸ The idea that one must willingly not correct the Millennial at every error is a difficult task, but unless Millennials can sort through the gospel on their own, through the guidance of the teacher, they will likely not open themselves up to the message.

Millennials, having been raised to express their opinions and ideas, bring this expectation to the church. Part of the way Millennials learn is through self-expression. As Millennials express opinions, it is not them rejecting the concept taught but instead engaging and thinking through the subject. Stark states, “They want to give input into just about everything; that is often how they go deeper and engage with things.”³⁹ The traditional method of lecture-based teaching might be rejected, not because they resist the message, but because they have not had the opportunity to take ownership of the subject. Referring to the ways in which the church has taught, Stark writes, “They are used to giving feedback about everything, and therefore listening to what they may consider a monologue for twenty to forty-five minutes is a big exception in their lives.”⁴⁰ Allowing conversation and allowing Millennials to express their ideas is essential to building a gospel worldview. The teacher must be willing to discuss and help Millennials think through their world view in order to for Millennials to understand. Stark sees one solution to engaging Millennials:

Take time to give in-depth answers to their questions, knowing that they are aware every day that people have very different answers than we do to life’s central

³⁸ Hecht, “Faithfully Relating to Unbelievers, 235.

³⁹ Stark, *Reaching Millennials*, locs. 1368-69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, locs. 1364-65.

questions. Using phrases like “in my opinion” and “from my perspective” and “what do you think” are critical to having a conversation, not giving a lecture.⁴¹

Sbanotto also sees the need for Millennials to engage and discuss more than just be taught. Where in times past the teacher would disseminate information to the class, reaching Millennials means the teacher must become more of guide than an authority. Sbanotto states, “Because truth is so personal and seemingly ever changing, Millennials place a high value on questioning.”⁴² In this time of questioning, the teacher shares one of many voices with the Millennial. If the teacher can guide the conversation, while at the same time allowing the entire group to engage in the conversation, he/she will successfully be able to teach the unchanging truth of the gospel. It is essential that the teacher allow any persons to express their ideas and opinions in the process. Sbanotto explains, “It is extremely important to Millennials that everyone involved in a process or decision be heard.”⁴³ Though many opinions and truths will be presented during the conversation, the teacher must understand that this is the way Millennials digest information. This style of teaching runs counter to the generations that preceded the Millennials. Where previous generations see disagreement as opposition, Millennials see disagreement as engagement. Sbanotto shares how Millennials engage truth differently than others:

They will express an opinion or a dissenting voice and expect others to do so as well. They then expect that the collective will choose the best suggestions and move forward from there. Being heard is of more importance than being right or being followed. In an attempt to be heard, a Millennial is generally expressing engagement and ownership in a system or a process; this often challenges a Boomer’s (or Xer’s) assumption that vocalizing an opposing view is an attempt at redirecting power.

One might ask why Millennials must engage and disagree to learn. For Millennials specifically, truth is one’s own. If one cannot make a truth individualistic, it will not resonate within them. Millennials must go beyond learning truth. They must engage, test,

⁴¹ Stark, *Reaching Millennials*, locs. 1159-61.

⁴² Nesbit Sbanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 181-82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 182.

and internalize truth, being guided by a teacher who understands that truth and can affirm it and expand on it as the Millennials in his sphere grapple with it.

The goal of guiding Millennials toward a gospel-centered worldview is to have them adopt the worldview personally. Truth for the Millennial must resonate deeper than the acceptance that it is intellectually true; it must also be felt truth. Evangelism in previous days rested on whether the evangelist could prove the gospel to be true. For Millennials, they must feel that the gospel is true. Zacharias express the struggle of modern evangelism and discipleship: “The challenge, as I see it, is this: How do we communicate the gospel to a generation that hears with its eyes and thinks with its feelings?”⁴⁴ Zacharias also argues that reaching the Millennial will take more than proving one’s truth is truer than the Millennial’s truth. Instead, one must express the truth of the gospel in a way that the Millennial can understand: “What our culture needs is an apologetic that is not merely argued, but also felt. There has to be a passion in the communication. There must be a felt reality beyond the cognitive, engaging the feeling of the listener.”⁴⁵ When a teacher or guide leads Millennials to engage the gospel worldview, it cannot be from a primarily intellectual perspective. He must lead them to internalize and individualize the truth for themselves.

Millennials view individualism differently than other generations. Sbanotto states, “For Millennials, individualism is not a stance against someone else. Instead, for Millennials, individualism is seen as celebratory, as a natural and intentional outflow of the parenting and education they received.”⁴⁶ The goal of the teacher must be to take the unchanging truth of the gospel and allow the Millennial to digest it on their own. In this,

⁴⁴ Ravi Zacharias, “An Ancient Message, through Modern Means, to a Postmodern Mind,” in Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

⁴⁶ Nesbit Sbanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 179-80.

Millennials will come to embrace the truth, accept it as their own and turn to Jesus. The Millennial needs to see and feel that the gospel can impact them personally, not just that it is a lesson taught by the church.

The process of reaching Millennials is not a short-term process. Reaching and discipling Millennials is a long-term project. Creating a safe environment where Millennials feel they can be open and share does not happen in a few weeks' time. If churches are serious about reaching Millennials, they must be willing to put together a patient plan. Reaching this generation is essential, and there are no shortcuts in the process. Robert Coleman expresses the patience the church must possess:

This is going to require a long-term approach to reaching the world. Too easily we have been satisfied with short-lived efforts to see multitudes turn to Christ without assuring their discipleship. In so doing we have inadvertently added to the problem in evangelism rather than its solution. We dare not compromise the focus of the Great Commission.⁴⁷

With understanding the challenges, hopes, and goals of building a gospel-centered worldview among Millennials, one might wonder whether such a task can be accomplished through a traditional Baptist church's discipleship structure. I believe the answer is a resounding yes. The Southern Baptist discipleship process, whether accomplished through Sunday School or cell groups, is the ideal organization to foster discipleship among Millennials.

The Necessity, Foundation and Leadership of Discipleship within a Traditional Church

The traditional Southern Baptist church should be equipped to reach Millennials through its discipleship processes. Within the DNA of most Southern Baptist churches is a discipleship program that provides the church with the necessary tools it needs to create community and reach Millennials. The problem most churches face is not that they do not

⁴⁷ Robert Coleman, "The Lifestyle of the Great Commission," in Carson, *Telling the Truth*, 242.

have the structure, but instead that they have allowed the structure to grow stagnant due to a lack of a deliberate focus and care. Allan Taylor expresses his thoughts regarding the state of most churches' small group ministries:

We would all agree that our Sunday Schools should be exploding with growth; however, I am of the opinion that they are declining, not from growing outdated and useless but from an implosion. You see, it is an inside job. We are crumbling from within. We have forgotten the essentials of the game.⁴⁸

This implosion has left the small group engine of the church ineffective in creating genuine community. Describing this reality, Randy Frazee explains, "The 'hard to swallow' premise I am making is that today's church is not a community; it is a collection of individuals."⁴⁹

Small Groups Still Matter

Sunday School and small groups are equipped to facilitate scripturally-centered community that will in turn produce believers who embrace the mission of God and the church. The community fostered by these groups is crucial to both the development of the believer and the growth of the church.

Christ-centered and Scripture-driven. Although the way people think and relate to one another has changed since the coming of Jesus and the birth of the church, the transformational power of God's unchanging Word and centrality of Christ in the community of believers has not. Before a case can be made for why small groups, specifically those already existing within the church, are still relevant in reaching Millennials, the foundation of these groups needs to be defined. Sunday School or small

⁴⁸ Allan Taylor, *Sunday School in HD: Sharpening the Focus on What Makes Your Church Healthy* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 72.

⁴⁹ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 420-22.

groups are not transformational if they are not centered on Christ and founded on the Word of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw no separation between the Christian community and Christ:

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

In other words, community could not be Christian without Christ at its center. Bonhoeffer explains, “Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us.”⁵¹ As the center of the community is Jesus Christ, the content and foundation of the community is the Word of God. Though the centrality of Scripture should be expected, much of what is called Christian community today does not include the Word of God. As the community gathers around Christ, they allow the Word of God to speak into their lives. Bonhoeffer states, “Therefore, a Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him.”⁵² In understanding the foundation of the Word of God within a community centered around life transformation in Jesus Christ, one can begin to understand why such a community is essential.

Community is essential. The Millennial believer needs more than a Sunday morning worship service. They need a community to which to belong. Just as community is essential to reaching Millennials with the gospel, so also community is essential in the life of every believer. Andy Stanley and Bill Willits saw the need of community as many attended services at his church and fell away within weeks. Regarding the need of

⁵⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John W. Doberstein, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 93-96, Kindle.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113-14.

community, Stanley and Willits state, “Sheep are never attacked in herds. Sheep are attacked when they become isolated from the rest of the flock.”⁵³ The very survival of believers within a church, regardless of age, is dependent on their connection to meaningful relationships within the church. People who attend but never connect to the body are not only lost from the body, but also separated from the very support God provided through relationships in the church. Frazee affirms Stanley and Willits’ proposition and highlights the gaping problem in the modern church—few are connected to genuine community. Frazee explains, “Community is not a luxury; it is a necessity for life. Sadly, it is a necessity that many of us lack.”⁵⁴

Ken Hemphill highlights the role of small groups in the building of intimate relationships within the church: “The intimacy of a small group like a Sunday School class is more relational than a worship service. Here friendships can be made that may become a natural bridge to presenting the gospel.”⁵⁵ Hemphill advocates that the Sunday School class serves to not only provide necessary relationships for believers but also creates an environment for nonbelievers to enter the church. He rationalizes his principle for reaching the lost through small groups, asserting, “People must first feel that they belong before they can be brought to a mature expression of their faith.”⁵⁶ Small groups are the organisms of care that hold believers in the church as they grow in faith, and they are the arms of hospitality that welcome non-believers and introduce them to the love of Christ. Small groups, whether in home groups as Stanley’s church is equipped or through

⁵³ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 32, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0*, 291-92.

⁵⁵ Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur: A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

the on-campus model as Hemphill advocates, are the means of connecting people to one another. They create an environment where people come to know and love one another. Stanley summarizes this principle simply: “People care for people they know well.”⁵⁷

Small groups help a church to function. The small group organization of the church accomplishes more than connecting people to one another. Small groups connect people to the church and its mission. Taylor believes that

Sunday School gives a functional expression to the church's DNA. The book of Acts gives us the fivefold purpose of the church: worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship. All of these, with the exception of worship, function better through Sunday School than through the corporate worship service.⁵⁸

Sunday School, or small groups, are the equipping body that connect people to serve. It trains believers in the Word and then deploys them to accomplish the mission. Taylor explains, “Mission is best accomplished in the context of small groups.”⁵⁹ Taylor shows that believers interact with the mission through the small groups: “Sunday School classes provide a forum for people to speak into the mission, to invest in the mission, and to own the mission.”⁶⁰ Millennials embrace what they own. Sunday School provides the avenue for Millennials to own the mission of the church. The end of Sunday School is to build an organization that equips its members to accomplish the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. Taylor emphasizes this view by stating that proper small groups equip their people to accomplish God’s mission: “Sunday School seeks to develop and lead people to

⁵⁷ Stanley and Willits, *Creating Community*, 106-7.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

become Great Commission Christians that are involved in reaching people, teaching people, and ministering to people.”⁶¹

For small groups to equip believers to own and live the mission of the church, they must become intentionally evangelistic. Sunday School was once the church’s tool for accomplishing evangelism. Taylor laments, “Evangelism was once the proud purpose and mission of Sunday School. She once served as the front door to the church, and many churches ran a higher number in attendance than did the worship service.”⁶² Small groups’ place in evangelism is equipping individual believers in accomplishing the Great Commission. Taylor emphasizes,

The church has forgotten to use Sunday School as her evangelistic arm and as a result baptisms decrease every year. The cold, hard fact is that we are seeing fewer people saved every year! We preach evangelism, and we have the good intention of wanting to see people come to Christ, but we have removed the personal responsibility of every believer to be a witness. Evangelism floats around in the domain of the theological and philosophical but never finds its way to the practical.⁶³

Sunday School provides community, but it should accomplish much more. Sunday School must serve to equip and send believers to accomplish the Great Commission. When small groups accomplish these purposes, they are indispensable within the body of Christ. The need within the church is not to find a new way to reach Millennials but instead to restore an established program to its original purpose and health.

