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EQUIPPING PASTORS TO PREACH EXPOSITORY SERMONS  
IN THE FREDRICKSBURG AREA BAPTIST NETWORK,  
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

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A Project  
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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Joshua Elders Thompson  
May 2021

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING PASTORS TO PREACH EXPOSITORY SERMONS  
IN THE FREDRICKSBURG AREA BAPTIST NETWORK,  
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I dedicate this project to my wife, Brooke. God has used you to encourage me, edit my words, and remind me of His love.

Second, I dedicate this to our kids, Annie, Emma, Gracie, and Jack, who I pray will discover the transformation of the gospel of Jesus Christ which is proclaimed.

Lastly, I dedicate this project to the small church pastors who labor diligently. I pray this work will equip you to preach the gospel throughout the Bible.

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## PREFACE

Thank you to my wife, Brooke, who has encouraged me, edited my words, and continually reminded me of Christ's love. Thank you to our kids, Annie, Emma, Gracie, and Jack, who I pray will continue to discover the richness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you also to Chancellor Baptist Church and Round Hill Baptist Church for allowing me the time to go on this journey. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Cook, and to my seminar professors who have taught me to pursue Christ and proclaim Him well. Lastly, thank you to Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network in supporting me to equip pastors in the Fredericksburg area to preach expository sermons.

Josh Thompson

Fredericksburg, Virginia

May 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Famous twentieth century British preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”<sup>1</sup> Modern pastors juggle pastoral care along with administrative and leadership duties, which limit the time a pastor is able to spend on sermon preparation. Expositing the message of Scripture is time consuming. In small churches where the pastor does not have a support staff, or where he is bi-vocational, sufficient sermon preparation is difficult. The mission statement of the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network is “to assist and strengthen member churches to fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-21).” The Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network understands the importance of preaching expository sermons and the time constraints of a small church pastor. Therefore, as the president of the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network, I sought a former associate pastor at one member church and a current pastor at another member church, to form sermon preparation groups to help pastors save time, pool resources, and develop expository sermons that lead area churches to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

#### **Context**

The Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network (FABN) is a Baptist association in Virginia comprised of 48 churches in a rapidly growing community. In the past twenty years the Fredericksburg area has exploded from a rural blue-collar community of roughly 16,000 people to a highly educated white-collar population of over 200,000 people. The

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 19.



area is now a bedroom community of Washington, DC. The community is ripe to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though population has grown, many FABN member churches have not. Only 12 of the 48 churches have an average attendance of 200 or more. Pastors of small churches find themselves overwhelmed with both congregational and community needs of a large suburb of the DC area, such as hospital visits, funerals, community engagements, poverty, multi-cultural ministries, weddings, and charity. Pastors have a difficult time guiding their churches in transitioning from rural churches, where everyone knows each other, to suburban churches whose focus must be reaching the lost in the community.

As a bedroom community for the Washington, DC, area, many congregants in churches are active military, FBI agents, Secret Service agents, CIA employees, Department of Defense employees, government contractors, top government leaders, and even those who cannot tell others what they do. The transient population has led to high turnover in congregations as church members are moved by the government every few years. Due to this turnover, many church members have been a part of different churches from different denominations with different preaching styles. Fredericksburg pastors' sermons are compared to other sermons their congregants have heard from pastors in other towns.

National disasters have been another challenge of pastoring in this area. For example, in my former church where I served as an associate pastor, Chancellor Baptist, several congregants were working at the Pentagon during 9/11. On that day, pastors labored to ensure their congregants who worked at the Pentagon were safe and their families were attended to until their husband, wife, parent or parents were located. Two DC sniper attacks happened in the Fredericksburg area in October 2002. The community lived in fear of going outside. Pastors had to preach to people who were directly affected by these events.

Pastors also share in the same problems as other American pastors where some of their congregation leave for bigger or flashier churches. Their sermons are being compared to large church pastors whose experience and dynamic delivery provide engaging, but not necessarily expository sermons. Large church pastors also have multiple support staff that allow them to focus more on the sermon preparation. Pastors of small and medium size churches, like the two churches I have served in the area, feel they cannot compete with sermons and worship experiences at these larger churches. These overwhelming needs have left pastors, especially where they are the only paid staff, feeling alone and unqualified.

The FABN is working to address the needs of pastors in the area. Three years ago, FABN hired a Pastor Networking Coordinator (PNC) to reach out to pastors and provide regular times for them to talk together. This position brought some success in helping pastors get to know each other and communicate with one another. However, one area of concern the PNC has discovered is pastors scrambling to find time to prepare engaging expository sermons.

### **Rationale**

Sermons that stand on the authority of Scripture and deliver engaging application led people to live out their lives on mission. Lloyd-Jones writes, “Preaching is that which deals with the total person, the hearer becomes involved and knows that he has been dealt with and addressed by God through this preacher. Something has taken place in him and in his experience, and it is going to affect the whole of this life.”<sup>2</sup> Well-delivered, compelling sermons help congregants better articulate their faith to their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family.

Some large churches can divide preaching responsibilities between a stable of teaching pastors with a talent for public speaking. Other large churches have sermon

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<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 56.

preparation groups with staff members to hone their sermons to be theologically sound and include pointed application. For example, Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois, has multiple campuses where their teaching pastors can prepare sermons together.<sup>3</sup> These large church pastors have the benefit of preparing with a group of people to reach a larger group of people.

What if the small church pastor had the same advantage? What if small church pastors use the resources of fellow pastors to prepare for their sermons? Having pastors prepare sermons in sermon preparation groups will produce faithful expository sermons with appealing application that will lead to spiritual development in churches around the Fredericksburg area.

The FABN has an opportunity to impact their member churches by starting a sermon preparation group. The benefits of such a group would be many. First, it would create and strengthen relationships among area pastors. When pastors find comradery, they no longer feel isolated in their churches. They have men in town with whom they can meet to brainstorm and discover solutions to their pastoral problems. As the apostles and Paul became leaders of the new Christian churches, they were not isolated. They found encouragement and community with each other. Luke tells of ministry comradery in the book of Acts:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:24-26)<sup>4</sup>

The first-century Christian church leaders did not minister alone. This same principle should be applied today, even in sermon preparation.

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<sup>3</sup> Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 148-55.

<sup>4</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Second, sermon preparation groups allow pastors to grow as preachers. Every pastor has strengths and weaknesses. Some pastors are great orators, but do not take the time to study. Other pastors have great biblical knowledge but poor delivery. Many pastors get behind on their sermon preparation. They find themselves frantically working on sermons on Saturday night. These groups would establish rhythms of sermon study. The meetings would be structured to allow time to exegete a passage included in a sermon to be delivered four weeks away, discuss interpretation of a passage to be preached three weeks away, discover application for sermons two weeks away, and polish up a sermon to preach the following Sunday. Sermon preparation groups would allow pastors to strengthen their preaching by working together on exegesis, interpretation, and application.

Third, sermon preparation groups build stronger churches in the community. Churches in the community have reputations as being either a “good church” or a “bad church.” Oftentimes this label is derived from the pastor’s sermons. Sermon preparation groups would create strong consistent preaching that would build the churches’ reputation as being a “good church.”

Last, sermon preparation groups would unite churches to focus on the Great Commission. When pastors see themselves as co-laborers and not competitors it allows them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the community and not to attract members from other churches.

I am unaware of any similar projects or books using sermon preparation groups among church pastors. I have seen large churches do something similar among their staff, but it is worth pursuing as an avenue for small to medium size churches to strengthen expository sermons and better proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip a select number of pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network to preach expository sermons through sermon

preparation groups for the benefit of their church and the proclamation of the gospel in the Fredericksburg area.

### **Goals**

The following goals were needed to complete this project. These steps showed the progression of equipping a select number of pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network to preach expository sermons.

1. The first goal was to assess the current sermon preparation practices among a select number of Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network pastors.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-session sermon preparation agenda where pastors commit to meet once a week to prepare sermons.
3. The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository preaching.

The instruments used, the means of measurement, and the benchmarks of success are explained in the research methodology of this project. The instruments used gave instructions to the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network or other organizations who wish to equip their pastors to preach excellent expository sermons.

### **Research Methodology**

The effectiveness of this project depended on three goals. The first goal was to assess the current sermon preparation practices among a select number of Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network pastors. This goal was accomplished through working with the FABN's Pastor Network Coordinator to identify and offer an invitation to FABN pastors who are senior pastors doing the majority of preaching, desire to better their sermon preparation practices, and pastor a church of 300 or less. An introductory meeting was conducted to explain more about the project, a sermon preparation group covenant was handed out and signed to ensure the participants commitment to be a part of the group for six weeks,<sup>5</sup> and a survey was given to assess the pastors' sermon preparation knowledge,

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1.

strengths, and weaknesses.<sup>6</sup> Candidates were chosen from those who signed the covenant and took the survey.

The second goal was to develop a six-session sermon preparation agenda where pastors committed to meet once a week to prepare sermons. I drew on practices for exegesis, interpretation, application, and sermon delivery that I learned from preaching books I have read and preaching course work to inform, correct, and affirm the participants' sermon preparation practices. I facilitated each meeting where we spent approximately thirty minutes on our sermons in three weeks discussing primarily exegesis and study, thirty minutes on our sermons in two weeks discussing primarily interpretation and application, and sixty minutes on our sermons we would be preaching the coming Sunday, focusing on delivery and illustration. After the six-week session, evaluations were administered to participants to discover the effectiveness of the sermon preparation group on their preaching.<sup>7</sup>

The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository preaching. This goal was accomplished by working with the Pastor Networking Coordinator of the FABN to start new sermon preparation groups.

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

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

*Expository preaching.* For this project, Haddon Robinson's definition of *expository preaching* is used: "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2. 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.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2.

study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”<sup>8</sup>

*Hermeneutics.* In this project, *hermeneutics* means to interpret the Bible where five questions are answered, as suggested by the *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*: “(1) Who was the writer and to whom was he writing? (2) What was the cultural-historical setting of the writer? (3) What was the meaning of the words in the writer’s day? (4) What was the intended meaning of the author, and why was he saying it? (5) What should this mean to me in my situation today?”<sup>9</sup>

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the effectiveness of sermon preparation groups depended on participants attending at least 90 percent of the meetings. To mitigate this limitation, an electronic poll was sent out to determine the best day and time to meet.<sup>10</sup> A covenant was explained and signed at the first meeting to impress the importance of attending.<sup>11</sup> Second, the preaching knowledge and experience of the participants varied. To mitigate this limitation, a survey was taken two weeks prior to the first meeting to understand the preaching experience, knowledge, strengths, and weaknesses of the participants.<sup>12</sup> The curriculum was then edited according to the results of the survey. Last, available time to meet was limited due to pastors’ other responsibilities.

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<sup>8</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 5. Other helpful definitions include Peter Adam’s adaptation of Anthony Hoekstra’s definition in Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 71.

<sup>9</sup> Trent C. Butler, ed., *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), s.v. “Bible, hermeneutics.”

<sup>10</sup> <https://doodle.com> is a good tool to determine the best time for everyone to meet. It is a free resource that allows participants to check which day and time works best for them. It then it sends the results of the poll back to the poll’s creator.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> See appendix 2.

To mitigate this limitation, meeting agendas were given and strictly followed to get maximal time out of the meetings.

Four delimitations were placed on the project. First, this project was narrowed to eight weeks. This delimitation gave time to choose pastors, develop curriculum, evaluate curriculum, and implement the group. Second, this was a closed group not open to other pastors once the sermon preparation groups began. Three, the project was limited to senior pastors who do the majority of the preaching at their church. Finally, the project was limited to pastors of churches with 300 or less of average weekly worship attendance.

### **Conclusion**

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is vital to the church. FABN is committed to their mission statement “to assist and strengthen member churches to fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-21),” by investing in their pastors. For many Fredericksburg area pastors, time to prepare sermons can be limited based on other pastoral responsibilities. Preparing sermons in a group setting can increase faithfulness of study, minimize sermon preparation time, and utilize the preaching strengths of other pastors. Chapter 2 of this project outlines the biblical and theological foundations for equipping pastors for the benefit of the church and for primacy of preaching the Word of God.



## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE NEED FOR PREACHING IN THE CHURCH

This chapter provides a biblical foundation as to why it is important to equip pastors to preach. First, an overview of the importance of preaching in the Old Testament is presented to establish the long close relationship between God’s Word and preaching. This is followed by an explanation of how the first-century church understood the purpose of preaching in the newly formed Christian church. Finally, this chapter will focus on 2 Timothy 4:1-6 and Ephesians 4:11-14 to provide a strong biblical foundation for why the church needs faithful and strong preaching.

This chapter will argue that the Bible teaches that it is essential for Christian preachers to proclaim the Word of God to equip the church. Preaching has precedence in both the Old Testament and New Testament. From the start of the Christian church in Acts, preaching has been essential to proclaiming the gospel and equipping the church. Therefore, sermon preparation groups, like the one performed in this project, are essential to the health and growth of the church.

#### **The Importance of Preaching in the Bible**

Christian writer, speaker, and pastor, Skye Jethani, published an article in October 2019 titled, “The Case Against Sermon-Centric Sundays,” where he argues that pastors are wasting their time preparing sermons because church attendance is decreasing and media consumption is increasing. He challenges pastors: “Either battle the marketplace currents and strive to convince enough people to pay for sermon-centric Sunday gatherings,

or rethink that model to better fit the realities of making disciples in the 21st Century.”<sup>1</sup> Jethani’s argument is based on the understanding that (1) the church attendee is a consumer,<sup>2</sup> (2) technology is making the need for local church preaching obsolete,<sup>3</sup> and (3) a pastor only preaches out of his arrogance.<sup>4</sup> This section will argue that preaching is not an outdated method that needs to be abandoned, but a biblical model that needs to be embraced and strengthened.

The Bible teaches the importance of preaching the Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments. In *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*, Peter Adam argues that preaching is supported by three biblical foundations. The first foundation is that God acts through speaking: “God speaks, and his words are powerful, effective and creative of reality. The God who *speaks* is the God who *acts* through his words.”<sup>5</sup> In Genesis 1, God’s voice is the tool used to create the universe.<sup>6</sup> Israel is

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<sup>1</sup> Skye Jethani, “The Case against Sermon-Centric Sundays,” *Premier Christianity*, October 2019, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2019/October-2019/The-case-against-sermon-centric-Sundays>.

<sup>2</sup> Jethani writes, Significant cost is required for the physical spaces (church buildings), the training of clergy (theological colleges) and the writing of sermons (professional pastors). To cover these expenses, Christians were expected to sacrifice their time and treasure by committing their households and tithes to a single local church. This expectation was tolerated because, like any other commodity in high demand and in low supply, the market demanded it. This has been the economic assumption supporting most Protestant churches for centuries. . . . This low demand and high supply means the market for Bible instruction has reduced the cost to virtually zero. (Jethani, “The Case against Sermon-Centric Sundays”)

<sup>3</sup> Jethani continues, “Pastors carry a Reformation mindset that sees Bible teaching as a scarcity, which makes their sermons valuable, while millennials with a digital mindset recognise the abundance of Bible teaching available, making most pastor’s sermons, and therefore Sunday attendance, unnecessary.” Jethani, “The Case against Sermon-Centric Sundays.”

<sup>4</sup> Jethani explains, “The greatest barrier to this work, however, is not the inertia of tradition or the time necessary to learn new strategies. I suspect the most significant obstacle is within preachers’ hearts. Are we willing to give up the spotlight? . . . And are we willing to lay down our lives, our microphones and our egos for our sheep?” Jethani, “The Case against Sermon-Centric Sundays.”

<sup>5</sup> Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Gen 1 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29.

birthed by God speaking to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.<sup>7</sup> God spoke the exodus plan in Exodus 3:16-22 and it was carried out just as he said in Exodus 12:31-36. Throughout the Old Testament God's voice is recorded and his words are turned into actions.<sup>8</sup>

The second foundation is that God has intentionally authorized people to write down his words to be taught to future generations for the preservation of his word.<sup>9</sup> God commands the writing down of his words early in the start of the nation of Israel for the Israelites to have an immovable authority as they grow as a nation.<sup>10</sup> God commands the prophets to write down their prophecies.<sup>11</sup> Though God never directly commanded it, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the Gospel of Jesus Christ for others who were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and teachings.<sup>12</sup> In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, Christ tells John to write about the vision he has seen for the sake of the church.<sup>13</sup> God's words were recorded for future generations.

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<sup>7</sup> Gen 12:1-3 says, "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

<sup>8</sup> The following are examples of God speaking what will happen and later it happening. The curses of the Israelites in Deut 28:15-68 are fulfilled in the judgement of Israel and surrounding nations in all the major and minor prophets. The blessings and curses of Israel's and Judah's kings in 2 Sam, 1 and 2 Kgs, 1 and 2 Chron. Most important, the telling of the coming of Messiah, his death, and resurrection especially in Deuteronomy, Psalms, and the prophets being fulfilled in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

<sup>9</sup> Adam writes, "The original revelation, then had its own significance in its day, but it has an even greater significance as it is passed from generation to generation, preserved by God as his revelation to his people." Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Exod 17:4; 34:27; Num 5:23; Deut 6:9; 11:20; 17:18; 27:3, 8; 31:19

<sup>11</sup> Isa 30:8; Jer 30:2; 36:2; 36:28; Ezek 24:2; 37:16; 43:11; Hab 2:2

<sup>12</sup> Luke 1:1-3 reads, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."

<sup>13</sup> Rev 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5

Since God’s words were written down for future generations, God’s plan has always been for his words to be preached. Adam believes this principle when he writes, “Preaching depends not only on having a God-given source, the Bible, but also a God-given commission to preach, teach, and explain it to people and to encourage and urge them to respond.”<sup>14</sup> Christopher Ash argues that Deuteronomy is more than a book of law: “Deuteronomy is the mandate for the people of God to assemble under the preached word of God, or to be more accurate, the written word preached. This is why Deuteronomy is not really a law book, but a preaching book.”<sup>15</sup> Ezra 7:10 describes Ezra as one who studied the written Word and taught what it said because Scripture was God’s words: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” In Nehemiah 8:1-8, Ezra reads the Word, and verses 7b-8 record, “The Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, all of the prophets proclaimed the Word of God for the people to understand and obey. The Old Testament authors understood that the words they were recording were God’s speech for

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<sup>14</sup> Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching* (London: Proclamation Trust, 2009), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Some OT scholars are divided on translation and interpretation of this verse. In F. Charles Fensham’s commentary, he translates verse 8 differently than the ESV. His translation reads, “They read from the book of the law of God and translated it . . .” instead of the Levites giving the “sense” of the Law of God. He comments, “We must recognize that the Jews who spoke Aramaic needed someone to translate the Hebrew of the law for them in their own vernacular.” H.G.M. Williamson notes (note 8a in his commentary) this difference in his commentary; however, he interprets this verse as the Levites expositing the Law of God. Whether the Levites were just translating or expositing both have the same goal of clarifying the Word of God. The Levites, likewise, share this same goal with modern expository preachers. F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 215, 217; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 278-279, 291.

future generations so that those holy words would be proclaimed for generations afterwards.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of preaching established in the Old Testament is developed further in the New Testament with the work of Jesus Christ: “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers” (Acts 13:32). The apostles preached from the same texts as Ezra and Moses, but with the new revelation of Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus is anointed to preach in Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Matthew 9:35 said, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (NIV). Jesus appoints his disciples to preach in Mark 3:14: “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” The final words of Christ in Luke 24:46-47 are a command to preach “and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’” The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, calls for God’s spoken word that has been written down for future generations to be preached.

Preaching is not an outdated method to be abandoned. It is commanded by Scripture. Therefore, it still has purpose in the church today. If, like Jethani says, “The forces of modernity and technology has conspired against”<sup>18</sup> preachers and preaching, then the answer is not to decentralize the sermon from the worship service, but to train

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<sup>17</sup> For further study about preaching in the Old Testament see Christopher J. H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) and Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Jethani, “The Case against Sermon-Centric Sundays.”

pastors to be faithful to the text and clear in their explanation. Preaching still serves an essential purpose in the local church.

