

PREACHING SELECTED BIBLICAL TEXTS TO LEAD
FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOREST, MISSISSIPPI,
TO BE A MISSIONAL CHURCH

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To Candiss,
whose love, support, and encouragement
made this possible

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PREFACE

This project is the direct result of many people who have influenced my life. Dr. Hal Kitchings has encouraged me in every step of ministry. His model of preparation has challenged me to pursue excellence in all that I do and to prepare myself for whatever God has for me. As a seminary professor, the late Dr. Mark Stephens continued to enhance my interests in studying expository preaching. Dr. Robert Plummer, my doctor of ministry faculty supervisor, has provided valuable insights into the missional idea for Forest Baptist Church.

Forest Baptist Church in Forest, Mississippi, of which I have been pastor since January 2010, has provided a wonderful working laboratory and been very receptive to moving in the missional direction. Lori Evans, my assistant, helped me with the technical elements of this paper. Five laypeople have earned special recognition. Charlie May, Dr. Randy Reynolds, Drew Kenna, Patty Reynolds, and Erin Vowell all helped to evaluate and to dream about the influence of the preached word. This project was greatly enhanced through their wisdom and insights. Three ministers who gave great feedback on my sermons, Dr. Hal Kitchings, Dr. Jeff Clark, and Dr. Ivan Parke, enhanced the project with their evaluations of each sermon preached.

Rodney Fambrough has been a constant source of encouragement in my life and specifically in this entire doctoral pursuit. His consistent, prayerful concern for me and this project is a clear reason for the completion of this project. Joyce Sweeney Martin has been an invaluable resource in the writing and editing phases of this project. I would have never made it to this point without her.

I must also thank my family. My grandmother, Mable Odeneal, has not only provided a godly influence in my life, but has generously supported me financially

through my entire doctoral studies. My mother, Judy Fortenberry, has been an incredible mother who has offered much support and encouragement. My brother, Doug Fortenberry, has critically looked over every page of this project and given valuable insight. He has been a challenge in my walk with Christ as I have watched his walk.

There are not enough words to express my gratitude to my wife, Candiss. She has sacrificed time and energy in the rearing of our three children (and a fourth on the way) as I have devoted time to this project. She has believed in me on days when things were going well and encouraged me on days when things were not going well. I look forward to what God has in store for us in the future.

Finally, I must acknowledge that doctoral studies are nothing short of a calling. It is similar as the call to pastor a great church. God, who has called us into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, is faithful. Only through his faithfulness can change in ministry be worthwhile.

M. Scott Fortenberry

Forest, Mississippi

May 2011

CHAPTER 1
PREPARING FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH
TO BE MISSIONAL

Introduction

Forest Baptist Church has a rich history of serving the Lord. Over the years, the church has even been involved in many mission projects. In spite of that, the church as a whole does not see itself as being on mission with God. While the church generously supports mission trips, mission giving, and mission endeavors, it seems that most of the members prefer to write a check rather than be personally involved in the mission God desires for his church. This project was designed, through the primary methodology of preaching selected biblical texts, to lead Forest Baptist Church to become a missional church.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to preach selected biblical texts in order to lead Forest Baptist Church, Forest, Mississippi, to be missional.

Goals of the Project

This project intended to accomplish five goals. These goals served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of this project. The first three goals were personal and focused on improving my preaching skills, because the ten sermons preached formed the core methodology of this project. The first goal was to exegete and preach selected biblical texts that focus on doing the Great Commission in a local context.¹ I used the expository preaching method, because it forces the preacher to

¹The last words of Jesus in Matt 28:19-20 are commonly referred to as the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

communicate what God has already communicated in the text. This is important in this project because becoming a missional church is not the latest fad in how to “do” church; rather, it is a biblical mandate. Correct exegesis gives the preacher confidence in that he knows that his message complies with God’s message. By using the expository method, I improved in my communication of God’s message of the Great Commission to take the gospel to all the peoples of the world.

The second goal was to improve my skills in the application of biblical texts in order to guide the church, in turn, to make proper application in its context. The need for this is clear. Many Christians feel that duly commissioned missionaries are the only ones whom God expects to engage their communities for Christ. As a result, very few Christians seek to understand and engage the culture in which they live. Through the sermon series that focused on applying the missional message of the Bible, members of Forest Baptist Church were challenged to apply those missional texts in the context of their daily lives.

The third goal was to improve my expository preaching skills. As a pastor, one of my primary responsibilities is to preach God’s Word. A major facet of this project was designed to help me improve specifically in the area of applying God’s Word to the lives of the people whom God has entrusted to me.

Goals 4 and 5 focused on how the sermon series impacted Forest Baptist Church and its becoming “missional.” The fourth goal was to lead Forest Baptist Church to understand what it means to be “missional.” One of the major hurdles for this church was to develop a passion not only for mission events but also for a missional lifestyle. Following God’s mandates for “missional” purpose required changes in the church’s approach to ministry. Therefore, this new “missional” mindset required church members

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.)

to trust God even more than they had in the past. This project served as a faith-building experience as God led the church to be on mission with him.

The fifth goal was to lead Forest Baptist Church to take specific steps to minister to its community as a result of the preached Word. The truth of God's Word will not make a difference in the church unless it is first applied to the church. Prior to this project, the congregation had not made adjustments in order to reach its community. As a result, the church did not reflect the racial nor socio-economic makeup of the community in which it is located. This project was designed to lead the church to adopt a biblical vision in order to reach its community.

Context of the Project

Forest Baptist Church is located in Forest, Mississippi, between Jackson and Meridian. Forest is the county seat of Scott County. The major employers are two poultry processing plants, Koch Foods and Tyson Foods, and Raytheon, a consolidated manufacturing center.

As of the 2000 census, 5,987 people lived in Forest.² The average household income was \$29,767.³ According to citydata.com, the population of Forest has been growing since the 1990s.⁴ Racially, Forest is 40 percent Anglo, 50 percent African American, 10 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent other races.⁵

Forest Baptist is an overwhelmingly Anglo congregation. A few non-Anglo high school students do attend. This racial makeup does not represent the community in which the church is located. A positive note is that Forest Baptist does financially

²U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Fact Sheet" (2000) [on-line]; accessed 24 July 2010; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

³Ibid.

⁴City-data, "Forest, MS," [on-line]; accessed 14 July 2010; available from <http://www.city-data.com/city/Forest-Mississippi.html.com>; Internet.

⁵U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, "Fact Sheet."

support the pastor of a Hispanic church, El Buen Baptist Church. Forest Baptist also has many ministries that serve people of non-Anglo races in the community. The church does a fairly good job of reaching people where they are; however, it does not then make a place for them to become involved in the life of the congregation.

Forest Baptist as a whole is a very well educated church. Most of the members, both men and women, are bank presidents, lawyers, small business owners, or are involved in various aspects of the public school system. Most of the ethnic and African American churches in town are small and do not have as much influence in the community as Forest Baptist. Two other churches in town do carry influence: Forest United Methodist Church and All Seasons Church, which is heavily involved in serving the community. However, Forest Baptist seems to have the most influence of all the churches in town.

Forest Baptist has faced many challenges in its history and has shown much resiliency in the face of major struggles. It began on May 12, 1867, as the Baptist Church of Christ, with W. R. Butler as the first pastor. In 1870, during the pastorate of J. B. Hamberlin, the church was invited to hold services in the Presbyterian Church in town and did so until 1874. In 1874, under the leadership of W. R. Butler, the first building was completed; the membership of the church, now called Forest Baptist Church, totaled 39.⁶

The church has had many pastors over its 143-year history. To set the context for what currently is happening in the church, the ministries of the last five pastors are germane. Frank Gunn became pastor in 1966 and served for more than five years. During his time as pastor, the church grew spiritually and numerically. Church members still greatly respect him.⁷

In 1972, Clyde Little was called as pastor. During his time, the church called its first missions pastor, Doug Broome. He directed the church's bus ministry and

⁶Norma Ruth Lee, "History of Forest Baptist Church" (typed manuscript Forest Baptist Church, Forest, MS), 1.

⁷Ibid., 5.

children's church. Also during this time, Little led the church to make major renovations to the worship center. Other structures, such as a fellowship hall, were added in order to make more room for the church to continue its ministry. Little served Forest Baptist Church for more than ten years.⁸

In 1982, Forest Baptist called Charles Belt as pastor. After five tumultuous years, he resigned. On the positive side, many mission endeavors were undertaken during his pastorate. In 1988, Sonny Adkins was called as pastor. Under his leadership, the church participated for the first time in a Southern Baptist World Missions Conference, which brought missionaries from around the country and the world to speak at the church. The church began supporting many other mission opportunities in the community as well. Adkins resigned in 1996.⁹

In 1997, Gordon Sansing became pastor. Under his leadership, the church began a medical mission, a once-a-month free medical clinic open to anyone in the community in need of medicine or medical care. Also, the church began a partnership with a church plant in New York City, called Graffiti 2. Sansing served until December 2009. I became pastor in January 2010. The current resident membership is 476 with an average Sunday morning worship attendance of 280.¹⁰

Over the last few years, members of Forest Baptist have been very involved in mission activities. The aforementioned medical mission continues to be held on the third Saturday of every month, with the church providing medicine, doctors, and nurses for those who need free medical care. Many church members also come to the clinic to pray with each person needing care. This ministry does connect the church with many in the community who are in need.

⁸Ibid., 6.

⁹Ibid., 7.

¹⁰Ibid.

Throughout the school year, a group of women called Soul Sisters meets on Tuesday afternoons to minister to African American teenagers. The church also offers an after-school Big A Club for elementary-aged African Americans. In both of these ministries, people from the church are reaching out to people who are not a part of Forest Baptist. The Soul Sisters meet in the church building on two Tuesdays a month. The Big A club meets at the Odessa Graves community center.

The church is involved in Angel Tree, a ministry of Prison Fellowship, which gives children who have a parent in prison the opportunity to spend a weekend at a Christian camp. For many of these children, the weekend has been life changing.

The church continues to partner with Graffiti 2 ministries in New York City. Graffiti 2 is a church plant in the second most dangerous neighborhood in the City. Each summer, church members go to Graffiti on a week-long mission trip to provide leadership for a tennis camp.

The church is involved in Kids Across America: Sports Kamps for Urban Youth. Each July 3-10, the church takes a bus load of inner city kids from Forest to a sports camp outside Branson, Missouri. Adult chaperones from the church accompany these young people, spending time with them during the week and following up with one-on-one Bible studies throughout the year.

Each of the local mission ministries in which the church is involved seems to be focused on reaching the inner city kids in Forest. However, there is a need for synergy between these ministries. There is very little partnership between these missions. Therefore, these mission endeavors take the form of “events” in the life of the church and do not seem to impact the heartbeat of the church. Forest Baptist does have a few people who live the missional life, but most only see church as an event that takes place on Sunday and missions as events and do not see themselves as being personally on mission.

Organizationally, Forest Baptist operates through a committee structure in making most decisions. As a result, the pastor leads through his involvement with the

committees and through vision casting in sermons. The church places a high priority on the preached Word of God, which gives me as pastor a great opportunity to prepare and preach to an audience highly engaged with the Word and to lead the people from being involved in mission events to being “missional.” It also gives legitimacy to my electing to use the preaching of missional sermons as the primary methodology for this project.

As pastor of Forest Baptist Church, my main objective is to cast a vision for the missional life in the hearts of individual people in the congregation. Once the vision has been cast, then those individuals who catch the vision will move the church in that direction. Since this church has already been involved in missions, the foundation is laid for a rich future as a missional congregation.

Rationale for the Project

To be a leader is a requirement for the pastor of any church. A pastor must lead his people with a clear biblical conviction to experience God in every area of their life journeys. Since such pastoral leadership must arise out of biblical conviction, the pastor must be able to communicate the Bible in such a way that it applies to the lives of his parishioners if they are to be missional.

I personally needed this project in order to help me develop the leadership skills required of a senior pastor. First and foremost, honing the process of applying a biblical text will improve my preaching and give me the necessary tools to cast a vision that will effectively lead these people to be missional and to apply the Bible in their lives. In order to be faithful to the mission that God has entrusted to me, I must improve the skills that he has given me. Therefore, three goals of this project related to improving my preaching skills.

Forest Baptist is at a unique point in its ministry and has an opportunity to reach the community in which it is located by using a missional strategy. This project was designed to help me improve my preaching in order to help the church recognize this need and opportunity. Through this project, I hoped to help the church transition from a missions-

minded congregation to a congregation that embraces the need for a missional approach in every area of life so that the church might reach more people for the kingdom of God.

The church has a history of more than 143 years of ministry, including many years of doing mission projects both in the community and in the country. Now, the community needed this church to take on a missional attitude at home. The message of the Bible is that every believer has been called to be a missionary beginning in the place where he or she lives (Acts 1:8).

In order for Forest Baptist to have an effective ministry in the community, an understanding of the local culture was required. Through the sermon series of this project, members of Forest Baptist began to see the importance of taking on the “missional” mindset in the context of the culture in which the church is located.

This change in mindset was essential if order for the many current missions events of the church to become a cohesive “missional” plan. This project was designed to bring cohesiveness to existing ministries as well as a new vision for the missional life. As a result of hearing and applying the preached Word, the church is adapting and reaching its community.

The results of this project will affect the community, the church, and God’s kingdom. First, this project gave opportunities for individuals to understand and then join in God’s missional purpose for their individual lives. Second, this project gave the church as a whole the tools it needs to reach the community with a concerted missional approach. Third, the church was given ownership of methodological changes needed to reach the community.

Definitions of Terms

Expository preaching. Expository preaching, according to preaching professor Haddon Robinson, is “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its

context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”¹¹

Missional church. The term “missional” was popularized in 1998 through the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* by Darrell L. Guder. Guder says, “Mission is not just a program of the church. It defines the church as God’s sent people.¹² Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and the mandate of the church. Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.”

The more detailed definition that used in this project comes from *The Missional Leader* by Fred Romanuk and Alan Roxburgh:

God is about a big purpose in and for the whole of creation. The church has been called into life to be both the means of this mission and a foretaste of where God is inviting all creation to go. Just as its Lord is a mission-shaped God, so the community of God’s people exists, not for themselves but for the sake of the work. Mission is therefore not a program or project some people in the church do from time to time (as in ‘mission trip,’ ‘mission budget,’ and so on); the church’s very nature is to be God’s missionary people. We use the word *missional* to mark this big difference. Mission is not about a project of a budget, or a one-off event somewhere; it’s not even sending missionaries. A missional church is a community of God’s people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God’s missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ.¹³

Limitation of the Project

The limitation of the project was the limitation of time. Because the project was only fifteen weeks in duration, some long-term results were not be measurable. This project was designed to help me improve my expository preaching and help the church begin to become missional. Therefore, follow-up strategies may be needed in order for this church to make this major transition in ministry.