Foundations of Small Groups

Small groups, whether in the form of Sunday School or in another form, are essential to connecting Millennials to the church and its mission. Due to a lack of attention and focus, most small groups have grown ineffective and stagnant in churches. In revitalizing small groups, the church must refocus, simplify, and restore the discipleship

⁶¹ Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 28.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 53.

structure. Even though this project does not work to implement this discipleship structure, the aim of this project is to move Millennial classes toward these ideal ends.

Refocusing the discipleship structure. The restoration or revitalization of the discipleship structure begins with setting a clear goal. The church must decide what it desires to accomplish through its small groups. If the church longs to connect Millennials to the mission of the church, then the church should refocus the discipleship structure to accomplish the purpose. Stanley and Willits explain, “Clarifying what you want people to become will ultimately define your church’s mission.”⁶⁴ Clarifying the aim of the discipleship structure will also define what small groups produce.

The problem in many churches is that the undisciplined and scattered organization of small groups with no focus or accountability has produced undisciplined, scattered believers who rarely share the doctrinal beliefs of the church, let alone the church’s mission. Frazee describes the current product of many church’s discipleship structure:

One of the major problems with the typical small group in America is that people do not enter the group with a common understanding and commitment to the basic tenets of the Christian faith. They may acknowledge that their church has a doctrinal statement of beliefs, but often they do not understand the relationship of these beliefs to daily life and therefore are not really committed to them for everyday living. These beliefs, which form the bedrock of Christian identity and practice, have no practical influence in the small group. Instead, everyone has their own individual idea or opinion as to what the Christian life is all about.⁶⁵

Frazee offers the solution to the laissez-faire attitude that has become normative in most Sunday School classes:

I offer what I see as the principal solution to overcoming the devastating effects of individualism on our search to belong. The answer is simple and straightforward:

⁶⁴ Stanley and Willits, *Creating Community*, 58.

⁶⁵ Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0*, 485-90.

we must have a common purpose. We must once again come together around a set of shared beliefs and values.⁶⁶

He states that both beliefs and values drive the purpose of the church. In other words, the church must be convictional and biblical to be purposeful. Frazee explains, “Another characteristic of effective communities of purpose is a common creed, a shared understanding of the beliefs and practices that guide the community.”⁶⁷ Doctrine drives purpose. If a church desires to connect any group to its mission, the doctrine taught in its small groups will become the mission that its people adopt.

In defining what Sunday School Should accomplish, Alan Taylor writes, “Sunday School has three purposes that are to reach people, teach people, and minister to people.”⁶⁸ Applying Frazee’s focus on doctrine driving a church’s mission through the small group ministries, Steve Parr’s purposes become a simple discipleship model. Sunday School reaches the unchurched, teaches them biblically, and sends them to accomplish reaching others with the gospel. Parr affirms Taylor’s model, asserting, “A Sunday School that really works is one where the lost are reached, lives are changed, and leaders are sent.”⁶⁹ This simple purpose and possible model reflect the foundation of a successful discipleship structure: people are reached, people are trained, and people are sent.

This model in the church can be pictured in a replicating cycle. When people are reached, they move into the training arm of the discipleship process. The training arm of the church exists to build a biblical foundation and connect the believer to the mission of the church. Trained believers are sent to reach people who are unchurched. The unchurched are then brought into the church, saved, and trained. Instead of creating a new

⁶⁶ Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0*, 529-31.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 584-85.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 80.

⁶⁹ Steve R. Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 53.

strategy for evangelism, a refocused discipleship structure serves as the evangelistic arm of the church. Parr states,

We also discovered that the top evangelistic churches connect their Sunday School and small group ministries to their outreach strategy. An overwhelming 90 percent of the top evangelistic churches responded that they strategically and purposefully make this connection.⁷⁰

When the church systems are built to work together, the discipleship structure produces believers who accomplish the mission of the church.

In his book calling for the revitalization of small groups, Hemphill declares that the loss of evangelism in the small group results in the stagnation of the Sunday School organization:

The Sunday School must be plugged into a passion for evangelism; otherwise, it will settle into the comfort zone of a maintenance organization. By ignoring the evangelistic potential of the Sunday School, we have reduced Sunday School to a stagnant pool of introverted groups that look primarily to their own needs and interests and ignore the plight of the unsaved.⁷¹

Hemphill argues against using the front door of the church as the evangelistic arm of the church for the simple reason that the way a church attracts the unchurched is the way that they will keep them:

As a general rule, the way you reach people is the way you must keep them. If you reach them through big events and powerful personalities, you are always struggling to produce bigger and bigger events. If a church across town produces a more spectacular event, those you attracted with spectacular events will leave you for the church across town. A church built on the small-group structure is founded on the solid rock of relationships, not on personalities or events.⁷²

People who connect to the church through small groups will find meaningful relationships and not fall through the cracks as is often the case when they are drawn only by the morning service.

⁷⁰ Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works*, 139.

⁷¹ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 30.

⁷² *Ibid.*

As the small group organization works properly, people will be reached, trained, and sent. Many times, classes fill with the new faces and grow stagnant as a small group believes it has accomplished its purpose. Classes also reach a point where community is no longer possible as the group has grown beyond a small group. Lamenting this tendency, Hemphill states, “One of the primary problems you will face with any organization of small groups is the tendency toward stagnancy. It is an unwritten law that small groups left alone will move toward entropy. They will become stagnant and introverted.”⁷³ To combat this trend, a process of launching new classes must be built into the DNA of each small group. Parr emphasizes the need of launching new small groups: “Creating new classes provides the avenue to simultaneously meet the ministry needs of the members while making room for new members as you reach out to the lost and unchurched.”⁷⁴ Taylor holds that every class is called to reproduce. Instead of the organization creating new units, the individual class is called to birth a new class: “Each class births a new class. By starting new classes, we put more people to work. It expands the organization so we have more teachers, outreach leaders, care group leaders, etc. The more laborers we put in the harvest fields, the more produce we will reap.”⁷⁵

The refocused cycle is simple. Small groups are trained to reach the unchurched. They are sent to meet the unchurched. The unchurched are reached through the gospel and brought into the small group. Small groups constantly replicate to accomplish the mission. Once new small groups are formed, the small groups begin the cycle again, training believers to accomplish the mission of the church.

⁷³ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 40.

⁷⁴ Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works*, 167.

⁷⁵ Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 51.

In-Class Dynamics

All the ideals, foundations, and models accomplish little without the direct involvement of the teacher. The teacher, or small group leader, either leads the group to connect to the mission of the church or away from it.

Defining a quality leader is essential in developing other small group leaders. Too often the picture many church members hold of a “good” leader is of a person with charisma or knowledge. Though charisma and knowledge can help a create a quality leader, they do not make one quality. James Wilhoit and Leland Ryken describe this false view many in church have of “good” teachers: “Charismatic teachers can seduce students into thinking they have learned when in reality they have only been entertained.”⁷⁶ He also writes, “When we speak of someone’s being ‘a good Bible teacher,’ we usually mean that he or she is full of facts about the Bible but may make little attempt to wrestle with applying those facts to modern living.”⁷⁷ When the congregation or other leaders define good teachers, they normally go to those teachers who exude knowledge or who entertain through charisma. Quality leaders are not born; they are defined by the church and trained to lead. The quality of a leader is not in how well the person entertains or educates the class; it is how well the leader disciples the class and equips them to serve the mission of the church.

Quality teaching defined. If biblical knowledge alone does not make a person a quality Bible teacher, then the attributes of a quality teacher must be defined. A quality teacher is one who is willing to model the mission of the church openly, while teaching and reproducing disciples who do likewise.

⁷⁶ Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

The teacher or leader must be the example of the mission to the class. Wilhoit and Ryken explain, “Theology is more than words and ideas: it is something that a teacher must live.”⁷⁸ The teacher is responsible for displaying to the class a desire for community through being open in class, a desire to serve through their own service to the church, and the desire to grow, through willingly building and deploying teachers from his class.

Regarding community, Wilhoit and Ryken emphasize, “The teacher who expects openness on the part of a class but remains a closed book will rightly be perceived as manipulative.”⁷⁹ The vulnerability essential to reaching Millennials and building community among them must begin with the teacher. Their care for the class will establish the culture for community. The teacher’s leadership directs the class.

When a teacher connects to the mission of the church through evangelism, the class that has learned in community alongside him will follow. Taylor states, “How does a Sunday School class become a Great Commission class? The teacher leads the class to reach out to the lost and unchurched.”⁸⁰ The difference between entertaining/knowledgeable and quality teachers comes down to what they produce. If the class is merely entertained, then the fruit of the teacher is seen. If the class is empowered to accomplish the mission of the church, the true substance of the teacher shines through. Highlighting the essential role of the teacher as catalyst, Taylor proposes,

It is one thing for the teacher to exhort the class to be personal witnesses; it is another thing for the teacher to emulate personal evangelism. When it comes to witnessing, more is caught than is taught. Individual Sunday School teachers start an evangelistic succession that works its way up through the class to the Sunday School organization and to the church. Therefore, you grow a Great Commission church one teacher at a time.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 37.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁰ Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 43.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

In many small group studies, evangelism is taught, but the people learning never take the step to becoming evangelists themselves. Leadership matters. In fact, for small group leaders to model the Great Commission, they must see it modeled by the pastor. Taylor emphasizes,

Evangelistic churches are led by evangelistic pastors. Evangelistic Sunday School classes are led by evangelistic Sunday School teachers. You do not necessarily have to be gifted in evangelism to be effective in reaching out to the lost and unchurched. However, you must have a conviction concerning its importance and necessity because of the extent of lostness in your world and community as well as an understanding that it is your responsibility based on the Great Commission.⁸²

Every leader must model personal evangelism so that the teacher might embody their own teaching for the class.

The temptation for any teacher who sees his or her class grow through evangelism is to allow the class to grow to a size where it can no longer serve as a healthy small group. A quality teacher sees a goal greater than his or her own class. Quality teachers understand that the needs of discipleship are greater than the numbers on their own rolls. Hemphill challenges teachers to see a grander vision than a large class: “Every teacher should establish a goal to discover and mentor one new teacher yearly.”⁸³ Hemphill pushes teachers toward an obligation in reproduction: “Giving birth to a new teaching unit should not be seen as an option, but as a holy obligation. You should instill in every class the desire to see another teaching unit born every year because God has given divine increase through the work of the class.”⁸⁴ Simply put, a quality teacher supports the mission of the church through loving the class, leading them to accomplish the mission, and launching new classes to reach new people with the gospel.