### **The Purpose of Preaching**

Why does the Bible call for its message to be preached? What is the purpose of preaching in the local church? The Bible teaches that Christian preaching is used to proclaim the gospel to the unbeliever and to equip the church. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

It is very important that we should recognize these two main sections in the message of the Bible. The first is what you may call the message of salvation, the *kerygma*, that is what determines evangelistic preaching. The second is teaching aspect, the *didache*, that which builds up those who have already believed—the edification of the saints.<sup>19</sup>

Preaching communicates the message of Scripture. Its message is for non-Christians and Christians. To non-Christians, Scripture’s message leads them to conviction and salvation. To Christians who are members of Christ’s church, Scripture leads them to obedience and purpose. The Bible tells the church its purpose.

First, the Bible reveals that preaching is to be evangelistic. Throughout the book of Acts preaching was done in order for people to surrender to the gospel. Acts 5:42 says, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” Acts 8:5 reads, “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.” Acts 8:35 continues, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news of Jesus.” Acts 9:20 says, “And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’” Acts 17:2-4a reads, “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.” According to the book of Acts, the complete revelation of Scripture is the gospel

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<sup>19</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 62.

of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the purpose of preaching the complete revelation of Scripture is to convert people to follow Christ.

Preaching is also to equip the church. Acts 6:2 explains the apostles' primary service to the church: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." The apostles had the church appoint deacons because they saw service to widows as important; however, they also recognized the importance of preaching to the church.

In the beginning of Romans, Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also in Rome" (Rom 1:15). Paul was not wanting to preach the gospel to them because they did not follow Jesus—he wanted to preach the gospel because he wanted to equip the Roman church. In Colossians 1:25-26, Paul explains that he serves the church by making the "word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints." He explains how preaching equips the church in Ephesians 4:11-14. This chapter will explore this passage further later in the chapter.

Preaching, according to the New Testament, serves two functions for the church. It is used to proclaim the gospel to the unbeliever, as well as to equip the church. Second Timothy 4:1-6 proves this.

### **Paul's Preaching Mandate**

Paul wrote 2 Timothy while in Rome as a prisoner waiting to stand trial. Paul's personal remarks at the end of the second recorded letter to Timothy indicate that Paul knew death was near. He asked Timothy to come quickly in 4:9, he asks for personal effects in 4:13, and he states in verse 18, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

The most significant reference that Paul gives of his upcoming death is seen in 4:6 where Paul writes, "For I [εγώ γαρ] am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure has come." George W. Knight points out, "εγώ γαρ

signifies that this subsection serves as a further reason and motivation for the charge just given. . . . The imminence of Paul's death is a poignant reason for his charge to Timothy."<sup>20</sup> Hence, Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy is vitally important for Paul to write, as well as for Timothy to understand.

Paul's last mandate to Timothy is in 4:2: "Preach the Word." The weight of this command is established in 4:1: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom." This command is not an afterthought. Paul is giving this charge in the presence of authority and with an eschatological perspective.

Paul is giving this charge in the presence of God and Christ Jesus. He understands God and Jesus as one.<sup>21</sup> They are ruling side-by-side in the same position as the righteous Judge. This is not a judge who is limited. This is a judge whose jurisdiction is the world of the living and the dead. Just as a charge given on the authority and in the presence of an earthly judge holds weight, this charge holds even more weight because it is in the presence of the eternally righteous Judge whose authority does not have boundaries.

Paul delivers this charge not only in the presence of the righteous, powerful judge, but "by his appearing and his kingdom." Paul uses this formula of charging in the

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<sup>20</sup> George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 458-59.

<sup>21</sup> Marshall and Towner write, "The opening phrase of the adjuration, διαμαρτορομαι . . . Ἰησοῦ, echoes the language of 2.14 an is par. to 1 Tim 5.21, but does not go on to include the reference to the angels which may there be evocative of judgement, a theme expressed here more directly. The omission has the effect of linking God and Jesus Christ all the more closely together as co-actors in judgement, just as they are in salvation (as in 1.2 and similar formulae). I. Howard Marshall and Phillip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 798.



presence of divine witnesses in 2 Timothy 2:14<sup>22</sup> and in 1 Timothy 5:21.<sup>23</sup> Philip H. Towner points out, “The gravity of the charge being spelled out would not be missed.”<sup>24</sup> He was not only imitating the way the Greek world gave charges, but also how Moses gave his charge in Deuteronomy 4:26: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.”<sup>25</sup> Paul takes his command to “Preach the Word” seriously by acknowledging that he is giving this command in the presence of God.

Paul then gives the reason for this command. I. Howard Marshall comments, “The future epiphany of Jesus for judgement is already determinative of present life and to that extent it has a contemporary character.”<sup>26</sup> Marshall explains that Paul is not giving this command in hopes that preaching the Word will one day produce Christ’s appearing and completion of the kingdom; Paul is giving this command because the future event of Christ’s coming dictates the present actions of Timothy.

“Preach the Word” is the present action to which Paul gives so much weight. William Mounce comments, “Within the context of solemnity created by v 1, Paul delivers his charge to Timothy: Preach the gospel! . . . Once again Paul is repeating the central theme of the role Scripture and the gospel are to play in Timothy’s ministry (cf. 1 Tim 4:6-16; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13,14).”<sup>27</sup> To Paul, preaching is of the utmost importance in

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<sup>22</sup> Second Tim 2:14 says, “Remind them these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearer.”

<sup>23</sup> First Tim 5:21 reads, “In the presence of God and Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.”

<sup>24</sup> Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 595.

<sup>25</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 595.

<sup>26</sup> Marshall and Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 799.

<sup>27</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville:

Timothy's ministry of pastoring the church in Ephesus. Thus, Paul answers in verses 2-5 what Timothy should preach, when Timothy should preach, how Timothy should preach, and why Timothy should preach.

Paul is not just directing Timothy to preach. He specifies what he should be preaching: "The Word." Paul defined the Word a few sentences prior in 3:16-17: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Paul understands the Word as God's spoken word. He sees it as God's breath. This Word is unique and authoritative. Timothy is to preach a different Word than what the heretics are preaching in verses 3-4.<sup>28</sup>

Paul then explains to Timothy in 4:2 how he should preach the Word: "Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." Timothy should always be ready to preach the Word. During this time, Greek orators chose the best time and setting in which to speak. If they felt like the environment, time, or compensation was not conducive to their speech, then they would not speak. However, Paul says the opposite. He says to always be ready to preach the Word of God, whenever given opportunity—not just when it suits Timothy. Regardless of the environment, time, or compensation, Timothy should be ready to preach.<sup>29</sup> He also links the idea of seasonal preparedness to verses 3-4.

Next, Paul states that Timothy's preaching should reprove, rebuke, and exhort his hearers. Just as the Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17 NIV), the preacher uses it to shape his hearers, the

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T. Nelson, 2000), 572.

<sup>28</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 572.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 800.

church. Teaching, reproofing, correcting, rebuking, and training are verbs used to reshape someone into a new image. However, preaching should not be done with violent force, but with “great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2 NIV).

Walter Liefeld points out the distinction between these two modes of preaching: “The modifying phrase ‘with great patience and careful instruction’ combines two dissimilar words, one denoting an attitude and the other content. Yet the two belong together because they are integral to Paul’s message in the Pastoral Letters that both attitude and teaching are important.”<sup>30</sup> In verse 2, Timothy should preach the Word with expectation, being prepared to proclaim what it is saying, but also what it is not saying, giving clear understanding of the message of the Word while having the right attitude so people will understand it.

While in verse 2, Paul instructs Timothy regarding what he should preach, when he should preach, and how he should preach (vv. 3-4). Paul explains why Timothy must preach the Word in such a manner: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but have itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim 4:3-4 NIV). Mounce writes that these verses “spell out the reason for the seriousness of v. 1 and the urgency of v. 2. Timothy is to prepare to preach the gospel even when the time is not right (ἀκαιρως, ‘inopportune’ [v 2]) because the καιρός, ‘time,’ is coming when people will not listen to the gospel.”<sup>31</sup>

In 2 Timothy 4:2, when Paul says to “be prepared in season and out of season,” he is instructing Timothy that the time is now because of the heretical preaching plaguing the church. He wrote earlier in 2 Timothy 1:15 of some who had abandoned the faith: “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus

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<sup>30</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 287.

<sup>31</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 574.

and Hermogenes.” He also writes in 2 Timothy 4:9 that Demas, who Paul mentions two other times in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 as being with him, “has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” He wrote in 1 Timothy 1:3-4 of the heresies being taught in Ephesus, “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.” These false teachings that Paul writes about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 were already being taught and some of Paul’s close friends were leaving the faith because of them. Preaching the Word will correct the false teaching, but Paul uses the future tense because this problem is not going away anytime soon.

For Paul, preaching the Word is the surgical procedure needed to correct the fractured posture of the church by these heretical teachings. Homer Kent writes,

Paul does not state what types of myths these are (muthous), whether Jewish, Gnostic, or other religious falsehood. ‘Turned aside’ (ektrapēsontai) has a medical usage referring to the dislocation of the limbs, a wrenching out of place. Hence Paul is stating that those who turn away from the truth leave themselves vulnerable to be wrenched out of joint spiritually by satanic influence.<sup>32</sup>

Preaching is needed to equip the Christian church by setting right the misaligned bones.

Paul then places his attention back on Timothy and tells him in 2 Timothy 4:5: “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Paul contrasts the capriciousness of the heretical teachers with the dedication Timothy needs to have to the Word of God. Mounce explains, “Four imperatives conclude the list of instructions begun in v. 2.”<sup>33</sup> Those imperatives are “be . . . endure . . . do . . . fulfill.”

The first imperative is that Timothy should be “sober-minded.” Being sober-minded is more than not being drunk. While Paul discourages drunken behavior in other

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<sup>32</sup> Homer Austin Kent, *The Pastor Epistles: Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 285.

<sup>33</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 803.

letters, here he is using sober to mean even-tempered.<sup>34</sup> Paul contrasts the self-control Timothy needs to preach the truth to the lack of self-control that is evident in the lives of false teachers.<sup>35</sup>

Next, Paul tells Timothy to “endure suffering.” To Paul, suffering was part of being a Christian. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:12 that his belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ and his calling to be a preacher, apostle, and teacher of it has caused his suffering. Paul does not tell Timothy to preach the Word and that he *may* encounter suffering, but to preach the Word and he *will* encounter suffering. Towner writes,

The place of this theme within the letter suggests that the notion of ‘suffering’ for the gospel was very much a ‘hill to be taken’ in the battle for the legitimacy of the Pauline mission; to shrink back from this demand, which Paul’s own team members and, almost certainly, the opponents had done, was to break allegiance with Christ (1:8; 2:8-13) who himself had established the pattern.<sup>36</sup>

Suffering caused some of Paul’s co-workers to abandon the task of preaching and may have caused others to become false teachers. To follow Christ was to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

Paul continues in 2 Timothy 4:5 to “do the work of an evangelist.” This is not a title as given to “Philip the evangelist” in Acts 21:8 or a singular task as Paul refers to it in Ephesians 4:11. Paul tells Timothy here to “do the work of an evangelist.” Kent states, “In his pastoral duties, he is not to forget the unsaved, but must always be concerned with announcing the good news of man’s redemption through Christ.”<sup>37</sup> While instructional preaching and evangelistic preaching are distinct, they are not completely separate. The Word of God is good for correcting and shaping people in the church at Ephesus, but at the same time Timothy should also be using it to point people outside the church to Christ.

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<sup>34</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 456.

<sup>35</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 606.

<sup>36</sup> Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 607.

<sup>37</sup> Kent, *The Pastor Epistles*, 286.

Tony Sargent in his book *Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* describes Lloyd-Jones doing what Paul instructs Timothy to do. Lloyd-Jones preached instructional sermons and evangelistic sermons; however, he often had elements of both in every sermon. An instructional sermon can be evangelistic to the unbeliever and an evangelistic sermon can be instruction to the Christian.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5 to “fulfill your ministry.” In other words, Paul tells Timothy not to phone it in. Strive and work hard at preaching the Word of God. Kent writes, “No halfhearted, professional performance will satisfy the spiritual needs of God’s people.”<sup>39</sup> The biblical view of preaching is not one of passivity, but of vigilant activity with the Holy Spirit giving power to the hard work.

Second Timothy 4:1-5 proves that the Bible teaches that Christian preachers should proclaim the Word of God to equip the church. The proclamation of the message of Scripture calls sinners into relationship with Jesus Christ as well as shapes doctrine and anchors the church in the immovable revelation of God. The Christian church needs to be diligent about equipping local preachers to preach well. Ephesians 4:7-16 provides evidence that the church saw the training of preachers as essential to the work of the church from the very beginning.

### **The Offices of the Church Are Vital to the Church**

Ephesians 4:7-16 is the second part of a passage that spans from verses 1-16, in which Paul urges the churches in and around Ephesus to be unified in Christ. Peter O’Brien explains how this passage is used in Paul’s overall argument for church unity, “Vv. 7-16 are a distinct unit within the section as a whole (vv. 1-16), and is underscored by the presence of ‘each one’ in both vv. 7 and 16, which forms an envelope with the passage

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<sup>38</sup> Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 264.

<sup>39</sup> Kent, *The Pastor Epistles*, 286.

(*inclusio*). We move from an emphasis on unity (vv. 4-6) to diversity in vv. 7-10, and then back again to unity in vv. 11-16.”<sup>40</sup> In verses 7-10, Paul highlights the diversity of offices to create unity in the church. He finishes his argument in verses 8-16 by describing the benefit of church.

Paul’s argument is that, at its foundation, the church is unified because Christ gives individual Christians the gifts that cause the whole church to mature and grow. Paul writes, “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). While Paul teaches how Christ gives gifts to each Christ follower in the church, no one person can say he is contributing more to the church than another. Frank Thielman rightly points out, “The power for achieving this goal, however, comes not from the believer’s own resources but as a gift from the victorious, ascended Christ.”<sup>41</sup> No church can boast in its efforts to grow because Christ, by his grace, gives the church members the ability to be unified and reproduce.

Since Paul is arguing in Ephesians 4:7-16 that Christ gives individuals supernatural gifts, then “this is consistent with Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts in two other passages (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:3-8), where he emphasizes the comprehensiveness of God’s bestowal of gifts on every member of the body.”<sup>42</sup> These spiritual gifts are defined by Thomas R. Schreiner in *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* as “gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit which are designed for the edification of the church.”<sup>43</sup> For instance, natural talent, like public speaking, cannot be something to boast

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 286.

<sup>41</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 262.

<sup>42</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 246.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 16.

about because the talent needed to preach is given fully by Christ for the benefit of the church.

Paul anchors his argument in a paraphrase of Psalm 68:18: “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men” (Eph 4:8).<sup>44</sup> While Psalm 68:18 in its original context speaks of Yahweh ascending to Mount Zion after conquering his enemies, Arnold argues in his commentary on Ephesians that Paul sees the overall message of Psalm 68 as the support of Christ giving gifts to the church: “Psalm 68 fits Paul’s purpose exceptionally well. The psalm which depicts God as mighty to empower and save his people in their struggle with their enemies. . . . for Paul, these enemies are no longer people, but hostile supernatural powers.”<sup>45</sup> Paul sees further revelation of Christ as the conqueror giving gifts to his church after his crucifixion and resurrection.

In his parenthetical explanation of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:9, Paul explains that not only does Psalm 68:18 prove that Christ gives good gifts, but his dominion over all things is demonstrated in his earthly descension and heavenly ascension. There is debate on exactly what Paul was thinking about where Christ descended, but Paul’s

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<sup>44</sup> Paul’s quote changes the original Ps 68:18 from “he received gifts from men,” to “he gave gifts to men.” Commentators have much to speculate about why Paul’s paraphrase is different from Ps 68:18. Most of the commentators I have read (Bruce, Snodgrass, Longman, Garland, and O’Brien) thought that Paul was quoting a common targum during his time where it says that Moses was ascending to Mount Sinai and he was giving the gift of the Law to the Israelites. They believe that Paul sees Jesus as the new Moses, but instead of giving the Law, Jesus is giving spiritual gifts to the church. These commentators agree that the targum that gives this explanation about Moses was written a few hundred years after Paul, but the targum would only have written down what was taught for hundreds of years previously. Thielman argues that it is possible that Paul changed the text himself and the Jewish targum’s teaching on Moses that came after Paul’s interpretation was only a reaction to Paul’s interpretation of Christ ascending. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 267-68. Either way, the commentators believe that Paul stayed true to the original message of Ps 68, which was that God is the conquering king who gives good gifts. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 342; Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 201; William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 111-13.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 250.



broader point is clear.<sup>46</sup> Paul says that Christ is the provider of all things that grow and mature the church, his body.

According to Paul, unification comes through diversification of the gifts Christ provides to individual Christians for the sake of the church. Verse 11 (“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers”) expands on the idea he introduces in verse 7 (“according to the measure of Christ’s gift”) by listing specific diverse gifts Christ gives the church. Snodgrass explains, “Like other passages on the body (Rom.12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31), Paul’s concern for unity is balanced by an emphasis on diversity and the responsibility of each person.”<sup>47</sup> Unification does not come from everyone having the same gifts, but each Christian contributing specific abilities that together mature and grow the church.

Paul lists four (or five) offices or gifts of the church in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ provides: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (or shepherds), and teachers. The list of offices in Ephesians 4:11 are similar to the spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, and 12:28. Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians that each of these spiritual gifts comes from Christ who gives them out as he sees fit.<sup>48</sup>

Schreiner explains that in Ephesians 4:11, “We recognize that Paul refers to gifted persons,

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<sup>46</sup> Verse 9 is also debated over what Paul was thinking of when he wrote, “He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth.” What did “lower regions” mean? Did Paul mean that Christ in his incarnation descended to earth or that in his death went to hell and defeated evil? The ESV clearly believes Paul is talking about the earth and not hell because of where they placed the comma. The NASB does not clarify this but leaves the possibility that he meant hell by translating v. 9, “He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth.” Some commentators point out that Paul could be referring to Pentecost where the Holy Spirit descended and gave gifts to the apostles. Klein, *Ephesians*, 113; John R.W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: IVP, 1979), 157-58.

<sup>47</sup> Snodgrass admits, “While not explicit in Ephesians 4 as in other texts, this is clearly Paul’s intent.” Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> First Cor 12:11 says, “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” This verse is similar to Eph 4:7: “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

but it is also legitimate to speak of the gifts themselves from this text.”<sup>49</sup> To understand the role of the offices listed in Ephesians 4:11, closer attention will be given in this chapter to each office to see the importance they have in equipping the church.

Paul views apostles and prophets as the foundational leadership roles in the church. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul writes, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets.” He writes of the foundational role of the apostles and prophets earlier in the letter in Ephesians 2:20, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” However, apostles and prophets are somewhat foreign offices to the church today.

Peter explains in Acts 1:21-22 that apostles are men who have witnessed the resurrected Christ and have been called by Jesus to lead the church: “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”<sup>50</sup> According to Schreiner, this specific definition would apply to Jesus’ eleven disciples plus Matthias (who had replaced Judas), Paul (who had seen and was called by the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus), James, Silas, and Barnabas; however, a broader definition the title of apostle could have been given to pioneer missionaries like Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7.<sup>51</sup> Either way, apostle is a gift given by Christ for the edification of the church.

For the office of prophet, Paul perceives a difference between prophets of the church and Old Testament prophets. Markus Barth comments,

NT prophets did not claim to have stood in God’s council; some, as the seer John on Patmos, may have been given visions, but not all of them claimed them. . . . Their special charisma appears not only to have been in making predictions of the

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<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Paul clearly also understood seeing the risen Christ as a qualifier to be called an apostle in 1 Cor 9:1: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 26-27.

immediate future—as in the case of Agabus (Acts 11:28)—but above all in applying the gospel to specific contemporary circumstances.<sup>52</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, Paul says the purpose of the prophet is to build up the church, not necessarily to declare repentance as with John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets: “The one who prophesies speaks to people for the upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.” Prophets were those who may have a special word from the Lord or a vision of the future for the benefit of the church as in John’s vision in the book of Revelation.

The next office Paul lists is evangelist. Evangelist is only mentioned two other times in the New Testament. First, in the book of Acts, Philip was described as an evangelist and then in 2 Timothy 4:5 where, as stated earlier in this chapter, Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. It is not mentioned in the lists of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, nor in the offices listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30. Bruce thinks that this may be because the evangelist was meant to work outside a local congregation as an itinerate preacher proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers.<sup>53</sup> However, evangelists are not always confined to travel. Paul tells Timothy, who is pastoring the established Ephesian church, to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5). O’Brien elaborates, “Here in Ephesians 4 evangelists are given by the ascended Christ for the purpose of building his body, and this included both intensive and extensive growth.”<sup>54</sup> Peter teaches in 1 Peter 3:15 that all Christians ought to be ready to “give the reason for the hope that you have.” However, evangelists have a gift to preach the gospel convincingly to unbelievers inside and outside the church.