¹¹Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 20.

¹²Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 6.

¹³Fred Romanuk and Alan Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv.

Research Methodology

This project was designed to teach a church to apply missional biblical texts and, through this, to understand what it means to be “missional.” A survey questionnaire was given to the entire congregation at the beginning of the project to determine what the members understand about being “missional.” The survey also gauged the congregation’s receptivity to a change in methodology for reaching their community. The same survey was given at the end of the project to see if any understandings changed. Each survey was administered during the Sunday school hour (see Appendix 1).

I preached ten sermons dealing with God’s missional heart in the Old Testament, Jesus’ missional heart, and the early church’s missional purpose in ten Sunday morning worship services. This was the core project methodology. The purpose of these sermons was to lead the congregation to recognize and understand that God wants his church to be on mission with him (see Appendix 2).

A focus group of five members of Forest Baptist evaluated each sermon in the project. Each Sunday evening, this group met and used the “Sermon Evaluation” research instrument to guide the discussion about that morning’s message (see Appendix 3). Each week, these members gave advice and helped with strategies to improve the next sermon in the series. I recorded their comments and used them in preparing the next week’s sermon. By involving members of the congregation, I had opportunities to make adjustments throughout the project to improve my preaching and application skills.

Each Wednesday night during the ten weeks of the sermon series, those people attending the regularly scheduled mid-week service were given the opportunity to discuss the previous week’s sermon using the “Wednesday Night Breakout” research instrument as a guide (see Appendix 4). All church members were encouraged to attend. I led the discussion and compiled responses about what the people said they had learned from the previous Sunday’s text about being missional and what that meant for Forest Baptist. This reflection and response method called for them to think with a biblical mindset about how to apply these truths, and it served as reinforcement of what had been

preached. This method gave them ownership of the application of the biblical message and led them to identify changes that need to be made in order to be missional.

Three ministers evaluated three of my sermons to gauge my effectiveness in communication (nine different sermons will be evaluated). Using a DVD of each service, each minister evaluated the sermons in the areas of content, presentation, and speaking habits. These ministers used the “Sermon Evaluation” research instrument (see Appendix 3). After I had preached the first three sermons, I called each of the three ministers at which time they evaluated the sermon. I then used their evaluations in my sermon preparations.

Summary

Forest Baptist Church needed to engage its community with the gospel. Learning to be on mission with God will make this engagement possible. With this church’s strong history of support for and involvement in missions, members seemed ready to consider the transition to being a missional church. The desired outcome of this project was for Forest Baptist Church to be on mission, engaging its community and ultimately the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR BEING MISSIONAL

While the term “missional” first became popular around 1998, the concept began long ago in the heart of God. In the beginning, God created humans to be perfect and to be in perfect communion with him; then the first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and sin entered the world (Gen 3) and that perfect communion was broken. All human beings since have continued to sin and have needed to be redeemed and brought back to a right relationship with their Creator. In the Bible, Genesis as the first book and Revelation as the final book, serve as bookends with the message of redemption filling the pages between the two. (See Gen 12:1-3; Exod 19:3-6; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 19:1-10; Rev 5:9-19.)

Beginning in Genesis and continuing throughout the Old Testament, God unfolds his plan to bring humankind back to himself. Ultimately, as recorded in the New Testament, redemption is purchased through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospels record the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, and the book of Acts traces the story of how the message of redemption spread to the ends of the known world. Thus, redemption as told in Scripture is the story of a God who loves people enough to engage them in their cultural context wherever they may live in order to redeem them back to himself; it is the story of a missional God.

In this chapter, God’s missional purpose as seen in representative examples in the Old Testament, Jesus’ missional heart as seen in the Gospels, and the early church’s model of missional living as seen in representative examples in the Book of Acts will be presented. This will provide the biblical framework on which the sermons that will be preached as a major part of the methodology of the project will be built.

God's Missional Purpose in the Old Testament

From the first pages of the Bible, God's purpose for humankind is evident. Genesis begins with the story of Adam and Eve living in perfect harmony with God. By Genesis chapter 3, however, they have rebelled against their Creator, and through this act sin has entered the world. The perfect relationship between God and humankind has been broken. As a result, God sets into motion his plan for redeeming humankind back to himself. But by the end of chapter 7, the rebellion of human beings has spread to such an extent that God sends the Flood to destroy humankind. Only eight people, including Noah, are saved and that because of their faithfulness to God. After the Flood, Noah and his children repopulate the earth. Then after several generations have come and gone, once again people stage a major rebellion against God at Babel. They begin to think of themselves as so powerful that they decide to build a tower that will reach God. To thwart their efforts, God separates them by confusing their language and sending them to live in different parts of the world (Gen 11). But then he calls a man named Abram to continue his plan of bringing sinful humankind back to himself.

God's Call to Abram

God clearly shows his concern for all humankind when he calls Abram to be on mission with him.¹ While Genesis 11 records how God scatters all humanity, Genesis 12 records how in the midst of that judgment and punishment, God calls Abram to be on mission with him in redeeming all humankind back to himself. About this, theologian Sidney Greidanus writes, "Because God had scattered humanity at Babel, he can now call an individual (Abram) to carry the banner for God's kingdom. In contrast to Babel, where people sought to make a name for themselves (11:4), God promises Abram, 'I will

¹Bryant Hicks, "Old Testament Foundations for Missions," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 53.

make your name great' (12:2)."² The placement of this narrative at this point in the biblical story links Noah and Abram, showing the return of God's blessing on all humankind.³ The writer of Genesis states,

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:1-3).

Abram's call is one of the most challenging calls God gave to any person in Scripture. At its core it is a call to be on mission with God. Abram must completely separate himself from his entire past, even from his identity. In the call, God gives Abram four commands, each of which is progressively more difficult. The first command is to leave his country, Ur of the Chaldeans. This command makes logical sense: when God establishes his kingdom; God will use people who are "set apart"; therefore, Abram must be set apart from his former life.

The next two commands are much more difficult for Abram because of the relationships he must sever. The second command is to leave his people. Greidanus sees this as Abram leaving extended family.⁴ The third command is to leave his father's household, which is his very identity. His father's things are his things; his father's gods are his gods. In fact, his name is Abram ben Terah, Abram son of Terah.⁵ To add insult to injury, God does not even tell him where he is going. To obey this command requires a total act of faith on Abram's part. He must trust his heavenly Father to provide for his every need. With the fourth command, God introduces one of the major themes that will

²Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 140.

³John Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 111.

⁴Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 151.

⁵Ibid.

continue throughout the remaining chapters of Genesis: God's blessing.⁶ A careful reading of Genesis will show that the blessing of God can only be experienced as an individual lives out the mission of God; the two are inextricably linked.

After having given him four commands, God now gives Abram seven promises that will be fulfilled through him if he obeys God's commands. About this Greidanus writes, "'Seven' is the number of perfection, of completeness. God's promises to Abram are complete."⁷ The first of these promises to Abram is to be a great nation. This promise is fulfilled as biblical history unfolds.

The second, third, and fourth promises are interrelated. The promise that Abram will be blessed and will have a great name is not mere window dressing; it has a missional purpose; it is "so that" he, in turn, will be a blessing. At this point in the narrative, the promise is only that he will be a blessing, but how that will happen is still ambiguous. God has called Abram and made promises to him, but he has not delivered anything tangible to help Abram understand what is happening. Abram's faith, however, seems unwavering as he now sees himself on mission with God.

God's fifth and sixth promises are that Abram will be a blessing to those who are a blessing to him and will curse those who curse him. About this Old Testament professor John Sailhamer writes, "The way of life and blessing, which was once marked by the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' (Gen 2:17) and then by the ark (Gen 7:23b), is now marked by identification with Abraham and his seed."⁸ Abram, now renamed "Abraham," is one whom God has chosen to join him in fulfilling his plan of redemption.

These six promises set the stage for God's final promise to Abraham. He tells

⁶Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 111.

⁷Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 151.

⁸Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 112.

him that he will be the vehicle through which all peoples on earth will be blessed. The Hebrew term *הַכּוֹפְשִׁים*, which is translated as “peoples,” is the same term that is used for those who were dispersed as a result of the rebellion at Babel. God’s plan at this point in history is clearly laid out: he will reach all the peoples of the earth. “This final promise can be fulfilled only in Abram’s great son Jesus Christ (Matt 1:1), who will send out his followers to ‘make disciples of all nations’” (28:19), writes Greidanus.⁹ Thus, early on in the Old Testament record, God’s plan for his people to be on mission with him is laid out. (Scholars differ as to what Israel understood its mission to the pagan world around it to be. I acknowledge that there is no clear command to reach the nations until that command unfolds clearly in the New Testament. There, however, seems to be a great deal of textual evidence to assert that God was passionate about reaching all people and used Israel to reach them).¹⁰

The fulfillment of this final promise to Abraham to bless all peoples of the earth continues throughout the Old Testament and reaches its final fulfillment in the New Testament through Jesus Christ as salvation becomes available to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (Gal 3:8, 14).¹¹ Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan that he promised to Abraham many years before; Jesus is provided for all humankind for all time. The mission of God is only fulfilled through the shed blood of Jesus the Christ.

These promises to Abraham present a clear picture of God’s love for all humankind. As biblical history unfolds, the theme of God’s love continues to be made more visible. Approximately 500 years after Abraham lived, just before God gives his chosen people, the Israelites, the Ten Commandments, he once again shows his love and concern for all humankind. This time he uses a man named Moses.

⁹Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 152.

¹⁰For differing views of the missionary understanding of the people of the Old Testament, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 55-66.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 146.

God's Call to Moses

The story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is one of the clearest illustrations of God's plan of redemption. After the Exodus and just before he delivers the law, the Ten Commandments, God speaks about this redemption to the man Moses, whom he has tasked with leading the people out of Egypt. The writer of Exodus 19:3-6 records it thusly:

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

When Moses goes up the mountain to talk with God, immediately the LORD, or Yahweh, begins to talk to him. This conversation is the beginning of God delivering the law, the Ten Commandments, to Moses for the people of Israel. He is setting the foundation for his purpose for the law in light of Israel being his chosen instruments to reach the world with the promise of redemption. In that conversation, God uses two significant terms to describe his people: the "house of Jacob" and "the people of Israel." According to theologian Walter Kaiser, the "house of Jacob" is a reminder of their past and their meager beginnings, and the "people of Israel" is a statement about their future and what they would become, namely a nation.¹² These two declarations thus serve to remind the people of who they are as well as who God is.

In Exodus 19:4, God reminds his people of the events of the Exodus, a reminder that he reiterates throughout the Old Testament. Verse 4 is "a summary of the entire proof-of-the-Presence narrative from the first of the mighty acts through the deliverance at the sea,"¹³ writes John Durham. God reminds his people that he has

¹²John Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 415.

¹³John Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), 262.

always been with them; they have experienced his direct hand. God also uses his presence with his people to show others their need for God.

The Israelites are told to pass this message on from generation to generation. Durham writes, “The speech that follows this formal messenger—introduction is a poetic summary of covenant theology, and the careful economy and memorable phrasing of its language suggests that it was a set piece composed for repeated use at covenant renewal ceremonies.”¹⁴ Thus, from the beginning, the missional purpose of God, his covenant with his people, was intended to be shared from generation to generation (Gen 17:7; Exod 12:14; Lev 3:17; Lev 23).

The reference in verse 4 to God having carried his people “on eagle’s wings” is more fully developed in Deuteronomy 32:11. In this passage, God compares the eagle’s attributes with what he has done for the Israelites.¹⁵ Just as a young eagle is carried from the nest on its mother’s wings as she teaches it to fly, so the Israelites have been carried from the nest of the Egyptians in order to be set free in a land of their own. They, however, have not been set free merely for their own good, but they have been set free to accomplish God’s missional purpose in the world. In this verse, there is also an emphasis on how God has protected them through all their struggles.¹⁶

God also delivers a message of freedom of choice as seen in Exodus 19:5, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” The Hebrew term *עַתָּה*, which is translated “now if,” is unique as it relates to a covenant. God is giving his people a choice in the relationship, which is radically different from the usual relationship to a superior being. It is not a choice of

¹⁴Ibid., 261.

¹⁵Walter Kaiser, *Exodus*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 414.

¹⁶Durham, *Exodus*, 262.

obedience or disobedience, but rather it is simply the opportunity for the Israelites to make a proper response to him.¹⁷

God shows his concern for his people with the addition of two requirements to the “now if” statement: First, they are to obey him; and second, they are to keep the covenant with him. This is a proposal of his love.¹⁸ God chooses to covenant with people in his missional purpose (Exod 19:6). The proper response to his proposal is to obey him and keep the covenant, which will place the nation of Israel in a unique position as his “treasured possession” (Exod 19:6). This title, among others, is important in understanding what God’s intentions are for his people as they relate to the world.

God clearly calls the whole earth “his” (Exod 19:6), and he also clearly says that he will make Israel “a kingdom of priests.” As the Old Testament story unfolds, the priest will serve as a mediator between God and man especially on the Day of Atonement. In like manner, as “a kingdom of priests, God is setting this particular group of people aside to minister to the world. His reason for selecting a group of people to be a “treasured possession” is in order that the whole world might know the one true God. In this “setting aside” is the call to be a servant nation, not a ruling nation,” writes Dunham.¹⁹ About this Joseph Exell also writes, “While all other nations, the whole world around them was in a state of pagan darkness, the lamp of life and truth shone forth in Israel.”²⁰ Throughout Scripture, God clearly shows his desire for his covenant people of Israel to lead all peoples into a relationship with him.

God also says that Israel is to be “a holy nation.” This is not merely another descriptive phrase; rather, it is a unique word about their relationship with him. God has

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Joseph Exell, *Exodus*, in vol. 2 of *The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 336.

¹⁹Durham, *Exodus*, 262.

²⁰Exell, *Exodus*, 337.

called a specific people group to act as mediators of his grace to all the nations of the earth. This was inherent in God's promise to Abraham that all peoples would be blessed through him, writes Kaiser.²¹

After the Israelites enter the land God had promised them, God raises up prophets as the instruments through whom he speak to his people. A prophet does not only speak of future events but becomes the very mouthpiece of God. One of those prophets was Jonah.

God's Call to Jonah

About 600 years after the time of Moses, the prophet Jonah receives a message from God to deliver to the Ninevites, a people group who do not follow God. But Jonah does not obey and, in fact, runs away. Jonah catches a boat to Tarshish, which is as far from Nineveh as he can go. In the process, he is thrown overboard and swallowed by a big fish. This fish, then, vomits Jonah back on to dry land, leaving Jonah with a repentant heart.