Care, mission, and purpose should drive every small group, always built on the Word of God and centered on Christ. When the small groups of the church are healthy, the

⁸² Taylor, *Sunday School in HD*, 43.

⁸³ Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur*, 137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

church as a whole will see health through the growth of its own people, growth through new people trusting Christ, and the expansion of the small group ministries of the church. On paper, the process is simple, but in practice, the process will take constant focus and energy. Teacher training is essential in molding leaders to become the ideal leader who cares, leads his group on mission, and willingly reproduces.

Conclusion

The tendency to overreact exists in regard to the exodus of Millennials from the church. The temptation is for churches to scrap discipleship programs that have served the established church for generations. Sunday School as a model did not fail Millennials. The discipleship model of Sunday School failed when the established church allowed it to fall into disrepair. Though this project cannot in its scope repair Sunday School, it can set a goal and action plan for the church.

At one point, Millennials offered a promising future for the church. They were wired spiritually, embraced community, and were eager to serve. Over the course of the last fifteen to twenty years, Millennials' connection to church reversed, and many churches found themselves lacking a generation. No matter the cause of the decline, the established church has the structure in place to connect with the Millennial generation, introduce them to the gospel, disciple them, connect them to other believers, and unleash them to transform the world with the gospel. To reach Millennials, the church must be willing to revitalize its Sunday School program. Sunday School, or the small group, is not obsolete. The program needs the senior pastor to invest in training its leaders, restoring its functions, and breathing new life into what some believe is an outdated program.

The church has not lost Millennials. The gospel has not lost its power. The church needs to reinvest into its own discipleship community, trusting that by God's power, a generation will be reached and disciplined within the church.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLE-MAKING MODEL AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

The mission of the church should drive both the programs and the people of the church. As the pastor of First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana, I have come to realize that not only do many members not live for the gospel-centered mission of the church, but many members also cannot express a specific time of gospel transformation in their lives. If the people of the church are not transformed by the gospel of Christ, then the programs of the church will not be centered around the gospel. Both the research on Millennials and my personal experience in the church led me to the conclusion that the single greatest need at FBCV is a gospel-centered curriculum.

As the project began to take form, the staff at FBC Vidalia realized that many Millennials who have begun attending the church were not plugged into a Sunday School class. Despite efforts to encourage both teachers to invite and students to attend, little impact was made. The young adult population continued to faithfully attend corporate services but did not plug into the established discipleship program. The staff of FBCV chose to launch community groups in correlation with the project to widen the discipleship base.

With many Millennials unable to communicate the gospel and some who struggled to see a distinct point in their lives where God saved and transformed them, the project sought to lay the foundation for faith, devotion, and evangelism. Even though the project's clear goal was to equip Millennials in the mission of the church, through its formation the project also sought to communicate the gospel and help Millennials clarify their salvation.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of developing a curriculum and to explain the implementation of its lessons for the purpose of equipping teachers and students in the gospel and mission of FBCV. In this established church, many more steps will need to be taken to align both the discipleship process with the mission of the church, but the aim of this project was to create a first step and a beginning place for the discipleship process. After completing the four-week curriculum, a student should have been able to understand the core of the gospel, been equipped with foundational practices to nurture the gospel, and been able to communicate their own gospel story with others.

The equipping project lasted for fourteen weeks. The tools developed included a pre-study survey called the FBCV Mission Understanding and Practice Survey (FMUPS), four lessons or leaders' guides, four Facebook live videos, four student worksheets, an evaluation worksheet for the lessons, and a post-study FMUPS for evaluations of the project's effectiveness. The lessons were written during the first four weeks of the project. The content and aim of the lessons were developed from the research found in chapters 2 and 3. Also, during the first four weeks, Sunday School teachers were contacted and the participating teachers agreed to use the curriculum. Small groups were also formed and scheduled to launch in coordination with the project. During week 5, leader guide curriculum and student worksheets were emailed to the expert panel for their review and evaluation. During week 6, the expert panel sent back their edits and the curriculum was revised until it reached a satisfactory level according to the project stipulations. Along with edits in week 6, the teachers and small group leaders were given the edited curriculum along with the FMUPS. The project was implemented during weeks 7 through 10. Each week, the teachers and small group leaders were led online through the curriculum and then they taught the curriculum during Sunday School or during the week in their small group. Before teaching the curriculum during week 7, each group took the FMUPS, and after finishing the lesson on week 10, the implementation concluded with the class taking the FMUPS again. During week 11, Sunday School teachers and small group leaders

were debriefed on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. The pre- and post-FMUPS were compared during week 12 of the project to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. In week 13, the curriculum was revised for future use. During week 14, an expert panel measured the success of the curriculum and training plan.

The goal of the project was to equip teachers and introduce students to basic Christian doctrines and disciplines, enabling them to share their testimony. The Millennial generation at FBCV holds untapped potential within the body of the church. This project sought to create a foundation for the Millennials to embrace the gospel-centered mission of FBCV: “Connecting to God, to each other, and to the world.” The simple curriculum centered around select passages of the book of Romans, which served to set the foundation for the project while the demographic study of Millennials and established church discipleship served to equip the teachers to communicate the lessons to their groups. This study was offered to more than the classes who had Millennial attenders—it was offered to the entire church. While some classes chose to participate in the project, others did not. Results of the larger scope of the study were recorded and are discussed within chapter 5 of the project. A total of 40 Millennials participated in the project.

Curriculum Development

The center of this project was Scripture-driven curriculum, built with the full understanding that no amount of information regarding Millennial demographics or teaching helps could change the heart. Four lessons were developed from Scripture to equip the Millennial membership of FBCV to accomplish the church’s mission.

Weeks 1 through 6

The curriculum was written and developed in the first four weeks of the project. The FMUPS was also developed alongside the curriculum. The purpose of the FMUPS was to establish an understanding of the Millennial church members’ basic knowledge of the gospel, spiritual disciplines, and comfort in evangelism. An evaluation rubric was also

developed to measure the biblical faithfulness and practicality of the curriculum. During the development of the curriculum, Sunday School teachers and small group leaders were contacted. The classes overwhelmingly agreed to implement the curriculum. While writing, I came to the conclusion that the curriculum would be beneficial to other classes beyond those with Millennial members. I reached out to classes beyond the scope of the project. Classes from middle school to senior adult chose to participate in the project.

During week 5 of the project, the curriculum was sent to the expert panel to evaluate the project using the evaluation rubric provided. The expert panel consisted of a senior pastor, a seminary professor, and a school administrator. The panel was varied specifically to utilize the specific job strengths of each individual. The senior pastor on the panel served as a model for church revitalization, having taken a declining church in a declining community and bringing health and new life to it. This pastor also serves as the president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and a trustee for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and he has received a Doctor of Ministry from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminary professor holds a Doctor of Philosophy from Southwestern Theological Seminary where he served as a professor for several years. He currently serves as an assistant professor at Liberty University. The school administrator, in full disclosure, is my sister-in-law. She currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Comal Independent School District in Texas. Her inclusion on the panel was due largely to her experience in the Wylie Independent School District in Texas, as the Director of Curriculum for the district.

At the end of week 5 through week 6, I received the evaluation from the panel of experts. Two of the three reviewers sent back the document within a few days. The senior pastor gave his edits over the phone, commenting on language changes and suggesting a few ideas to elaborate, but overall, he thought the curriculum was excellent. All the edits given over the phone were integrated into the curriculum. The seminary professor emailed his evaluation back with edits on the document itself. His evaluation

rubric graded the curriculum 3 percent points lower than 90 percent standard set for the acceptance of the curriculum. The professor explained that the section on Jesus as substitute should go into more depth. He suggested I use the specific terminology of atonement with explanation of the concept. I agreed to this edit as well as the smaller edits on the document and resubmitted the curriculum to the professor. The document was returned with an exemplary score.

The final expert, the assistant superintendent who evaluates curriculum professionally, offered the most critical assessment. Her realm of expertise was not theological but instead practical. She emailed back a page full of suggested edits for the paper. In her original evaluation, both the excellence and the teachability of the curriculum were graded as 2s, requiring attention. She offered the lowest score of the three-expert panel. Her critique was that the curriculum would not pass the minimum standards for her field. In the assessment, she offered the advice to make the learning goals clear, communicate up front the objectives of the lesson, and move the curriculum to a more structured format over the narrative approach used in the original draft. She also suggested that the Millennial teaching points be further differentiated from the curriculum so that the teacher could clearly see the difference between curriculum content and helps. The project was reformatted and clarified according to the advice of the curriculum expert. The document was resubmitted and approved by the expert with an exemplary score.

Project Implementation

The project was implemented in week 7. The project was targeted toward Millennials and younger members in the church, but as the project came together, it became clear that the curriculum would be beneficial for the whole church. During week 7, a last revision was made to create curriculum void of Millennial helps for those small groups that did not have Millennial members. All people attending the first-class session, both Millennial and non-Millennial, were asked to complete the FMUPS. All class members who completed the FMUPS whose age matched the defined demographic were

included in the data. Separate data was kept over all the church to see if the curriculum was useful beyond the targeted age range. The data on Millennials was used for the project, while the data collected for those outside the target age range was collected and used for the church.

Week 7

During week 7, the project was implemented across the church. A week before the project's implementation, teachers were given the whole of the curriculum for their own study and preparation. On the Sunday before the project's implementation, teachers were presented with a printed copy of the curriculum for their classes. Every Monday of the project, a live video streamed from www.facebook.com/Alive4Jesus/. Teachers were encouraged to interact with me on the video. With the time constraints of the teachers, live participation was not required, but each teacher was asked to watch the video during the week in preparation for the class. The project was presented to classes throughout the week by the varied small groups of FBCV.

The weekly teachers' training consisted of lesson overview, teacher training, Millennial understanding, and interaction with the teachers. The livestream began with a simple walk through of the lesson, encouraging the teachers to focus and outline their lessons on the text of Scripture. As the varied classes teach through many different formats, the lessons were written to be used in varied formats. As an example, FBCV's largest class consists of fifty-plus members. This class is taught in a lecture-based format, as opposed to evening small groups, which are capped at eight members. After walking through the lesson as outlined in the print curriculum, the training videos addressed teacher training and facts about Millennials. These were included to equip the teachers of FBCV to communicate the material properly. Throughout the video, teachers were encouraged to ask questions, type in thoughts, and add ideas. Once the material and teaching tips were shared, time was given for interaction with teachers to discuss their input in the material. The goal of each livestream was to keep the lessons under thirty minutes. A suggested

order was given for teachers to follow in the implementation of each lesson. The following paragraphs work from the understanding that teachers followed the communicated order of curriculum.

After opening in prayer during the first week of implementation, the class began by taking the FMUPS. The FMUPS measured each participant's understanding of the gospel, practice of devotion, and evangelistic competency. The first set of questions was included to determine whether the participant clearly understood fundamental concepts regarding their own salvation. Regarding devotion, the FMUPS asked practical questions to gauge whether each participant understood the practices of a daily Christian walk. Finally, regarding evangelism, the FMUPS measured the participant's comfort and competency in evangelism. The pre-test was given to establish a baseline in order to measure growth across the curriculum. The FMUPS was given anonymously both in print and online. To match participants pre-tests to their post-tests, the survey asked participants to include the last four digits of their social security number. After administering the FMUPS, teachers moved to teach the lesson. Teachers were given the full curriculum to teach the class, and listening guides were provided for the students. These guides were not required in the participation of the project but given as a tool for classes who sought to utilize them.