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<sup>52</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians Chapters 4-6*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 34A. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 437.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 347.

<sup>54</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 299.

Pastors (the Greek's literal translation is "shepherd") were men who led the local congregation. Klein considers this role synonymous with the title elder.<sup>55</sup> Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:17 that some elders did preach and teach: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Thielman and Snodgrass debate whether Paul meant for the pastors and teachers to be separate offices or a combined office of a teaching pastor.<sup>56</sup>

Pastors were caretakers of the congregation. Thielman writes,

Insofar as we can distinguish "teachers" from "shepherds," we should probably think of people who are not necessarily skilled in administration (Ellicott 1859: 87), but whom Christ has equipped to instruct others in what 1 Tim. 6:1 calls "the teaching" (ἡ διδασκαλία, *hē didaskalia*), "the Christian message or doctrine by which the church is known" (Towner 2006: 382).<sup>57</sup>

However, to detach shepherd from teacher may not be necessary. Schreiner writes, "Nowhere does Scripture teach that Christians have only one gift."<sup>58</sup> It is possible that shepherd and teacher are linked together at the end of verse 11 because those who were shepherds were often also teachers. Teaching the congregation correct theology and doctrine are how pastors and teachers served the church.

As previously stated, teachers may have been another description of the pastor's duties or it may mean those who are not pastors but are still charged to teach the Word. Paul mentions teaching as a spiritual gift in all four lists of spiritual gifts. In addition, Schreiner states, "The importance of teaching is especially emphasized in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:10; 2:7, 12; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1-3; 2 Tim. 1:11; 3:10, 16; 4:3;

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<sup>55</sup> Klein writes, "They carry out the function of overseer (episkopos, GK 2176) as they direct the body (Ro 12:8; Php 1:1; 1 Th 5:12; 1 Ti 3:1; Heb 13:17). The role is interchangeable with elder (presbyteros, GK 4565; cf. Ac 14:23; 20:17; 1 Ti 5:17; Tit 1:3,5)." Klein, *Ephesians*, 115.

<sup>56</sup> See Thielman's reason for not seeing shepherds and teachers as one office compared to Snodgrass' reason to see the offices as one office: Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 204.

<sup>57</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 31.

Titus 1:9, 11, 2:1, 7, 10).”<sup>59</sup> O’Brien comments, “In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition and committed to men specially chosen (e.g., 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9).”<sup>60</sup> In light of the concern Paul has in verse 14 that the church is susceptible to being led astray by false doctrine, Paul may see teachers as defenders against these false doctrines. Either way, Thielman suggests, “A concern to keep false teaching at bay may be the reason Paul coupled these two groups.”<sup>61</sup>

All these offices are involved in the ministry of the Word. Schreiner divides all the spiritual gifts Paul lists in his letters into two categories: “Gifts of speaking and gifts of serving (1 Pet. 4:11).”<sup>62</sup> Schreiner places all the gifts that Paul lists in Ephesians 4:11 as gifts of speaking.<sup>63</sup> This categorization supports the idea that these offices in Ephesians 4:11 are specifically for the ministry of the Word. Whether an apostle planting a new church through proclaiming the Word or a traveling evangelist proclaiming the Word to unbelievers or a teacher explaining the Word, their primary function was to teach the Word.

These leadership offices of the church were “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Paul gives three prepositional phrases, literally translated by Snodgrass “*toward* the equipping of God’s people *unto* a word of service *unto* building up the body of Christ.”<sup>64</sup> These prepositional phrases are not saying that the leaders are to do all the work, but that they are to equip the rest of the

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<sup>59</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 300.

<sup>61</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

<sup>62</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 204.

church for the work of the church because “grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). Therefore, through the ministry of the Word the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers build up the body of Christ to maturity.

Paul writes that maturity is attained through “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:13). The knowledge of Christ that the leaders impart brings unity in the church by equipping the church. O’Brien writes, “Christian growth or progress does not occur in isolation, for Paul’s language here envisages God’s people *collectively (we all)* as en route to this destination.”<sup>65</sup> Collectively, preachers should be equipped to preach for the good of the unity and maturity of the church.

How does unity and maturity help the church? Paul answers this question in verse 14: “So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” The enemies of unity and maturity are bad doctrine and intentional manipulation of the truth by Satan.<sup>66</sup> To clarify further, “Immature churches are also poorly taught churches. Thus, they are doctrinally unstable, blown here and there by false teachings.”<sup>67</sup> Paul understands that a unified, mature church is vital to protect the church from bad doctrine and deceitful plans. A church that thinks and acts contrary to God’s Word is destructive to the members of the church and the witness of Christ to the community. The importance of teaching and preaching right doctrine is the difference between the life and the death of a church and a community.

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<sup>65</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 305.

<sup>66</sup> Arnold writes about how Paul sees Satan’s hand behind false teaching in other letters, which would give insight into where he views the source of false teaching comes from in Eph 4:14: “Paul often sees the power of darkness as actively inspiring various forms of dangerous teaching (Gal 4:8-10; 2 Cor 11:13-15; Col 2:8).” Arnold, *Ephesians*, 268.

<sup>67</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 49.

When a church is divided on which doctrinal issues and unholy schemes to adopt then the church is ineffective in advancing the kingdom of God. Its leader is not Christ, the giver of gifts to the church, but human cunning and false wisdom. The result is a weak church that does not proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Word of God and therefore does not change the culture or human's hearts from the judgement that is to come but only leads to death and despair.

Paul describes a unified and mature church as a church that speaks truth in love and works to “grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15). Paul contrasts the negative impact of bad teaching and deceit in verse 14 with the positive impact of right teaching in verse 15.<sup>68</sup> O'Brien explains, “*speaking the truth in love* lays out a twofold contrast with the false teachers: the latter were presenting *false* doctrine in a *deceptive* manner, but over against this God's people are to grow through proclaiming the *truth in love*.”<sup>69</sup> Paul is teaching that Christ's gifts not only guides the preacher what to preach (true doctrine), but how to preach (in love).

When truth is taught and preached lovingly then, Paul writes, we “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15b). The body image Paul uses here continues to express Paul's view that Christ is Lord and head of the church. Snodgrass explains that as Christians grow “they are more closely brought into relation with him and into conformity with his character and his will.”<sup>70</sup>

This closeness that the church gains with Christ is beneficial for everyone. Paul concludes this passage with the body image he has been using throughout: “From whom

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<sup>68</sup> Thielman explains, The verb ἀυξήσωμεν (*auxēsōmen*, we might grow) stands in contrast to the phrase μηκέτι ὄμεν (*mēketi ōmen*, might no longer be) in verse 14 and, like it, is part of the purpose clause that begins with ἵνα (*hina*, that; v. 14). In contrast, (δέ, *de*, but) to the deceit of the false teachings and the cunning with which they advance “the system of error,” believers grow toward maturity as they speak the truth in love. (Thielman, *Ephesians*, 285)

<sup>69</sup> O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 310, emphasis original.

<sup>70</sup> Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 207.

the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:16). Growing into the head of Christ causes all the body parts to work together. O’Brien writes, “[Christ] as the head who rules over the body he is the ultimate source (from him) of its growth, for he supplies all that is necessary for its well-being, including its unity, nourishment, and progress.”<sup>71</sup> This is Paul’s main argument. Christ rules the church; therefore, all gifts are given to the church by him to bring about maturity and unity, and specifically for the purpose of this project, preaching.

### **How Preaching Equips the Church**

In Ephesians 4:7-16 Paul is explicitly laying out an order of gift giving in the church. Christ, as the triumphant king, graciously provides gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelist, shepherds, and teachers to the church. These officers of the church equip other Christians to serve the body of Christ. Together, these gifts serve to bring the church into unity and maturity. Does this mean that there is no need for Christians to train pastors to preach or teachers to teach because only Christ can train Christians for these offices? No, the equipping of the church provides the offices that Paul describes in verse 11. Schreiner provides insight into how church training regarding spiritual gifts is valuable to the church. First, training provides discernment and confirmation of a church member’s spiritual gifts: “Other members of the body of Christ can and must help us discern and confirm the gifts in our lives.”<sup>72</sup> Second, training helps strengthen church members’ spiritual gifts: “Focus your energy on where you are strong and rejoice in the gifts God has given you.”<sup>73</sup> Equipping means that the church has a responsibility to help its members discern their

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<sup>71</sup> O’Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 313.

<sup>72</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 68.



gifts and strengthen their gifts. Paul is instructing that these offices are given by Christ to equip others to preach and teach in the church.

Paul implies that the leadership of the church will train others in their gifts. In Colossians Paul writes of the teaching of each other in the church: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (3:16). The author of Hebrews writes of the need for teachers to be equipped: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God” (5:12). As seen in Ephesians 4:12, Colossians 3:16, and Colossians 5:12, the training of teachers and preachers was an expected part of the church from the beginning.

Like a good gardener, Christ plants the seeds of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers for the church to feed on their teaching. These offices replicate themselves, with the grace of Christ, by equipping others to teach the same sound doctrinal truths. This replication of preaching and teaching benefits the church by creating unity and maturity in the church. Therefore, more training of preachers needs to be done on a frequently consistent basis to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthen the church from heresy.

### **Conclusion**

Second Timothy 4:1-6 and Ephesians 4:7-16 provide a biblical foundation for this project that aims to equip small church pastors to preach expository sermons through sermon preparation groups. The Bible teaches in 2 Timothy 4:1-6 that Christian preachers should proclaim the Word of God to equip the church to follow correct doctrine, which in turn will produce authentic right living and greater glory to God. Preaching is more essential to the growth of the church than church growth strategies based on business models, outreach strategies, or the Sunday morning worship performances. Baptist

associations on the local, state, and national level need to concentrate more on helping produce greater preachers.

The local autonomous church should work to equip preachers to preach well the message of Scripture. Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:7-16 shows that the gift of preaching comes from God and that it is the church's responsibility to continue to train those Christ has called to be preachers. As seen in the exegesis of 2 Timothy 4:1-6 and Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul teaches that equipping preachers to preach will anchor the church in truth, proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, cause it to grow closer to Christ, and unify the church under the leadership of Christ.

## CHAPTER 3

### UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATIVE SERMON PREPARATION FROM PREACHERS WHO DO IT

Preachers come with all different types of talents, backgrounds, and cultures. Some preachers are widely read and have high recall. Some preachers are very academic and have invested much time and money in education that has made them efficient in studying the Bible, culture, and preaching well. Some are good storytellers who grab their congregation with the message of Scripture. Some are preachers in large churches where the church allows them time to study and prepare. Some are preachers in small churches where the time to study is limited. Regardless of a preacher's talents, education, and responsibilities, they all have one thing in common: it is vital that they preach clearly the message of the Bible to people each Sunday who desperately need the Word of God proclaimed to them. This chapter will look at one method that helps accomplish this goal: collaboration.

No one in the evangelical church today would say that it is okay for a preacher to prepare a sermon without reading a commentary. Most evangelical churches would not let a preacher in their pulpit who said they have only read a passage of Scripture and have a few thoughts about it with no exegesis of the passage. The necessity of commentaries and other study tools in sermon preparation proves that preachers understand the need for some collaboration in sermon prep. Preachers read commentaries, books on theology and hermeneutics, listen to other sermons, and read historical sermons, in order to prepare us to preach. However, the one thing these all have in common is that none of these voices are physically in the room during a preacher's sermon preparation. Their words are, but they are not. These scholars and fellow preachers cannot tell a preacher when his sermon

prep goes off the rails or when an illustration is bad. He cannot ask questions of them specifically when he does not understand a passage they are commentating on.

As important as studying is in sermon preparation, making time for a pastor to study for his sermon is equally important and quite a challenge. In the introduction to their book, Hershael York and Bert Decker write an honest description of the average American pastors' lives:

Those who proclaim the Word of God are a very busy lot. Most preachers are pastors whose preaching is one of many jobs he must routinely perform. Time for study has to be squeezed between budget meetings, hospital visits, staff retreats, crises, correspondence, funerals and family duties. Sermon building is often little more than a frantic cut and paste from other's sermons in books, tapes, or the Internet and may even border on plagiarism.<sup>1</sup>

Study tools cannot hold a preacher accountable, but working with people can.

This chapter will demonstrate how collaboration has been used to help pastors of small and large churches to prepare for sermons. This chapter investigates collaborative sermon preparation practices by interviewing five preachers and in-depth study of two books by preachers who have used collaborative methods to prepare sermons. Based off these case studies, this chapter will explore the benefits and challenges of collaboration in preaching.

### **Case Studies Using Collaboration to Prepare Sermons**

#### **Brian Fulton**

Brian Fulton is a church planter who lives in the city of Chicago.<sup>2</sup> He was part of a church planting team that planted Missio Dei Church in September 2013. Missio Dei has four churches around downtown Chicago with the desire to plant a church in every neighborhood. The four congregations are currently located in Humboldt Park, Lincoln

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<sup>1</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2003), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Fulton, telephone interview by author, April 23, 2020. I went to Beeson Divinity School with Fulton. I sent him a private Facebook Message asking if he participated in a sermon preparation group, and if so, could I interview him. He replied back that he did and he set up a time to talk.

Square, Uptown, and Wrigleyville. Missio Dei is not a multi-site church; however, each congregation is in fellowship with each other and shares some administration cost.

Since 2013, Brian has been meeting most weeks with the other Missio Dei pastors for sermon prep. Brian says they meet about 60-70 percent of the year to plan sermons. The rest of the Sundays the pastor of each congregation has the freedom to preach sermons of their own choosing.

Each year the pastors end two or three meetings mapping out sermon series for the coming year. They ask questions like, “what are the theological gaps in our congregation that need to be taught?” “what is going on in our city?” “what is going on in our nation?” “what are some things on the church calendar that we need to speak into?” They also talk to their key leaders in each congregation to get ideas for sermon topics to preach on. During the year’s planning meetings they write the answers to these questions and choose their top 5 topics. They also decide during this time when each preacher will preach stand-alone messages and allow the preachers to do their own planning.

They have weekly sermon preparation meetings. Three weeks prior to the message they choose one person to do what Fulton calls “data mining.” This is an extensive exegesis into the book or topic they are planning to preach. The person assigned to this task is one of the pastors, an intern, or someone from one of the congregations that the pastors have recognized has biblical and theological knowledge or the gift of teaching. Though the exegete is responsible for providing research on the material, it is the pastors responsibility during this time to familiarize themselves with the passage or topic. Two weeks prior to the message the exegete will present his findings. The pastors then ask questions and think through the exegetical presentation. One week prior to the sermon, the pastors talk about the message and where they are in their preparations. They discuss their applications, illustrations, and theological questions. The week of the sermon the pastors present their outlines for review and discussion. The pastors preach the same theme or passage each week, but their sermons do not all have the same structure.

Each weekly meeting lasts two hours following the same basic format from week to week. Weekly meetings include a “data mining” presentation, time to talk about the sermon in two weeks, and discussion of their near finished sermon outlines for the current sermon.

Fulton says that sermon preparation groups are most helpful to pastors who struggle with preaching and recent seminary grads who have the knowledge of how to preach but lack the experience of preaching. Fulton’s challenge with the sermon preparation group is that it can eat away at his work week. At times he has struggled to commit adequate time to the group. He acknowledges that though the sermon preparation group has been beneficial, it is not essential to his preaching. He sees preaching as one of his strengths. He advises pastors who want to start a sermon preparation group to not be afraid to give feedback. Trying to be nice and not giving honest and sometimes uncomfortable feedback will hinder the effectiveness of a sermon preparation group.

### **Larry Osborne**

Larry Osborne is one of the lead pastors at North Coast Church in the San Diego, California area.<sup>3</sup> North Coast Church has seven locations with different worship venues at each location. North Coast Church has three main teaching pastors: Larry Osborne, Chris Brown, and Christopher Hilken.

Osborne has been the pastor of North Coast since 1980. In the mid 1980s, North Coast Church started sermon-based curriculum for their discipleship groups in an effort to be more effective at creating and nurturing disciples. In sermon-based curriculum, the members of discipleship groups answer questions based on the theme of the sermon

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<sup>3</sup> Larry Osborne, telephone interview by author, April 24, 2020. In June 2013, I attended a discipleship workshop at North Coast Church in Vista, CA. During that workshop I observed that week’s sermon preparation meeting. That meeting introduced me to collaborative sermon preparation. It sparked a desire to see how this method could be used in smaller churches. While searching for preachers who collaborate, I reached out to Larry Osborne through his website [larryosborne.com](http://larryosborne.com) on April 22, 2020, thinking it was a shot in the dark. He was kind to reply the next day saying he would be glad to talk.

before arriving for discipleship groups, then the discipleship group discussion is fostered based on those questions.

To accomplish sermon-based curriculum, someone needed to write the questions and Osborne realized that could not be him. So, to make sure the question writer had time to understand the direction of the sermon and to write the questions, Osborne started having sermon preparation meetings every Tuesday at 9 a.m. to discuss the sermon with question writers. Osborne realized that talking out his sermon gave him beneficial feedback that helped him better understand the passage and how his church would hear the message of the passage.

These sermon preparation meetings are now open to anyone. At 9 a.m., the preacher for the week starts the meeting by explaining the passage on which he plans to preach. Someone reads the passage out loud while everyone reads along in their Bibles. Then, the preacher tells where he is in his study and thinking. Osborne said, “For extroverts, like he and Chris Brown, it is a time they will think out loud and everyone has an opportunity to chime in.” He said that he and Chris Brown do not have much prepared prior to the meeting other than knowing what passage they will preach. Chris Hilken, who is an introvert, spends time studying the passage in depth before meeting on Tuesday.

During the meeting, after the preacher explains the passage and explains the big idea of the passage, everyone else can chime in. Any ideas the preacher thinks are worth considering or remembering he writes on the large white board at the front of the room. At the end of the meeting, the preacher takes pictures of the board on his phone to remember what was discussed. During each meeting, the preacher also talks to the question writer to make sure he or she is on the same page as the preacher. The question writer’s job is to take the theme and/or points of the sermon and expand it by adding questions that encourage the discipleship groups to dig deeper into the Bible, better understand the doctrines in the passage, and encourage critical thinking about how the message should be applied to their lives.

One of the challenges of having this sermon preparation time is that people can throw out some goofy ideas that can distract from more beneficial discussion. Everyone in the meeting, including the preacher, has to have thick skin; they cannot be upset if their ideas are not chosen. In fact, Larry said he doesn't like to look at this as a collaboration. He says to him collaboration means that everyone's ideas have to be used, which is not ever the case with their sermon preparation meetings. He prefers the word "research" because people are allowed to contribute but don't get their feelings hurt if their idea isn't chosen.

Osborne would advise a pastor who wants to start a similar method of sermon preparation to personally invite those he wants to be there. He recommends that the meeting be open for anyone to come but the preacher should take time to invite the people he thinks would contribute the best ideas.

### **Chris Hilkens**

Chris Hilkens is the newest of the teaching pastors at North Coast Church.<sup>4</sup> He has been on staff since 2011, and has been a teaching pastor at North Coast Church since 2014. Osborne mentioned in my interview with him that he and the other teaching pastor, Chris Brown, are both extroverts and lead the sermon prep meeting the same way. They go in with a blank sheet of paper and think out loud through the text with the group. Osborne said that Hilkens, being an introvert, prepares and leads differently. The fact that (1) Hilkens, unlike Osbourne, did not create the sermon prep process at North Coast, but had to learn how to do it and (2) prepares in a different way than Osbourne, led me to reach out and interview Hilkens as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Hilkens, telephone interview by author, May 6, 2020. After talking with Larry Osborne, I wanted to talk to Chris Hilkens, because Hilkens was the newest teaching pastor and did not develop a North Coast sermon preparation process, but had to learn it. Osborne also mentioned that Hilkens prepares differently than he does because Osborne is an extrovert and thinks out loud while Hilkens is an introvert and takes time to prepare more before the meeting. I thought the fact that he had to learn how to collaborate in sermon preparation and has a different personality would contribute to the understanding of collaboration in sermon preparation.