Jonah, however, is given a second chance to follow God's command. This time, he obeys and delivers the message to the Ninevites that simply says that in forty days Nineveh will be destroyed. When the king of Nineveh hears the message, he immediately calls the people to repentance, hoping that God will relent. God does and shows compassion on the Ninevites.

A look at Jonah 1:1 and Jonah 3:1 shows that the two calls of God to Jonah are identical except that in 3:1, the phrase "a second time" is added. From the time of the first call to the time of the second, God's command to Jonah does not change. Jonah merely gets a second chance to obey. Contrary to common thought, the story is not about a rebellious prophet but is a story about a forgiving God. Frank Page writes, "There is no

²¹Kaiser, *Exodus*, 416.

mention of reproach for the prophet's former disobedience."²² It also is a story of how God used an improbable candidate to further his mission. In verses 2 of both chapter 1 and chapter 3, the identical three imperatives are given to Jonah: *מוק, גלה, ארק*, which translated from Hebrew are "Arise, go, proclaim." The emphasis is not on the reason for the mission, but rather it is on speaking God's word, according to Page.²³ The message that Jonah is to communicate is not his own message, but it is the very message of God.²⁴ It is a message of redemption for a people who are in desperate need. Jonah 3:2 begins much like Jonah 1:3, but there is a much different result. This time Jonah obeys. The emphasis in this verse is to show that God has great concern for the city of Nineveh.²⁵ Another implication is that God uses ordinary people in his plan of redemption. In this little book, the groundwork is being laid for God to reveal his desire to see the nations come to him as well as the fact that he will use unlikely people to accomplish that purpose.

In chapter 3, Jonah preaches one of the shortest sermons recorded in Scripture, but his task takes three days. According to some commentators, on the first day when Jonah proclaims the message, it is not only received by but even spread by the Ninevites, which is why only one day is mentioned.²⁶ The point, however, is not how long Jonah preached, but rather that the people repent in response to Jonah's five-word sermon.²⁷

The repentance of the Ninevites is described very simply: they believe God. The pattern seen in this story is repeated throughout the Old Testament: God threatens

²²Frank Page, *Jonah*, New American Commentary, vol. 19b (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 254.

²³*Ibid.*, 255.

²⁴Desmond Alexander, *Jonah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 23a (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 119.

²⁵Douglas Stuart, *Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 31 (Waco: Word, 1987), 487.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Alexander, *Micah*, 120.

punishment; the people repent; and God shows mercy (1 Sam 7:3-14; Ezra 8:21-23; Jer 36:3).²⁸ The Ninevites, under what appears to be the leadership of their king, set up a fast and dress in sackcloth as an indication of their repentance. Interestingly, 125 years later when the prophet Jeremiah preaches a similar message to the Ninevites, he is thrown in jail for treason.²⁹ This does not mean that true repentance did not occur under Jonah's preaching; it merely means that there is no time limitation on how long lasting the results of repentance will be in a society. Each generation must make its own decisions about whether to follow God.

Continuing the story of Jonah, the king of Nineveh calls his subjects to make four behavioral responses to Jonah's message, fast, wear sackcloth, call on God, and turn from evil and violence.³⁰ His mandate is merely a reflection of a community of people whom God has caused to repent and not the result of the eloquence of the prophet or the sophistication of the message. It is simply that God awakens the people to their need for him. Based on his final question as recorded in chapter 3, verse 9, the king realizes that there is no guarantee that God will show mercy, because he knows that the actions of the people do not deserve such.

The crux of the book comes when God's missional heart is revealed. "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (3:10). Here and indeed throughout the Old Testament, God interacts with all peoples. He is portrayed as one who has intimate care and concern for all people, even those who are not of the house of Israel. In the book of Jonah, a significant parallel also exists between the recipient of the message, Nineveh, and the deliverer of the message, Jonah. The same mercy is afforded

²⁸Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 489.

²⁹Page, *Jonah*, 264.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 266.

both parties. That is true for all people throughout all times. Perhaps Douglas Stuart has written it best, “When Nineveh repented God relented.”³¹

While it is true that in the Old Testament God shows his concern for reaching all nations, it is not until the pages of the New Testament that he gives the mandate to his followers to reach the nations.³² In the New Testament, God not only delivers judgment, but he also reveals his plan to use redeemed people in his mission of redemption. In the New Testament, the call to follow God is a call for his followers to leave everything for the sake of those who are yet to be reached with the good news about Jesus, the only one who can bring people back to God.

Jesus’ Missional Heart

Jesus gave up the glories of heaven to come to earth with the sole mission to redeem humankind. He laid aside his deity in order to reconcile God and humankind. His heart was missional; thus, his life serves as a model of what it means to be missional.

If Christians are to emulate Jesus, they must take on a missional heart. “Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and sent out his disciples to do the same. But that is not all. His mission was not only a matter of words and neither is ours,” according to theologian Lesslie Newbigin.³³ The mission is to reveal the faceless God of the kingdom with the presence of Jesus Christ.³⁴

Throughout the Old Testament, God clearly shows a desire for all people to be drawn unto him, but it is in Jesus’ coming to the world that God gives the greatest missional example that can ever be presented. Scripture is clear that Jesus laid aside his

³¹Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 495.

³²Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 502-03.

³³Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 40.

³⁴*Ibid.*

nature to become human (Phil 2:7). It is clear that he gave up everything in order to reach people who are nothing. Selective events recorded in the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Luke show Jesus' missional heart for all people, no matter their lot in life.

Jesus' Call to Levi

An event recorded in Mark 2:13-17 sets the stage for revealing Jesus' missional heart:

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Mark introduces Levi's call with the phrase, "Jesus went out." This is one of several literary devices Mark uses to link events in Jesus' life.³⁵ At first glance, this move of Jesus seems to interrupt the flow of the Gospel, but as William Lane notes, "this action becomes meaningful when it is seen as a part of a recurring pattern in Mark's Gospel. After a demonstration of the saving power of God, Jesus withdraws to a lonely region."³⁶ His withdrawal proves not simply to be a getaway but rather is an intentional action that sets the stage for the call of Levi to be on mission with him.

Jesus passes by Levi, who is described by his work as a customs agent, which was somewhat different than the work of a normal tax collector.³⁷ It is possible that he

³⁵Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 125.

³⁶William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 100.

³⁷It is usually assumed that the name "Levi" is an alternative for "Matthew," which appears in the lists of the twelve. See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 131.

worked for a middleman who answered to Herod Antipas the tetrarch.³⁸ Jesus' call to Levi, like that of his calls to the four fishermen whom he had chosen previously, was very simple and concise. In the simplest of terms, Jesus says, "Follow me." It is a call to submit to the mission of God; it is a call to be a messenger of redemption; it is a call to a missional life.

Then Jesus goes to Levi's house to eat with his friends, who were also in the tax business. The fact that Jesus reclines at the meal and the fact that other tax collectors and sinners were present probably means that this was an ordinary meal, not a special banquet, according to Robert Stein.³⁹ Still, it creates a stir amongst the religious leaders, the Pharisees. About this, Stein writes,

Jesus' eating with such people served as a visual declaration of the offer of forgiveness such as he pronounced in [Mark] 2:5. Such behavior was seen by Jesus' opponents not as a polite action in accepting the hospitality of toll collectors and sinners, but as an intentional parabolic act bearing a message.⁴⁰

The message is clear: Jesus is on a mission to reconcile people to God. Jesus is eating and reclining with people who are not pure, which is more than the Pharisees can handle since they prided themselves on being separate from such people. Jesus readily accepts social outcasts and sinners, so the Pharisees ask him a question that has direct implications about his morality. They call his character and his discernment into question, according to R. T. France.⁴¹ "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Obviously, they do not grasp his missional intentions.

Jesus' response to their question contains two parts. First, he cites a traditional proverb. About this proverb, Stein writes, "It [the proverb] focuses on the commonly accepted fact that physicians exist to heal sick people and thus must associate with

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Stein, *Mark*, 127.

⁴⁰Ibid., 129.

⁴¹France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 135.

them.”⁴² Through this proverb, Jesus is saying that his mission is not an attempt to earn heaven but to bring heaven to a helpless people. He never apologizes for his actions, but simply reveals the error in their logic.

Second, Jesus sets forth his mission.⁴³ He makes it clear that he is calling sinners to be on mission with God. Jesus refocuses the attention on the issue of sin. He makes a clear assertion that he is calling sinners into relationship with God. This becomes one of the keys to interpreting many of Jesus’ statements throughout the remainder of Mark’s Gospel.⁴⁴

The main point Mark makes in this passage is clear: Jesus has come to save sinners. Therefore, in order for him to fulfill his mission, he must associate with those whom he has come to save. The result is that throughout his ministry Jesus was rebuked by the religious and welcomed by the sinner. And, in his plan, the sinners who welcome him and receive his forgiveness are then sent out to bring others to repentance (John 4). Levi’s call is similar to that of another man: Zacchaeus. His story is recorded in Luke’s Gospel.

Jesus’ Call to Zacchaeus

Jesus’ call to Zacchaeus is recorded in Luke 19:1-10:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him,

⁴²Stein, *Mark*, 131.

⁴³France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 135.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Luke 19:1-4 sets the stage for the encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus as Luke links this portion of his gospel with Jesus’ “passing through to Jerusalem,” the importance of which will become clear later in the story.⁴⁵ Like Levi, Zacchaeus “gained his income by extorting money from the people that he had contracted to pay the Roman government. . . . His location in the major customs center of Jericho was ideal,” writes Walter Liefeld.⁴⁶ Zacchaeus is curious about Jesus, which was not unusual since Jesus had a way of making “sinners” desire to be near him—and he wanted to be around them. Jesus’ missional heart is clearly seen in his interactions with “sinners” such as Zacchaeus.

While the fact that Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by certainly is unique, the really unique point is that Jesus looks up in the tree, calls Zacchaeus by name, and says, “I must stay.”⁴⁷ The “must” implies a divine necessity for Jesus as he passes through to Jerusalem where he will pay the price of redemption by dying on the cross, writes Stein.⁴⁸

Zacchaeus responds immediately to Jesus’ call. When he welcomes Jesus into his house, it is both a sign of fellowship and of Jesus’ forgiveness. Even though the passage never explicitly mentions Zacchaeus’s faith, his actions do reveal his faith: Jesus has forgiven Zacchaeus and has called him to be on mission with him, and for Zacchaeus, that call means that will return what he has extorted from his clients.

Of this encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, theologian Darrell Bock

⁴⁵Robert Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 467.

⁴⁶Walter Liefeld, *Luke*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 1007.

⁴⁷This is the only occurrence in the New Testament of the word “sycamore.” The sycamore tree is similar to an oak tree, having both a short trunk and wide branches, according to Darrell Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol.3b (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1517.

⁴⁸Stein, *Luke*, 467.

writes, “The crowd is offended by Jesus’ intention to stay with Zacchaeus. They like Jesus’ miracles, but they do not like his associations.”⁴⁹ The mention of the grumbings of the crowd is unusual in the book of Luke.⁵⁰ In this passage, the grumbings shows that the crowd does not understand why a righteous man would spend time with “sinners.” The very word “sinner” carried great connotations for the crowd, particularly for the Pharisees. The fact that Jesus spends time with Zacchaeus and other “sinners” makes the Pharisees question whether he is a righteous man. Clearly, Jesus’ actions are intentionally missional. For the Pharisees, this is a radical redefinition of the word “righteousness.”

Luke does not give the setting for Zacchaeus’ speech; as a result, the make-up of the audience is somewhat unclear. In his speech, however, is a message that will not only affect him but also his clients. About this Stein writes, “The verbs ‘give’ and ‘pay back’ in this verse are in the present tense in Greek and may be translated ‘I am in the habit of giving’ or ‘I shall now give.’”⁵¹ Jesus’ call to Zacchaeus radically changes his interactions with his clients. Suddenly, to Zacchaeus, they become people who are in need of a God who reconciles.

While Jesus’ response is directed to Zacchaeus, it is intended for all to hear. He says: “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:10). The word “salvation” is used only four times in Luke and describes a restored relationship with God.⁵² Jesus then says the reason for this salvation is that Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham, which could mean that he is a spiritual descendant of Abraham or that he is a Jew and Jesus is saving a

⁴⁹Bock, *Luke*, 1518.

⁵⁰Stein, *Luke*, 468.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Bock, *Luke*, 1522.

lost sheep of Israel.⁵³ In either case the lesson is the same: Jesus pursues those who are not in the fold.

Luke clearly includes this encounter with Zacchaeus to show that Jesus' mission is to seek and to save the lost (19:10). About this Bock writes, "Jesus becomes the instrument through whom God works. Jesus' mission is to initiate relationships with those who do not know God and call them to come to know him."⁵⁴ After they are made right with God, Jesus then sends them out on mission. His mandate as recorded in verse 10 is a mission to seek and to save, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Missional Living in the Early Church

The history of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts is that of a people who lived missional lives. From its inception and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church as the people of God was given very clear instructions about its purpose. That purpose was to reach people for Christ.

Acts 1:8 and Missional Living

In Acts 1:8, Luke records Jesus' final instructions to his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth." The disciples had just asked Jesus if the time had arrived when he would restore the kingdom to Israel. Even after all they had experienced with Jesus, they still did not understand Jesus' missional heart. Jesus does not answer their question directly, but rather he instructs them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon them. He knew that only then

⁵³Liefeld, *Luke*, 1008.

⁵⁴Bock, *Luke*, 1523.

would they understand all he had told them about how the Old Testament pointed to him as the fulfillment of God's mission (Luke 24:27).

The disciples' question was about political power, but Jesus' answer was about a completely different kind of power.⁵⁵ When Jesus says that they will receive power, he used the term, *δυναμις*. Found ten times in the book of Acts, it sometimes refers to miracles and other times to enablement.⁵⁶ In this context, it means enablement. Jesus says that the power of God, the Holy Spirit, will enable his people to carry out his mission (Acts 1:8).

About this, missiology professor David Bosch writes, "The idea of being led by the Spirit into mission is, then, however, applied in a far more comprehensive manner to the ministry of the disciples. They turn into Jesus' witnesses as soon as they are clothed with power from on high."⁵⁷ The Spirit becomes the power for their fulfilling the redemptive mission of God.

The fulfillment of the promise to receive power comes only through Christ.⁵⁸ The role of the Spirit in the New Testament is as the deposit and guarantee of the faith as he indwells every Christian. The Holy Spirit imparts the power of God in the life of the believer. The power that Jesus gives in and through the Holy Spirit is the ability to be on mission for God. This ability is called *μάρτυς* or witness, literally translated as "one who testifies," according to Bock.⁵⁹ He explains,

⁵⁵F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 36.

⁵⁶Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 63.