The first lesson of the curriculum focused on gospel understanding. The objective for every student was to understand what the gospel is, understand what it is not, and learn why a simple message could completely transform lives. The lesson was driven by Romans 1:16-17. The teacher was given six concepts to teach from the passage of Scripture. First, every person sins. Second, Jesus literally died on the cross and literally rose from the dead. Third, Jesus' death is sufficient to pay for a person's sins. Fourth, the punishment awaiting unbelief is not Satan but God's wrath. Fifth, there should be personal clarity in the student's life regarding his salvation. Finally, sixth, the student should be able to clearly articulate the gospel message.

Part 1 of the lesson focused on the gospel, and teachers were given a working definition of the gospel. Romans 5:8-9 served as the clear definition of the gospel for teachers to use in communicating the gospel to the group. Romans 5:8-9 was selected to define the gospel from Scripture because the passage identifies men and women's sinful nature, the death of Christ, the transferred righteousness of Jesus, and the removal of God's ultimate wrath. The lesson then followed the text of Romans 1:16-17 in understanding God's power and men's belief, and it concluded with the understanding that genuine faith is lived out.

Paul's words "the righteous will live by faith" directed the next three weeks of study. It was essential in these lessons for the learner to understand that faith is more than simply walking an aisle or praying a prayer. Much of the context and questions written in the lesson were done so in order to lead the learner to discover whether his faith was transformational. One of the Millennial facts shared in the first lesson was that Millennials are looking for something bigger than themselves. The gospel answers this need. Teachers were encouraged to show their class that the gospel is more than just being saved and going to Heaven. They were encouraged to help their classes see that the gospel transforms their lives. The first lesson served to build a gospel understanding for the next three weeks and to show how the gospel transformed the learner's daily and eternal life.

Week 8

During week 8 of the project, the curriculum was taught to the teachers and then taught to students in the same way as week 7. One major difference in week 8 was the way teacher training was implemented. A committee meeting was unintentionally scheduled during the planned livestream video, and it could not be rescheduled. I believed consistency in the scheduled time of the video mattered more than the live interaction of the video, so on the Saturday night of week 7, the teachers' guide video was recorded and scheduled to post the Monday of week 8 at 6 p.m. To make up for the loss of the live element, teachers were encouraged to leave questions in the comment

section of the video where I responded to their questions in comment form. Even though there was less live interaction, two detailed emails were sent to me regarding the material. Where the livestream did encourage more response due to the instant reaction on the video, the questions asked in reflection to the prerecorded video showed reflection of the material.

The video led teachers through the learning objective, Scripture focus, and major concepts that the students needed to articulate by the end of the lesson. The video also walked teachers step-by-step through the lesson, elaborating on individual ideas, offering examples, and explaining the goals behind each part of the curriculum. The lesson was broken into two parts. The first part served as a scriptural foundation while the second served as a practical application. Its goal was to explain to the students how God transforms a person after they place their faith in Christ, embracing a Christian worldview and then giving them the practical tools necessary to establish a daily devotional time.

The learning objective was for students to understand how God changes people after they are saved and to help students learn how to have a quiet time. To accomplish this goal, teachers were given six concepts to communicate through the lesson. First, they communicated the identifying marks of a personal relationship with Christ. Teachers were encouraged to move beyond simply teaching and share from their own experience on the topic. Second, students were taught how to systematically read the Bible daily. The third concept teachers were challenged to communicate was how to pray biblically. Fourth, teachers were to explain how students could connect their morning Bible reading to their daily life. Finally, teachers were encouraged to show the importance of spiritual growth.

The first half of the lesson focused on Romans 12:1-2. The text served to lead the students to understand the necessity of daily devotion and life change. As with the initial lesson, the text of Romans 12:1-2 formed the outline and ideas of the foundation. The lesson began with a review of the previous week's content. As Romans 12:1 builds off "the mercies of God," teachers were encouraged to remind students of the gospel taught from Romans 1:16 and Romans 5:8-9. With the foundation of the gospel in place, teachers

then explained how salvation does not end with conversion but instead moves the believer to daily sacrifice and renewal of his mind. Lesson 2 sought to show the scriptural foundation for the renewal of the mind, as well as give a practical plan to students on how to implement a daily devotional time.

The second half of the lesson sought to equip students with a plan to understand and implement a daily quiet/devotional time. Students were encouraged to have a plan, set aside time daily, be consistent, and talk about their devotions with others. A simple outline was given to the students to help them build a quiet time. Their plan began with prayer. Matthew 6:9-13 was given as a model prayer for students. The prayer was broken down to show the themes through which Jesus prayed, and students were encouraged to incorporate those themes into their personal prayer time. Within the teaching video, the point was made that quoting the prayer and then expanding and personalizing each theme would be an easy way for students to implement praying like Jesus.

After praying, students were encouraged to spend time systematically in the Word of God. For students who did not have a basic plan, teachers were to encourage the students to read a chapter of the book of John daily. Within the book, students were charged with underlining or highlighting passages that stuck out, identifying the big ideas of the text, applying those points to their lives, finding one verse to take a picture of (or write down) to remember, and applying the verse throughout the day to their lives. The teachers were also to encourage the students to find a reading plan on the YouVersion Bible App for future devotional time. After reading and thinking through the text, students were taught to share what they learned daily with a friend.

Teachers were encouraged to show that the conclusion of the devotional time should end in praying over the text of Scripture. Just as they were encouraged to apply the passage to their lives, student were also encouraged to pray the passage over their life. If the passage brought conviction, the student would confess that conviction to God. If the passage brought comfort, he/she was to talk to God about the hurt or fear. Teachers

then shared that the devotional time did not end with the concluding prayer, challenging students to continue to apply the daily learning throughout their day from the text that they wrote down.

As Paul taught that a believer is transformed by the renewal of his mind and the ability to discern God's will, the goal of the week 2's curriculum was to equip students with the tools necessary to accomplish that renewal. The goal of the week 2's curriculum was to equip students to practice a daily quiet/devotional time. Students in week 2 were challenged by their teacher to practice a quiet time daily for seven days.

Week 9

During week 9 of the project, the curriculum was taught to the teachers and then taught to students in the same way as weeks 7 and 8. In week 9, the curriculum was taught via livestream as it was proposed and intended in the project. The livestream was not as actively watched live as the first week, but all teachers watched later, though interaction declined progressively as the study continued. The livestream began with discussing the teacher evaluation that would be given to the teachers within their weekly materials. The intent of the teacher self-evaluation was to have teachers think critically about their teaching habits and allow them to grade themselves. There was no follow-up on the teacher evaluation, but the surveys will be used by the church later for training.

The week's lesson focused on Romans 5:8-9 and 12:1-2. The first two weeks challenged the learner to think about their own salvation, understanding of the gospel, and devotional life. The third sought to build from the same biblical base toward an evangelistic end. The goal of the third lesson was to help the student understand the four basic parts of a testimony: what did God do, from what did God save you, how did God make you new, and how is God at work in your life today. The four goals of the lesson were driven from lessons 1 and 2. The goal for the teachers was to have their students begin to see gospel moments in their own lives and categorize them within the framework of the four parts of the testimony.

Two major points of Millennial emphasis were placed before the teachers in the training video. The first was that Millennials are looking for something bigger than themselves; they are looking for meaning and purpose. By walking the students through understanding the basics of a testimony, the teachers were able to help students see how the gospel connected to their own life stories and see how they are a part of a narrative bigger than themselves. The other point of emphasis was equipping teachers to understand the worldview many Millennial learners in their groups hold to—moralism. Teachers were instructed to keep their ears open to listen to whether students could find gospel moments in their lives. Teachers were encouraged not to whitewash over moments of confusion or doubt but instead to see that there might be gospel opportunities within the lesson as students saw the four parts of the Christian testimony and then realized that their own lives were missing one of the parts.

The lesson was built around the four parts of the Christian testimony. The first part of the lesson focused on the question: What did God do? Romans 5:8 gave the simple answer: “But God proves His own love.” Teachers highlighted that even before a person’s moment of faith, God had already been at work. If God did not act first by sending Jesus to the cross and providing salvation for men out of His love, then man’s response would be pointless. Salvation first sits on the work of God. At this point in the curriculum, teachers were encouraged to remind their groups of the two major works God performed to give men salvation: (1) Christ took God’s wrath for human beings, and (2) God declared men righteous through Christ. The first part of the lesson focused a great deal on what had been taught during week 1 of the project but was purposely repetitious so the students would be clear in their gospel understanding.

After beginning the lesson with the understanding that the testimony is about what God does within the Christian life, students were taught about their own condition before conversion. Just as Romans 5:8 begins, “But God proves His own love,” it continues, “while we were still sinners.” The second part of the testimony is about

admitting sin. Teachers were encouraged and urged to share their own sin struggles with the class to encourage vulnerability in the class. The video stressed that Jesus died for the religiously self-righteous just as much as the sinful that churches tend to single out. First John 1:8-9 was highlighted to show the consequences of denying one's sinfulness. The desire to magnify other's sins while minimizing one's own was also highlighted. Teachers shared 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 to talk about how every person has a sinful past and that the hope of the redeemed is in the work of Jesus Christ.

After the teachers led the students to understand their personal sinfulness, teachers were instructed to discuss conversion. Romans 5:9 highlights both God's declaration of righteousness and the forgiveness of God's wrath. During week 9, many of the pre-tests were graded. The question many of the students failed in the pre-test was the question of whether Satan was the tormenter of eternity. Over and over students showed that they believed Satan, not the wrath of God, is to be feared in eternity. As in the first lesson, teachers were encouraged to show in Romans 5:9 where God saves men from His wrath. The idea that one will not face double jeopardy in eternity was also highlighted in the video. When talking about the forgiveness of God, students came to understand that every sin was forgiven and that they were made fully righteous by the work of Jesus Christ. This doctrine was perhaps one of the most valuable points of growth that came from this curriculum.

The last section of the lesson focused on God's continued work within the learner's life. An idea highlighted in the video was that many students might have felt that their testimony was not as valid as those of people who were saved from more grievous sins. The video taught that one's testimony is not just about one's past sinfulness and conversion experience but instead about God's continual work after conversion. As an illustration I used my own story, communicating that I was saved as a child and that the bulk of my story is what God has done since I was saved. One point of emphasis was

1 John 2:19, teaching that God's continual work proves that one is truly saved. Students were challenged to identify in their lives how God has continued to work after salvation.

Week 3 of the curriculum set the last principles for the final week of the project where students applied the previous lessons as they wrote out their own testimonies. Students were taught that the four parts of the Christian testimony are (1) What did God do? (2) From what did God save you? (3) How did God make you new? (4) How is God at work in your life today?

Week 10

During week 10 of the project the curriculum was taught to the teachers and taught to the students in the same fashion as the previous three weeks. As with week 8 of the project, an evening committee meeting was scheduled during the livestream's scheduled broadcast.¹ The teacher training video was recorded on the Saturday prior and posted to air at the scheduled time. Teachers were encouraged to post questions and comments in the comments section of the video so that I could engage with them. I also provided my email address to open even more communication with teachers.