Hilkens said that when he is scheduled to preach the next weekend (North Coast has services on Saturday and Sunday), immediately after he listens to the sermon on Saturday night he is thinking about where needs to go with his sermon. North Coast usually does series through books. The teaching pastors decide on the book to preach from, but they do not schedule specific passages in advance.

Each week the teaching pastor for the following weekend determines his text based off the previous weekend's sermon. On Sunday and Monday Hilkens will spend at least four hours saturating his mind with the passage he plans to preach. He studies the original language (he has a degree in biblical languages from Concordia University), spends time looking at the biblical authors' points of emphasis, and discovering the structure of the passage. By the time he presents the passage on Tuesday mornings at 9:00 a.m., he has about three ways he could preach the passage already in mind.

Before coming to North Coast Church, Hilkens had no prior experience in a collaborative sermon preparation model. In 2014, when he started preaching to the large church, he had to learn their collaborative sermon prep process. When he started he realized that, as an introvert and the new guy, he processed things differently than Osborne or Chris Brown. When he prepared to lead Bible studies or teach youth he mostly prepared alone. When he started preaching regularly at North Coast, he had to be retrained regarding how to prepare for sermons. He had to let go of thinking that his way was the right way. When he was being trained in North Coast Church's sermon prep process, critical thoughts of, "do they just want me to do it their way?" or "why are they telling me to do it this way?" kept crossing his mind. He also had to learn philosophically what North Coast's sermon prep was meant to do. In the beginning he would think "why am I listening to these people telling me about this passage when they don't know as much as me? I know what I think about this passage." He admits that he struggled with the sermon prep process at first.

However, he now understands the benefit of having a sermon preparation meeting. He realized that the way he processes and communicates a text is through a few very particular lenses, which limits who will listen to him. The sermon prep group allows him to understand how people of other ages, sexes, races, and ethnicities hear how he is communicating the message of the text. Sermon prep meetings allow him to understand how females, African Americans, Hispanics, and others understand the text and the message he is giving. He has found it valuable to know how to better communicate the message of the text to a large spectrum of people. He compares it to human research and development of his sermon prep and allows him to avoid saying things that may be misinterpreted, misunderstood, or unclear. For instance, during a sermon prep meeting he led, he said the word “sanctification.” Someone in the meeting asked, “what is that word?,” which signaled to him that he needed to define that word in his sermon.

One thing that Hilkens talked about that Osborne did not was the value of comment cards to the sermon prep process. North Coast Church members are encouraged to leave comments on comment cards after the services to communicate with the leaders. The comments can be about anything going on in the church, including the sermon. Hilkens said that all three teaching pastors take time to read the comment cards each week to understand how the congregation heard the message. This helps them gauge where people are in their walk with Christ and how they can speak to non-Christians, and immature and mature Christians. To Hilkens, the comment cards are like learning from the congregation in real time.

I asked Hilkens he what would do differently if he could adjust the sermon prep process at North Coast Church. He said he would be more selective in who is invited to be in the sermon prep meeting. Having an open invitation for anyone to sit and comment allows people with a low emotional intelligence who may get mad at someone else’s comment and pick fights. They have to deal with people who tell long stories that are not beneficial to the sermon prep. Both, he says, waste time.

I talked to Hilkens during the coronavirus quarantine. He said that during the quarantine he has been allowed to invite who he wants to his online sermon prep meeting via Zoom. During this time, he meets with about 17 people on Zoom. Chris believes that the benefit to this new way of collaboration is he is better prepared for his sermons because he can now choose people who he has learned from their knowledge, perspective, and understanding.

### **Mark Hutton**

Mark Hutton was the Pastor of Congregational Life at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Virginia, from 2006-2012.<sup>5</sup> Trinity Presbyterian practices a collaborative leadership model that includes each pastor being on a rotational schedule to preach.

Every Spring, Trinity would hold a two-day pastor retreat for spiritual formation and to plan out the year. Pastors in attendance would discuss what they would like to preach through and why. They also talked about what commentaries and resources they thought would be beneficial to use. Each preacher would be studying from the same commentaries and resources. After the retreat, participating pastors would meet every Monday morning for sermon prep.

These sermon prep meetings would be about an hour long. They would give critiques about the previous sermon and look ahead at the following week's sermons. Elders of the church, who were not clergy or on staff, could join the sermon prep meetings. Inviting elders had both benefits and challenges. Hutton remembers two elders who gave great feedback on previous sermons. He said these two elders also gave great insight as they discussed the upcoming sermon. Another elder who would regularly come was hard to deal with because he thought he was an expert and was overly critical. The value in

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Hutton, telephone interview by author, April 25, 2020. I went to Beeson Divinity School with Hutton. I sent him a private Facebook Message asking if he participated in a sermon preparation group, and if so, could I interview him. He replied back that he did and he set up a time to talk.

this critical elder, Hutton explained, was that his would be the worse critique so any other critiques they heard, either in the meeting or during the week, were not so hard to take. Hutton admitted that the critical elder was frustrating to hear week after week.

Hutton now is a minister in the PCUSA church in Bristol, Tennessee, where he ministers at Windsor Avenue Presbyterian Church. He is also a lecturer at Kings University in Bristol and a County Commissioner in Sullivan County, Tennessee. Though he is not in a formal sermon preparation group he still collaborates with two friends at separate times to talk through their sermons. One friend is in St. Louis, Missouri, and one friend is in Scotland. He talks to each friend every few weeks to discuss what each is preaching on and what commentaries and resources they are using. He has been doing this with his two friends for five years. He has found it helpful to bounce ideas around and help shape his thinking as he prepares.

### **Tim Perrin**

Tim Perrin is the Senior Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Warrenton, Virginia.<sup>6</sup> For 3-5 years (he could not remember how long) he has regularly met with a sermon preparation group that they called “The Tomato Club.” This group had as many as five pastors and as little as three pastors during the group’s lifespan. Participating preachers did not use the same outline nor would they preach on the same text or theme. Perrin found it challenging to do the same topic and outline because of differences in delivery and interest among the pastors. Each week they would preach their sermons and the group “threw tomatoes” at bad parts of the sermons. They took that method from old vaudeville acts who use to do the same thing to bad acts.

After “The Tomato Club” stopped due to conflicting schedules and inconsistent meeting times, Perrin formed a “research team” at his church to help him research the

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Perrin, telephone interview by author, April 30, 2020. I emailed Jim Ailor, a retired Field Strategist for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, to see if he knew any pastors that participated in a sermon preparation group. Jim Ailor gave me Perrin’s name.

text. This group was made up of church members that met every Sunday night. He would take notes on their research and hear their impressions of the passage, which allowed him to discern the message he needed to preach. At the end of each research team meeting he would give them next week's text so they had all week to research. He did this for three or four years.

The research team evolved into a preaching and teaching training course that he now leads. This training course, which he calls "Preaching and Teaching Training," is a ten- to twelve-week course that teaches his congregants how to preach and/or teach. Grace Baptist Church ministers in four different prisons throughout Virginia. Students in Perrin's course learn how to study and develop one sermon over the course of the training and then have an opportunity to preach at the prisons.

The groups are made of three or four people. Early on groups had more participants, but Perrin found it to be too difficult to hear everyone's sermon and give constructive feedback. He teaches students how to find the structure of the text, diagram the sentences, gain a conceptual understanding of the passage, and find the big idea of the text. At the eighth or ninth week participants are expected to produce a manuscript of their sermon. Perrin will talk to them about their manuscript and coach them where they need to rewrite. Each student will preach their sermon at week 10 or 11. Though they only prepare one sermon, they practice each skill on other passages. Perrin's goal is to train his students to do exegesis and not eisegesis. He does not spend much time on sermon delivery, but students usually learn about delivery by preaching to the group. They critique delivery when they preach their sermons. Currently, Perrin has three groups he is training. A men's group, a women's group, and a youth group. The women's group was started because one of the prisons in which they minister is a woman's prison. The youth group is made up of juniors and seniors in high school. Perrin really enjoys the youth group because he says they know that they do not know anything about preaching. They often do a better job in their assignments.

Perrin pointed out that the sermon preparation groups and preaching training groups work best with a maximum of three or four people. Limiting group size allows time for everyone to preach and be trained. He sees sermon preaching groups as a training rather than teaching. Teaching communicates explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is head knowledge about a certain field. For instance, explicit knowledge in music would be knowing skills, finger positions, and musical theory—anything needed to actually cognitively understand music. Training communicates tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the integration of the explicit knowledge that produces something. If continuing in the musical example, tacit knowledge would be a musician making incredible music with the explicit knowledge he has attained.

Perrin believes that sermon preparation groups can help pastors with tacit knowledge. Most pastors know enough of the explicit knowledge of preaching, but do not have the tacit knowledge to preach well. Sermon preparation groups help train a pastor through feedback and understanding to produce consistently good sermons. Perrin does not consider himself an excellent preacher but believes that sermon preparation groups and leading preaching training has allowed him to better understand the biblical author's message and preach it in a way that his congregation will listen.

### ***The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet***

In 1995, John S. McClure wrote *The Roundtable Pulpit*, about a collaborative sermon preparation process that involves meeting with members of his congregation weekly that he calls the sermon roundtable.<sup>7</sup> He weaves direct comments from the sermon roundtable group into his sermons. For example, in the case study chapter he provides a written sample of discussion from a sermon roundtable meeting and then prints the sermon he delivered based off that sermon. He says in his sermon, “But at least

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<sup>7</sup> John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995). All parenthetical page numbering in this section is from this book.

one member of our roundtable worried that a lot of people tragically misunderstand Paul when he boasts in his suffering. She has seen this kind of thinking at work with a friend who was a victim of domestic violence” (104). McClure gives a clear description of how he understands collaboration and the benefits of it in preaching.

McClure describes collaborative preaching as “a method that involves members of a congregation in sermon brainstorming” (7). He calls it a “rhetoric of listening” (7, 57) where the goal is to “engage in and influence the ways that a congregation is ‘talking itself into’ becoming a Christian community” (50). The need for this method not only helps with clarity of the sermon, but also helps lead the church.

He sees preaching and leadership working together

in at least three important ways: to embody the kind of relationships that are to exist in the community; to indicate the roles that members of the community can expect to play in decision making and planning; and to demonstrate the form of persuasion that is central to bringing about change in the community . . . both leadership and preaching must embody face-to-face relationships, participative roles in decision-making, and interactive forms of persuasion. (20)

The result of this type of collaboration is that the preacher “goes into the pulpit and represents this collaborative process in the event of sermon delivery” (48).

Reflecting in part on Peter Adams’ argument in *Speaking God’s Words*, McClure contends that preaching is more than a monologue on Sunday mornings but part of a broader ministry of the Word the church is to carry out. Adams writes, “Preaching is essentially a corporate activity and its most useful aim is corporate edification . . . its primary aim is the welfare, obedience, holiness, godliness and good working of the congregation.”<sup>8</sup> The process of sermon preparation and preaching allows the pastor to lead the church from the pulpit, but not only from the pulpit.

McClure’s collaborative process involves the preacher completing the biblical study work for the sermon and knowing “the history, doctrine, and current theology of

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Adams, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 70.

the church and of a particular denominational tradition” (60). The sermon roundtable meets weekly for an hour and a half and consists of “men and women of various ages, interests, and backgrounds. . . . The sermon roundtable should include not only church members and frequent visitors but also, when possible, members of the church staff” (60). McClure also encourages preachers to “include persons who are not church members, may not even be Christians, but live or work in the surrounding community, and perceive the church its ministry from the outside” (62). He recommends the sermon roundtable have no more than ten people at a time and that the group changes every quarter if in a large church or longer if a smaller church (62-63). Each member will have the biblical text in advance of the meeting and be encouraged to be familiar with it before the sermon roundtable meets (64).

McClure’s purpose for the sermon roundtable is brainstorming rather than what he refers to as *preparation*. “The group’s only task is to brainstorm: to reflect honestly and candidly on the biblical text in the relation to their understanding of God, the Christian tradition, their own experience and the mission of their congregation. Participants are members of sermon roundtables, not sermon *preparation* roundtables” (64). He encourages brainstorming by asking in the first ten minutes for feedback or what he calls *feedforward* (67). Two commonly asked questions that stimulate discussion are “1. How faithful was last week’s sermon to our group’s discussion? In order to make up for what was missing, what should we be aware of as we move toward this week’s sermon? 2. What feedback have you heard about last week’s sermon that should have an impact on our thinking as a group?” (67).

For approximately twenty minutes he engages the group with the biblical text by asking,

1. What questions do you have about the historical context, words, or authorship of this passage that you would like to have answered?
2. Interact with the author of the this text. What does the author seem to be saying? What do you want to say in response?
3. If the text is in the form of a story, interact (don’t identify) with the characters. What is your response to their actions or words? What would you like to say to each character?
4. Interact with the language written here. What does this



kind of language do to you? How does it make you feel? What responses do you have to this language? (67-68)

In the last hour of the meeting he encourages roundtable participants to engage each other in “1. Topic-setting. . . . Ask them to identify important ideas or themes that they think are prominent as they reflect on this biblical text in relation to their own lives, the church and the world around them” (68). Also in “Interpretation. . . . Observe how the topics your group is discussing are interpreted by members of the group. Look for differences or contrasting point of view. . . . Look for similarities or convergences of opinion. . . . What clarifications are needed?” (68). Also “Empowerment. . . . Invite those who have not spoken to speak, Ask who is missing from the table who might have something to say. . . . Explore feelings people have about what is being discussed. Ask for stories” (68-69). He asks the group “so what. . . . See if the group can arrive at a tentative commitment that states what they are willing to believe or do in light of the discussion underway. Ask what difference the things that are being discussed could make for the church, broader community, or world. Ask what, if anything, should be done in light of what has been discussed” (69). Finally he asks how to practice this sermon: “Ask what practical steps would be necessary in order to accomplish the goals suggested. What arrangements need to be made? What personnel or resources are needed, both within and beyond the church?” (69).

This agenda is a lot to accomplish in an hour in a half. McClure writes that to make sure the group continues to make progress and the preacher stays on task he enlists the assistance of a co-host: “The primary responsibility of the co-host at meetings is to guide group process, making sure that the group covers the appropriate ground in the allotted time” (61).

***The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration***

*The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* is written by Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett who are

three pastors of Community Christian Church in the Chicago area.<sup>9</sup> This book explains how to use collaborative efforts to create “missional velocity” (52). They share, “Our ideas are better than your idea” (166), meaning what they have discovered, that for their multisite church, collaboration produces a better product than working alone.

The teaching pastors at each site meet together weekly to prepare sermons. The book explains that this only takes 105 minutes. Before the weekly meetings they already have a “one-year Big Idea plan” (148). All the church leaders are involved in this plan to determine the major themes and topics the church would like to learn or emphasize that year. When the teaching pastors meet together, they already know what the next week will look like. During their teaching pastors’ team meetings they follow an agenda that includes focus, desired outcomes, brainstorming, structure, consensus, and divvy time.

Focus time takes five minutes. During this time, the teaching pastors review the summary and ideas that have already been thought out during their one-year planning session with the other worship leaders involved in the service. It helps them understand “where the teaching time fits in the overall service” (148). After they have a reminder of what elements are being prepared for the service, they then discuss desired outcomes.

Desired outcomes take ten minutes of the meeting. They have identified three areas in desired outcomes: the head, the heart, and the hands. Each area serves to focus on three central questions. The head answers the question, “how do we want people to think differently?” (149). The heart answers the question, “how do we want people to feel differently?” (149). The hands answer the question, “how do we want people to act differently?” (149). Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett write, “As we answer these questions and become clear about our desired outcomes, we write them on giant sticky

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<sup>9</sup> Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson, and Eric Bramlett, *The Big Idea: Aligning the Ministries of Your Church through Creative Collaboration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). All parenthetical page numbering in this section is from this book.

notes. We keep these desired outcomes in front of the whole team so we are focused on the change we want to see happen” (149). Next they begin brainstorming.

They invest forty-five minutes of their meeting in brainstorming. During brainstorming they

really see the benefit of the team. . . . When you have a team of people who are thinking creatively together, and one person reaches his or her limit on an idea, another person’s creativity and experience can take the idea to the next level. That’s why a team of people brainstorming will always develop an idea to a more profound level than an individual thinking alone. (149-50)

They come prepared with “stories, Scriptures, illustrations, insights, props, and jokes and jotting more ideas on the oversize sticky notes than we will ever use!” (150). The group, as with individuals, can sometimes find themselves in a rut. When this happens, they spend brainstorming time playing thought starting games like hot potato where they throw around a ball and each person “has to come up with a new angle on the Big Idea within fifteen seconds” (150) in order to jumpstart critical and creative thinking. After brainstorming, they move to the sermon structure.

They spend thirty minutes working on structure. They generally use six different structure types: “narrative” (151), “problem-solution”(151), “question-answer” (152), “not this, but that” (152), “ambiguity-clarity” (152), and “what? So what? Now what?” (152). They admit that this is where “teams are most likely to get stuck. And if you get stuck and fail to create a structure, you will not be able to take the next step” (152). If they get stuck, often times they will ask quick response questions like “If you had to preach this right now, how would you do it?” (153). Quick response questions create forward movement toward creating a sermon structure. After agreeing on a structure, they work on a consensus.

It takes approximately ten minutes to come to a consensus—a consensus to review what they have already talked about and a check to ensure that everyone is on the same page. “We reach consensus when we review the content and structure of the message and everyone says, ‘I’m okay’” (153). The consensus only takes ten minutes

because “we now trust the team and the process more than any one of us trusts him-or herself” (153). After the consensus they divvy up the workload.

The “divvy time” consumes the last five minutes of the meeting. The meeting leader “asks everyone in the room which part of the message they would most like to write up” (153). When writing assignments are determined, the meeting ends. While the meeting has ended, the sermon prep process has not.

The leader of the teaching pastors types up the notes on the meeting within twenty-four hours and emails the teaching pastors. In the notes are “references to stories we might want to use or books for further research or links to websites mentioned in the teaching team meeting” (154). The sermon section writeups that each person is assigned to during the divvy section is due “seventeen days in advance of the first weekend that the message is taught” (154). This allows time for the group’s leader to assemble the writeups and resend the first draft of the sermon sixteen days before it is time to preach that sermon.

This first draft “is usually about twenty-page-long document featuring 18-point Times New Roman type and 1.5 line spacing . . . has more content than will be needed and therefore is longer than the final” (157). Sixteen days allows the teaching pastors to collaboratively edit and improve the first draft. “For the next sixteen days emails fly back and forth among the teaching team members as we swap new and improved edits” (154-55), which include new illustrations, eliminating areas that slow the sermon down, or constructing a better conclusion.

Ferguson, Ferguson, and Bramlett give five reasons why their type of sermon prep works. First is teamwork. They write, “This team is like a basketball team in that the members depend on each other every play of every game. If one person doesn’t run the play, the who play breaks down. . . . We trust each other to show up prepared. WE trust each other to do our best writing” (156). The second reason their method of sermon prep works is they do not have big egos. They happily take ideas from outside visitors to

sermon prep meetings. During their sermons, “the teacher references the work the teaching team did rather than the work that he or she did” (156). Each of the teaching pastors sees their work as a team effort. Third, this method works because of leadership:

Having a point person who is responsible for getting the product where it needs to be, when it needs to be there, has been invaluable. The teaching team is like an orchestra: if we didn’t have a conductor, no one would know when to come in and when to crescendo. The leader of the teaching team makes sure all members of the team know their roles: what section they’re writing, how long each section should be, when they’re due, and so on. (157)

Fourth, though the sermon is produced as a team, it is adaptable to the preferences and styles of each preacher. Whether the preacher likes to bring a full manuscript or no notes to the pulpit, or they like to preach with a narrative or structured style, their collaborative sermon prep process allows each preacher the freedom to choose what they prefer. Because they work on the sermon together as a team it gives each preacher “buy-in at every step of the process so that the finished manuscript is something they created and not something forced on them” (158). Last, this collaborative sermon prep has created a culture of discipline. Their “relentless determination to constantly create new things while at the same time planning well in advance” (158) causes them to be disciplined in sermon prep because they know that if everyone on the team does not meet the deadlines they have in place for their sermon prep, the sermons will suffer.