⁵⁷David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 113.

⁵⁸Gerhard Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 60.

⁵⁹F. L. Fisher, "Witness, Witnessing," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1279.

Jesus also spoke of witnesses in a legal sense (Matt 18:16), as do passages discussing activity or potential activity in the church (2 Cor 13:11; 1 Tim 5:19). A witness in this sense is someone who helps establish facts objectively through verifiable observations. As such, a witness is more than someone with merely subjective and personal impressions. This objectivity and fact-based quality of the witness are why the direct experience of Jesus' ministry and resurrection are required of Judas's replacement in Acts 21-22, a passage that shows what stands behind Luke's use of this term. Thus "witness" is a key term in Acts for those who experienced Jesus and saw him in a resurrection appearance (1:22). This experience means that they can testify directly to what God did through Jesus (Luke 24:48).⁶⁰

Jesus' command to be a witness as given in Acts 1:8 involves more than just than being one who tells a verbal story. It involves being a living testimony of the power of the risen Savior. It is a way of life. The Spirit is to live through the life of the witness. As a result, the power of God will be manifest in the life of the witness. His or her entire life will become a demonstration of the power of God as he/she lives out the mission of God. This is missional living.

The specific geographical areas noted in Acts 1:8 where Jesus tells his disciples to be witnesses form the outline for the book of Acts. Jerusalem is the main focus of Acts 1-7. In Acts 8-10, Judea and Samaria rise to the forefront. The remainder of the book focuses on reaching the ends of the earth, ultimately ending in Rome.⁶¹

The term "ends of the earth" not only refers to physical parts of the world, but also refers to reaching all people groups. The Apostle John clearly saw this, as recorded in Revelation 7:9 and 14:6,⁶² "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev 7:9). "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6). The Apostle Paul clearly understood this as well.

⁶⁰Bock, *Acts*, 64.

⁶¹Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 36-37.

⁶²Bock, *Acts*, 65.

Paul and Missional Living

In the opening chapters of the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter is the dominant personage, but by chapter 13 Paul becomes the major figure. The story Luke records in Acts 17 is an example of Paul's missional heart as he shares with the people of a pagan culture how they need the one true God. The story occurs in Athens.

Of the importance of Athens, Gerhard Krodel writes, "Just as Jerusalem is the center of the church and the symbol of the continuity of salvation history, and just as Rome is the center and symbol of imperial power, so Athens is the citadel of pagan thought and a symbol of Hellenistic religiosity."⁶³

Thus in Athens, Paul is in the center of pagan thought and religion, which he chooses to turn into a missional opportunity. As he walks through the city, he becomes greatly distressed with the abundance of idols. Interestingly, the Greek verb *παροξύνω* used in Acts 17:16 to describe his anger is also used to describe God's anger toward idols.⁶⁴ Paul's response to this distressing situation reveals his missional nature. About this F. F. Bruce writes, "The spectacle of a city so entirely dedicated to false worship stirred him to the conviction that here, if anywhere, were men and women who sorely needed the gospel with which he had been entrusted."⁶⁵

As he walks about the city, he talks about Jesus. Soon, a dispute broke out among the philosophers. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers begin to argue with him. Some call him a babbler and ask each other what he is trying to say. Others think he is advocating foreign gods, because Paul is preaching "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). These two philosophies were Greek attempts to make sense of life. While the philosophies were distinctly different, the philosophers with

⁶³Krodel, *Acts*, 323.

⁶⁴Bock, *Acts*, 560.

⁶⁵Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 329.

whom Paul talks do agree that the message from Paul has appeal.⁶⁶ “The philosophers realize that Paul is discussing some new god and his divine activity that they do not recognize,” writes Bock.⁶⁷

These events set the stage for Paul’s speech at the Aeropagus. Paul starts his message in an affirming tone. He uses the difficult term δεισιδαιμονία, which is best translated with the neutral use of “religious.”⁶⁸ On his walk through the city, Paul had seen an altar with the inscription “To an Unknown God” and now he uses this to try to connect with the Athenians. In no way does he back off from his repulsion for idolatry, but instead he tries to lay out a common understanding with his audience. This also helps to refute the idea that he is bringing in a new god.⁶⁹

Paul continues to try to connect with his audience by quoting some of their own poets as he intentionally lays the groundwork for presenting Jesus. He establishes God as the creator and further says that God cannot be confined to a temple, which would have resonated positively with the Epicurean philosophers, according to Bock.⁷⁰ He makes a general reference to Adam, showing that all humans are connected to this Creator God. He quotes an anonymous Athenian, with a clear intention to show that God is not a distant God.⁷¹

Paul then moves on to say that God, the Creator of all, will judge all in righteous judgment. To the Greeks, that was radical. “Greek thought had no room for such an eschatological judgment as the biblical revelation,” writes Bruce.⁷² Paul then

⁶⁶Ibid., 331.

⁶⁷Bock, *Acts*, 562.

⁶⁸Ibid., 565.

⁶⁹Krodel, *Acts*, 330.

⁷⁰Bock, *Acts*, 565.

⁷¹Ibid., 568.

⁷²Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 341-42.

begins to get to the point. He says there was a time when God overlooked humankind's foolishness and idolatry, but no longer. Now is the time to repent of such things. Once again, Paul shows his missional heart as he declares that God says that all people everywhere must repent. Amazingly, even with this declaration, Paul is allowed to continue talking, but not for long. When he mentions Jesus' resurrection, his speech is cut short. Bruce writes, "A mixed reaction follows the mention of the resurrection. Greeks believed dead people remained dead and had no resurrection hope."⁷³ Some sneer; some want to hear more; a few become believers and follow Paul.

Paul has gone to great lengths to try to connect with his audience. While Paul clearly understands that his audience holds a much different view of life than he does, he also knows that his message about the risen Christ is clearly worth any harm that might come to him. He is willing to take the risk--and in the process he teaches all who have followed in his footsteps a valuable lesson in how to live a missional life.

Summary

From the very beginning, God has been on mission and has called people to be on mission with him. His call to be on mission is a call to leave the known and comfortable and to move into the unknown to follow him. God's missional purpose is seen in the Old Testament with his calling of individuals to be on mission with him. It is seen in the life and the teachings of Jesus. And it is seen as the early church took on the missional mindset. The call to follow Christ is a call to be on mission with God.

⁷³Bock, *Acts*, 570.

CHAPTER 3

APPLYING GOD’S MISSIONAL PURPOSE

God’s missional purpose throughout the Bible is clear, yet many Christians do not live their lives as if they are on mission from God. Many Christians who regularly hear or read Scripture often fail to apply its truths to their lives. The result is that many Christians have great knowledge of the Bible, but their lives do not reflect its missional purpose. Application is the missing link for these believers.

This chapter is devoted to helping the preacher prepare and preach sermons that will lead Christians to apply the biblical concept of being missional in their lives. First, in order to prepare such missionally-focused, applicational sermons, a preacher must acquire a clear understanding of the biblical command as laid out in both the Old and New Testaments. (See chapter 2 of this project for a detailed exposition of selected missional passages.) Second, in order to help his parishioners apply the missional command, a preacher must understand the situation in which the command was originally given. Third, in order to know the truth of a text, the preacher must ask the right questions of the text. Fourth, in order to know how to help his parishioners apply the text in their lives, the preacher must understand those parishioners. Fifth, a preacher must keep Christ at the center of every application he makes.

Understanding the Original Situation

In order to lead present-day believers to apply a biblical text in their lives, an effective preacher first must understand what the writer meant when he wrote the text, a text that was written at least two thousand years ago. Of this process, professors Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart write, “The believing scholar insists that biblical texts first of all

mean what they meant.”¹ Preaching professor Ramesh Richard adds that “the preacher is first an exegete of Scripture before he is an expositor of Scripture.”² (The process of understanding what the original writer wrote is called *exegesis*. Translating that information into what the text means today is called *hermeneutics*.)³

Of the intersection of exegesis and hermeneutics, theologian Walt Kaiser writes,

To begin with, let it be stated as a sort of first principle that preparation for preaching is always a movement which must begin with the text of Scripture and have as its goal the proclamation of that Word in such a way that it can be heard with all its poignancy and relevancy to the modern situation without dismissing one iota of its original normativeness.⁴

While a preacher must focus on the original meaning of a text, he also must not lose sight of his audience. The resulting tension should cause the preacher to spend much time in his study as well as much time with his people. The time he spends in his study begins with what Jack Kuhatschek calls a “walk back in time.”⁵

Walking Back in Time

John Stott, rector emeritus at All Soul’s Church in London, emphasizes the importance of understanding the world of the Bible while at the same time communicating to the modern world. In *Between Two Worlds*, he calls the preaching event a bridge that links these two separate worlds.⁶ In “walking back in time,” the

¹Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 11.

²Richard Ramesh, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 23.

³Fee and Stuart write in great detail about exegesis and hermeneutics.

⁴Walter Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 48.

⁵Jack Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 38.

⁶John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135.

preacher tries to get a comprehensive view of the message that has been revealed in the text. He, however, must know that walking back in time only sets the stage so that he can understand what God has said in the past in order that he can apply God's missional purpose to his present-day parishioners. Too much emphasis on background study can leave the people without a clear word from God.

Walking back in time requires recognizing and understanding the many barriers to understanding the original situation in which a text was written. Four of these are time, language, culture, and geography. These barriers separate the people to whom the preacher is speaking from the original message of the text.⁷ Only by overcoming these barriers can the preacher "walk back in time" and help his audience walk with him. Overcoming these barriers makes applying the missional heart of God possible.

First, the historical time period when a text was written is a barrier because, quite simply, no one alive today was alive when the original message was given. That, however, does not mean that no information is available about a biblical time period. It is; and it is incumbent on the preacher to learn as much as he can about the time period of a text which he is preaching. About this Kuhatschek writes, "The more we know about the historical context of a biblical passage, the better equipped we will be to understand the message of the author."⁸ God has communicated his missional heart to his people and recorded that communication in the words of Scripture. Therefore, understanding the original situation allows the preacher to better understand the text.

Second, language is a barrier. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew with some Aramaic (a few small portions in Daniel and Ezra), and the New Testament was written in Greek.⁹ Even when a preacher learns Hebrew and Greek, he is

⁷Ibid., 38-45.

⁸Ibid., 42-3.

⁹Robert Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin Merkle, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 23.

still at a disadvantage over the original audience. However, many scholars have mastered aspects of these languages and can help the serious student better understand what is written. Gaining a clear understanding of the true meaning of the message will direct the preacher to correctly apply God's missional purpose. God used the vernacular of the people in which he was communicating, which shows the nature of his missional heart: God desires for people to be able to hear and follow him.

Third, every message in Scripture was delivered within the context of a particular culture. The Bible, in fact, was written in the context of many different cultures: Egyptian, Babylonian, Canaanite, Jewish, Roman, and Greek to name a few.¹⁰ Since twenty-first century American culture is far removed from any of the aforementioned cultures, much homework is necessary just to begin to understand what the original audience would have understood. Culture varies from biblical book to book. Even within some biblical books, such as Genesis and Acts, the culture changes from chapter to chapter. Consequently, in order to properly exposit a biblical text the preacher must understand the original culture and also understand the culture in which the message is now to be delivered. Since God delivered his message using culture, it only makes sense that today the church use the culture in which it has been placed. This will allow the preacher to effectively and correctly deliver the message of God's missional purpose so that his people can then apply it in their lives.

Fourth, geography is a barrier. While in today's world visits to the places mentioned in Scripture can be made, that is not always possible. In order to understand the original message, however, the modern recipient will greatly benefit from some familiarity with the geographical areas that are mentioned in the text.¹¹

Preachers Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix give a step-by-step process for how the preacher can "walk back in time" as he prepares a sermon. They use the following terms:

¹⁰Ibid., 43.

¹¹Ibid., 45.

instigation, investigation, interpretation, and implication.¹² Vines and Shaddix write, “The expositor’s first and highest responsibility in dealing with the biblical text is to discover—insofar as possible—what the Holy Spirit was saying when He inspired a particular passage of Scripture.”¹³ Robert Plummer writes, “Each word in the Bible is the word of a conscious human author and at the same time the exact word that God intends for the revelation of himself.”¹⁴

During the instigation process of developing a sermon, the preacher selects the passage or biblical book in/from which he will preach. After making a prayerful decision, he begins the investigation process. A background study of the passage allows the preacher to put the text and even the entire book in its cultural, time, language, and geographic context. Then he begins the interpretation process in which he interprets what God is saying. Finally, he is ready for the implication process. The preacher can now begin planning the actual outline of the sermon.¹⁵

Looking for Surprises

In searching for God’s intended meaning, the preacher must look for disclosures within the text itself. God, however, does not leave us alone in this process. Preaching professor Wayne McDill writes, “Not only do we tend to be weak in our natural power of observation, but the Bible teaches that we also suffer from spiritual blindness.”¹⁶ As a result, God opens the eyes of the reader in order for his message to be

¹²Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermon* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 91-127.

¹³Ibid., 91.

¹⁴Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 32.

¹⁵In *Power in the Pulpit*, Vines and Shaddix go into much greater detail. They, however, continually emphasize the importance of letting God’s Word speak from the context in which it was written.

¹⁶Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 38.

delivered (Eph 1:17-18, 1 Cor 2:10). God uses these surprises to reveal his truth in order that his mission may be applied. McDill continues,

Not only do we need the supernatural ability to see in the spiritual dimension, but we also need to cultivate our natural alertness to the written text. Spiritual enlightenment enhances mental perception. Even for the most experienced of us, there is always room to grow in our insight into the subtleties of the text.¹⁷

By this point in the process of preparing his sermon, the preacher has gone to great lengths to understand the background of the text and even search for the meaning of the text. While he now is ready to look for surprises in the text itself, he may find that this will require a different way of thinking than that to which he is accustomed. He may need to learn to think inductively.

If God is to speak through the text, it is imperative that the preacher use an inductive approach to the study process. While the natural approach is to use a deductive approach, according to McDill, this results in a “head full of preaching ideas looking for a place to touch down.”¹⁸ By contrast, using the inductive approach will allow the text and ultimately God to speak autonomously, revealing his heart for the nations (Gen 12:1-3, Acts 1:8, Matt 28:19-20, Rev 5:9).

Even as he allows the Bible to speak for itself by using the inductive study model, the preacher must also understand that the Bible was written for theological impact. As a result, when he is doing research for a sermon, understanding the intended theological impact of the passage can create a fuller grasp of the text. When the theological impact of the message is seen, the preacher then can apply the missional heart of God to his people. Preaching professor Harold Bryson writes,

Expositors need to discover the theology that moved the writer to choose the words and make the observations. Such a theological approach is not a violation of the sound principles of knowing a Bible book. Historical and grammatical study should examine the theological surroundings of a Bible book.¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., 39.