The fourth week of curriculum focused on applying the previous three weeks' lessons into the students' lives. The objective of the lesson was to equip students to write and share their testimony. Weeks 1 through 3 of the curriculum built scriptural foundations, and week 4 applied the learning into practice. The focal verses of the lesson were Romans 1:16-17. The lesson sought to help students share the gospel story of their lives with others. This lesson was complete if each student could articulate the four parts of the testimony from his or her own life and share the testimony verbally with another person.

One note about Millennials that was shared with teachers was that Millennials need to feel the information they learn. In having students connect personally with the truth taught in the previous three weeks, the Millennial students were able to both learn

¹ Due to circumstances beyond my control, multiple scheduling conflicts interfered with the intended livestream broadcast.

and experience the truth of the gospel. The testimony was the avenue to embrace the gospel personally, as well as equip them to fulfill the church's mission of connecting them to the world. It employed the strategy of teaching them a basic avenue of evangelism that would resonate personally.

For students to openly share, a safe environment was needed. Teachers were encouraged to provide food and start the class with a social atmosphere. It was important for each group to have open and safe discussions as the class began. After opening the class, teachers reviewed the gospel and the four parts of the testimony, and then they asked the class to write their testimonies on the form provided. Each person's testimony was the personalization of the four parts taught in lesson 3. After the students finished writing their testimonies, teachers led the class to break off into pairs of two where the students verbally shared what they had written with a friend. After every person was given the opportunity to share their testimony, the teacher challenged the students to share their story or testimony with someone outside of the church. One major goal of the project was fulfilled when students connected with each other through sharing their testimony.

During week 10, the class concluded with each student taking the post-FMUPS. Every class was equipped with physical paper copies and the survey was available at fbcvidalia.com/fmups. Teachers were instructed to have the classes take the survey before concluding class. After the classes, teachers turned in the post FMUPS to me.

Application and Evaluation of the Lessons

After concluding the lessons, the results were gathered to begin the study of the post-project FMUPS. Most copies of the FMUPS were submitted on paper in batches as each small group concluded. A minority of FMUPS were submitted digitally as the classes concluded without completing the FMUPS. Each teacher who did not turn in their FMUPS was contacted and urged to reach out to their students with the encouragement to complete the survey within week 11. The post-FMUPS was identical to the original FMUPS in content. The post-project FMUPS did contain questions regarding whether the participant

conducted a pre-project FMUPS and options to circle which dates the participant attended class. A large percentage of FMUPS were rejected because the four-digit codes did not match despite the participants' admission that they took the pre-study FMUPS. After gathering both digital and physical copies of the FMUPS, the pre- and post-study surveys were compared and evaluated to understand the effectiveness of the project.

Week 11

During week 11, a teachers' lunch was held to discuss the curriculum. Every teacher of the Millennial classes attended the lunch. The format of the discussion was kept purposefully casual so that the teachers would feel free to express their own thoughts as opposed to answering direct questions. I guided the conversation with open-ended questions but allowed conversation to flow. Leading up to the lunch and discussion, many teachers reached out to me at church or on the phone to discuss their thoughts regarding the curriculum. Additionally, during week 11, the post-FMUPS were graded and compared to the pre-project FMUPS. One class, as a whole, did not complete the FMUPS as their children competed in a baseball tournament together and therefore did not have class. Generally, teachers shared their excitement over the curriculum but also suggested a few changes which will be included in chapter 5.

Week 12

During week 12, pre-study FMUPS were recorded and analyzed to measure the success and outcome of the project. A baseline for understanding the student's pre-project knowledge was measured by the pre-project FMUPS, and the project's effectiveness was measured by post-project FMUPS. Within the FMUPS were three open-ended questions which were identical in both the pre- and post-project FMUPS. Those questions were used to measure the students' understanding of the gospel, practice in devotion, and comfort in evangelism. The results for the pre- and post-FMUPS along with analysis are found in chapter 5 of the project.

Furthermore, during week 12, the discipleship minister of FBCV and I discussed his evaluations of teachers during the project. He attended every Sunday School class once as well as led a small group on Sunday night during the curriculum. He submitted detailed notes on the specific teachers, as well as vocal commentary regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers within the scope of the project.

Week 13

During week 13, the curriculum was revised for future use within FBCV. One of the hopes for the curriculum was that it would serve as a new member course for the church. The understanding was that new members should be sure of the gospel, equipped to have a daily time of devotion, and be able to share their testimony. The major change to the curriculum was that the lessons were extended from a four-week to a six-week study. After consultation with the small group leaders, the overall belief was that the curriculum included too much material to teach in the timeframe given. Week 1 was split into two weeks, as was week 2. Week 3 and 4 remained unaltered in regard to the timeline. The other major change to the curriculum was that the notes on Millennials were amended to point across generations. Teachers who taught the curriculum outside of the Millennial classes expressed how the notes helped them teach their non-Millennial classes. Because of the usefulness of the helps, the notes were changed to address the whole of the church.

Week 14

During week 14, the expert panel, which measured the curriculum the first time, reviewed the curriculum alongside the results. Further changes were made to the updated curriculum based on the expert panel's recommendations.

Conclusion

This project of equipping teachers to teach Millennials was a beginning step for FBCV. The goal of connecting the youngest adults to the mission of the church found a starting point. Within the project, many teachers came to understand the spiritual

lostness within their own small groups, which gave them greater urgency and purpose in their own preparation and planning for the future. Many teachers came to see the shallow faith hidden under the surface of many of those who grew up under the teaching of the church, and we were able to pinpoint specific areas where discipleship has been poorly done in our church. This project did not solve the issues of the church. The Millennial mission field at FBCV remains in large part unchanged due to the project. Stating that the mission field is unchanged does not mean that the project was not successful. Instead, as will be discussed in the final chapter, the project opened the eyes of teachers to understand their classes and equipped them to better minister in the future. This understanding is helping and will continue to help our church as we undertake the task of connecting Millennial members with the purpose of the church.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Connecting Millennials to the mission of First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana, could not be accomplished in the span of a four-week curriculum. This project did not produce the intended outcome, but instead, it raised awareness among Sunday School teachers and small group leaders so that future gospel work can be done among Millennials in the area. The evaluation of the project will examine the purpose and goals outlined in previous chapters and expound on strengths, weaknesses, and future modifications of the project. Perhaps most importantly, the evaluation will bring both theological and personal reflection so that the lessons learned throughout the weeks of writing and implementing the project can be applied to the life and ministry of FBCV.

Evaluating the Project's Purpose

The purpose of the project was to implement a disciple-making model among young adults at FBCV. The project was proposed three years ago as I was stepping into the pulpit as the new pastor of the church. From the beginning, it was clear that there was a need to not only attract Millennials to the church but also to disciple them. Millennials, both those raised in the community and those originally from outside of the community, were attracted to the modern worship and casual feel of the church. That said, many Millennial believers in the church displayed a lifestyle contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and their commitment to the church showed a lackluster faith. The purpose of the project took these issues into account, but it was also chosen out of my own life experience. As someone who grew up in church, I have observed as an adult that many of those raised

alongside me have since fallen away from the faith and no longer love God nor his church. These two factors led me to the purpose of discipling Millennials at FBCV.

The content within the disciple-making model was driven from the research in chapters 2 and 3, as well as intentional conversations with the younger adults in the church. As their pastor and friend, I would ask Millennials to tell me their faith story, simply asking when God changed them. As each conversation unfolded, I came to realize that many within the congregation could not articulate the gospel nor express a moment in their lives where they turned to God in faith. Many young adults at FBCV were either raised with moralism as a religion or accepted the prosperity gospel leanings of our impoverished community. The mission of FBCV is to connect people to God, to each other, and to the world. The church was not accomplishing its first purpose, let alone the subsequent goals. As the project began and Millennials took the FMUPS, the conclusions I had informally made from conversations were confirmed. Most young adults who attended regularly FBCV were ignorant of the gospel and gave little evidence of regular devotional practices or evangelistic passion. They were not connected to God, to one another in any deeply meaningful, spiritual way, nor to the world. A greater plan for discipleship was and still is a need at FBCV.

The greatest success of the project was the pinpoint accuracy of the purpose. Discipleship still is the greatest need among Millennials at FBCV. Until the younger adults of FBCV can be transformed and disciplined to know and experience the gospel, all other changes will be inconsequential. When introduced to the curriculum, many teachers expressed how simple the content was, saying that they believed their classes already knew what would be taught. After teaching the curriculum, however, those same teachers came back dumbfounded by the lack of gospel comprehension, the absence of daily devotion, and the evangelistic incompetence of their students. The overwhelming request of the teachers was to expand the curriculum because the need among their students was so great that four weeks could not compensate for and correct the years of ignorance and bad

theology their students possessed. The teachers assumed their students knew the gospel, and because of this tragic misunderstanding, they never clearly articulated the gospel nor taught it in their classes. The time these teachers spent teaching clear and simple, gospel-driven curriculum helped to open their eyes to the spiritual lostness in their classes. This experience served as a spiritual wake up call for the teachers and leaders and was, as such, a pivotal moment in the life of our church.

Evaluating the Project's Goals

The goals of the project were chosen in an effort to accomplish and measure the purpose of the project. The goals chosen were interconnected as a process of accomplishing the project. As one goal was met, the next goal of the project commenced, until the project was completed.

Goal 1

The first goal of the project was to assess the knowledge of basic doctrine and spiritual disciplines among young participants aged 18-35. Students were given the FBCV Mission Understanding and Practice Survey (FMUPS) to measure their pre-project understanding of the gospel, practice in devotion, and comfort in evangelism. The questions were directly tied to the content taught over the four weeks through the curriculum. The questions were scored on the Likert scale from "0" to "6." Students were graded based on the correctness of their answers to the curriculum taught. They were asked to circle or click from a range of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Of the questions, four questions rated "strongly disagree" as 0, while eleven questions rated "strongly agree" as 6. Questions were also separated and scored by categories: gospel, devotion, and evangelism. The categories were scored separately to gain a greater understanding of comprehension both before the project and throughout the project. The survey also included three open-ended questions upon which students to expound. The open-ended

questions were included to gain a greater understanding of what participants believed beyond the Likert Scale questions.

Forty students took the pre-survey. With a maximum score of 90, the scores on the FMUPS ranged from 48 as the lowest to 85 as the highest score. While grading the pre-tests, I anticipated scores across the spectrum, but overall students scored poorly in all three categories. The most shocking revelation was regarding students' understanding of the gospel. While some scored perfectly in their understanding of the gospel, most students displayed major confusion over central gospel truths. Overall, most students agreed that a person cannot live without sinning, that Jesus literally died for their sins, and that He literally rose from the dead. Surprisingly, many students expressed doubt on whether they would go to heaven when they die, despite believing the gospel about the sufficiency of Christ and His atonement. The gospel concept with which most students struggled was punishment after death. Many students expressed doubt on whether they would be punished after their death, and most students strongly agreed that the greatest punishment one can face is being tortured by Satan. I expected some to strongly agree with the statement about being tortured by Satan, but I was surprised that an overwhelming majority of students went beyond doubt and firmly believed that the ultimate punishment in eternity was to be tortured by Satan. To confirm that this belief was prevalent among our Millennials, I corresponded with the teachers to see if the question was misleading, but they affirmed that most of the students in their classes were unfamiliar with the understanding that God's wrath was the ultimate punishment in eternity, not the devil.