The authors list several benefits to their process of collaborative sermon prep. First, it leads to better theology for the church because Scripture is best interpreted or understood in groups. They quote Stanley Hauerwas from his book *Unleashing the Scripture* to support this point: “Strategies of interpretation are not those of an independent agent facing an independent autonomous text, but those of an interpretive community of which the reader is but a member” (161). Second, they believe it leads to better content for the sermon. Having the first draft of the sermon done sixteen days before it is preached allows time for the preacher to internalize the message: “The longer you get to live with the message, the more you can reflect on it, pray over it, and think through the specific application. . . . We spend more overall hours on one Big Idea teaching and get it done

farther in advance, and the result is better content” (162). Third, it leads to better illustrations. A group of people can bring more illustrations than one person can think of on his own. The task becomes not merely thinking of illustrations but choosing the best ones. Fourth, the authors argue a collaborative sermon preparation process is a better use of time; claiming it frees up ten hours a week, which allows them to focus on other important parts of pastoring. Finally, the authors suggest that working as a team toward a common goal is simply more fun.

### **Benefits of Collaborative Sermon Preparation**

These case studies indicate several benefits to collaborative sermon preparation. These benefits are evident in the study of the passage, the delivery of the sermon, and the time management for sermon preparation, which will be examined in this section,

#### **Study**

In Ramesh Richard’s preaching book *Preparing Expository Sermons*, Richard writes, “Proper methods of interpretation must form the backbone of the sermon. The preacher is first an exegete of Scripture before he is an expositor of Scripture.”<sup>10</sup> He defines studying a text as “seeing the details of a text” and “seeking meaning from the details.”<sup>11</sup> The assistance others provide in sermon preparation collaboration can help a preacher accomplish these two goals in studying the text.

Working with others for sermon preparation does not eliminate the need for personal study; however, it does help a preacher gain more information and process the information found in a text. The most formal example of this statement is from Brian Fulton’s sermon preparation group. They assign another preacher, an intern, or a knowledgeable lay member to “data mine” a passage. This gives a boost in the preacher’s

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<sup>10</sup> Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 34.

own study of the text. Study no longer is a solo activity, but a team activity that involves biblical scholars from commentaries and people the preacher can engage in discussion regarding the Scripture text. Having someone else exegete the text allows time for the preachers to ask questions and interact with the text, which in turn drives them to their own study, which is valuable to sermon preparation. A secondary benefit to this sermon group's study process is that it provides a method for training to study the text.

There are many commentaries for a preacher to choose. Which one is the best one? Mark Hutton's sermon preparation group at his Presbyterian church could answer that question for the preachers in his group. While planning the sermon topics, passages, and schedule for the year, group members agree upon commentaries and resources to use. Preachers depend on the expertise of others to quickly choose the best study resources instead of wasting time and money on unhelpful commentaries. Less formally, Hutton's collaboration with his long-distance friends provided this benefit of study by discussing what helpful commentaries they read and what they learned from those commentaries.

McClure writes in his book that study is primarily up to the preacher:

The preacher completes a thorough study of the biblical material for this Sunday's sermon. By virtue of the preacher's seminary training or the special training provided for most lay preachers, members of the sermon roundtable will look to the preacher to provide clarifications and insights along the way, based on exegetical and theological expertise. At the sermon roundtable, the preacher also represents the history, doctrine, and current theology of the church and of a particular denominational tradition.<sup>12</sup>

However, the sermon preparation group is still needed for study. John McClure, Larry Osborne, and Tim Perrin all enhanced their study by taking time to hear what a group from their congregation said about the text.

McClure would spend twenty minutes of his hour and a half group time asking questions to his group about their interactions with the text. Osborne and Perrin both had a more informal approach by letting the group simply talk about the text. While they have

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<sup>12</sup> McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, 60.

more biblical training than most of their congregation, they recognize the benefit of thinking through the text with others.

Collaboration assists in study. Whether by gleaning information from a seminary-trained individual or listening to congregants, collaboration can help a preacher's study to not be an echo chamber. A preacher is able to interact with the text more and ask questions about the text with a human being that is physically present instead of just a scholar on a page.

## **Delivery**

The delivery of a sermon by a preacher is the artistry of the sermon process. Study is discovering what to say, but delivery is crafting how to say it. It is the art of rhetoric. R. L. Dabney writes, "Art is but the rational adjustment of means to an end. Art is adaptation; it employs proper means for a worthy end; it is but wisdom in application."<sup>13</sup> Another Presbyterian preacher, Francis James Grimké, quoted the painter George Frederick Watts about his paintings:

"I want to make people think. My intention has not been so much to paint pictures that will charm the eye as to suggest great thoughts that will appeal to the imagination and the heart and kindle all that is best and noblest in humanity." . . . The aim of the preacher ought always to be of the same lofty character as that of the artist.<sup>14</sup>

Collaboration can assist preachers as they hone their delivery, which allows their sermons to stick in the hearts and minds of their congregants.

Perrin's experience in his sermon preparation group, called "The Tomato Club," allowed the preachers in his group to preach their sermons and then hear honest, messy feedback about how well it was delivered. This experience allowed the preachers to chisel

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<sup>13</sup> R. L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Francis James Grimké, *Meditations On Preaching* (Madison, MS: Log College Press, 2018), 18-19.



away the imperfections in their sermons or remold parts of their delivery that were not as engaging or clear.

How one says something is just as important as what one says. It is important to know how a preacher's words will be heard. McClure and Hilkens both talked about how having a sermon preparation group with people from different backgrounds can help a preacher know how people hear a message. Hilkens knows that he is going to speak through a lens based on the culture in which he grew up. Talking through his sermon with others allows him to hear how they perceive it and determine how to deliver a sermon that allows him to engage with people from a different ethnic background, gender, or social class. Hilkens says the sermon preparation meetings have been valuable to him in this regard. When an African American woman or a Latino tells him how he could better communicate a point in his sermon by choosing a different word or phrase to reach other African Americans or Latinos, it improves his delivery. For Hilkens, sermon preparation meetings have made him aware of when he needs to clarify a term. One time he used the word *sanctification* in his sermon preparation meeting and a couple of people asked what that word meant. This indicated that he should define that word in his sermon so people understood the point of his message.

Collaboration also creates helpful feedback. Hilkens found that comment cards submitted by the congregation after his sermon were helpful in understanding how his delivery impacted how people heard the message. Comment cards create collaboration with the whole congregation and allow preachers to learn about their delivery in real time.

Collaboration allows preachers to try their sermons, in part or in whole, out on an audience. Whether it was like The Tomato Club where members may throw tomatoes during the bad parts of a sermon, or like Fulton's sermon preparation group, who presented sermon outlines for review and discussion, the process of presenting and discussing sermon illustrations and structure impacts the final delivery of the sermon.

Collaboration offers the chisel to perfect the art of sermon delivery. In their book *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, Hershael York and Bert Decker remind why this is so important to get right: “Remember: the better we are at communicating, the less people notice us and the more they see God.”<sup>15</sup> The art of rhetoric should be so good that it does not distract from the message of Scripture.

### **Time Management**

In a blog post titled, “How Much Time Do Pastors Spend Preparing a Sermon?,” Thom Rainer reports from an survey he took from pastors that “70% of pastors’ sermon preparation time is the narrow range of 10 to 18 hours per sermon. . . . Many of the pastors are frustrated that they don’t have more time for sermon preparation. . . . A number of the pastors indicated that finding consistent and uninterrupted sermon preparation time was difficult.”<sup>16</sup> In my introduction of this chapter I offered York and Decker’s description of the busyness of pastors and making time to adequately prepare for a sermon. Based on my interviews, collaboration can help a preacher manage his sermon preparation time by holding them accountable to others and by providing a springboard for sermon ideas.

When a preacher has a scheduled sermon preparation meeting every week, he must be ready for his group. Fulton knows he has to be ready to present his sermon outline each week, which forces him to prepare. Hilkens understands he has to be prepared for his meeting on Tuesday so that his Sunday and Monday schedule have time for sermon preparation. Preparing sermons alone means that the preacher is not accountable to anyone to have his sermon prepared by a certain deadline. Collaboration creates a deadline earlier than Sunday morning.

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<sup>15</sup> York and Decker, *Preaching with Bod Assurance*, 215.

<sup>16</sup> Thom S. Rainer, “How Much Time Do Pastors Spend Preparing a Sermon?” Church Answers, June 22, 2013, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/how-much-time-do-pastors-spend-preparing-a-sermon/>.

Collaboration also allows preachers to spend less time coming up with sermon topics, ideas, and illustrations. Ferguson, Ferguson and Bramlett boast that it only takes their teaching team 105 minutes to prepare for a sermon. While this is not totally true because each teaching pastor has to come with ideas before the meeting, write their assigned sections, and rewrite the final outline after their meeting, that 105 minutes makes the best use of their time by brainstorming and discussing rather than staring at a blank screen. In fact, having a sermon preparation meeting (whether it is two hours, like Fulton, an hour and a half, like McClure, or 105 minutes) causes preachers to efficiently use their time.

In reading and talking with preachers who use collaboration in their sermon preparation, the benefits are so great that I find myself asking the question “why aren’t more preachers doing this? Why are seminary preaching classes not pushing for pastors to do this?” Though collaboration has many benefits, it does have difficulties.

### **Challenges of Collaborative Sermon Preparation**

In interviewing these preachers, I discovered that working with others in developing a sermon does have its challenges. Personalities and coordinating schedules are a struggle and can make it difficult to collaborate well.

The Tomato Club no longer meets because of scheduling conflicts. Perrin acknowledged that even when they did meet it was hard to coordinate schedules with other pastors. The Tomato Club eventually fizzled out, but only after years of meeting together. Committing time to meet can be difficult. Fulton mentioned a similar problem of scheduling time for a two-hour meeting each week to talk about upcoming sermons. The reason they are able to consistently meet is because, first, it is part of their job. All of the preachers that meet in his group work for Missio Dei Church. Second, when they plan out the yearly preaching calendar, they create breaks from meeting together so each pastor can preach messages based on specific topics or for their preacher to have family time.

They intentionally only collaborate on 60-70 percent of their sermons throughout the year.

The second challenge with collaboration is working with different personalities. Hilkens said if he could change something about North Coast Church's sermon preparation meetings it would be that he would not make it open to all, but select those who attend the meetings. Allowing anyone to comment has caused wasted time as various people rant about someone else's comments, want to pick fights, or even innocently tell long stories. Hutton speaks of the same problem about one elder who would regularly come to the sermon preparation meetings; this elder always had criticisms rather than helpful critiques.

However, despite these challenges, collaboration is a viable method of sermon preparation that can benefit the study of Scripture, crafting of the sermon, and time needed to prepare for a sermon. T. David Gordon, in his book *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, writes about problems in modern sermons. One solution Gordon provides to increasing the quality of preaching today is collaboration:

Some ministers work on the technical aspects of their sermon preparation by developing a homiletical partner: another minister with whom they meet once or twice a month to discuss their recent sermons, and why they constructed them as they did. The feedback of another set of eyes can be very helpful, and this process is a great aid in developing the sensibility of thoughtful composition. Conversing about potentially different ways of organizing the same material makes one increasingly aware of compositional choices.<sup>17</sup>

Chapter 2 argued that the Bible esteems the preaching of the Word for the benefit of believers and nonbelievers. This chapter argued that collaboration can help preachers study and craft their sermons that in turn prepare preachers to preach sermons that will shape and build the local body of Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 105.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SERMON PREPARATION GROUPS

The implementation of this project took a month of preparation and six weeks of implementation. Based off interviews from pastors who have or currently use sermon preparation groups (see chap. 3), I decided to keep the sermon preparation group small to allow maximum time for each pastor to present and allow ample time for the group to discuss each upcoming sermon. I invited four pastors to be part of the group: all pastor a member church in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network and all serve churches with less than 200 in average weekly worship participation. Unfortunately, two had to back out due to family responsibilities while their children were participating in online school because of COVID-19 education restrictions

The sermon preparation group was made up of Cliff, Kenny, and myself. Cliff has been the pastor at his church since 2004. His church has 135 in average Sunday worship attendance and he is the only full-time staff member. Vocational ministry is Cliff's second career. He is retired from the Navy. Cliff has an MDiv (2002) and a DMin (2014) from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Kenny has only been the pastor at his church since March 2020. His church has 35 in average Sunday worship attendance and he is also the only full-time staff member. His first day was March 15, the first Sunday churches in Virginia were prevented from in-person gatherings due to COVID-19 restrictions. This is the first church Kenny has served as pastor. He has a MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. Kenny is a young, new pastor with more liberal seminary training.

Cliff, Kenny, and I spent a month trying to line up schedules so we could meet. Other obligations caused us to wait until October 29 to begin meeting. I chose Thursday mornings from 9 a.m.–11 a.m. because by Thursdays we should have a good portion of our sermons done for the coming Sunday, while still allowing time to make adjustments based on new information and feedback from our group meeting.

For the sake of clarity for the reader I have organized the explanation of each meeting by heading each meeting with the date. I use the subheadings “sermons in three weeks,” “sermons in two weeks,” and “sermons for upcoming Sunday” to indicate when the sermons in that meeting will be preached. I also describe the discussion of each pastor’s sermon by first reviewing Cliff’s sermons, Kenny’s sermons, then my own. This will help the reader have a clearer understanding of the process of the project.

### **Meeting 1: Thursday, October 29, 2020**

In the first meeting we met in my office. I asked Kenny and Cliff to fill out a pre-project survey.<sup>1</sup> I also went over a sermon prep covenant that explained the sermon prep group purpose, the time we would meet, how long we would work on each sermon, and provided contact information in case they were unable to meet.<sup>2</sup>

The covenant explained that we would spend approximately 30 minutes discussing what we are planning to preach in three Sundays, 30 minutes discussing what we are planning to preach in two Sundays, and 60 minutes discussing our upcoming sermon. I allowed more time for the current week’s sermon in order for each member to preach their sermon and receive feedback.

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

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

### **Sermons in Three Weeks**

After having them fill out the pre-project survey and explaining the covenant, we started by looking at what we were planning to preach in three Sundays, which at this meeting would be Sunday, November 15, 2020. Cliff was preaching a sermon series through Ephesians. He preached on Ephesians 6:18-21. His sermon was on prayer since this passage is Paul asking for prayer and encouraging the Ephesians to pray for him and each other.

Kenny was preaching using the Revised Common Lectionary as his guide. On November 15 the lectionary has Psalm 90 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. At this point he did not know what the main point of his sermon would be.

I was currently working through a sermon series emphasizing worship. All of our adult and youth Sunday school classes were studying the same theme. We were using the book *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Your Church, and Your Family* by Keith and Kristyn Getty. Each week I preached on the theme of the chapter that all our discipleship groups were reading that week. The theme of my sermon was “Sing with the Local Church.” I did not have much more prepared than that.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

We moved on to our November 8 sermons. Cliff was preaching on Ephesians 6:10-17 on the armor of God. He planned to preach on spiritual warfare. In his study he saw Satan’s primary goal was “turning you from God and his primary attack zone is unity in the church.” He planned to explain that spiritual warfare is usually not normal everyday problems like one’s car breaking down, because that does not turn someone from God. Spiritual warfare encompasses things that may be common but are distracting from God’s mission.

Kenny intended to preach, as suggested by the lectionary, on Joshua 14:1-3, 14-25, but he wanted like to give a “fly over of the Babylonian exile.” He wanted this sermon to relate to his congregation’s feelings after the presidential election and

demonstrate how God can use leaders, good and bad, for his glory. We discussed how Joshua would fit in that aim considering the book of Joshua occurs prior to the Babylonian exile. He said he would think through that this week.

My November 8 sermon was titled “Sing with Your Family.” I did not have a passage yet, but we discussed the importance of parents and even extended family in the Bible to model worship for their kids and grandkids. This helped me consider what the main theme of this sermon should be.

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

We moved on to our November 1 sermons. Due to the newness of meeting and getting to know each other, we did not preach our sermons but simply discussed them. Cliff was preaching on Ephesians 5:22-6:9 about Paul’s instructions to the household. Kenny was preaching an All Saints Day sermon on Revelations 7:9-17. He planned to have people read out the names of all 20 people in his church who have died this past year and light candles for each name. He planned to talk about the influence they had on the church. In his sermon explanation it seemed he was going to more glorify people than Christ. We talked about how Revelations 7:9-17 can actually honor the saints but emphasize how the saints point to Christ and not to themselves, which seems to be the danger of his sermon. He said that was helpful.

I was preaching on Lamentations 3 with the sermon title being “Singing with Heart and Mind.” Lamentations 3:22-23 is the Scripture reference for the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* and teaches the church how singing can affect hearts and minds, and how hearts and minds can affect singing. Reading all of Lamentations 3 would take about five minutes, which I thought might be too long. Cliff suggested I summarize the first half in a few seconds, which would save me time but not neglect that section. We discussed how important lament was in Old Testament worship and how we need to teach our congregations to lament. Kenny said, “I think it’s ok to lament, it’s ok not to feel God,” with which Cliff agreed and added, “but it’s not ok to forsake God. Lamenting allows us



to be honest with God, even mad at God, but not to forsake God.” This was helpful to me and I made a note in my sermon notes.

## **Meeting 2: Thursday, November 5, 2020**

### **Sermons in Three Weeks**

Cliff shared that he was planning to preach an eight-week series on the Holy Spirit. He had taken time to think of some themes he would like to preach on, including the gifts of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and the fruit of the Spirit, but he did not have much more than that. Kenny recommended he look at *Open to the Spirit* by Scott McKnight and *Forgotten God* by Francis Chan for ideas. I recommended Thom Schreiner’s *Spiritual Gifts*.

Kenny was continuing preaching through the lectionary. November 22 was “Christ the King Sunday” according to the lectionary. His texts were Ezekiel 34:11-24 and Matthew 25:31-46. We read through the two texts together. We talked about what goats and sheep represented and about how these passages depicted the judgement of God. I asked if the commentators shed any light from the Bible of what exactly made a “goat” a goat and a “sheep” a sheep? Matthew 25 tells that the goats did not take care of the people groups Jesus identified with and the sheep did. In light of the Ezekiel 34 passage, was there any more understanding of the sheeps and goats? Kenny said he would look into that question and see if that would be helpful in his sermon. Cliff brought out a Christological connection acknowledging “Christ is King,” which means that Christians accept him not only as savior and shepherd, but as judge and executioner. Cliff pointed out that Jesus has to step in to be the shepherd and judge because Israel’s shepherds and judges had failed miserably.

Lastly, I told them I was finishing up my series based on the book *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church*. I was planning to preach on the theme of chapter 7, “The Radical Witness When Congregations Sing!” and the postlude “Will You Sing?” I explained how several weeks ago I thought Psalm 101 would be a

good text to preach this week, but during the meeting I did not remember why. We read through the text. Cliff wondered who was the “I” in Psalm 101. Was God or David speaking? Did the “I” shift from David to God somewhere in the text? We studied it together and determined that the “I” was the David the king. Allen Ross’ commentary on Psalms confirmed the “I” was David. This information made me question whether I should preach this passage. However, as we studied together in Ross’ commentary, we discovered that this may have been a coronation psalm where the king made this covenant at his coronation. Kenny said that the king is not stating a new covenant but renewing the covenant. Kenny said this may be a good text to encourage the congregation to renew their covenant with Christ at the end of this Sing! preaching series.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

Cliff was planning to finish his series in Ephesians with chapter 6:18-24. We read it together. He said that right now the structure of his outline would be to pray intentionally and not just reactionary to life’s stresses (v. 18); pray for missionaries (v. 19); pray that all will be bold in proclaiming the gospel (v. 20); and pray for one another (vv. 21-24). I pointed out that Paul knew the people he was writing to so it is important when praying in a church context for the people to know each other the best they can. Cliff thought that was an important point and wrote it down.

Kenny planned to preach a sermon he titled, “Choosing Christ Again.” He said that the thrust of the sermon will be “Being a Christian is more than a nametag to put on but actions of how you act every day. Every day you need to choose Christ.” His texts were Psalm 123 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. We read these passages together. Cliff said that the challenge in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is to make disciples and not just a decision. This means Christians can no longer just do what they want. Cliff pointed out that John teaches perseverance in obedience in 1 John 2:28 where he writes, “Continue in him [Jesus], so that when he appears, we may be confident and unashamed before him at his

coming.” Cliff offered a tagline for Kenny’s sermon, “the proof is in the perseverance,” which Kenny wrote down and said he would use.