¹⁸Ibid., 13.

¹⁹Harold Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 104.

In the Old Testament, often the surprise in the text is a physical characteristic. For example, Esau is described by the amount of hair on his body, the very thing with which his brother tricks their father (Gen 25:25-34). And Ehud is described as being left-handed, which is what allowed him to assassinate Eglon (Judg 3:12-30). In these cases, the physical characteristics are clues about upcoming plot twists. Surprises in a text often indicate major plot twists.

The man of God who desires to preach God's Word effectively should be greatly concerned with understanding the original circumstances of the passage, and he also should be concerned with how to help his audience apply the message of the text. To arrive at these understandings will require him to ask the right questions of the text. Asking the right questions will allow the preacher to see God's missional purpose from God's perspective. Every text will present different dilemmas, but asking the right questions will help the preacher understand God's intended message in each specific text and then make appropriate application to his audience.

Asking the Right Questions

God's missional purpose can be missed simply because preachers do not ask the right questions in order to get to the main idea of the text or in order to apply the text correctly. Of this McDill writes, "As you raise questions, you may not be sure which ones will lead you to the answers you need. It is better to raise too many questions than to talk yourself out of one that might prove fruitful."²⁰ "So, what?"²¹ and "Now, what?" are two useful questions the preacher can ask of the text.

²⁰McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 61.

²¹Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 86. Robinson uses "So what?" as a question preachers can answer as they seek to make application of the text in the lives of their audience. I am using "So, what?" to find out what the original audience would have taken away and the question "Now, what?" to answer what the modern-day audience should do in response to the message.

So, What?

One obviously cannot ask the right questions of a text until he or she understands the original situation of the text. Conversely, understanding the original situation means nothing if the fruit of that research is not used to communicate how the text applies to a modern audience. To bridge the gap between the research and the audience, the most important question is simply, “So, what?” In essence when the preacher asks “So, what?” he is asking, “So, what did this mean in the lives of the original hearers?”

After the preacher has come to understand the original context of the text and interpreted what God has said in the passage, teaching the congregation the facts of what he has learned in his studies will not produce life changes unless the “So, what?” question is addressed. Haddon Robinson writes, “In order to apply a passage accurately, we must define the situation into which the revelation was originally given and then decide what a modern man or woman shares, or does not share with the original hearers.”²² In other words, a preacher must ask “So, what did this text mean to the original audience?” Answering the “So, what” question allows the preacher to stand boldly in the pulpit and deliver God’s missional purpose.

When answering the “So, what?” question, the preacher must always be faithful to the biblical writer’s intentions.²³ He must understand what was said and why it was said. Asking the “So, what?” question also will force the preacher to see how the original audience would have responded to the message. This will influence the way in which he will communicate the message to his modern-day audience.

Now, What?

Once the question “So, what?” has been answered, the preacher must then address the question “Now, what?” This question begins the process of applying the text

²²Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 90.

²³*Ibid.*, 91.

to the lives of the listeners while still keeping the emphasis on the original situation. The text must only be applied in a way that is consistent with the manner in which it was originally applied. But first, the preacher must ask the “Now, what?” question of himself. As Robinson writes, “Before a man proclaims the message of the Bible to others, he should live with that message himself.”²⁴

When the preacher has applied the answer to the “Now, what?” question to his own life, then he is ready to address the question with his congregation. He must model application by living how the truth of the Word intersects with his own life if he expects the Word to impact the lives of the members of his congregation.

About this intersection of Word and life, preaching professor Warren Weirsbe writes,

When you apply truth, you bring people and truth together. To ‘apply’ a sermon doesn’t mean to review all the points and ‘hammer them home.’ It means to bring together God’s truth and God’s people in such a way that people’s hearts feel the truth, their minds understand the truth, and their wills want to act on what they’ve heard from the Word.²⁵

Application is the intersection of God’s Word and the lives of the listeners. The preacher has the opportunity to lead his people through this intersection by answering the “Now, what?” question. As they see God revealed in his word, transformation is soon to follow. However, people need to be led to the implications of the text; they usually will not see the implications on their own.

Of this, Wiersbe writes,

A sermon isn’t a picture on the wall, hanging there for folks to admire. It isn’t even a window in the wall, giving people a glimpse of a beautiful life that’s beyond their reach. The sermon is a door that opens onto a path that leads the pilgrim into new steps of growth and service to the glory of God.²⁶

Application, that is the “Now, what?” factor, brings God missional purpose

²⁴Ibid., 25.

²⁵Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 217.

²⁶Ibid., 218.

into the lives of the listeners. It moves the sermon from being simply a lecture that dispenses all the exegetical facts that the preacher can dig up to an opportunity for the hearers to intersect with the truth of God's Word. Proper application leads to decision. Of this, Robinson writes, "A congregation convenes as a jury not to convict Judas, Peter or Solomon but to judge themselves."²⁷

Structuring the Points

After answering the "So, what?" and the "Now, what?" questions, the preacher then must ask the question, "How do I structure a sermon so that my audience will understand the implications of the text for their lives?" While every step of the sermon-building process must develop from sound exegesis and theology, the process of application must also be included at every step as well.²⁸ The preacher can use the "So, what?" and "Now, what?" questions to keep himself focused not only on finding the meaning of a text but also on finding the implications of that text for the lives of the hearers.²⁹ Sharing the truth of a text *and* witnessing the proper response to it in the lives of his congregation should be the preacher's top priorities.

For a preacher to think about application during his sermon preparation only is not enough. He also must construct the sermon in such a way as to reveal the applicational intent of the passage. Of this, preaching professor Jay Adams writes, "Those preachers who understand preaching is application, organize their points for application."³⁰ Intentional applicational wording of the sermon points forces the preacher to focus on the application of the Word of God to the lives of the listeners. Application

²⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 27.

²⁸Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 72.

²⁹Hershael York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 140.

³⁰Jay Adams, *Truth Applied* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 85.

gives meaning to the work of the exposition of the text. To structure a sermon in this manner will transform the way in which the sermon is presented and heard.³¹ Michael Fabarez writes, “I see no better way to bring biblical relevance to bear on the congregation than to be faithful to the text’s intended impact on lives.”³²

In fact, the actual intent of every sermon should be applicational,³³ according to preaching professor Hershael York. He writes, “We preach for decision, not merely for information.”³⁴ The goal of any sermon is for the lives of those involved in the preaching event to be conformed to the image of Christ. Since Christ’s very nature was missional, as shown in chapter 2 of this project, the result of being conformed to his image is that the congregation will be missional as well. Thus, making the structure reflect the intent of the sermon makes sense. The “points” of a sermon form the structure and should be worded in an applicational manner.

The “points” of a sermon are some of the most visible portions of the entire sermon. Fabarez writes, “They are statements that, by their placement and presentation, form the elements of your message that will be highlighted and most likely remembered. Spending significant time on their construction will always be worth the effort.”³⁵ Thus, a preacher must use his “points” to emphasize the application of the message of the text as a means of reinforcing the applicational, missional nature of the entire sermon.

Knowing the Audience

Delivering God’s Word is one of the most important tasks that any man can do.

³¹Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 58.

³²*Ibid.*, 59.

³³York and Decker, *Bold Assurance*, 142.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 16.

³⁵Fabarez, *Preaching*, 61.

Consequently, it must be done with great intentionality. Communication occurs between people. As a result, when delivering the message, the sender must not only plan the message but also plan how he will communicate with the receiver of that message.

Pastor Graham Johnston writes, “No missionary worth his or her salt would enter a field without first doing an exhaustive study of the culture he or she seeks to reach. The time has come for today’s preachers to don the missionary garb.”³⁶ That is, they must understand and analyze the audience to whom they speak. There is too much on the line to be indifferent about the response of the people. Not only should pastors “don the missionary garb” but parishioners must also don the garb themselves. Johnston continues,

It’s worthless to engage people and not bring them to face God’s truth, and likewise it is absurd to declare to the world ‘good news’ with an indifference as whether the listener responds. To lose either of these burdens results in not being heard or in having nothing to say.³⁷

Since application is the goal of every sermon, the preacher must be thinking of the audience to which he will preach both as he prepares and as he preaches. Martin Lloyd Jones writes, “Let me sum it up in modern terms by asserting that it is always our business to be contemporary; our object is to deal with the living people who are in front of us and listening to us.”³⁸ Analyzing the audience helps keep the preacher contemporary as he seeks to know them and how to communicate with them. In applying the missional nature of God, the pastor is also challenging his people to be contemporary. The preacher, thus, becomes a living example of the missional approach.

Each time a preacher preaches, he must be aware of traits or issues common to the audience. One of these is a common thought pattern. When he capitalizes on a common thought pattern, he already has captured the audience’s attention. Holidays, special

³⁶Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 10.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1971), 138.

occasions, and even catastrophes in the life of a congregation provide such opportunities.

Another common issue for any audience is sin (Rom 3:23). Jones writes of a preacher,

He knows that all the people in front of him are suffering from the same disease, which is sin—every one of them. The symptoms may vary tremendously from case to case, but the business of the preacher is not to mediate symptoms, it is to treat the disease. The preacher therefore should not be over-interested in the particular form sin takes.³⁹

So, ultimately the preacher should be concerned with delivering the message of the gospel to offer the cure for the sin problems faced by everyone in his audience. But he must rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to work in conjunction with God's written and spoken word to convict of sin.

Analyzing the Audience

If a preacher is to know his audience, he must be aware of some basic demographic and psychological information. In his book *The Moment of Truth*, McDill identifies some of this data, writing that each time a congregation gathers, the combination of people present, the time, and situation create a unique audience.⁴⁰ He writes that understanding the following six common factors will help the preacher as he prepares his sermon: age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, and socioeconomic status.⁴¹

Each of these six factors affects the way in which the sermon needs to be delivered. Most audiences contain a blend of young and old, male and female, which means that the illustrations a preacher uses need to vary and be age and gender-specific if each person is to be led to be on mission with God. Being aware of the ethnic and racial make-up of an audience also helps a preacher know the communication patterns with which an audience is familiar and most comfortable. An awareness of the religious views

³⁹Ibid., 134.

⁴⁰Wayne McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 46.

⁴¹Ibid.

in an audience also may affect how a preacher presents his message. Education and socioeconomic status often reveal the vernacular in which members of an audience speak and think as well.

McDill also identifies three factors to be considered in a psychological analysis. The first factor is the attitudes that prevail in the congregation. He writes, “In one sense attitudes are the emotional baggage listeners bring to your sermon.”⁴² The second factor is preconceived beliefs. By preaching God’s Word in an applicational way, the message at times will conflict with the dearly held beliefs of the audience. The third factor is the values the people in the congregation hold. McDill writes, “Values are habitual judgments by which we look at life and the world around us.”⁴³

Adapting to the Needs in the Audience

After analyzing the audience, the preacher must tailor his communication style to fit the audience. This sets an example for how the congregation is to be missional in the ways they communicate with other people. In doing this, the preacher must be aware of and avoid two dangerous extremes: first, engaging the audience at the expense of the message of the text; and, second, failing to adapt to the audience because he knows he is presenting truth.

Johnston writes, “Don’t engage at the expense of the message.”⁴⁴ He continues, “That’s why when we speak of effective preaching, this is not to say the preaching necessarily works or gets results.”⁴⁵ Thus, the effective preacher will focus on meeting the needs in the audience with answers from Scripture. He will not sacrifice the message.

The other end of that spectrum is that the preacher cannot assume simply

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Johnston, *Postmodern World*, 61.

⁴⁵Ibid., 62.

because he is presenting truth that it is the audience's responsibility to engage. He bears responsibility for connecting with the audience. The truth of the text will affect the lives of the listeners only to the degree that they hear the message. Theologian and preacher Bryan Chapell writes,

People do not make decisions simply because they are intellectually informed. No one has a true understanding of what they are being asked to do until they have experiential data to evaluate the significance of the change being demanded. Because life-situation illustrations provide this experiential data, allowing individuals to 'live through' the implications of their spiritual choices, they well serve life-changing preaching.⁴⁶

The preacher must be intentional about connecting with the audience. Chapell argues for using illustrations to make connections. He writes,

To sum up, human understanding in its fullest sense involves the will as well as the intellect, the heart as well as the mind, emotions as well as cognition, obedience as well as scholarship, and experience as well as erudition. Persons who make decisions without this full understanding are, in some degree, acting in ignorance even if their decisions are strictly rational. The truth that is most fully experienced is the truth that can be most responsibly acted upon.⁴⁷

The effective preacher will always speak truth into the lives of the audience by meeting them where they are in their knowledge and understanding and taking them where God wants them to be. "Preaching that consistently connects with the listeners does so by uncovering the area of human need within a passage of Scripture and then speaking in a way that compels the listener to hear what the Bible says,"⁴⁸ writes Johnston. The involvement of the preacher in the human concerns of the text will reveal the needs in the congregation. He must exegete his text as well as exegete his audience.

Keeping Christ at the Center

To this point in this chapter, the emphasis on the application of God's missional purpose has been primarily focused on what the text says and how the audience

⁴⁶Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2001), 62.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Johnston, *Postmodern World*, 72.

will best receive that message. The preacher has been encouraged to understand both the message and the recipient. The problem, however, is that if he is not careful, the details of the text can cause him to miss the intent of the entire context of the text. That context is the redeeming nature of Christ. That must always be at the center of any message. Therefore, keeping Christ as the center becomes the guiding tenant of application that will prevent the preacher from handling the Bible as a how-to manual rather than presenting the missional heart of God.

The Christian preacher is under a compulsion to reveal Christ in every sermon he preaches from Old and New Testament texts. Paul said this best when he said that he was determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). This, therefore, should be the call of the Christian preacher. He must preach the truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He cannot assume that everyone in the audience understands that they are listening in light of Jesus' death and resurrection; to leave that to chance is simply irresponsible.⁴⁹ Theologian Graeme Goldsworthy writes of the preacher's obligation,

I maintain that no Christian preacher ever lets the Old Testament speak purely in and of itself. The Christian preacher who operates on this theory of direct application of Old Testament texts is presumably not imagining for one moment that there is no distinction between his hearers and the original audience or readers.⁵⁰

Keeping Christ the center of application will require the preacher to apply duty with grace. It will also require the preacher to avoid the temptation of human-centered preaching. And, it will require the preacher to follow the example of how Jesus himself preached.

It is easy for the preacher to look at a text without placing it in its proper context, which can result in the impression of duty without grace. Of this, Goldsworthy

⁴⁹Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 127.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 126.

writes, “The result is that the exhortations and commands are no longer seen to arise out of the good news of God’s grace in the gospel but as simple imperatives of Christian behavior; as naked law.”⁵¹

For example, preaching through a book of the Bible on consecutive Sundays often segments the book from its original context. Many of the letters in the New Testament were written to be read in a single reading; therefore, when preaching a section each Sunday, many of the doctrines of Paul can be presented as law without seeing the grace of God.