The open-ended question revealed ignorance of the gospel beyond any of the Likert scale questions. Students were asked, "What is the Gospel?" Answers ranged from "the Word of God?" to clear explanations of the gospel. It must be noted that a number of Millennials started the project but did not finish the project. As pre-surveys were paired with post-surveys, those who finished the project were able to communicate the gospel succinctly and clearly in their pre-surveys, indicating that they came into the project

with a clearer understanding of the gospel. Obviously, there was greater commitment to weekly attendance for those who displayed a clear understanding to the gospel.

The second section of the FMUPS focused on devotion. Students were asked basic questions which were used to determine whether they practiced a daily time with God. Students scored consistently on neither extreme of the Likert scale but instead in the middle scores. Many admitted to inconsistent time spent in the Bible, ignorance toward prayer, and lack of long-term spiritual growth. The surprising discovery I made in the devotional section was the lack of consistency regarding devotional practices and their connection to gospel understanding. Many students expressed strong devotional lives while their gospel scores were lacking. In the open-ended question in the devotional section of the FMUPS, students were asked if they had a quiet time and to share what their time with God entailed. The answers ranged from daily walks around the neighborhood, listening to music in the car, and intentional time spent with God. Few listed Scripture as a part of their daily time with God, and many who listed Scripture stated that their daily consumption of the Word of God consisted of a verse of the day text. The consistent word used throughout a majority of responses was “inconsistent,” which was disheartening.

The final section of the FMUPS focused on evangelism. The intent of this section was to determine whether students were capable of communicating the gospel with others and whether they felt comfortable doing so. The evangelism section of the survey was the poorest scored of the three sections. This did not come as a surprise to me. My belief coming into the project was that gospel understanding would drive devotional life and devotional life would drive evangelism. Responses for these questions tended to the extremes of the scales where the student either felt completely comfortable in evangelism or completely incompetent. The open-ended question asked respondents to state what kept them from actively engaging in evangelism. The reasons given were fear of not knowing the answers, offending others, or creating tension in existing relationships.

The FMUPS gave a beginning picture of the students' understanding of the gospel, practice in devotion, and confidence in the gospel. The forty respondents to the survey showed that a good portion of young adults at FBCV were willing to begin the project, though many students (including one entire class) dropped the project in the final week. The FMUPS gave me an understanding of the Millennials at FBCV. The surveys helped me see that many of the young adults at the church either bear an insufficient understanding of their faith or have not been transformed by faith in the first place.

Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to develop a four-session curriculum to equip young adults in the mission of FBCV. The lessons were developed to instruct the students in the gospel, build an understanding of daily devotional practice, and equip them to share their testimony. Focusing on the mission statement of FBCV, which is to “connect people to God, to each other, and to the world,” the curriculum was intended to build the foundations for connecting the students to God through understanding the gospel and helping them understand and utilize a daily devotional time. Regarding connecting them to each other, the curriculum was intentionally built for the students to discuss each of the lessons, thereby helping them connect with one another in a meaningful way. As to connecting them to the world, the students were equipped through the curriculum to share their own story or testimony in the final two weeks of the project.

The material was developed based on the study and research seen in chapters 2 and 3. The scriptural foundations understood within chapter 3 drove the curriculum for the students. The practical application of chapter 3 drove the helps given to the teachers and written into the curriculum to equip them to better communicate with their classes. As the FMUPS were graded, the curriculum was tweaked to highlight many of the shortfalls of students, specifically regarding their understanding of the gospel. One major edit was the students' understanding of the wrath of God. A greater emphasis was placed

in the curriculum on this point because students believed punishment came from Satan and not from God.

The curriculum was evaluated in six areas.¹ The expert panel of three was chosen specifically from different backgrounds to review, critique, and improve the curriculum. The curriculum was graded on a scale of 4, with 1 being “insufficient” and 4 being “exemplary.” The second goal would be considered met when all three experts graded the curriculum at 90 percent or higher. The initial scores for the evaluations from both the academic reviewer and professional curriculum administrator came in below satisfaction. The pastor made corrections over the phone which led the project to the score chosen. Even though he graded the project at 100 percent, he made changes he believed were necessary to bring the project to the grade.

Table 1. Scores from the initial evaluation

	Administrator	Pastor	Seminary Professor
Biblically Faithful	4	4	3
Excellence	2-3	4	3
Relevance	4	4	4
Easily Taught	2-3	4	4
Thorough	4	4	3
Mission of FBCV	3	4	4
Totals	79%-87.5%	100%	87.5%

The curriculum administrator, my sister-in-law, was the most difficult and detailed critic of the three experts. Her critiques improved the project by raising the teachability and usefulness of the project. As a secular educator, she does not hold expertise regarding the biblical faithfulness, but as a public-school curriculum superintendent, she judges curriculum daily. She suggested adding learning objectives that would give teachers the target ideas to teach, and gave me tips on organizing and visually presenting the

¹ See appendix 3 for the evaluation rubric.

material so that teachers were equipped to easily use the curriculum. One highlight she mentioned was the Millennial moments. She stated that these types of helps were common in school curriculum. After the revisions were made, the material was resubmitted to her, and she graded the materials with a perfect score.

The seminary professor's evaluation also did not meet the satisfactory score for the approval of the curriculum. His major concern was that atonement was not satisfactorily explained in the curriculum. The curriculum was purposely written simply because most of those participating in the project were not college educated. After several revisions in attempting to explain atonement in language simple enough that every person in the project could understand, the professor sent over text he requested be placed into the project to satisfy the required theological level for the curriculum. Once the specific explanation of atonement was added to the curriculum, along with a few other small changes, like the additional supplemental passages, the professor resubmitted the evaluation at 100 percent.

Along with the base curriculum, listening guides were created and evaluated by the expert panel. No member of the expert panel had revisions regarding the listening guides. The listening guides for the first three lessons contained the outline of the curriculum being taught by the teachers. The fourth listening guide was a basic outline on which the student recorded his/her testimony.

The curriculum sought to teach the participants at FBCV the basics of the gospel, the practice of a daily devotional time, and help to identify and communicate the participants' testimonies. This curriculum will be used in the future at FBCV to teach new members who come to join the church. The intent of the curriculum was to build a gospel-driven foundation for any member, specifically young adult, at FBCV. We want every person at the church to be able to understand and communicate the gospel. The desire is for every member to have a daily devotional time, which will lead him/her to

know and follow God. The curriculum sought to help each participant identify God's work in his/her life and communicate it with others.

Goal 3

The third goal was to equip teachers to communicate and teach the curriculum. This goal was achieved through four, hour-long Facebook Live events where I equipped teachers to communicate the materials in their class as well as equip them to lead their classes. The goal was measured by the teachers utilizing a basic self-evaluation² both before and after the project. The discipleship minister at FBCV also attended each class during the project and submitted an evaluation of the teachers.³ Teachers were also debriefed after the project and given an open forum to discuss the curriculum and project.

In the past at FBCV, the discipleship minister has attempted to equip teachers through in-person teaching events. Due to the busyness of young families, these events were poorly attended and eventually no longer scheduled. The intent of the livestream event was to allow the teacher to remain at home while still interacting with other teachers and myself. The reality of these events was good attendance with unfortunately little interaction. Every teacher watched the video weekly, but few interacted during the event.

The livestream training also failed because two of the weekly training videos were forced to be pre-recorded, and therefore live interaction was not possible. During the project annual budget meetings were mistakenly scheduled during the time intended for the Facebook Live. Because of the importance of the meetings and the number of people involved with them, I chose to pre-record the livestream video and encouraged teachers to leave comments on the post so I could interact at a later time. After the first pre-recorded video, live attendance decreased as well online interaction. Teachers still

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 4.

viewed the training videos, but instead chose to watch them at their leisure instead of during the live broadcast, which led to a discouraging lack of active participation.

I was encouraged, however, by the interaction outside of the live stream videos. The teachers involved in the project communicated with me through email and weekly conversations, discussing the project and asking questions. One Sunday School teacher stopped to discuss the curriculum teaching videos with me after the Wednesday night Bible study in each of the four weeks. Another teacher sent me emails twice asking for clarification from the video. Only one teacher did not interact with me, whether during the livestream or informally. This teacher also did not complete a teacher self-evaluation before or after the event, and he also canceled his class the last week of the project due to a commitment to little league baseball.

Teachers were asked to evaluate themselves based on the criteria of prayer, preparation, learning styles, teaching, member care, reaching out, and organization. The survey was based on an evaluation produced by the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Three teachers completed the pre-project survey while one did not. While the surveys were completed, teachers did not include many additional comments. There was no major statistical movement regarding the teacher’s self-evaluation.

Table 2. Teacher self-evaluation

Participant	Pre-Study	Post Study	Difference
1.	23	26	3
2.	18	22	4
3.	13	15	2
4.	N/A	N/A	N/A

The Discipleship Minister at FBCV also observed each teacher once during the project. He observed three teachers and collected data on these classes. He also used the curriculum with the small group he teaches on Sunday nights, which helped him to be even more familiar with the entire process. The major observation from the Discipleship

Minister was that competency on the teacher survey does not equal impact from the teacher. Teacher 3 listed in table 2 scored lowest in both the self-evaluation and in the observed class, yet in the final class, his was the only one to share testimonies as the curriculum dictated. This teacher also retained the highest consistency in attendance during the time of the project. On the other hand, the teacher who did not fill out the self-evaluation nor interact with the videos displayed the highest score in observation. His class was inconsistent, as was he, missing two weeks within the project. When this teacher missed, the class was canceled as well. The Discipleship Minister noted that the more ill-equipped teacher talent wise has seen more spiritual growth in his class than the talented non-committed teacher.

In the follow up lunch where teachers were given an open forum to discuss the project, all teachers attended. One observation of the teachers was that the timeframe of the project was not great enough to equip teachers over all the listed topics on the teacher self-evaluation. One change that would be made if this project were to be replicated in the future would be to remove the teacher self-evaluation and grade teachers on a rubric that matches the material taught from the curriculum instead of a general overview. It will be important to go back and equip teachers with the concepts on the self-evaluation. Teachers did express appreciation for those self-evaluations as many of the concepts within them were good reminders and goals for future practice.

Teachers did express that the training was sufficient in equipping them to teach the curriculum. Because the curriculum was tweaked to match the weak scores of the FMUPS, teachers were grateful for the clarification given in the training videos on topics where confusion and discussion took place.

Overall, the training videos were successful in equipping teachers to teach the curriculum while insufficient in equipping them within the wide scope of the self-evaluation. Weekly training videos can be a useful tool in equipping parents with busy

schedules, but the demands of time for both a church staff and the teachers prevent the scheduled live interaction.

Goal 4

The fourth goal of the project was to implement the curriculum utilizing the Sunday School model already in place. This goal was achieved by the teachers who, through the livestream videos, were taught the curriculum. The project was done within an open Sunday School model, with a Sunday night small group participating as well. The participants were not limited by selection, but instead, the study was open to any person who decided to attend. Because of the openness of the study, many participants began the study but did not finish, and many attended the study but missed the first week.

For the sake of consistency, only those who completed a pre- and post-survey while attending at least three of the four sessions were included in the data. Twenty-five Millennials began the study but did not qualify because they either did not complete a post-survey or did not attend three of the four weeks. The list of ineligible data includes an entire class that canceled on the last session of the project.