I planned to preach on chapter 6, “Sing with Your Local Church.” I confessed that I felt like I was just repeating myself, which made it a struggle to preach through this series. Cliff said that was ok because the congregation probably was not listening the first time. I had still not completely decided what passage to use, but I was looking at Hebrews 10:23-25 because it gives directives to the church. We read that together. Cliff encouraged me to articulate a biblical definition of “church.” He recommended looking at Jonathan Leeman’s article “What Is the Local Church?” to help develop a good definition. We looked at that together. Kenny suggested I give a definition of the church in the first half and give the “so what?” application in the second half of the sermon. Cliff pointed us to Matthew 16, 18, and 28 for proof of how Jesus defined the church. Cliff said Hebrews 10 really says the same thing that Jesus said a church should do: gather together, affirm each other as Christians, encourage and direct each other, and go make disciples.

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

In this second meeting we used our sermon prep time for the sermon we planned to preach this Sunday by preaching 10 minutes of what we had so far. Cliff preached on Ephesians 6:10-18 about spiritual warfare and putting on the full armor of God. He started off explaining what spiritual warfare is and what it is not: not every disappointment or bump in the road is spiritual warfare. Satan is real and he is opposing what God is doing and wants to keep Christians from what God is doing. Sometimes life is tough, but it may not be spiritual warfare. However, when spiritual warfare is present then Ephesians 6 instructs the church to put on “God’s armor, not our own.” After he preached for 10 minutes, we talked about hooking the audience into the text, which I thought he could work on improving. One possible hook would be asking the congregation, “are you happy because, like Satan, you are opposing what God is doing?”

One thing Cliff would like to get better at in delivering sermons is balancing illustration and exposition. He recognized he only has so much “real estate in the sermon,” which means he has to choose what he is going to say. He usually chooses exposition over illustration. Cliff remarked if he says “thus saith the Lord” that the Lord actually said it. The three of us talked about the struggle with that, but I said that it does not have to always be a struggle. I pointed out that illustration can be a part of exposition. An example is in Ephesians 6:10-18. Paul’s illustration of armor did not distract from his exposition that there is spiritual warfare. It enhanced his message that one must rely on the Lord to fight spiritual warfare.

Kenny started his sermon telling a story about he and his wife going through the drive-thru at the local McDonalds and not being able to decide on what he wanted from the many options on the menu. He said he could not decide so he had his wife pick. He transitioned this story into “we have many choices in life every day. One study showed that we make 24,000 choices a day.” He then read Joshua 24:11-26 and gave the context of Joshua 24 as being Joshua’s final farewell to Israel. Three times Joshua asked the Israelites, basically, “do you really want to follow the Lord?” Kenny pointed out that three is a symbolic number of wholeness, which means Joshua was asking them to make a complete commitment to God. He was going to exhort his congregation to also commit wholly to the Lord. I commented that I liked his introduction, but it would be better to draw his congregation in by asking, “Have you ever been to our McDonalds and not known what to choose? I have.” By asking that question it makes the congregation a participant in his story rather than a spectator of the story, which in turn makes them a participant in his sermon.

I preached on Deuteronomy 6:4-7. I read the text and preached about how verses 4-5 reminds that the oneness of God unifies the church and how it should impress the command to love the Lord your God on the upcoming generation. Since the oneness of God makes the church one, then it is the responsibility of the family and the church, as

one body, to impress the command of verse 5 on the next generation, i.e., “the children.” Cliff and Kenny both said I should give a clearer explanation of what it means to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength and use that to draw a clearer application for the congregation of how they can impress Christ on the next generation.

### **Meeting 3: Thursday, November 11, 2020**

The third meeting was on November 11 at my church. Before we got into our sermons, we spent 30 minutes catching up and talking about the role our wives play in feedback for our sermons. We shared similar stories of wives giving encouraging, but honest feedback.

### **Sermons in Three Weeks**

Cliff did not know what passage he was to preach on November 29. This would be the second week in the Holy Spirit series he preached. He planned to preach on the Trinity on November 22. He had a better idea of the topics he wanted to preach on: Fruit of the Spirit, Gifts of the Spirit, Baptism of the Spirit, Leading of the Spirit/ Misunderstanding of the Spirit, and Charismatic gifts of the spiritual gifts. I suggested in light of Christmas he could talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in the birth story of John the Baptist in Luke 1. The three of us talked about the order of the series. While Cliff did not come up with a definitive order, he did take our suggestion of starting with the familiar things of the Spirit like “the fruit of the spirit” and moving to more unfamiliar things of the spirit, like the charismatic gifts of the spirit.

November 29 started the first Sunday of Advent. Kenny was planning to preach a series during advent called “Matriarchs of the Messiah.” He was going to look at women in the Bible whose lives pointed to Christ. He planned to start with Sarah but did not know what key passage to use. Cliff recommended Genesis 17:15-16, where Sarai’s name changes to Sarah. We discussed how this could lead into a sermon about how Sarah was in a place of desperation with no hope for a child, but God provided more than Sarah could

imagine by promising her a child. This in turn could point to how Christmas reminds that the Lord has led and continues to lead from hopelessness to hopefulness through the incarnation of Christ. Cliff asked if he was going to preach on Eve. Kenny had not considered Eve but was intrigued. If he began with Eve, then he could show how creation pointed to Christ.

I would be out of town visiting family on November 29 so I was not planning to preach. However, I talked about my overall advent preaching series. November 29's theme would be "A Promise," which was about the prophecy of Christ and how the Lord always goes before His followers. I had asked a recent graduate of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who is a member at Round Hill, to preach.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

Cliff started his Holy Spirit series on November 22. He planned to preach on the Trinity with a focus on the Holy Spirit. The sermon was to answer two important questions: "why the Holy Spirit?" and "why can you accept the Trinity?" In our discussion the group discussed how Cliff may consider changing the focus of his sermon to "why the trinity is important for you and our church?" We discussed the change in focus because the Triune God models the best church and the best community to which all humans long to belong. Understanding and modeling the trinity can help the church be a better representation of Christ in a community.

Kenny recognized that November 22 was the Sunday before Thanksgiving so he changed his "Christ the King" sermon to this coming Sunday, November 15, and preached a thanksgiving message on November 22. He considered preaching on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28. He said he would like to have space in the bulletin where people could write down what they are thankful for. He was going to instruct them to write it down in his introduction and then at the end have people come up to a couple of mics and tell what they are thankful for. In his study, Kenny determined the meat of the passage to be verses 16-22 but was unsure of what to do with the whole passage. Cliff noted that

verses 12-13 taught of having a right attitude toward those who have spiritual authority in the church, verses 14-15 taught of having a right attitude toward one another in the church, and verses 16-22 commanded attitudes of worship and discernment in the church.

Therefore, his theme of the sermon could be that thanksgiving is an attitude. Kenny found this very helpful.

I decided to stick with Psalm 101 for November 22. I wanted to impress on my congregation that to be a radical witness for Christ, Christians must be leaders who are committed to truth and are faithful to the gospel. I learned through my exegesis of Psalm 101 that the king praises the LORD for his faithful love and justice, the king desires to maintain a spiritual relationship with the LORD, the king desires to remain pure by not tolerating sin around him, and by surrounding himself with faithful people. Lastly, the king desired to lead the country to purity and faithfulness by consistently protecting the country from evil by purging evil from the temple and other places of service. Cliff asked how this passage could be applied today. Was I going to ask the church to purge the evil ones from the church that Sunday? This led to a discussion of church discipline and the need to bring up the opportunity to instruct the congregation on the proper use of church discipline. This passage demonstrates that church discipline does not have to be bad, but can be kind and loving to the church and to the ones who need discipline. Biblical church discipline is a radical witness to the world of how Christians deal with evil in a different way than the rest of the world does.

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

We preached 10 minutes of our sermons for the coming Sunday, November 15. Cliff admitted that he was behind on this week's sermon because he took his grandkids camping. He was preaching on Ephesians 6:18-24. He read through the passage explaining what Paul had taught. In verse 18, Cliff explained that praying at all times means having a continuous conversation with the Lord. It does not mean having to start every prayer with "O Lord" and end it with an "amen." Verse 18 also reminds Christians to pray in the

Spirit, pray about life, and pray for each other. Verse 19 says to pray for Paul, but it should encourage contemporary Christians to pray for missionaries regularly. Cliff provided a brief explanation of the gospel to emphasize the gospel that Paul would have fearlessly made known:

The Gospel is the explanation of how to be reconciled with God. We need reconciliation because we are separated from God because of sin. Sin carries a death penalty, that's why Jesus came and died on the cross. He took the death penalty on himself and makes forgiveness possible, which is the only solution for sin. When we go to God and confess our sin and repent, which means to turn from sin an self to God; and we ask for forgiveness in faith, then God forgives us and adopts us as his children.

Verses 21-24 are the challenge to be a community of “one anothers” and not just individuals who go to the same event each Sunday.

At the end of his 10 minutes, I commented that I liked that he inserted the brief explanation of the gospel in his sermon. Cliff said he likes to inject this brief explanation of the gospel in his sermons four or five times a year to train his congregation to briefly explain the gospel to anyone they meet. Cliff has had several people in his congregation tell him this has helped them share the gospel. He had one congregant who was talking with a guy at McDonalds at breakfast and in the conversation told the stranger he was a Christian who believed in the gospel. When the stranger asked what the gospel was the congregant's mind went blank. Then Cliff's brief explanation came to mind and the he recited Cliff's gospel explanation. I found this very helpful and very biblical since Paul oftentimes gave a brief description of the gospel in his letters. Kenny and I both thought this was a good idea to imitate in our own congregations.

Kenny moved the sermon he was planning to preach on November 22 to this coming Sunday, November 15. He preached on “Christ the King” using the text Ezekiel 34:11-24. In his introduction he asked, “why are there so many farming analogies in the Bible?” He sang “O MacDonald had a farm,” but used “Jesus the Farmer had a farm.” He talked about the three different characters in the passage: the good shepherd, the good sheep, and the bad animals. He then mentioned Matthew 25:31-46, but he did not read it



and swiftly instructed us to read it “some other time.” He spoke about false shepherds and that Christ our king is the great shepherd who guides, oversees, and protects.

After he preached, I asked him what he would like to improve in his preaching delivery. He thinks, and other people have told him, he struggles with his sermon structure. He said his wife and others have said sometimes it is hard to follow where he is going. Cliff and I agreed with that assessment. I told Kenny he should not speedily mention to his congregation that they should read Matthew 25:31-46 some other time. I asked if he planned to say that to his congregation. He said yes because he was worried about his sermon time. Cliff and I told him not to do that. It was off-putting and worth the extra time to lead them to the text. Even if he chose not to read it all he could summarize what that text was saying.

I preached on Hebrews 10:19-25. The title of my sermon was “Sing with the Local Church.” I read Hebrews 10:19-25 and defined a church as “a regular gathering of Christians who affirm, encourage, and direct each other through gospel preaching, gospel ordinances, and gospel discipleship.” I structured my sermon outline around this definition using Matthew 16:13-19, 18:15-20, and 28:18-20. I concluded in Hebrews 10:19-25 by demonstrating how the author of Hebrews defined the church based off the exhortations he gave his church. By this time, my 10 minutes was up. Cliff asked, “by defining what the local church is what do you want your local church to do with that?” He encouraged me to echo the exhortations of Hebrews 10:19-25. Kenny agreed, but said he thought my delivery was good and I was headed down the right path. At the end of our meeting, I asked if we could meet at another church next week. I thought it would be good for us to preach in different locations. I also thought it would help us get to know each other better if we saw each other’s church buildings.

## Meeting 4: Thursday, November 19, 2020

### Sermons in Three Weeks

Cliff would preach his third sermon on the Holy Spirit on December 6. He would focus on the gifts of the Spirit, but had not decided what text to use. He was leaning toward 1 Corinthians 12. He wanted to look at the functions of the gifts instead of just the list of the gifts. We talked about whether Paul's list was complete or not and agreed that we do not believe it is, nor did Paul believe his list was comprehensive. Spiritual gifts are any talents used for the glory of God. Kenny pointed out that in Exodus when the tabernacle was being built, "the Lord has gifted them to build the tabernacle," which was a gift given to skilled men by the Lord. These were spiritual gifts. Cliff talked through Rick Warren's definition of spiritual gifts using the acronym SHAPE: Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences. Cliff said the struggle in preparing for this sermon was that it was hard to describe what spiritual gifts are without limiting the spiritual gifts. We talked about how to discern spiritual gifts. Cliff said the best way he had found was not in taking a self-assessment spiritual gifts inventory, but in asking others what they think one's spiritual gifts are. I thought Cliff would want to make sure to instruct his congregation that they have to filter all spiritual gifts through love, as defined in 1 Corinthians 13. If Christians are enacting "spiritual gifts" but not doing it out of love, then it is not a spiritual gift.

Kenny was continuing his advent sermon series "Matriarchs of the Messiah" and talking about Ruth. He would be focusing on Ruth 1:12-18. He said he saw Christ committing to His followers as Ruth committed to Naomi. He read a dramatic monologue he wrote that a woman in his church would act out before his sermon. I pointed out that he could make his sermon more Christocentric by bringing out that Ruth was a foreigner who became a Jew by clinging to Naomi. When humans are sinners/rebels to God, then they are like foreigners to God. However, it is the Lord who has clung to us rebels to give citizenship in his kingdom. Cliff pointed out how he could connect this story with Matthew

1 by reading Jesus' genealogies where it mentions that Ruth, this foreigner and gentile, was an ancestor of Jesus.

I would continue in my advent series on December 6 by preaching on "A Problem" which is sin. I told them I was looking at preaching on a passage in the prophets, but Kenny suggested looking at Romans 3:9-26, which I thought was a great idea. Cliff said, "Why did Jesus die on the cross? Because 'the wages of sin is death.' It's not that we have died, but we are already dead. We are born dead. How can we be resurrected? Only by the one who came to earth, died, and was resurrected." This was a big help to me.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

Cliff would preach on the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Overall, Cliff wanted to explain what the fruit of the Spirit accomplishes in Christians' lives. The goal of the fruit of the Spirit is to imitate Christ. Christ is all the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. Cliff thought he had a good grasp on this sermon so far, so we did not discuss it any further.

Based on our discussion the previous week week, Kenny changed from preaching about Sarah to preaching about Eve as his first Sunday in his series on the "Matriarchs of the Messiah." He planned to use Romans 5:12-21, where Paul talks about Christ being the greater and final Adam. Kenny said, "Christ is the final Adam and provides a new beginning and a fresh starting place." He said he wanted to use Matthew 1:1-17 as a starting point to this series, but Matthew 1 does not mention Eve. I agreed it does not, but it may be a good introduction because Matthew 1 shows how flawed Jesus' genealogy was to those who prided themselves on being pure children of Abraham. He could lead with talking about how dysfunction existed even in Jesus' family. Jesus' family reminds Christians that though they have dysfunction in their own family the Lord has a plan for their family to be used for His ultimate good.

I would be out of town and would not preach on November 29. However, I did inform them that the sermon that week would be Deuteronomy 31:1-8 and my substitute would be preaching on how the Bible continuously shows how the Lord goes before the Israelites just as he does now. I solicited them for any exegetical thoughts I could pass along to my substitute for his study, but they did not have anything to contribute.

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

We preached our sermons the coming Sunday, November 22. Cliff preached first on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. Cliff said he was not fully prepared and only preached for five minutes but gave us a breakdown of his sermon. He was going to trace the evidence of how the Bible describes the Trinity in the “us” passages (Gen 1, 3, 11; Isa 6), Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3:16-17, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, and finally Paul’s understanding of the Trinity in 1 Corinthians 12:1-6 and Ephesians 4:4-6. The purpose of his overview was to show “there is a trinity, we can believe in it, it’s hard to understand, and that’s ok.” He then pointed to the apostles in the Gospels and how they did not understand who Christ was nor his mission. However, after the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles in Acts 2, Luke describes in Acts 4:29-41 how people were impressed with what the apostles knew. Cliff asked, “What changed these disciples from an unimpressive group to an impressive group? What is at work here? It’s the Holy Spirit!”

Kenny prepared to preach a thanksgiving sermon on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18. He gave a history of thanksgiving and how it is tied to Christianity and community. He then read verses 16-18 and suggested that this seems like an impossible command. I was unable to follow his thoughts and explanation in his sermon. It was disjointed and confusing. After Kenny preached, Cliff and I talked through the sermon with Kenny, trying to understand why it was confusing. I asked him to explain his sermon structure. He explained that based off what we talked about the previous weeks, he thought he would start with verses 16-18 since it was the meat of the passage then explain why Paul tells the church to do this by working backwards through verses 14-15 and 12-13. After hearing

his explanation, we understood what Kenny was trying to do, but suggested that it was not clear in his sermon. We advised him to make sure he is not subtle in what he is doing; rather, he should describe what he is doing when he moves from point to point to allow the congregation to follow along. Kenny said he was trying to stay away from the “stereo typical three-point sermon.” Cliff and I advised him while that is a good goal long term, he should stick with a three-point sermon for now. It will help him develop structure in his sermon. He is a brand-new preacher. He should use the three-point sermon structure model to help him improve sermon clarity while keeping other sermon models in mind to imitate in the future.

I preached on the sermon I titled, “Will You Sing? The Radical Witness When Congregations Sing!” based on Psalm 101. I stumbled through it more than I thought I would. I explained how Psalm 101 can instruct my church to be a radical witness by outlining my sermon with the sermon points: sing of the Lord’s character and not our own, let us live a blameless life with the one we are singing to, let us hate sin, let us be faithful together and let us stand by truth even when it is hard. Cliff thought that I needed to not jump into the application but explain how this is first a song for a king and what this psalm is saying a king should do in order to lead his people faithfully. Cliff brought out how the text lends itself to teach how a church who has a radical witness needs leaders who are faithful. The church should be helping their leaders be spiritually mature.

### **Meeting 5: Thursday, December 3**

#### **Sermons in Three Weeks**

Cliff was continuing his Holy Spirit series by preaching on what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Drawing on past study, he desired the main point of the sermon to be that “being filled with the Holy Spirit allows us to recognize what God is doing and proclaim what God is doing.” Due to it being the Advent season he was considering using Luke 1:5-45 about Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. He referenced Luke 1:15

where Gabriel said of John the Baptist, “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth,” and Elizabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:41.

Kenny found it interesting that when Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit in verse 41, she exclaimed in verses 42-45, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” The three of us talked about how in this passage it was the Spirit’s filling that prompted Elizabeth to exclaim in worship. Cliff said this teaches the idea that the filling of the Holy Spirit gives Christians the ability to proclaim what God is doing. I suggested to Cliff that he not preach this whole passage because it may take a long time. Cliff agreed and said he would work on that.

Kenny planned to preach on December 20 about peace, which is the theme of the fourth week of advent. He planned to preach about Mary with his main text being Matthew 2:13-18 and supplemental text being Luke 1:46-56. Kenny said the main point of the sermon was that “Christ provides us with peace in the midst of chaos.” We talked about the context of the Matthew 2:13-18 where the first Christmas occurs, but then some horrific things happen. According to Matthew, the move to Egypt and the slaughter of the babies were God’s plan all along because Matthew notes these two events fulfilled prophecies in Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15. I pointed Kenny to a lecture by Allen Ross played on the Beeson Podcast where Ross discusses the massacre of the Bethlehem children in order to help Kenny better know the context and the promise that those babies did not die needlessly. In the lecture, Ross references that in Revelation the martyrs or innocents (like the babies) are closest to the throne of God.

I planned to preach Luke 2:9-20 about how Christ gathers people together pointing to his birth and the shepherds being the first to hear. The main purpose of the sermon was “Christmas gathers us together.” I intended to talk about how the shepherds,

the lowest in society, were the first to see the greatest king, the Messiah. Cliff talked about how the shepherds would swaddle young lambs. He pointed me the prophesy about the “watchtower of the flock” found in Micah 4:8. Cliff said this watchtower is called Migdal Eder. He encouraged me to learn more about the Migdal Eder.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

We then discussed our sermons for December 13. Cliff did not have a passage, but a topic. He planned to preach on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Cliff talked about how the Holy Spirit supervises the authoring of the Bible, the perseveration of the Bible, and Christians’ reading of the Bible. His main point was “when we read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is active in our reading and understanding.” Kenny suggested Cliff look at Psalm 119:105. I added that all of Psalm 119 is a great text to talk about the Bible. We discussed how God told Jeremiah to write His prophecies in Jeremiah 36 and John was told to write down the Lord’s words in Revelation 21.