The Old Testament was given to a group of people who had been redeemed by grace. Thus, the Old Testament law is a gift given as a result of the relationship with God. Then, Jesus is the fulfillment of the law as well as a sign of the covenantal relationship to which God calls his children.

When preaching from the law in the Old Testament, many preachers and even parishioners struggle to see the grace of God within the law of God. First, when preaching focuses on application, the preacher must not lose sight of the fact that “the law was given to a people who had been chosen by grace and already redeemed by grace,” writes Goldsworthy.⁵² The law was not given in order to obtain salvation but was given in light of that salvation. The law sets God’s people apart from other people. Also, the law’s purpose is to show humans their inability to keep it (Rom 3:20). The duties that come with following Jesus come as a result of following him, not in order to follow him.

Jesus had not even entered into human history in the Old Testament, yet he is the fulfillment of the promise in the Old Testament. Jesus is pointed to as the fulfillment of the promise of redemption that later is revealed in the New Testament. One cannot understand the Old Testament without understanding its fulfillment in Jesus and,

⁵¹Ibid., xiv.

⁵²Ibid., 152.

conversely, one cannot understand the New Testament without understanding the Old Testament.⁵³

Following Christ is a covenantal relationship in which God sets expectations. Goldsworthy writes, “The law is not simply a guide for human behavior; its ethics and obedience are primarily there to indicate a relationship to God. At the heart of the law is the covenant relationship with God.”⁵⁴ The law or duty reveals the very nature of the God who has redeemed his people. These actions should never be removed from the redeeming nature of God.

Avoiding Human-Centered Preaching

The law is not the only area of difficulty when preaching Christ-centered messages. Old Testament narratives can produce great challenges as well. The biblical writer did not include these stories to either be followed or avoided but as a way to reveal the nature of the missional God. For the preacher, the challenge is to remain faithful to the text and reveal the Christ who is ultimately at the text’s center. Regardless of what type of text the preacher is preaching, he can always find the common denominator in the lives of the audience—and that is always sin. As a result, the preacher can avoid human-centered preaching by identifying the fact that no human can address his or her sin problem alone.

When preaching from narratives, liberty is often taken with the text in order to make connections with the modern audience. Many times, the story gets moralized in order that listeners can identify with a character in the story. Sidney Greidanus identifies the problem that arises with this type of preaching when he writes that “it imposes an interpretative grid on the story that equates biblical characters with the people in the pew and then inquires how we ought to imitate or learn from their examples.”⁵⁵

⁵³Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 157.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁵Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 36.

That is not to say that narratives do not contain any morals or that these morals do not apply today. In fact, learning from the experiences of people from the past can be very helpful for a Christian.⁵⁶ However, those lessons must not be separated from the Christocentric principle. When separation occurs, the result is moralism only, and the missional heart of God is missed altogether.

In order to avoid simply meeting the felt needs of his parishioners, the preacher needs to find the sin that is being addressed by the text. Bryan Chapell writes that every Scripture addresses sin, its consequences, and God's remedy.⁵⁷ Human-centered preaching is the result of attempting to engage the audience while avoiding the sin issue. Preaching about the impact of sin in the lives of the congregation always leads to the ultimate answer in Christ.

With so much emphasis on the Christocentric principle of application, the preacher must be careful not to separate the work of Christ from the work of God. Greidanus writes, "Christ is not to be separated from but was sent by God, accomplished the work of God, and sought the glory of God."⁵⁸ Revealing God's glory is a life on mission. The importance of putting a text in its complete context must even be true for the work of Christ. Christ can never be separated from the work of God.

Follow the Example of Jesus

In arguably one of the most famous sermons ever preached, Jesus employed all the application techniques mentioned above. Throughout his Matthew 5 sermon, Jesus says "You have heard it said" as he quotes what we would now call Old Testament texts and then follows with his own interpretation (Matt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). He recalls

⁵⁶Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2001), 197-98.

⁵⁷Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 40-44.

⁵⁸Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 179.

these passages and expounds on what the original audience would have heard. He does not dismiss the original understanding but in each case goes a step further than the people listening to him would have anticipated.

Jesus understands his audience. He applies the Old Testament to their lives by, in effect, using the “So, what?” and “Now, what?” questions. He makes direct application to their lives as he reveals how they are to follow him.

Jesus also uses the wisdom genre from the Old Testament to fashion an illustration to bring home his point. Of this Goldsworthy writes, “Not only does Jesus blend the typical wise-foolish dichotomy into his sayings, but in its use as the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount there is the further implication that his is the very embodiment of all wisdom.”⁵⁹

In the conclusion of the sermon, Jesus tells a story of two men. One builds his house on the rock, the other on the sand. When the storms come, the house built on sand is destroyed and the house built on the rock is safe. Jesus then says that he himself is the rock on which a person should build his/her house. Thus, he concludes his sermon with a powerful illustration that applies his teaching to the lives of his listeners.⁶⁰ He is to be the foundation of their lives; they are to build their lives on him. He keeps his sermon Christocentric.

Summary

In chapter 2 of this paper, God’s missional purpose was traced through the Old Testament, through the life of Jesus, and ultimately through the life of the early church as seen in the book of Acts. That study clearly showed that the call to follow Christ is a call to be on mission with God and is a duty, not an option, for the believer.

In this chapter, the focus has been on how a preacher can lead his congregation

⁵⁹Goldsworthy, *Preaching Whole Bible*, 230.

⁶⁰Chapell, *Using Illustrations*, 120.

to apply a biblical text to their lives. Truth without application is simply knowledge. Preaching is not concerned merely with disseminating information; instead it is focused on provoking life change. Therefore, in the context of this project, the effective preacher will focus on applying the truth of God's missional purpose to the lives of the people who listen to his sermons in order to lead them to make the life changes that God desires for each of them.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

God's missional purpose is such a foundational part of the life of the church universal that each local church must be intentional in order to ensure that it is living out that missional purpose. In this chapter, I will show how I addressed this issue of intentionality at Forest Baptist Church in Forest, Mississippi. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the genesis, design, and implementation of the project. The evaluation of the project will occur in chapter 5.

Genesis of the Project

This project began with the intent to implement methodological changes using the missional approach as the vehicle for those changes in a church in Ferndale, Florida, of which I was the pastor at the time. However, as I began researching the missional idea, God revealed himself to me in a very real way. He showed me that the missional approach is not a way to change methodologies in a congregation but rather is the biblical approach for how Christ-followers should live their lives. God also showed me that this approach often requires a complete transformation of one's entire view of life and, consequently, a change in how a local congregation lives out its God-given mission in the world.

In the midst of this, Forest Baptist Church in Forest, Mississippi, began talking with me about serving as pastor. As together we pursued that possibility, I talked with the pastor search committee about what God was doing in my life and how he had convicted me that I must pastor a missional church. The search committee shared with me the many mission events in which their church was involved and how they felt a lack of cohesiveness amongst these ministries. As I shared with the committee about the project I was planning

to implement in Ferndale, they indicated that their church could benefit from a similar project. Through this process, God called me to become pastor of the church.

In my first few months as pastor of Forest Baptist, I began to observe a lack of missional drive in the congregation. I noticed that while being located in the middle of the Deep South provided the church with many opportunities for practicing cultural Christianity, something was lacking. I sensed, however, that the church was longing to be led to be something more than just a church involved in many mission projects. The response to my leadership in the year since I have been pastor has confirmed this sense. To date, the people seem to be responding to a vision to be a different type of church in the midst of a community in need of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, I knew that I needed to develop specific leadership skills required of a senior pastor who, under God's direction, could turn the church in a missional direction. First and foremost, I knew that I needed to improve my preaching skills since my doctoral project would center on preaching selected biblical texts that would lead the church to be missional. I believed that honing the process of applying a biblical text would give me the necessary tools to effectively lead this congregation to be missional. Therefore, the first three goals of this project relate to improving my preaching skills, while goals 4 and 5 focus on leading the church to be missional.

Design of the Project

This project is designed to lead Forest Baptist Church in Forest, Mississippi, to be a missional church. The basic methodology will be built around my preaching selected missional texts. A 10-week sermon series on God's missional heart in the Old Testament, Jesus' missional nature, and the missional response of the early church was the backbone of the project. I asked five lay people to evaluate all 10 sermons and three minister peers to evaluate three sermons each for a total of nine sermons. Each Wednesday night, the entire church was given the opportunity to engage in a discussion about the application of the previous week's sermon.

Lay Focus Group

The lay focus group had two purposes. The first purpose was to secure feedback from a segment of those people who hear the sermons. This group was composed of five intentionally chosen laypeople who are strongly committed to Christ and his church, but who have little or no formal theological training. I wanted to hear from “average” church people. The second purpose was to secure creative insight that I would consider incorporating into the next Sunday’s sermon. I used some of the suggestions.

The lay focus group met eleven times. Each meeting lasted an hour and was held in the church conference room. In the first meeting, I trained group members in how to listen to a sermon for application. I then walked them through the information in chapter 3 of this project. They were instructed specifically in how to look for the “Now, what?” in a sermon.

Each week, the “Sermon Evaluation” guide was used to structure the evaluation portion of these meetings (see Appendix 3). In this section of the meetings, the things that were effective in the communication process and the things that needed improvement were discussed. For the creative aspect of this meeting, I briefly discussed the passage and the main idea of the sermon to be preached the following Sunday. The group then discussed creative ideas for presenting the sermon to the congregation. I took notes on each of these meetings for reference throughout the project.

Peer Focus Group

The purpose of the peer focus group was to evaluate my effectiveness in exegeting and delivering an applicable message to the congregation. The three peer group members evaluated sermons that had been recorded on DVD and sent by mail to them. They also used the “Sermon Evaluation” instrument (see Appendix 3). After each of the men evaluated one sermon each, I contacted each to ask them for practical advice for improving my preaching.

I selected these peers based on their experience. First, I chose a personal mentor who has been instrumental in my ministry from its beginning. Because he has been involved in my life so closely and for such a long period of time, I felt he would be uninhibited in his evaluation of my sermons. The second peer is an Old Testament professor at Mississippi College. My goal was that for him to evaluate how I exegeted the text and communicated what God had already communicated. The third peer has led his church through a major transition in doing ministry in a local setting. My goal was for him to help me understand how to apply a text in such a way as to move a congregation to change its mindset.

Pre-Project Survey

The pre-project survey was designed to help me learn how members of Forest Baptist Church felt about being missional before the sermon series was preached (see Appendix 1). This survey showed the general mindset of the church about being on mission with God. The survey questionnaire was distributed in Sunday school classes. After the survey was completed, I compiled the information in a spreadsheet.

Wednesday Evening Discussions

The “Wednesday Night Discussion” guide was used each Wednesday night during the ten weeks of the sermon series (see Appendix 4). It was designed around a reflection and response model, which called for the people to think with a biblical mindset about how to apply missional truths and also served as reinforcement of the previous week’s sermon. This method also gave the church ownership of the application of the biblical message and led the church to see what changes need to be made in order to be “missional.” These discussions were held in the church fellowship hall.

The Sermons

A summary of the ten sermons is as follows and includes the rubric of “*So, what?*” and “*Now, what does this mean today?*” explained in chapter 3. The first sermon

was based on the call of Abram/Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). In this text, God calls Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's household. "So, what?" Abraham was asked to leave the land of comfort for the call of obedience. "Now, what does this mean today?"

In the call of Abraham, God sets a paradigm for how he would interact to call and use his people in accomplishing his mission and purpose from that time forward, including how he interacts with and calls his followers today. As with Abraham, God continues to call unlikely people to do unlikely things in order to reach the nations and fulfill his unlikely promises. Of this Bryant Hicks, emeritus missions professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes, "The clear missionary intent of the Almighty One comes into view with his plan to bless all extended families of the earth through Abraham and his descendants."¹ Who are the descendants of Abraham? In Galatians 3:7-8, Paul makes the answer clear when he wrote, "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

God had announced the good news of the gospel to Abraham when he said to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." Of this, Sidney Greidanus writes, "This final promise can be fulfilled only in Abram's great son Jesus Christ (Matt 1:11), who will send out his followers to 'make disciples of all nations'" (28:19).² Thus, believers in Jesus are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and are, therefore, to be instruments in the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The purpose of this sermon was to show the missional nature of God as well as his desire to use his people today to reach the nations.

¹Bryant Hicks, "Old Testament Foundations for Missions," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 55.

²Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 152.

The second sermon was based on the call of the Israelites to be the people of God (Exod 19:3-6). Moses receives the message from God that God wants Israel to be a nation of priests. “*So, what?*” Israel will be God’s representative to the nations. God uses his covenant relationship with Israel to reveal his glory through Israel. “*Now, what?*” The people of God today are to be a kingdom of priests for the nations. The priesthood of all believers not only gives believers total access to God but also gives them the responsibility to reveal his glory to the nations. The purpose of this sermon was to show the missional nature of God and to challenge his people today to live as a nation of priests.

The third sermon was based on the second chance that God gives Jonah to preach God’s message to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-10). Previously, Jonah has run from God and the call to deliver his message to Nineveh. This time, Jonah accepts God’s call and preaches to the people. God has compassion on the people of Nineveh when they repent and turn from their ways. “*So, what?*” God cared intimately for the Ninevites in spite of their actions, and God cared for Jonah as well. “*Now, what?*” God uses his people even if he must give them a second chance to reach people who are undeserving of his grace. This action shows the missional nature of God: he is intimately concerned with his creation, namely the nations. The purpose of this sermon was to show God’s missional heart for the nations and to help his people today understand that he gives them second chances to be missional.

The fourth sermon was based on Jesus’ call to Levi (Mark 2:13-17). After Levi responds to the simple call of Jesus to “follow me,” Jesus attends a feast at Levi’s house at which Jesus is ridiculed for eating with sinners. “*So, what?*” Jesus reveals that his coming was not only missional, but that his very being is also missional. “*Now, what?*” The reason a person today tells people about Jesus is not to earn heaven for himself but to bring heaven to the people. The purpose of this sermon was to show Jesus’ missional heart and how his people today are to bring heaven to people.

The fifth sermon was based on the call of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus’

righteousness is called into question when he eats in the house of Zacchaeus. Jesus makes his missional approach clear with the statement, “I am here to seek and save the lost.” “*So, what?*” Jesus is the ultimate missional example for his followers to emulate. “*Now, what?*” Jesus’ followers must understand that in order to be like him, they must be involved with the lost. The purpose of this sermon was to reveal Jesus’ missional heart as well as to show how his people today are to follow his model of engaging with the lost.