The curriculum was taught over the course of four weeks and implemented during the regular time when Sunday School met. The first lesson began with students taking the FMUPS, either in paper form or on an online survey. After completing the FMUPS, teachers taught the first week's curriculum, leading their students to understand the gospel. Week 2 consisted of teaching the students how to have a time of daily devotion. The lesson was split into two parts—first in foundation and second in practice. Weeks 3 and 4 equipped the students to share their testimony. Week 3 taught students the basic pieces of the testimony, while week 4 was reserved for students to write and share their testimonies with one another. At the end of week 4, classes ended by taking the post-survey FMUPS.

Overall, teachers followed the curriculum closely. Three of the four classes were consistently taught and followed the plan. One class only met twice during the project. Teachers communicated that the curriculum was easy to teach and that it led to quality discussions, especially in the places where students as a whole scored poorly on the FMUPS. The one major issue classes had was the final week of the project. The curriculum asked students to write their testimonies and then share them with a person at the table. Only one class fulfilled the desired curriculum's aim. Every teacher led their class to fulfill the curriculum, but in one teacher's words, "when I asked them to share their testimony with another member in the class, I had a mutiny on my hands." The curriculum was only implemented fully in one class. In the one class that fully implemented the project, the teacher shared that the class originally did not want to share their testimonies with each other, but once they did, the class overwhelmingly grew together as they learned each other's stories and took the step to be able to share their faith.

Also, during the implementation of the curriculum, one class did not meet consistently. The class met on the first week and the third week but did not meet on the second and fourth weeks. The reason for the inconsistency of the class is the teacher. He has children that play baseball and softball. When a conflict between church and ball came up, the teacher canceled the class. When he canceled the class, generally about half of his class did not come to church. Even though a good number of Millennials began the project in this class, the entire class's surveys were disqualified from the results because the project was never fully implemented.

The evaluation of the project showed improvement in the scores of those who attended at least three sessions and completed both the pre and post FMUPS. Of the forty Millennials who began the study, fifteen attended at least three sessions and took the post-survey. The survey was broken into the three target categories: gospel, devotion, and evangelism. Within those categories, students grew in their gospel understanding from 24.8 to 28.4, a 3.5 point growth. They grew in their devotion from 24.2 to 25.8, a 1.6

point growth, and they grew in evangelism from 23.06 to 23.53, a .5 point growth. Overall, scores rose 5.2 points from 72.1 to 77.8. The overall score was measured with a t-test by comparing the scores from the identical pre and post FMUPS.

The t-test revealed significant growth overall within those who completed the curriculum. The mean score was raised from 72.13 to 77.80. The t-test showed that the absolute value of the t-stat was greater than the t-critical value. The p-value was less than .05. Participants grew significantly in their understanding of the gospel but saw little improvement in evangelistic practice as many refused to participate in the exercise. Even though the overall scores show significant growth, the individual scores show that little to no growth happened evangelistically for the students.

Table 3. Comparison of pre- and post-study gospel FMUPS scores

Participant	Pre-Study	Post-Study	Difference	
1	29	30	1	
2	25	25	0	
3	13	24	11	
4	27	30	3	
5	30	30	0	
6	24	27	3	
7	25	30	5	
8	25	29	4	
9	26	29	3	
10	25	30	5	
11	24	30	6	
12	24	30	6	
13	23	26	3	T(9)=2.9998
14	30	30	0	P=.0028
15	23	26	3	P<.05

Table 4. Comparison of pre- and post-study devotion FMUPS scores

Participant	Pre-Study	Post-Study	Difference	
1	25	26	1	
2	26	26	0	
3	21	28	7	
4	27	30	3	
5	23	26	3	
6	27	28	1	
7	22	26	4	
8	22	24	2	
9	26	25	-1	
10	22	20	-2	
11	24	26	2	
12	22	26	4	
13	23	23	0	T(9)=2.0117
14	26	26	0	P=.0269
15	27	28	1	P is <.05

Table 5. Comparison of pre- and post-study evangelism FMUPS scores

Participant				
1	27	21	-6	
2	19	26	7	
3	23	27	4	
4	30	29	-1	
5	23	26	3	
6	22	20	-2	
7	22	23	1	
8	25	25	0	
9	25	24	-1	
10	20	13	-7	
11	25	22	-3	
12	22	25	3	
13	17	20	3	T(9)=.3493
14	26	26	0	P=.7294
15	20	26	6	P is not <.05

Table 6. Comparison of pre- and post-study overall FMUPS scores

Participant				
1	81	77	-4	
2	70	77	7	
3	57	79	22	
4	84	89	5	
5	76	82	6	
6	73	75	2	
7	69	79	10	
8	72	78	6	
9	77	78	1	
10	67	63	-4	
11	73	78	5	
12	68	81	13	
13	63	69	6	T(9)=2.3547
14	82	82	0	P=.02577
15	70	80	10	P is <.05

The greatest change in the students came in their gospel comprehension. Consistently, students displayed growth regarding their understanding of the gospel. The greatest growth in understanding for students centered on the understanding that a person is saved from God’s wrath and not the torment of the devil. Special attention was given to this point in both the curriculum as well as the teaching videos. Teachers affirmed that this topic caused great discussion in their classes. The other major area of growth in students was their understanding of the forgiveness of Christ. Many students came into the study with the understanding that they will face a second punishment in Heaven. The study helped participants understand the totality of Jesus’s sacrifice, helping them understand that they would not be judged on their works but instead on the finished work of Christ if they trusted Christ by faith.

Devotional scores did not show the same growth as the gospel lessons, but progress was still made. Students were asked to describe their quiet time in an open-ended question in both the pre- and post-FMUPS. As students described their daily practice, answers ranged anywhere from listening to music in the car to genuine time in both prayer and Scripture. Much of the confidence regarding the students’ devotional practice shown in

the pre-test was defused by poor answers in the open-ended portion of the survey. Teachers expressed that many students in their classes had never been taught the basics of Bible study and prayer as a daily practice. The lackluster growth in the devotional scores highlighted not a lack of growth in the participants but instead that students understood what genuine devotional time looked like only after going through the curriculum and in turn reflected their right understanding of their own daily practice in the post-survey.

Evangelism scores surprised me. When building the survey, I was sure that growth would be seen in evangelism as students would affirm that they had shared their testimony and had been taught how to share their faith through the curriculum. Instead, the students' scores swung wildly. Students either showed substantial growth on the surveys or they showed substantial decline regarding evangelism. I believe many students answered the evangelism questions in the first FMUPS with a false confidence toward their evangelistic competency. When the final class was held and students were asked to share their own testimony and all but one class balked at the task, students were presented with their own incompetency in sharing the gospel. The false confidence of the pre-survey was shattered when students refused to move beyond listening about evangelism to participating in evangelism. The second set of scores accurately reflects the true competency of students regarding evangelism.

With the reality of many students balking on the last lesson, the silver lining remains that many students were equipped to share their faith through the curriculum. One class pushed back when the teacher asked the students to pair off and share their testimony. The teacher continued to encourage the students despite their protest. Eventually the class followed the directions. The teacher stated that once the class finally began sharing their testimonies, he could not get them to stop as the class went over in time into the corporate worship hour. Whereas the classes that did not follow through in lesson 4 declined drastically, my belief is that the class that followed showed marked improvement on the post-FMUPS.

For three of the four classes, goal 4 failed. The project was not completely implemented. Students came to comprehend the gospel and understand the basics of a devotional life but were not equipped in evangelism as they refused to share their testimony among their friends. For the class that implemented the curriculum fully, the project was a success. The class moved beyond simply studying evangelism to practicing it by sharing their faith in the class.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Overall, there were several clear strengths and weaknesses to the project. Both the strengths and the weaknesses provided opportunities for reflection and greater insight on how to improve strategies to reach Millennials in the future.

Strengths

Even though the project did not fulfill its intended purpose, it was beneficial to the church. There were three major strengths of the project. First, the project gave insight into the spiritual condition of Millennials at FBCV. Second, the project helped define and educate Millennials in the gospel. Third, the project equipped willing participants to practice daily devotion and basic evangelism.

The project's greatest strength was its ability to define the spiritual condition of the Millennials at FBCV. As students took the pre-survey FMUPS, their misunderstanding of the gospel and daily devotional practices (if they had them) were exposed. The last lesson in the curriculum exposed the incompetency of evangelistic practice among the group. Understanding the gospel confusion and evangelistic incompetency is beneficial to the church in helping it focus teaching and practice to equip these younger believers for the future. The church cannot clarify issues of confusion for its people when it is unable to identify those issues. FBCV believes it is an evangelistic church because the gospel is preached and taught. The project exposed in many participants' eyes how they are not

evangelistic after all. Perhaps by exposing the illness, the church is finally ready to take steps to health.

The clear success of the project was Millennials' understanding of the gospel. As stated in chapter 1, most Sunday School classes at FBCV pick their own curriculum or study what they want. Because of the lack of intentionality in small groups, major doctrines, such as the gospel, have not been studied. The project defined for Millennials what was assumed and never understood. Concepts like substitution, imputation, and salvation might be touched on in sermons, but never digested. The starting point for any believer should be a right understanding of the gospel. This project helped define what has not been taught within the small group structure of the church.

The third strength is conditional. Where many students did not participate in the final lesson, the third strength is limited to those who completed the fourth lesson. Students who completed the whole curriculum were equipped to know the gospel, practice a biblical devotion, and be able to share a gospel-centered testimony. Students and teachers both expressed the enjoyment of being challenged to grow spiritually through the curriculum.

Weaknesses

There were many weaknesses to the project, but the two major weaknesses were the medium chosen to equip teachers and the dependence on teachers to facilitate the curriculum. The medium of using Facebook Live to equip teachers did not produce the expected results in the project. Most teachers used the interactive web videos as a screen to watch with little to no interaction. Because the web videos were not a physical class held on the church campus, they were overlooked in the scheduling of events and not treated with the same regard as an in-person event. If the project were to be redone in the future, equipping would either happen through pre-recorded videos sent to teachers with a follow-up phone call to discuss the curriculum or through an on-campus meeting.

Even though the project was about equipping teachers, the specific teacher's commitment to the church and belief in the project determined the success of the project. For the teacher who canceled class twice during the project due to kids' softball, not only did the project suffer, but the Sunday School class learned from the teacher's perspective the value of Scripture versus the value of kids' sports. In the same way, because teachers were not fully committed to the final step of the project—when students expressed reluctance toward the project, the teachers abandoned it for the status quo. The point could be argued that both the strength of the project and its weakness were the small group leaders. Those committed weekly to the study of Scripture see tremendous growth in their classes. Those who do not produce classes of little spiritual growth.

Proposed Modifications

As stated in the strengths and weaknesses section, the weaknesses of the project were the medium chosen to facilitate both training and content through and the dependence on teachers for the project. The proposed modifications connect to the medium chosen to equip teachers through as well as changing the length of the curriculum. Regarding the second weakness—the dependence on teachers—no modification will be proposed. The reason behind no modification is that teachers are the key factor to the future of discipleship at FBCV. Even though one teacher took his responsibility trivially, revitalizing FBCV rests on connecting with teachers like this and leading them to embrace both the importance and commitment of discipleship.