On December 13, Kenny was planning to preach about joy for the third Sunday of advent. The matriarch he intended to focus on was Sarah. He would preach from Genesis 17:15-10. We talked about this passage in our sermon prep a couple of weeks ago. His supportive text would be Matthew 1:18-25. He saw many parallels between the two birth stories: both were unexpected pregnancies, impossible conceptions, and both were meant for the glory of God. We talked about ways these birth stories are different from disruptions today. Modern American Christians do not have angels to tell them everything is going to be ok; disruptions are caused by personal sins or other peoples’ sins. I cautioned Kenny to make sure he did not unintentionally justify teenage pregnancies or other sinful disruptions. Together we articulated a good sermon point: “Disruptions can be redeemed when we surrender to God’s commands.”

On December 13, the title of my sermon was “A Wilderness: Listen to the Voice of John the Baptist” and I would preach from Luke 3:1-20. We reviewed the overall

structure of the passage. Luke 3:1-6 gives historical and prophetic context to John, verses 7-18 describes John's message, and verses 19-20 are the repercussions of John preaching this message. Cliff pointed out that John's message was to repent and be good. The contrast here is that humans need to recognize that they cannot be good enough. The goodness that John preached that is needed has to come from Christ transforming the sinner. There is practical application in John's message, but it also points to Christ who all of mankind needs, to be completely good.

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

Cliff preached first, even though he was not prepared to deliver a sermon. I encouraged him to talk it out and preach the best he could. He was preaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 1:4-7. He talked about the purpose of the spiritual gifts to equip Christians to do what the Lord wants Christians to do until Christ returns. His second point was that spiritual gifts are for the church and edifying to the church. Then he asked, "What are the specific spiritual gifts?" He pointed to 1 Corinthians 12:8-19, 28 and Romans 12:6-8 where Paul lists spiritual gifts. He pointed out that twenty-two gifts are listed between the two texts, but the lists are not identical. He turned to the men who were chosen to craft the tabernacle in Exodus 31:1-11. These men were filled with the Spirit. Cliff explained that this may not seem like a spiritual gift because these workers had been trained in a trade, but all gifts come from God. Even one's natural ability comes from God. Cliff drew attention to the diversity of the spiritual gifts that drives the church to need and appreciate each other. The diversity of the spiritual gifts brings unity in the body of Christ. Finally, he remarked that 1 Corinthians 13 reminds that all gifts have to be tempered with love. Therefore, Christians should, as Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6, develop the gifts that have been given to us for the sake of the body of Christ. He ended his message with the following statement, "How do you know what your giftedness is? You do stuff."



Kenny commented that it was tough to understand where he was going with the sermon until five minutes into the sermon. I commented one way he could bring out the structure is by making the questions he mentioned to be the structure of his sermon. I proposed that he act like a museum guide of a spiritual gifts museum where he is explaining what they are, what are they use for, and why that matters to Christians today.

Next, Kenny preached on Ruth in Ruth 1:12-18 and John 15:12-17. He commented that Ruth 1:12-18 would be read earlier in the service. He read John 15:12-17. He recapped his sermon on Eve and the fallen state of humanity the previous week. Then he stated, “We want to throw people away when we experience pain. Are we going to run into God, like Ruth did to Naomi, or run away from God, like Orpah did to Naomi? It doesn’t matter what choice we make; this passage should give us some comfort.” He then read John 15:12-17. He ended by saying “God loves you and wants the best for you. He will shine on you. He loves you. Will you be receptive to God’s love?”

I asked him what he meant by “doesn’t matter what choice we make.” Did he mean that it does not matter if Christians run to God or away from God? Kenny said that is not what he meant at all. He made a note in his sermon notes to make sure he was clear on how he worded that point. We talked about how sermon prep groups can help us make sure we are communicating clearly and faithfully. Practicing our preaching in the sermon preparation group allowed us to catch mistakes and avoid confusion from the pulpit.

Lastly, I preached on Romans 3:9-26 titled “A Problem: Sin.” I read all of Romans 3:9-26. My first sermon point was “Sin unites us and divides us” drawing from Romans 3:9-20. Then, to speak to the non-Christians and show how all sin unites Christians and non-Christians, I asked, “What if we don’t believe in the Bible?” I explained that other religions, like Buddhism or Islam, have rules that their followers break. Those who believe that “science” is their truth break the laws of nature by doing things that are against the betterment of our species. Even those who are secular and think they make their own rules cannot help but break them. There are times when they are surprised by

the evil they do. My second point was, “Jesus unites us and transforms us,” based off Romans 3:21-26. Then I listed three ways my church can prepare for the best Christmas ever: “1. Don’t panic about the present because you believe in the promise. 2. Admit that the problem is you and you need someone to change you. 3. Be excited that Jesus came to transform you.”

Cliff asked, “How many Buddhist or Muslims come to your church?” I said none. Cliff responded, “I would cut that out then.” He recommended mentioning secular people because there are people in my congregation with a secular mindset. Kenny recommended that I break up the passage by reading Romans 3:9-20 then make my sermon point, reading Romans 3:21-26 and making my next sermon point. Kenny proposed that I spend more time articulating the three ways to prepare for the best Christmas ever.

### **Meeting 6: Thursday, December 10**

#### **Sermons in Three Weeks**

On December 27, Cliff planned to continue his series on the Holy Spirit. He was planning to preach about the Holy Spirit’s interaction with prayer and worship. Cliff had not chosen a passage yet. We discussed Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:45 as passages that describe the curtain in the temple being torn. We discussed that while Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not explain explicitly that this action was to teach that Christians now have a greater intimacy with God through the Holy Spirit, this is how the early church interpreted this passage as evidenced in Hebrews 10:19-22.

Kenny said he had not thought much of his sermons after Christmas. He did not have anything to discuss, but he realized that Christmas and December 27 were coming fast so he should start preparing. Cliff and I encouraged him to do so.

Looking at the twelve-day Christmas season, I planned to preach on Matthew 2:13-18 in order to teach my church that though Christ has come, hardships still follow. This led into a discussion of how so much of the American culture’s view of Christmas is

shaped by Christmas cards and songs rather than the Bible. Churches need the Bible to shape their celebration of Christmas.

### **Sermons in Two Weeks**

In two weeks, Cliff's sermon would be titled "Being Filled with the Holy Spirit" and his passage was Luke 1:11-17. He decided to shorten the passage based on our suggestion from the previous week. He explained the description of John the Baptist's and Elizabeth's experience with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth and caused her to say verses 42-45 to Mary for Mary's, not Elizabeth's, benefit. Cliff asked two questions and gave an answer, "Why did the Holy Spirit reveal this to Elizabeth? So she can know stuff? No, for Mary's benefit." Cliff argued that this passage shows that being filled with the Spirit means that the Lord is revealed in a way God's creation had not known, and it is for the benefit of guiding the righteous to do His work. That is all he had so far. I asked what he planned to say in the introduction of this sermon. He said he did not know. I suggested he emphasize the importance of this event to Mary (and possibly Elizabeth) who told it to Luke. Cliff could start the sermon by asking, "Who told this story to Luke? Did Mary tell this to Luke? Did Elizabeth and Zechariah? This story was so meaningful that we have this story being told 30 years later." Cliff liked that idea because those background questions provoked more interest in this story in his preliminary study.

Kenny was finishing up his advent series on the matriarchs on December 20 with Mary. He planned to preach from Luke 1:46-56 and Matthew 2:13-18 with the main message being "Christ provides us with peace in times of chaos." Cliff remarked that Mary's song in Luke 1:46-56 probably initially took place at Elizabeth's house since Mary was with Elizabeth up to the birth of John the Baptist. He asked, "Was Mary singing this song traveling 9 months pregnant to Bethlehem? Was this song her life song? Was she singing this song looking at Jesus on the cross?" Kenny then thought of a possible question to ask his congregation, "What is the song you sing when life gets hard?" I asked how he

was going to link Matthew 2:13-18 to Luke 1:46-56. Kenny said, after our discussion on Luke 1:46-56 being a song Mary sang enough times to be able to recite it to Luke, he might ask, “What if Mary was singing this song on the way to Egypt?” I asked if Kenny had thought of the structure of the sermon, which he said no. He was encouraged to work on the structure since he struggles with having a clear structure to his sermons.

I planned to finish up my advent series talking about how Christmas gathers people together to worship the Lord, as seen in Luke 2:9-20. I did not have much more to add from the previous week. Cliff suggested that while Christians can identify with the shepherds who have been invited to see Jesus, Christians can also identify with the angels. Christians are also messengers, like the angels, declaring the glory of the Lord and inviting all to come. In the stable, the shepherds would have encountered loud and smelly animals, yet the glory of the Lord in Jesus overshadowed such things. Christians too can look past the noisy children, smelly neighbors, and inappropriately dressed when the church gathers together to behold the glory of the Lord. This led to discussion of how our congregations view church. Is it a place humans can shop for spirituality or is it a place Christians can belong and grow in knowing the Christ who was once a baby in the manger?

### **Sermons for Upcoming Sunday**

Cliff admitted he did not have a concrete outline, but at the present had only thoughts. We encouraged him to voice his thoughts in hopes of developing his sermon points. He was planning on preaching on the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Based on our discussion over the previous weeks he decided to preach on Psalm 119:18: “Open my eyes so I may contemplate wonderful things from your instructions.” He asked himself, “What do we know about God apart from the Bible?” and “What do you know about salvation apart from the Bible?” turning to 2 Peter 1:16-2:2 to get the answer to this question, which Cliff answers, “nothing.” Lastly, he said that the Bible shapes who we are as Christians and it equips Christians to do righteous acts in this world, citing 2 Timothy 3:14-4:4. This was as much as he had prepared.

Kenny and I helped Cliff develop the structure of his sermon from the explanation he presented. We articulated them to him: read the Bible because it (a) teaches who God is and what salvation is, (b) shapes and trains the church in righteousness, and (c) it equips the church to actually benefit others. We determined that the conclusion of his sermon should be to exhort his congregation not to neglect the Bible because it is essential to how the Holy Spirit shapes their lives.

Next, Kenny preached on Sarah. He read a Sarah monologue that a woman will be acting out before his sermon. Next, he read Matthew 1:18-25 about Mary's story of the birth of Jesus. He then compared the stories of Mary and Sarah. He began this sermon movement by stating, "When I began to ponder how this speaks in my life . . ." before giving a brief explanation of how the following points have spoken in his life.

Kenny's sermon presented a comparison of the births of Mary's and Sarah's sons. First, neither Sarah nor Mary was expecting a child. God can work in any season of Christians' lives. They do not know when or where He will work in their lives, but gospel-centered Christians are confident He does. Second, Sarah and Mary are given a child of promise. Kenny asked, "What do we do when we are given a gift or call, we aren't expecting?" He explained that Sarah laughed, took matters into her own hands by giving Abraham her servant Hagar, and therefore rejected God's plan that the child would come through her. On the other hand, Kenny pointed out, though Mary did not have to wait as long for the promised child she did trust that the Lord was going to make it happen. Kenny conceded that, unlike Mary, angels do not always come to Christians personally. He asked, "Like Sarah, how often do we try to force our will on God?" He ended his sermon by stating that "our life's interruptions can be redeemed." He then explained that interruptions can only be redeemed when Christians surrender to Christ in worship and obedience. As a church, Christians are told to speak the truth. They should speak the truth so the truth can redeem any interruption in their lives. He ended by asking, "What are we doing to experience the gift of joy?"

During our comments to Kenny, I advised him to stay away from stating “when I began to ponder how this speaks into my life . . .” I admitted it may just be me, but when preachers describe the process they use to develop those points it communicates that the preacher has not truly thought his sermon through, and he is unprepared. I also said it is useless space in the sermon when preachers need to make sure every second counts. Cliff encouraged Kenny to answer the “so what?” of the sermon more clearly, making sure his congregation knows why it matters to compare Sarah and Mary.

Lastly, I preached on Luke 3:1-20, titling the sermon “A Wilderness: The Place to Prepare for a King.” I started my sermon by stating that John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ, demonstrated how the church can prepare for Christmas. My sermon points were “check your location” expounding from the text that Luke lists all the secular rulers and religious rulers of their day and then describing that John the Baptist was not in those places, but in the desert as Isaiah 40:3-5 predicted. I asked, “Are we preparing for Christmas in the malls and websites more than we are in the worship of the church?” My second point was “hate your sin” as John says in Luke 3:3, 7-9 when he tells the people to repent. I then gave a brief description of repentance: recognizing you should hate the sin that Christ hates and relying on Christ to lead you to hate that sin too. I then transitioned to my next point by asking the same question John’s audience asked: “What should we do then?” My third point was “do good according to God’s standards” as John teaches in Luke 3:10-14. Pointing out that Christians should strive to do good to others, but also remembering Romans 3:9-10, which I preached on the previous Sunday that “no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” I asked, “Is it by trying to do good by God’s standard we become better employees, friends, neighbors, but also realize how terrible our sin is and how much we need Christ?” My fourth point continued to follow Luke’s narrative where the crowd wonders if John is the Christ and John tells them that the true Christ is better and scarier than he is. I stated this point as “discover this scary, but great

King Jesus.” I ended with my last point “be ready for where Jesus will take you,” drawing on Luke’s informing his readers that John the Baptist ended up in Herod’s jail.

After I preached my sermon, I asked Cliff and Kenny’s advice regarding whether I should state my sermon points as emphatic application, as I had prepared, or as pondering questions. For instance, instead of stating “check your location” should I ask, “are you in the right location?” Kenny said I should keep it as I had it in order to be clear. Cliff said that either way would be fine with him. Cliff then encouraged me to lean in on John’s description of Jesus with his winnowing fork and burning the chaff. He said that is a part of Christ Christians sometimes do not think about at Christmas because the image of Christ as a baby is so prominent. He said he thinks that congregations need to be reminded how the Bible describes Christ. It is not just as a baby.

### **Conclusion**

We concluded the last session by filling out a post-project survey in order to gauge how the sermon preparation group helped in our preaching. The results from that survey are discussed in chapter 5. I asked them if they would be interested in meeting together for another six weeks or so starting in the end of January or beginning of February. Both said they would be interested and look forward to starting again.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

This project is a step in studying the need for consistent, small group training for preachers of small churches. Sam Rainer, pastor and church consultant, wrote on his blog that most churches in America average less than 100 people in regular attendance on Sunday morning.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, most seminary graduates will pastor a small church for most, if not all, of their career. This project is meant to help those small church pastors manage their sermon preparation by working together with other pastors in their areas.

This project was meant to encourage more expository, faithful, and engaging sermons from small church pastors. It will also help to encourage more research into sermon preparation groups for small church pastors and their long-term benefits on preaching. While the following statistical results will show this project had little effect on preaching among the participants, the direct feedback from the participants in the post-project survey 2 will show the promised long-term positive effects sermon preparation groups can have for pastors.

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

The stated purpose of this project was to equip a select number of pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network to preach expository sermons through sermon preparation groups for the benefit of their church and the proclamation of the gospel in the Fredericksburg area. The statistics from the *t*-test below show that the project did not make a measurable positive result. In the “weaknesses of the project” section an

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Rainer, “What Two Simple Statistics Reveal about the American Church,” January 21, 2018, <https://samrainer.com/2018/01/what-two-simple-statistics-reveal-about-the-american-church/>.



explanation is given as to why that is and what could have been done differently to gain quicker positive results.

However, feedback from the participants, interviews with preachers who have participated long-term in sermon preparation groups, and research regarding general collaboration show that the positive effects of collaboration are initially slow. This project could have better met its purpose during the six-week implementation period if different elements of the project were adjusted. These adjustments will be described in the “weaknesses of the project” section of this chapter. However, it can be deduced from the research that the biggest hinderance of this project was time. I am confident that the project’s purpose would be accomplished if given enough time and long-term attention to the sermon preparation group process.

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

The first stated goal was to assess the current sermon preparation practices among a select number of Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network pastors. A survey was created to understand the pastors’ beliefs toward the Bible, preaching, and their current feelings regarding being a small church pastor.<sup>2</sup> The pastors were invited to join the group based on the size of their church and their availability. The two baseline requirements for project participants were pastors of churches under 200 in regular attendance on Sunday and a commitment to perfect in-person attendance of all meetings. The goal was to look at how pastors in churches under 200 prepare for sermons each week. Even during the COVID-19 state-wide restrictions this first goal was met.

The second goal was to develop a six-session sermon preparation group agenda where pastors commit to meet once a week to prepare sermons. The agenda was set by the Sermon Preparation Group Covenant, which stated that the sermon preparation group would participate in five primary activities: equip, exegete, interpret, apply, and illustrate.

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

It also provided a consistent agenda to each meeting by stating that each week “we will spend approximately 30 minutes on our sermons in three weeks discussing primarily exegesis and study, 30 minutes on sermons in two weeks discussing primarily on interpretation and application, and 60 minutes on the sermon you will deliver the coming Sunday focusing on delivery and illustration.”<sup>3</sup> This covenant helped keep each meeting focused on the preparation of sermons and fulfilled the second goal of this project.

The third goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository preaching. This goal was completed by meeting with the Pastor Networking Coordinator of the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network and identifying small church pastors who might be interested in joining a group. Next, the Pastor Networking Coordinator and I will invite and meet with these pastors to inform them of the sermon preparation group ministry plan and create new groups. This planning of creating new groups accomplished the third goal of this project.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

The weaknesses of the project can be summed up in the statistical results from the *t*-test completed on the comparison of the pre-project survey and the post-project survey 1.<sup>4</sup> The survey showed no statistical significant difference ( $t_{(2)}=1.511$ ,  $p=0.134$ ) in increasing faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository preaching. I will explain why this project produced these results and what could be done differently in the future in order to produce positive results.

First, the creation of the survey could have been more direct in better assessing the weekly sermon preparation habits of the pastor. The statements on the pre-project survey and post-project survey 1 were too general to determine the effects of this limited-time project. Specific statements in the survey like “I spend 16 hours a week on sermon

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

<sup>4</sup> See appendixes 2 and 3.

preparation,” “I prepare five days a week for my sermon,” “I prepare one day a week for my sermon,” “I always use enough resources to study Scripture very well,” “I often wish I could speak to a biblical scholar when preparing sermons,” and “I always rehearse my sermons out loud each week before I preach on Sunday,” would have better reflected the actions and thoughts of small church pastor’s sermon preparation practices. In doing so, they could better measure how a six-week sermon preparation group changed the weekly sermon preparation practices of the preacher.

Second, my original post-project survey was not created well enough to elicit a *t*-test. This was discovered after researching the steps in performing a successful *t*-test on the data I collected. After conversations with Joe Harrod and William Cook, I created a new post-project survey with the same statements as the pre-project survey. I should have sought more detailed instruction and guidance in confirming my instruments could be used to better measure the effects of my project.

Third, creating a sermon preparation group with pastors who did not know each other before was a weakness to the project. The pastors in the sermon preparation group knew each other well, two pastors had never met before the first meeting. Therefore, there was a timidity to offer construct criticism and feedback in the first three or four meetings. Feedback in the last couple of sessions was more forthcoming due to increased familiarity and trust among group members.

Fourth, the six-week implantation period was too short to show the desired long-term effects. In her book *Smart Collaboration: How Professionals and Their Firms Succeed by Breaking Down Silos*, Heidi K. Gardner tells of the large start-up investment in time and money needed with many collaboration efforts. She admits, “But teamwork isn't cheap—the risks, coordination effort, and startup costs are real—so unless you know why you're collaborating, it may not be smart at all.”<sup>5</sup> Though writing to lawyers,

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<sup>5</sup> Heidi K. Gardner, *Smart Collaboration: How Professionals and Their Firms Succeed by Breaking Down Silos* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), 2.

accountants, and other business professionals, the lesson should also be applied to preachers looking at forming sermon preparation groups. The long-term benefits of collaboration, which would include sermon preparation groups, may take time: “Over time, the costs fall, and the benefits rise—but *only if you stick with collaboration long enough.*”<sup>6</sup> When the participating pastors were asked in the post-project survey 2, “what is one thing about the sermon preparation process you would improve?,”<sup>7</sup> pastor 3 answered, “The limited timeframe of the project affected the overall impact. A long-term commitment might make for a bigger effect.” The other proof of the need for a longer implementation period to show long-term effects can be found in the preachers interviewed in chapter 3. The ones who spoke highly of preparing sermons alongside a group had participated in a sermon preparation group for years.