The sixth sermon was based on Jesus’ commissioning his disciples (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples of all nations. “*So, what?*” This command is for them to do as he has done. “*Now, what?*” In order to follow Jesus, one must make disciples of all nations. The purpose of this sermon was to show that God’s people at Forest Baptist Church are to join him in making disciples of all nations.

The seventh sermon was based on Jesus’ final instructions to his followers before he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:8) in which he promises the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the believer to live a life on mission. “*So, what?*” The early disciples allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them. “*Now, what?*” God’s people today must be empowered by the Holy Spirit if they are to live missional lives and reach all the peoples of the world. The purpose of this sermon was to lay out the missional call for God’s people today, understanding that the Holy Spirit must empower the mission.

The eighth sermon was based on Paul’s speech given in Athens (Acts 17:16-32). In this passage, Paul studies the culture and even uses cultural references in order to share the gospel. “*So, what?*” Paul was engaging culture very intentionally. “*Now, what?*” Forest Baptist Church must know the culture in which the church is located and be willing to engage the culture for the sake of the gospel. It is incumbent upon those entrusted with this important message that the message be heard. The purpose of this sermon was to call the members of Forest Baptist to engage the culture of the community of Forest.

The ninth sermon was based on Paul’s sharing the gospel with Crispus in

Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). Paul begins by sharing the gospel in the Jewish synagogues. This is where his spiritual foundations were and where his area of comfort lay. After the people refuse to respond and even turn violent, Paul moves on to share the gospel with the Gentiles in the city, a people with whom he has nothing in common religiously. “*So, what?*” Paul understood that his mission was to deliver the message in ways that the people could understand the truth. When that did not happen, he went to people who wanted to hear from God even if they were out of his known culture. “*Now what?*” Christians today should be reaching people who are hungry for God wherever they are. The purpose of this sermon was to challenge the congregation at Forest Baptist teach the word of God to people who are willing to listen.

The tenth sermon was based on the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). The Spirit set them apart for the work he had called them to do. “*So, what?*” Their call was to be acknowledged publicly, and then they were given a commission to follow. “*Now, what?*” When God calls, we should identify, celebrate, and go. The purpose of this sermon was to commission the people of Forest Baptist Church as missionaries to the people of Forest.

Post-Project Survey

The post-project survey was designed to learn how the people of Forest Baptist Church felt about being missional after the sermon series had been preached (see Appendix 1). I compared the results of this survey with the results of the pre-project survey to see if the idea of being on mission with God had changed as the result of the project. This survey was conducted in Sunday school classes. I tabulated the information in a spreadsheet format.

Post-Project Evaluation

I evaluated the project based on how well I had met the goals laid out in chapter 1. In order to evaluate how I exegeted and preached selected biblical texts that

focus on being missional in a local context, I used the data gained from the lay focus group and peer focus group through the use of the “Sermon Evaluation” research instrument (see Appendix 3). I evaluated my personal use of application in order for the church to make application in its context by using the “Wednesday Evening Discussion” research instrument and in order to see how ideas for implementation were coming to fruition (see Appendix 4).

In order to evaluate my improvement in expository preaching skills, I looked at what these two focus groups had shared in order to see how I had improved over the course of the sermon series and to find common threads that would help improve my preaching primarily by using the “Sermon Evaluation” research instrument (see Appendix 3). Leading Forest Baptist Church to understand what it means to be missional was evaluated by using the “Pre- and Post-Project Surveys” (see Appendix 1). Finally, leading Forest Baptist Church to minister to its community was evaluated by using both the “Pre- and Post-Project Surveys” and the “Wednesday Evening Discussion” research instrument.³

Implementation of the Project

Since the missional idea was somewhat new to the Forest Baptist congregation, I laid a foundation with the church as a whole before the project began. As the project began, I selected and trained key people who would be involved in specific phases of the project. I administered a pre-project survey questionnaire to ascertain what the church knew about being missional. I prepared and preached the ten sermons that would be the core methodology of the project.

Simultaneous with the sermon series, I met with the lay focus group, communicated with the peer focus group, and led the Wednesday night discussion groups to secure feed-back. I used the information gleaned from these groups to help me

³See Appendix 1 for the Pre- and Post-surveys and Appendix 4 for the Wednesday evening research instrument.

understand the needs of the congregation in order that they would better understand what it means to be a missional church. At the conclusion of the ten weeks of the project, I administered a post-project survey questionnaire to ascertain what the church had learned about being missional. At the conclusion of the project, I also evaluated all the components of the project. This evaluation is included in chapter 5 of this project.

Communicating with the Church

As stated above, I informed the church about this project from the very beginning of our relationship. As the pastor search committee shared the ministries and missions of the church with me, they expressed the fact that they felt the church lacked missional purpose. I then talked about my heart and passion for seeing churches involved in the mission of God. When I visited the church in view of a call to be their pastor, I expressed the desire to see the church become a missional church and expressed my desire to use my doctor of ministry project as step in that direction. The church overwhelmingly affirmed their agreement with their vote to call me as pastor.

I became pastor of Forest Baptist Church in January 2010. The following summer I used methods such as mission trips, Bible studies, and sermons to begin to introduce the missional idea. To prepare the congregation as a whole, I led a Sunday night home group study through a seven-week Bible study written by Ed Stetzer and Phillip Nation, *Compelled by Love*.⁴

Selecting and Training the Focus Groups

In selecting the lay focus group, I was intentional about selecting members of the congregation who are committed and involved in the church's mission events. I, however, did not want people who had formal theological training. I also wanted a variety of ages as well as both males and females in the group. In our first meeting, I

⁴Ed Stetzer and Phillip Nation, *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living* (Birmingham, New Hope, 2008).

trained this group to look for the “*Now, what?*” portion of a sermon. I also stressed the importance of understanding the “*So, what?*” portion.⁵

In selecting the peer focus group, I chose three ministers who could speak from different perspectives. I chose a pastor who has led his church to make a major change in its mindset. I also chose a Bible professor who could speak to how I handle a biblical text. Finally, I chose a pastor who knows me well and could speak honestly about my preaching. I instructed these pastors in the use of the “Sermon Evaluation” research form (see Appendix 3).

Preaching the Sermon Series

Introducing the sermon series to the congregation was a process. As I concluded the summer series noted above, I mentioned that I would be preaching a sermon series on God’s missional purpose for our lives. I also introduced the series in my column in the church’s weekly newsletter. I prepared a video with scenes from the city of Forest to introduce the idea of being on mission in Forest, Mississippi, and used it to introduce the first sermon in the series on August 15, 2010. I used a video to introduce each section of the “God of this City” sermon series: God in the Old Testament (sermons 1 through 3); Jesus Heart was Missional (sermons 4 through 6); The Early Church Lived Out the Missional Life (sermons 7 through 10). As the series progressed, each section became more specific to Forest Baptist.

The sermons were as follows: August 15, 2010, “God is Doing What?” based on Genesis 12:1-3; August 22, 2010, “The Proposal,” based on Exodus 19:3-6; August 29, 2010, “The Call for Revolution,” based on Jonah 3:1-10; September 19, 2010, “Risk It All,” based on Mark 2:13-17; September 26, 2010, “Sticks and Stones,” based on Luke 19:1-10; October 3, 2010, “We Are on a Mission from God,” based on Matthew 28:18-

⁵See ch. 3 of this project for further discussion of the “So, what?” and “Now, what?” questions.

20; October 10, 2010, “Are you Plugged In?” based on Acts 1:8; October 17, 2010, “Meet Them Where They Are!” based on Acts 17:16-32; October 24, 2010, “Club or Church?” based on Acts 18:1-11; October 31, 2010, “Just Do It!” based on Acts 13:1-3.

Lay Focus Group

On August 4, 2010, the lay focus group met for the first time. In the first half of the meeting, I trained the group using the information in chapter 3 of this project. This meeting was held on a Wednesday night after prayer meeting rather than on the scheduled Sunday night because of another meeting having been scheduled on Sunday night, August 8. In the second half of the meeting, the lay focus group discussed creative ways to apply the Genesis 12:1-3 scripture, which would be the focus of my first sermon in the series scheduled for August 15, 2010. One idea the group suggested was to use a puzzle to reinforce the idea that God uses people. I used this idea in the next sermon.

In subsequent meetings, the group spent the first half of each meeting discussing what worked well in the previous Sunday’s sermon and what could have been done better. The “Sermon Evaluation” form guided the discussion (see Appendix 3).

Peer Focus Group

The conference call that was to include all three ministers did not work out because of conflicting schedules, so I had a phone conversation with each minister individually. I talked with each between September 13 -15, 2010. Each conversation revolved around the sermon evaluation guide (see Appendix 3). I asked each minister to share what connected and was applied well, what needed clarification, and what needed improvement. These were the only phone conversations that I had with these ministers. The remainder of their feedback came through written sermon evaluations (see Appendix 3).

Wednesday Evening Discussions

On August 18, 2010, the first Wednesday evening discussion was held in the church fellowship hall. In this and subsequent meetings, the “Wednesday Evening

Discussion” research instrument was used to facilitate the discussion and to gather data (see Appendix 4). The discussions were a part of the regularly scheduled church prayer meetings. The discussions gave me insight into preconceived notions held by the congregation and also gave me an indication of what I was communicating in the sermon series. The discussions also provided opportunities for the people to share what God was laying on their hearts about being a part of God’s mission.

Pre- and Post-Project Surveys

The pre- and post-project surveys were designed to help me ascertain what members of Forest Baptist knew about being missional before the sermon series has been preached and what they learned as a result of the sermon series (see Appendix 1). This survey was designed to show the mindset of the church about being on mission with God. I had planned to conduct the surveys at the close of two Sunday morning worship services but instead distributed it in adult and youth Sunday school classes because of logistical issues such as providing writing implements and the reality that many people leave quickly after the Sunday morning service to get to lunch and would not have been included in the survey. After the surveys were completed, I compiled the information in a spreadsheet. The evaluation of this information is included in chapter 5 of this project.

Post-Project Evaluation

During the final stage of this project I evaluated the effects of this project on my expository preaching and the effect of the missional idea in the life of the church. I evaluated the project based on the goals I had set for the project. Also, I looked at what has occurred in my own life as a result of this project. The details of this evaluation will be given in chapter 5.

Summary

The project began as a dream of changing methodologies in a traditional church. In the process, God showed me that lasting change in methodologies comes only

when people have seen the missional heart of God. This project was designed to help the people of Forest Baptist Church glimpse God's missional heart through a ten-week sermon series. The project concluded with a challenge for the people to begin their mission with God immediately.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE PROJECT

In chapter 1 of this paper, the purpose and goals of this project were identified. The purpose of the project was to preach selected biblical texts in order to lead Forest Baptist Church, Forest, Mississippi, to be missional. The goals were (1) to exegete and preach selected biblical texts that focus on doing the Great Commission in a local context;¹ (2) to improve my skills in the application of biblical texts in order to guide the church, in turn, to make proper application in its context; (3) to improve my expository preaching skills; (4) to lead Forest Baptist Church to understand what it means to be “missional”; and (5) to lead Forest Baptist Church to take specific steps to minister to its community as a result of the preached Word.

This chapter focuses on evaluating the results of the project in light of the purpose and goals, using a seven-step evaluation process. First, the project will be evaluated based on the project’s stated purpose. Second, the outcomes of each the five goals are assessed. Third, the strengths of the project design and implementation are examined.

Fourth, the weaknesses of the project design and implementation are noted. Fifth, recommendations for how the project could have been improved are given. Sixth, the theological implications of this project are explored. Seventh, personal reflections on the project design, implementation, and impact on my future ministry are given.

¹The last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are commonly referred to as the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt 28:19-20).

Purpose

The project's purpose was to preach selected biblical texts in order to lead Forest Baptist Church, Forest, Mississippi, to be missional. I preached a ten-week missionally-based sermon series in the Sunday morning services August 15 through October 31, 2010.

The best indicators of how my preaching affected the congregation's understanding and application of what it means for a church to be missional is shown in the evaluation below of the goals I set for the project.

Goals

Five major goals were set for the project. These served as guides throughout the project.

The first goal was to exegete and preach selected biblical texts that focus on doing the Great Commission in a local context. The achievement of this goal was measured by three peer evaluators in three specific areas: biblical content, speaking habits, and presentation. I provided an evaluation instrument ("Sermon Evaluation") on which the peer evaluators recorded their input (see Appendix 3). Their input confirmed my decision to include evaluations by a peer group as a project methodology as well as my decision to ask them to evaluate my sermons over the course of the project and not merely at the conclusion of the project in order that I could use their evaluations to make adjustments to my preaching over the course of the project.

Biblical Content

Statements 1 and 6 on the "Sermon Evaluation" form I provided speak specifically to content. On each of the nine sermons the three peer group evaluators evaluated, they marked statement 1, "The sermon focused on the biblical text," between 8 and 10 (with 10 being the highest). The scores improved as the sermon series unfolded, indicating that I was able to use the evaluations of each sermon to improve how I handled the biblical content in subsequent sermons: the first three sermons I preached were given

ratings of 8, 8, and 9; the middle three sermons I preached were rated 9, 10, and 10; and the last three sermons I preached were also rated 9, 10, and 10.

The peer evaluators also rated statement 6, “I have a much better understanding of the passage after hearing this sermon,” between 8 and 10. The scores improved as the series progressed, indicating improvement in handling the biblical content throughout the series: the first three sermons I preached were rated 9, 9, and 8; the middle three sermons preached were rated 10, 10, and 8; and the final three sermons preached were rated 10, 10, and 8. As is shown, one evaluator did not change his rating over the course of the three sermons; it remained an 8. The other two, however, raised their marks, thus indicating they felt I had shown improvement. The high marks all three peer evaluators gave to statement 6 is evidence that I had properly exegeted and applied the biblical text in each sermon.

Speaking Habits

About my speaking habits, one of the peer group noted on his written evaluation of my second sermon, “The Proposal,” from Exodus 19:1-3, that “he needs to pace himself in the delivery. He starts out fired up which I like, but a varied pace of the message can strengthen his presentation.”² In his evaluation of the eighth sermon, “Meeting Them Where They Are,” from Acts 17:16-32, this evaluator wrote, “Great pace and was more relaxed. He engaged me,” thus indicating that I was improving in my speaking habits. The other two peer group evaluators did not address my speaking habits in their written evaluations.

Presentation

One of the peer group evaluators noted on his written evaluation of my first sermon, “God is Doing What?,” from Genesis 12:1-3, that I made “great eye contact, [and

²As per the agreement of participation in the project, members are not identified by name.

used a] variety of illustrations [that] helped keep the attention of listeners.” In the fourth sermon, “Risk it All,” from Mark 2:13-17, he wrote, “I love this sermon! It had every component necessary for impact; eye contact, biblical explanation, personal application.” His evaluation reflects an effective presentation.