Regarding the medium chosen, equipping teachers could either be handled through a pre-recorded video where either I or the discipleship minister corresponds outside of the lesson, or in a live classroom. Much of the necessary interaction would be lost in moving to a digital or prerecorded platform. Equipping teachers goes beyond simply giving them information or tips. Equipping teachers requires direct interaction with them

to discuss, not simply inform. Because of the necessary interaction, which was attempted in livestream videos, I would propose to conduct teachers' meetings in person.

The second modification would be the expansion of the curriculum from four weeks to six weeks. Most teachers expressed a frustration that the curriculum attempted to impart too much information into the time slot given. Additionally, with Sunday School as an open group, many people did not show up on time and some classes did not begin at the scheduled time. Splitting lessons 1 and 2 into the two separate lessons, while maintaining lessons 3 and 4, would rightly distribute the curriculum to a manageable load for the teachers.

Theological Observations

The goal of equipping teachers at FBCV was to reinvest into the discipleship structure of FBCV. Through the project, teachers were to equip students to accomplish the mission of FBCV: connecting people to God, to each other, and to the world. The lessons were centered around these three central points of the curriculum.

No sooner had students within FBCV taken the FMUPS did the greatest area of concern appear for FBCV. Students did not know the gospel. This revelation established the first theological reflection. The greatest issue at FBCV is gospel comprehension/conversion. If the student is not connected to God, then he cannot be connected to his fellow classmate, nor can he be equipped to reach the world. The lack of gospel comprehension among Millennials is a central piece in understanding the dropout and decline of young adults within the church. Too little emphasis and time is given within discipleship and worship to simply explaining and teaching the gospel. For FBCV to reach young adults, a renewed emphasis on the gospel is needed.

The gospel is the cornerstone on which everything else is built. Church attendance, fellowship, and evangelism are all dependent on the gospel. Beyond just gospel knowledge though, gospel transformation is necessary. This transformation is only

found when a believer places genuine faith in Jesus Christ. The question that the project raised in my mind was regarding how many young adults did not truly place their faith in Jesus Christ. My belief is that many young adults at FBCV do not know Jesus Christ by faith but instead have placed their faith into a Christian like religion, not the true gospel.

The second theological reflection is centered around the lesson within the curriculum on devotion. The church, through discipleship, has not equipped young adults to develop a daily relationship with God. Students were unclear in understanding what daily time with God looked like, how to pray, and how to study God's Word. The discipleship model at FBCV does not equip believers nearly as much as it informs them. If the goal of pastors is to equip, then students should be equipped with basic disciplines in their daily Christian walk. Many students at FBCV have not matured in their faith because the church has not equipped them with the basic disciplines of the Christian life. For young adults to move from their fledgling faith to spiritual maturity, students must be equipped to study, pray, and practice their faith outside of the church. This project enlightened me to understand the weakness of FBCV's discipleship structure and discern what necessary changes must be made for the future equipping of young adults.

The third theological reflection focuses on the evangelistic arm of the project. Evangelism will happen when faith and/or evangelism become more than a course taught but instead come from hearts that are truly captured by the gospel of Christ. The opportunity was given to every student in the study to learn and share their testimony with a friendly audience. When presented with this opportunity, over half of the participants did not share. There is little hope for students to share the gospel with unbelievers when they refused to share it with believers. No matter the curriculum or the teacher, until pride in the gospel swells within the heart, the student will not share the gospel. The answer to evangelism is that every individual needs to both understand and experience the fullness of salvation through the life-giving power of the gospel. Only when the gospel becomes real within believers' lives will they care about evangelism and desire to share their faith.

Personal Reflections

As the pastor of FBCV, my heart is to serve and equip the church over a long-tenured pastorate. As I studied my people and their interaction with the gospel over the course of this project, my mind could not escape the fact that the future elders and deacons of FBCV are the very young adults wrestling with their understanding of the gospel, devotion, and evangelism. The future of FBCV will be defined by whether the young adults, students, and children can know and experience the true gospel of Jesus Christ which penetrates their daily lives and overflows in evangelism to those in our city. Throughout this project I faced the challenges of the curriculum within my own walk. I asked if I could challenge my people to embrace the gospel, a vibrant daily devotional life, and intentional evangelism if I myself did not apply it personally.

A second personal reflection regards my greatest source of frustration in the project. The most influential, educated, and talented teacher in the project was also the least committed to the project. As a pillar in the community and a member of the church with deep family roots in the congregation, he leads a Sunday School class of students who have been connected to the community for generations. His lackluster commitment to his own Sunday School class has produced a class that shares his apathy. While discussing the teacher reviews with my discipleship pastor, he stated that this teacher was hands down better than any of the other teachers. That said, the lackluster commitment he gave to the project and to Sunday School as a whole has invalidated his teaching. On the opposite hand, the teacher who is, practically speaking, the least gifted produced a class that is growing spiritually. That authenticity regarding discipleship and a passion for the gospel, both characteristics that this teacher exemplifies, goes far and above teaching talent.

Over everything, whether teaching, devotion, or evangelism, gospel transformation is necessary. Teachers may educate but will not transform if they themselves are not transformed by the gospel. Students might learn but will not desire to spend time daily in prayer and study of the Word of God if they are not first transformed

by the gospel of Christ. Evangelism cannot be taught, and believers will not share their faith if they are not transformed by the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

The project of implementing a discipleship model at FBCV surprised, enlightened, and disappointed me. Many pastors realize that the greatest need of their church is genuine gospel conversion among their members. This project opened my eyes to the gospel ignorance and lack of transformation within the young adults at FBCV. Truthfully, I was surprised by how poorly the young adults at FBCV scored and answered questions about the gospel, their devotion, and evangelistic practices. Additionally, the project helped me understand how to further equip the church. Four weeks was insufficient for the scope of the project, but it was an excellent starting point in discovering what I should teach and how I can equip FBCV's current discipleship model to lead students to gospel transformation. The last lesson of the curriculum disappointed me. With most students refusing to give their testimonies and one class forgoing meeting altogether, my eyes were truly opened to the spiritual deficiencies of the young adults of FBCV.

Even though the project failed in three of the four classes, I am hopeful. One class (whose teacher shows evidence and passion for the gospel) finished the project and embraced the final week by sharing their faith. I am hopeful because the work of reaching Millennials at FBCV did not finish when the project was done. The Millennials still attend the church and are still involved in small group Bible studies. If this project did nothing more than give a diagnosis of the spiritual condition of FBCV, it was successful. The project gave the church a starting point to reach Millennials with the gospel and equip small group leaders to accomplish the task. The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

APPENDIX 1

FBCV MISSION UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of the mission of FBCV. This research is being conducted by Wesley Faulk for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. 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 project.

Directions: Respond to the questions in the space provided. Respond the statements by giving 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.

What year were you born? ___

The Gospel:

1. It is possible for a person to live without sinning.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. Jesus literally died for my sins and literally rose from the dead.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. When I get to Heaven, I will be judged for my sins.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. The ultimate punishment is going to Hell and being tortured by Satan.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. When I die, I will go to Heaven.
SD D DS AS A SA

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Devotion:

6. I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
SD D DS AS A SA
7. I read the Bible daily.
SD D DS AS A SA
8. I do not understand prayer, or I struggle to pray.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. I apply the Bible throughout my day to my life.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. I know God better today than I did last year.
SD D DS AS A SA
11. Do you have a quiet time with God? What does it entail?

Evangelism:

12. I feel comfortable sharing my faith with others.
SD D DS AS A SA
13. I have friends who do not know Jesus.
SD D DS AS A SA
14. I can clearly communicate the gospel.
SD D DS AS A SA
15. I have been trained to share my faith.
SD D DS AS A SA
16. I can clearly communicate my testimony.
SD D DS AS A SA
17. What keeps you from sharing your faith?

APPENDIX 2

TEACHER SELF-EVALUATION RUBRIC¹

Teacher Self-Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Prayer: Am consistent with daily devotions. Seek a personal encounter with God. Pray for members and leaders regularly. Lead class in prayer.					
Preparation: Begin preparation early and am always ready to guide interesting and life-changing study experiences with God in His Word.					
Learning Styles: Am aware of members' needs and select methods to address those needs using their preferred learning styles (verbal, visual, and experiential).					
Transformational Teaching: I teach and lead in ways that move learners from where they are toward their potential in Christ.					
Member Care: Maintain regular ministry contact with my members. Make contacts regularly, especially on birthdays and special days.					
Reaching Out: Lead the class to pray for, relate to, and invite guests to class fellowships, projects, and Bible study sessions. Focus on follow up.					
Organization: Enlist and train class leaders to serve as a class leader to enable the class to be more effective in growth and ministry.					

¹ Kentucky Baptist Convention, "Sunday School Teacher Self Evaluation," December 14, 2011, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://web.kybaptist.org/kbc/blogs/ssrb.nsf/dx/ssteacher-self-evaluation.htm>.

APPENDIX 3
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The curriculum is biblically faithful.					
The curriculum displays excellence in both content and presentation.					
The curriculum is relevant to the student's life.					
The curriculum is easily taught and used in Sunday School.					
The curriculum is thorough in its treatment of each topic.					
The curriculum leads the student to accomplish the mission of FBCV.					

APPENDIX 4

TEACHER EVALUATION BY DISCIPLESHIP
MINISTER RUBRIC¹

Teacher Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Prayer: Leads class in meaningful prayer					
Preparation: Clear preparation is seen in teaching.					
Learning Styles: Communicates to all members of the class in ways they can understand.					
Transformational Teaching: teaches and leads in ways that move learners from where they are toward their potential in Christ.					
Member Care: Shows knowledge of members' lives and connection beyond classroom.					
Reaching Out: Encourages class to reach non-attenders and guests. Leads by example. .					
Organization: Enlists and trains class leaders to serve to be more effective in growth and ministry.					

¹ Kentucky Baptist Convention, "Sunday School Teacher Self Evaluation," December 14, 2011, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://web.kybaptist.org/kbc/blogs/ssrb.nsf/dx/ssteacher-self-evaluation.htm>. (modified)

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLEMAKING MODEL AMONG YOUNG ADULTS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN VIDALIA, LOUISIANA

Wesley Taylor Faulk, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William D. Henard III

This project was designed to equip Sunday School teachers to lead the young adults of First Baptist Church of Vidalia, Louisiana (FBCV), through the Sunday School model to accomplish the mission of the church. It was the goal of this project to help Millennial members of FBCV to understand the core doctrines of salvation, lead them to personal devotion, help them identify their spiritual gifts, and build confidence toward evangelism.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context of FBCV and includes the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 builds the biblical foundation for a curriculum, which aims to catalyze young adults into the service of the church. The curriculum was built from four passages, Romans 1:16-17, 5:8-9, 12:1-2, and 12:6-8. These passages together form a picture of what a healthy member at FBCV should look like. Chapter 3 builds a basic framework of the Millennial mindset and also discusses how Millennials can be reached through the established program of Sunday School. Chapter 4 encompasses the curriculum and training materials for this project. Chapter 5 synthesizes the project results and includes recommendations for further use of the materials

VITA

Wesley Taylor Faulk

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Howard Payne University, 2003

M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006

MINISTERIAL

Youth Minister, First Baptist Church Pearsall, Texas, 2001-2002

Senior Adult Minister, Handley Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, 2003-2006

Senior Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Okinawa, Japan, 2006-2007

Senior Pastor, Western Heights Baptist Church, Duncan, Oklahoma, 2007-2011

Senior Pastor, Memorial Baptist Church, Pasadena, Texas, 2012-2016

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Vidalia, Louisiana, 2016-