Lastly, working on fewer sermons may have led to better time-management and deeper study. When asked in the post-project survey 2, “what is one thing about the sermon preparation process you would improve?” one pastor stated, “Only discuss two weeks of sermons and not three.” It was difficult to keep the meeting to two hours while trying to discuss three upcoming sermons. Also, rarely was the sermon planned to preach in three weeks ready to have an exegesis study discussion. Most of the time the participants had an idea of their sermon topic but did not have a passage to exegete. In contrast, most of the time each pastor had decided on a passage for sermons two weeks out and the upcoming Sunday. If the third Sunday sermon discussion was eliminated, more time could have been given to sermons in two weeks and the coming Sunday while keeping the meeting under two hours.

As the *t*-test proved, this project had no statistical effect in increasing faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository preaching. However, the feedback

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<sup>6</sup> Gardner, *Smart Collaboration*, 84, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 4.

received by participants was overwhelmingly positive. In the next section, a look at that feedback will be used to examine the strengths of this project.

### **Strengths of the Project**

Post-project survey 2 offered direct statements of how the sermon preparation process affected each pastors' preaching.<sup>8</sup> The survey had eighteen statements that participants were asked to mark on the Likert six-point scale. Along with these statements, the survey asked three short-answer questions to gather feedback in the participants own words. Out of the fifty-one statements, the pastors responded to forty-six with strongly agreed or agreed. Six of the statements they agreed somewhat and with only two statements did they disagree somewhat. There were no statements where they disagreed or strongly disagreed. This survey provides valuable feedback and points out the many strengths of the project.

First, according to this survey, all three pastors agreed or strongly agreed that they were better prepared to preach on Sundays because of participating in this sermon preparation group. When asked in question 19 of the survey, "what has been most beneficial about participating in a sermon preparation group?," pastor 1 answered, "Preaching my upcoming Sunday sermon before Sunday helped me think through my delivery better"; pastor 2 answered, "Imagining/connecting scriptures to other text"; and pastor 3 answered "fellowship and mutual support. Talking through ideas in advance. It provided an external motivation to prepare further in advance." All three pastors agreed with the statement, "Because I have been in this sermon preparation group, I feel better prepared to be a preacher." In the six-week implementation, each pastor remarked how the sermon preparation group was beneficial to their sermon preparation.

Second, this project provided needed tacit knowledge for preachers. In the interview with Tim Perrin, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Warrenton, Virginia, he

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 4.

discussed the need for tacit knowledge, and not only explicit knowledge, in preaching training. Tacit knowledge is the application of explicit knowledge. Trusting that each of the pastors had received adequate explicit knowledge from their seminary education, the sermon preparation group was designed to increase tacit knowledge. When ranking the post-project survey statement, “This sermon preparation group has been a good training ground to help me be a better preacher,” all three pastors agreed with this statement. In the three statements regarding how the sermon preparation group helped in exegeting, interpreting, and applying the Bible, pastors 1 and 2 agreed with all three statements. Pastor 3 agreed somewhat to the exegeting and interpreting Scripture statement and agreed with the applying Scripture statement. In the statement, “The sermon preparation group has given me illustrations to use I have not thought of before,” pastor 3 strongly agreed and pastors 1 and 2 agreed. Sermon preparation groups, like those implemented in this project, become preaching laboratories where preachers can form exegetical, interpretive, and delivery hypothesis, test them in the sermon preparation group, and give proven sermon practices to their congregation.

Third, this project fostered relationships with area pastors. Pastors need other pastors. Kevin A. Miller in an article for *Leadership Journal*, writes, “Aside from coaches and referees, perhaps no one receives more unsolicited advice on how to do their jobs than pastors. Everyone, it seems, has an opinion about who pastors are and what they should be doing.”<sup>9</sup> Pastors need other pastors to trust, confess to, and to empathize with. This sermon preparation group showed some positive persuasion in fostering good relationships among pastors. In the post-project survey 2, pastors 1 and 3 agreed with and pastor 2 strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel less alone as a pastor after joining this sermon preparation group.” Pastors 1 and 3 strongly agreed and pastor 2 agreed to the statement, “This sermon preparation group has allowed me to know more pastors in the

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin A. Miller, “Irritating Stereotypes That Make Me a Better Pastor,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2014): 25.

Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network.” Preparing sermons together increases relationships among pastors that are beneficial to the long-term health of the pastor and the churches they serve.

Fourth, this project is reproducible. This sermon preparation method does not require new textbooks, conference fees, or guest experts to equip small church pastors to preach expository sermons. It requires only the commitment of the pastors to meet, the knowledge they have learned, the resources they already have, and the willingness to listen to direction and feedback. Therefore, this method of preacher training is highly reproducible. Most pastors are not blessed with sufficient professional development budgets or located near seminaries to provide easier access to valuable resources. However, no matter what section of the country pastors serve or what size their budgets are, all can form a sermon preparation group of two to three pastors and imitate the actions of this project. When asked in the original post-project survey, “Would you recommend a sermon preparation group to a preacher you know?” all three pastors said yes.

The FABN’s financial resources are very limited. The FABN’s Pastor Networking Coordinator sees this as a high impact, low-cost method to help the churches in the network have vibrant preaching. This project requires no money and no additional information, only the willingness of preachers to improve on their proclamation of the Word of God. Therefore, this project could benefit all pastors everywhere.

The strengths in this project have been told by the three pastors who participated. As stated in the weaknesses of this project, while adjustments need to be made to the process, overall there are compelling arguments for the benefits for sermon preparation groups in equipping pastors to preach. Therefore, the next section will describe more in detail the plan for sermon preparation groups moving forward.

### **Moving Forward**

As stated in the third goal of this project, the purpose of this project was to help develop a ministry plan to increase faithfulness to sermon preparation and expository

preaching. Therefore, this was never meant to be a stand-alone project, but a trial of an easily reproducible method of sermon preparation for the pastors in my area. To reproduce this method, I met with the Pastor Network Coordinator of the FABN and we developed a structure for our Baptist association that will be beneficial and realistic.

First, the Pastor Network Coordinator and I developed a yearly schedule to implement sermon preparation groups. The yearly schedule is divided into three sessions. This will give pastors a realistic commitment timeline and give pastors breaks from meetings to concentrate on other ministry tasks. Also, the sessions are designed when pastors have fewer distractions due to church calendar or personal travel. In the fall session, sermon preparation groups will meet for eight weeks from the middle of September to the middle of November. In the winter session, sermon preparation groups will meet for eight weeks from the middle of January to the middle of March. The spring quarter will meet for six weeks from the middle of April to the end of May. We are not planning on summer sermon preparation groups due to vacation and travel. We plan on making necessary adjustments along the way.

The Pastor Networking Coordinator and I identified eight pastors in the FABN who might be interested in joining a sermon preparation group. We plan to meet with them and explained the purpose of sermon preparation groups, what they would doing in their meeting, and how long they would meet. We also will convey to them when we would like to start these sermon preparation groups. We will give them a week to decide if they are able to commit to the eight-week sermon preparation group. We would like to start two new sermon preparation groups for this winter/spring. The Pastor Networking Coordinator will meet with each group in their first meeting and explained the covenant to them. Each group will be assigned a “leader” who the Pastor Network Coordinator can call to check in on them.

The Pastor Network Coordinator sees sermon preparation groups as a great tool to help area pastors be regularly trained in preaching and to know each other better.



He believes that pastors who know each other better will in turn help churches know each other better. He also sees this as a conduit to implement preaching workshops for the Baptist association. It is very possible that having enough pastors investing together in the tacit knowledge of preaching will create opportunities for local workshops that teach explicit knowledge of biblical study and preaching.

### **Conclusion**

This project has been years in the making. From the first time I was exposed to a collaborative sermon preparation model by sitting in one at a church in California, to starting my DMin studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, to doing research for this project, to implementing this project, collaborative sermon preparation models have been on my mind for seven years. In that time and through this project I have learned a lot regarding how sermon preparation groups can truly help pastors no matter what size church they serve. I have learned what not to do, but also what works. After seven years, three years of that working on this project, I am even more convinced that this is a much-needed method for preachers today. I hope more discussion, research, and development are done so that all pastors can take advantage of this method and increase their faithfulness in sermon preparation while producing faithful, engaging sermons to their local congregations that produce gospel change.

## APPENDIX 1

### SERMON PREPARATION GROUP COVENANT

The following covenant was used to clarify meeting times and stress the importance of participants' attendance.

## SERMON PREPARATION GROUP COVENANT

This sermon preparation group thrives on participation and you are an important part of this group! The purpose of this covenant is to help clarify the group's goals, expectations, and commitments.

### **Sermon Preparation Group: Purpose**

This sermon preparation group exists to help pastors better preach expository sermons. We'll do this by focusing on five primary activities:

#### **EQUIP**

Each week we'll take time to learn practical steps to better exegete, interpret, and apply Scripture.

#### **EXEGETE**

Each week we will begin exegeting a passage of Scripture to understand biblical authorial intent. This passage will be preached three weeks away.

#### **INTERPRET**

Next, we will examine the passage that was exegeted the previous week and discuss how to best interpret the passage today.

#### **APPLY**

We will then discover application of the passage that was interpreted the previous week.

#### **ILLUSTRATE**

Lastly, we will discuss how to best illustrate a passage that will be preached the following Sunday.

### **Guidelines & Covenant**

#### 1. **Dates**

We will meet on Thursdays for six weeks. We will start on Thursday, October 29, 2020 and end on Thursday, December 3, 2020. We will not meet on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 25, 2020. Our final meeting of this project will be on Thursday, December 10, 2020.

#### 2. **Time**

We will arrive between 8:45am & 9:00am and begin the meeting at 9:00am. We will spend approximately 30 minutes on our sermons in three weeks discussing primarily exegesis and study, 30 minutes on sermons in two weeks discussing primarily on interpretation and application, and 60 minutes on the sermon you will deliver the coming Sunday focusing on delivery and illustration.

#### 3. **Prayer**

Praying for one another.

#### 4. **Homework & Attendance**

Joining this sermon preparation group requires a commitment to attend each week and do some of the sermon preparation ahead of time. The goal of improving preaching practices is dependent upon everyone participating and attending. We will make this a priority in our schedules for the six weeks of this project.

**If we cannot come to a meeting, we will call Josh.**

APPENDIX 2  
PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

The following survey was given to participants before the project implementation to determine their knowledge, experiences, and sermon preparation habits.

## SERMON PREPARATION GROUP PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

### **Agreement to Participant**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help equip pastors to preach expository sermons using sermon preparation groups. Joshua E. Thompson is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a Doctor of Ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the sermon preparation group meets and at the conclusion of the six-week session. Any information you provide will be confidential, and your name will not be reported with your responses. Participation is 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 research.

I agree to participate.

I do not agree to participate.

### **Section 1: Background Information**

This first section of this survey will obtain some demographic information.

Directions: Answer the following questions by placing an "X" next to the appropriate answer.

1. How old are you?  
 20-29  
 30-39  
 40-49  
 50-59  
 60-69
2. On average, how many people attended your church on Sunday mornings this past calendar year?  
 0-99  
 100-199  
 200-299  
 300-350
3. How many weeks do you preach each year?  
 22-31  
 32-41  
 41-52
4. On an average week, how many hours do you spend preparing for your Sunday sermon?  
 0-5  
 6-10  
 11-15  
 16-20  
 20+

5. How many years have you been serving as a pastor (senior pastor or associate pastor) at a church?  
 0-9  
 10-19  
 20-29  
 30-39  
 40-49
  
6. How many years have you been the pastor that preaches the majority of the time in a church?  
 0-9  
 10-19  
 20-29  
 30-39  
 40-49
  
7. How many years have you been the senior pastor at the church you are currently serving?  
 0-9  
 10-19  
 20-29  
 30-39  
 40-49

## Section 2

Directions: Based on the following scale, circle the answer that best represents your agreement with the statement:

SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, DS= Disagree Somewhat,  
 AS= Agree Somewhat, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

8. I understand what it means to apply the Scriptures.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
  
9. Sermon delivery is how I use my voice, movements, and sermon illustrations to preach the biblical text.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
  
10. I spend adequate time preparing to preach on Sundays.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
  
11. I wish I could spend more time preparing for sermons.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
  
12. I do a good job exegeting a passage of Scripture that I preach.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
  
13. I do a good job interpreting the Scripture in view of the message of the whole Bible.  
 SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

14. I do a good job applying Scripture to the lives of my congregation.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
15. People often tell me that my sermons draw them closer to Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
16. I see how my sermons positively impact my church.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
17. I see how my sermons positively impact my community.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
18. I often feel overwhelmed by my pastoral responsibilities.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
19. I sometimes use the same illustrations in the same year.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
20. I clearly communicate what the Scripture passage says in my sermons.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
21. I know many pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
22. I prepare for sermons one week at a time.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
23. Every Scripture passage I preach should point to the gospel of Jesus Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
24. The Old Testament often does not point to Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
25. I feel lonely as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
26. I feel overburdened as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
27. I feel overworked as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
28. I have questioned my calling into the ministry during the last month.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
29. Jesus is Son of God.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
30. I need more training as a preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA



31. I do not preach parts of Scripture because I do not understand how it relates today.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
32. I do not preach parts of Scripture because I do not like what God says.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
33. I am in a preaching rut.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
34. I feel inadequately prepared to be a preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
35. I read five or less preaching books a year.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
36. The last time I read a book on preaching I was in seminary.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
37. I enjoy the fellowship of other pastors.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
38. I feel like I can learn from other pastors.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
39. I usually understand what the Scripture passage is saying.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
40. I have misinterpreted a passage that I have preached.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
41. The Holy Spirit can help me understand a passage.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
42. The Holy Spirit can help illustrate a passage to a congregation.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
43. The Holy Spirit can help deliver a sermon that changes the actions of an audience.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
44. The gospel is needed to change the actions of people.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
45. I could be a better preacher if I had more training.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
46. I only preach in the New Testament.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
47. I seldom preach in the Old Testament.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

48. I frequently preach sermons where I do not talk about Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
49. Most of my sermons tell people how to be moral people.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
50. I regularly study the original biblical languages when I prepare sermons.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

## APPENDIX 3

### POST-PROJECT SURVEY 1

The following survey was given to participants after the project implementation to determine the statistical effect of the project.

## SERMON PREPARATION GROUP POST-PROJECT SURVEY 1

Directions: Based on the following scale, circle the answer that best represents your agreement with the statement:

SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, DS= Disagree Somewhat,  
AS= Agree Somewhat, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

1. I understand what it means to apply the Scriptures.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
2. Sermon delivery is how I use my voice, movements, and sermon illustrations to preach the biblical text.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
3. I spend adequate time preparing to preach on Sundays.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
4. I wish I could spend more time preparing for sermons.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
5. I do a good job exegeting a passage of Scripture that I preach.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
6. I do a good job interpreting the Scripture in view of the message of the whole Bible.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
7. I do a good job applying Scripture to the lives of my congregation.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
8. People often tell me that my sermons draw them closer to Christ.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
9. I see how my sermons positively impact my church.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
10. I see how my sermons positively impact my community.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
11. I often feel overwhelmed by my pastoral responsibilities.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
12. I sometimes use the same illustrations in the same year.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
13. I clearly communicate what the Scripture passage says in my sermons.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
14. I know many pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA

15. I prepare for sermons one week at a time.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
16. Every Scripture passage I preach should point to the gospel of Jesus Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
17. The Old Testament often does not point to Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
18. I feel lonely as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
19. I feel overburdened as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
20. I feel overworked as a pastor.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
21. I have questioned my calling into the ministry during the last month.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
22. Jesus is Son of God.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
23. I need more training as a preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
24. I do not preach parts of Scripture because I do not understand how it relates today.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
25. I do not preach parts of Scripture because I do not like what God says.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
26. I am in a preaching rut.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
27. I feel inadequately prepared to be a preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
28. I read five or less preaching books a year.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
29. The last time I read a book on preaching I was in seminary.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
30. I enjoy the fellowship of other pastors.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
31. I feel like I can learn from other pastors.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

32. I usually understand what the Scripture passage is saying.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
33. I have misinterpreted a passage that I have preached.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
34. The Holy Spirit can help me understand a passage.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
35. The Holy Spirit can help illustrate a passage to a congregation.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
36. The Holy Spirit can help deliver a sermon that changes the actions of an audience.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
37. The gospel is needed to change the actions of people.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
38. I could be a better preacher if I had more training.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
39. I only preach in the New Testament.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
40. I seldom preach in the Old Testament.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
41. I frequently preach sermons where I do not talk about Christ.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
42. Most of my sermons tell people how to be moral people.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
43. I regularly study the original biblical languages when I prepare sermons.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA

APPENDIX 4  
POST-PROJECT SURVEY 2

The following survey was the original survey given to participants after the project implementation to get descriptive feedback from the participants on how the sermon preparation group assisted in their sermon preparation.

## SERMON PREPARATION GROUP POST-PROJECT SURVEY 2

Directions: Based on the following scale, circle the answer that best represents your agreement with the statement:

SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, DS= Disagree Somewhat,

AS= Agree Somewhat, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

1. I understand what it means to apply the Scriptures.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
2. Sermon delivery is how I use my voice, movements, and sermon illustrations to preach the biblical text.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
3. I am better prepared to preach on Sunday participating in a sermon preparation group.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
4. The sermon preparation group helped me in my exegeting a passage.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
5. The sermon preparation group helped me better interpret the Scripture passage in view of the whole Bible.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
6. The sermon preparation group helped me better apply the Scripture passage to the lives of my congregation.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
7. I think participating in this sermon preparation group helps my sermons make a positive impact on my church.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
8. Participating in a sermon preparation group has made me feel less overwhelmed with my pastoral responsibilities.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
9. The sermon preparation group has given me illustrations to use I have not thought of before.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
10. I think I have been able to be communicate clearer because I participate in a sermon preparation group.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
11. This sermon preparation group has allowed me to know more pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA
12. I feel less alone as a pastor after joining this sermon preparation group.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA



13. This sermon preparation group has been a good training ground to help me be a better preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
14. This sermon preparation group has giving me new ideas of topics and passages to preach.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
15. Because I have been in this sermon preparation group, I feel better prepared to be a preacher.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
16. I have learned from my fellow pastors in my sermon preparation group.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
17. The sermon preparation group has helped me better understand a Scripture passage I was planning to preach. I usually understand what the Scripture passage is saying.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
18. The sermon preparation group has helped me not misinterpret a passage I was planning to preach.  
SD      D      DS      AS      A      SA
19. What has been most beneficial about participating in a sermon preparation group?
20. What is one thing about the sermon preparation process you would improve?
21. Would you recommend a sermon preparation group to a preacher you know?

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING PASTORS TO PREACH EXPOSITORY SERMONS IN THE FREDRICKSBURG AREA BAPTIST NETWORK, FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

Joshua Elders Thompson, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William F. Cook III

This project equipped pastors in the Fredericksburg Area Baptist Network to preach expository sermons through sermon preparation groups for the benefit of their church and the proclamation of the gospel in the Fredericksburg area. Chapter 1 provides the context of the Fredericksburg area in Virginia, and the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, limitations, and delimitations of this project. Chapter 2 presents a biblical foundation based on 2 Timothy 4:1-2 and Ephesians 4:11-14 for equipping pastors to preach. Chapter 3 presents benefits and challenges of collaboration in sermon preparation by learning from pastors who use collaboration in their sermon process. Chapter 4 gives a week-by-week description of how the project was implemented. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the project. Ultimately, this project used the method of small group sermon preparation groups to better equip small church pastors to preach better expository sermons.

## VITA

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### EDUCATION

BA, Auburn University, 2002

MDiv, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, 2006

### MINISTERIAL

Interim Minister to Youth and Children, First Baptist Church, Gadsden,  
Alabama, 2002-2003

Minister to Youth and Children, Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, Georgia,  
2006-2009

Minister to Youth and Children, Riverchase Baptist Church, Birmingham,  
Alabama, 2009-2010

Associate Pastor of Discipleship and Youth, Chancellor Baptist Church,  
Fredericksburg, Virginia, 2011-2019

Pastor, Round Hill Baptist Church, King George, Virginia, 2019-