Another peer evaluator wrote of the third sermon in the series, “The Call for Revolution,” from Jonah 3:1-10, “Good use of humor.” Of the ninth sermon “Club or Church,” from Acts 18:1-11, he wrote, “Scott’s enthusiasm enhances what he preaches.” The third evaluator did not address the issue of presentation.

The second goal was to improve my skills in the application of biblical texts in order to guide the church, in turn, to make proper application in its context. For this, I formed a five-member lay focus group that met weekly, and I intentionally structured the regularly scheduled Wednesday night services to incorporate discussion to evaluate how the congregation was applying the biblical texts from which I preached. This methodology was designed to allow me to determine if I was improving my ability to articulate appropriate application from the text. The lay focus group used the “Sermon Evaluation” (see Appendix 3) instrument to record their responses; the Wednesday night group used the “Wednesday Night Discussion” instrument (see Appendix 4).

Lay Focus Group

In their written responses and in the feedback at each meeting, it was evident that all the members of the lay focus group understood the missional idea. Two of the group had lived missional lives before the sermon series began, while three others were introduced to the idea through the project.

One wrote that based on the third sermon in the series from Jonah 3, he now understood that his personal “message to people [should be that] God has already paid for the judgment to come!” He also mentioned in the discussion time that the ability to tell people about God’s judgment is radically different from the message Jonah shared. He

said that it truly is good news. I saw that he was responding to the “Now, what?” of the passage. He understood the passage as it relates to his daily life.

About hearing my sermon based on Mark 2:13-17, one member of the group wrote, “Revealing Jesus means revealing our heart since our hearts belong to him.” He then wrote that this understanding gives freedom in sharing Christ, because it comes in the everyday moments of one’s life. He wrote that the missional life is really about living an intentional life of revealing Jesus in all one does. This was powerful evidence that he understood what it means to be missional. Observing him in his daily life, I saw that he puts this into practice at work and even at his son’s athletic events.

In reference to the sermon, “Meeting Them Where They Are!” from Acts 17:16-32, one woman wrote, “We become the church scattered, on mission with him, we are not created to sit, soak and sing this is not what Christ died for.” She used many of the actual words from my sermon. I learned that long before the sermon series began, she was one who had lived a missional life. One member of the group who also was living the missional lifestyle prior to the series summed up the experiences of the group best when he wrote, “Scott, thanks for allowing me to help on this project. It has been such a blessing for me.”

Wednesday Night Discussion

As I planned the project, I felt that the regularly Wednesday night meeting, which typically draws about 40 to 50 percent of the Sunday morning adult attendance, would be representative of the entire church body and that this group’s responses would give me a snapshot of what the larger congregation was hearing, understanding, and applying in their lives. Their responses confirmed my thinking.

One person wrote about the first sermon, “God is Doing What?” from Genesis 12:1-3, “Having a piece of the puzzle told me that I had a part to play in the kingdom.” Another wrote about the fourth sermon, “Risk It All,” from Mark 2:13-17, “I need to look for ways to involve the uninvolved and not wait on opportunities to come to me.”

Another wrote about the eighth sermon, “Are You Plugged In?” Acts 1:8, “I have struggled with how to be a good Christian, how to do the ‘things’ Christians should do. But it doesn’t matter what we do; if we do not do it through Christ, we will fail. It is through him and through him only that his will can be done. As a church, we must trust in him to guide us; we must do his will, not our own, and we must invest in people [and] not just people within our church but people in our community.”

These people were making the application that was intended from each sermon. Their comments were indicators that the “Now, What?” of the sermons was connecting with them. Thus, these comments show that application was being made by several people in the congregation. The congregation’s responses on the pre-and post-questionnaires gauged the depth of the response and will be evaluated in Goal 4 below.

The third goal was to improve my expository preaching skills. The process of having each sermon evaluated by one ordained minister who regularly preaches to a local congregation encouraged me to be very intentional in every aspect of building each sermon. Because the series covered a ten-week period, I was able to establish several healthy habits. These habits include: thinking through how people in various age groups hear a message, understanding the need to have input from other people in the sermon-building process, and contemplating varying introductions to each sermon.

In order to evaluate the effect of this project on my expository preaching, I will use the verbal comments of the peer focus group and their written responses on the “Sermon Evaluation” tool (see Appendix 3).

As laid out in chapter 3 of this project, expository preaching is not simply getting all the facts right, but it also is about calling the church to appropriate response and action. One of my peer ministers pointedly reminded me of this after his first evaluation of a sermon, which was sermon 3, “The Call for Revolution,” from Jonah 3:1-10. He asked if I planned for the church to be involved missionally in the community of Forest. He was concerned that hearing a message like the one from Jonah without

creating an outlet for missional living would only create frustration in the hearers. I then realized that in that sermon, I had not set forth a corporate application. The peer evaluator's comment made me aware of the need to include corporate outlets as well as individual application. In his evaluation of my final sermon "Club or Church?" from Acts 18:1-11, he wrote, "Scott uses a variety of illustrations to connect with hearers. He makes sense, offers specific ways for hearers to become doers." This indicated that he saw that my expository preaching had improved in that I now specifically included both individual and corporate calls to action to the people of Forest Baptist Church.

This peer evaluator addressed not only the issue of leading the people to act but also the issue of correct exegesis. In "We are on a Mission from God" from Matthew 28:19-20, he wrote, "Scott addressed relevant linguistic and grammatical matters without being too technical. His knowledge of Greek did not distract or overwhelm. Scott is so personable; in the pulpit, he is transparent. As a result, he enjoys a wonderful rapport with his congregation. His connection with them means they will listen to him. The sermon exhibited a balance: verse by verse, between exposition and explanation." One peer evaluator did not comment on the elements of expository preaching.

Through the process of having peers evaluate each sermon in the series, I learned about the more technical side of expository preaching skills. One evaluator noted about the first sermon, "God is Doing What?" from Genesis 12:1-3, that I "drove the one point home throughout the message and applied it to the community of Forest." Of the fourth sermon in the series, "Risk It All," from Mark 2:13-17, he noted that the sermon "had every component necessary for impact." Then, of the seventh sermon in the series, "Are You Plugged In?" from Acts 1:8, he noted that I "gave great background to the text." (He scored this sermon numerically higher than any other that he evaluated.) While there is no progression in his comments, the comments do show that I exhibited the skills necessary for effective expository preaching throughout the series.

The fourth goal was to lead Forest Baptist Church to understand what it means

to be “missional.” I used the pre-and post-questionnaires to assess the change in how the people of the church understood what it means to be missional. This format gave those youth and adults who were involved in the church’s Sunday school the opportunity to express what they had learned through this project. One hundred thirty-two people completed the pre-project questionnaire, and 90 people completed the post-project questionnaire.

There were three major shifts in the responses recorded on the Pre-project Questionnaire and the Post-project Questionnaire.³ The first major shift was in response to statement 9: “The way our church is doing things is the best way to reach our community.” Before the sermon series, the average score was 5.2, while after the series the average score was 6.0, a positive difference of 0.8. I believe this occurred not only as a result of the sermon series but also because throughout the 15 weeks of the project, many missional events took place in the life of the church. These both enhanced the church’s existing ministries and opened new doors to reach the community, which influenced the way the respondents understood what the church was doing in the community.

The second major shift in the responses of the pre- and post- questionnaires occurred in response to statement 10, “I am personally involved in missions.” Pre-project, the average score was 6.1; post-project, the respondents’ average score was 6.8, a difference of 0.7. This means that the perception of what it means to be missional changed as the sermon series unfolded and as each sermon included specific suggestions about how to be missional in the daily events of one’s life.

Before the project, as indicated by their responses on the questionnaire, many people saw being on mission as for those who serve in missions overseas or for those who participate in short-term mission trips in the United States or abroad. After the project, more people saw themselves as living the missional life where they live. It is

³See Appendix 1.

also possible that they simply got involved in the missional endeavors during the project. To a certain degree, they had begun to understand the “Now, What?” of the missional texts.

The third change was the most significant of all and occurred in response to statement 11: “I am willing to make whatever changes necessary to reach our community.” On the pre-project questionnaire, the score was average 7.9, while on the post-project questionnaire, the average dropped to 7.4. For me as pastor, this has been one of the most difficult things to accept. Cognitively, I know it is much easier to lead people to *learn* new things than it is to lead them to *learn and apply* new things in a short period of time. But emotionally, it is hard for me to accept. I, however, must note that a solid core of people in the church *are* willing to “make whatever changes necessary” to reach the community. I must hold on to the fact that 37 percent of the 90 people who completed the Post-questionnaire indicated that they “strongly agree” and 40 percent indicated that they “agree” with that statement. Thus, 77 percent “agree” or “strongly agree.”

Also, based on their responses to statement 10, evaluated above, they may still think primarily of missions as being involved in a time-specific project. This negative change shows that while people now may actually understand better what it means to be a missional people and what that will require of them, they are not yet willing to change. The goal of the project may have been too idealistic in stating that people could make such major changes in response to a 10-week sermon series.

I used the application model described in chapter 3 in order to convey the meaning of being missional to Forest Baptist Church. The “So, What?” was used to show that God has been a missional God from the beginning. In the Old Testament, the call of Abraham, Moses, and Jonah showed who God was. Jesus was missional in his very coming to the earth, and the early church modeled the missional life. As a result, I led the church to the “Now, What?,” which means that in light of who God is and what God has done in and with his people, we must now lead missional lives.

The fifth goal was to lead Forest Baptist Church to take specific steps to minister to its community as a result of the preached Word. I used the results of the Wednesday night discussion forum to evaluate how the people were applying the message of the missional life (See Appendix 4). About 40 to 50 percent of the adults who completed the Pre-project Questionnaire regularly attended the Wednesday night sessions (see Appendix 1). Each Wednesday night, the people who attended the discussion forum had the opportunity to tell what God was leading them to do as a result of the message preached on the previous Sunday morning.

The specific application of the sermon series began with an intentional effort in the Forest Housing Authority of Forest (“the Projects”). Before I had even shared this vision of reaching the people in the housing projects, someone in the first Wednesday night group wrote, “Go into areas of the town where we aren’t comfortable. Jesus spent time with sinners; who are we to not?” Another wrote that the church must place a higher priority on people and less priority on personal preferences. This shows that these two people cognitively understood the missional idea, which is the beginning step in setting the missional direction of a church. Thought patterns must change before actions change. In reality, at Forest Baptist, translating these ideas into actions is an on-going process.

Several individuals in the church fellowship did begin living missional lifestyles during the weeks of the sermon series, and, thus, are laying the foundation for a missional mindset in the church. As mentioned above, the initial step of a change in ideas has already begun. In hindsight, I now know that a more realistic goal for this project would have been to lead some individuals to change their mindsets about what it means to be on mission with God, which then would create the momentum to bring change in the entire church. These are the stories of some who took specific missional steps during the project:

One woman began a ministry, which she named Hot Heads, in which she knit hats for the homeless in the Forest community. She then used this ministry as an

opportunity to unite different aged women in the church around a common cause as they joined her in knitting the hats.

Three leaders of existing mission events united to hold a Block Party at the Forest Housing Authority (“the Projects”). They now are planning another block party in the spring in order to continue building relationships with people of the community. In the summer of 2011, they plan to bring in mission teams from across the United States to lead week-long evangelistic sports camps similar to the ones the church has conducted in New York City for six years (see chapter 1). They hope to bring youth from New York City to Forest as one of the mission teams, thus seeing the ministry come full circle. Because this mission will be conducted in Forest, it will require the people of the church to be involved in the lives of people in the community on an on-going basis; it will require adopting the missional lifestyle.

For the first time, the students who attended the church’s “Kids Across America” event (see chapter 1) will have mentors from Forest Baptist who will invest in them year-round. Until now, one family has carried out this ministry alone. As a result of my project, 15 people in the congregation have seen the possibility of making an impact in the lives of students who come from a different background and are willing to invest their lives in them. They are seeing how to be missional by interacting with students who are different from them.

Each year, the city of Forest hosts a chicken wing festival/craft show called “Wing Dang Doodle.” Because the major industry in Forest is the poultry business, everything revolves around the chicken industry. A member of Forest Baptist decided that since the entire community seems to turn out for this event, he needed to use this as an opportunity to share the love of Christ. So, he set up a booth at the event and used this as a missional opportunity. He shared his life with the community of Forest as people came to his booth for chicken wings and to hear about the love of Christ.

When a woman in the church asked the owners of the Sweet Pea Swap what

happened to the group's unsold children's clothes, she was told that they are given to charity. So, the woman asked if she could bring the clothes to Forest Baptist in order that she and the members of her Sunday school class could begin a Kidz Kloset where needy parents could get clothes for their children. She is not only living a missional life, but she is now leading others to lead missional lives.

Members of Forest Baptist have hosted ministers and laypeople from other countries in their homes. Each week, those who gather in Wednesday night prayer meeting pray for the nations one nation at a time, asking God to send workers to the harvest even if that means they are to go. The church family is learning to see that being missional means sharing the love of Christ in the neighborhood and around the world.

The children missions organizations, Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Action, have begun doing a mission once a month. To date, they have prepared shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child and gone to nursing homes. One second grader decided to give all her birthday gifts to a local children's hospital. She understands that she is serving those in need and desires to share the love of Christ with those in this world who are hurting.

While these missional examples indicate that individuals in Forest Baptist have caught the missional vision, the effect of this project on the congregational and institutional life of Forest Baptist Church will only be known in the years to come.

Strengths

This project was designed to share God's missional purpose with the people of Forest Baptist Church. Several strengths surfaced during the 15-weeks of the project. Five of those strengths are the impact of the sermon series itself, the input of the lay focus group, the input of the peer focus group, the timing of this project in the life of Forest Baptist Church, and the short-term outcomes in the life of Forest Baptist Church.

Sermon Series

The focus of the sermon series on the biblical approach to seeing God's missional heart in both the Old Testament and the New Testament was very helpful for the congregation, as indicated in their evaluations noted above. Each sermon presented the people with a challenge and an opportunity to join God's mission, the missional life. The repetitive theme of the sermons, all dealing with the missional nature of God, forced people in the congregation to reckon with the idea.

Lay Focus Group

The lay focus group provided me with encouragement that I was on the right track in how to lead the church to be missional and was also a helpful venue in which to discuss the ideas for the sermons. The bond that developed in this group was helpful both for me personally as a new pastor as well as for casting the missional vision for the future of the church.

I learned valuable lessons about the power of a small group and about the influence that can emerge from such a group. The lay focus group had its finger on the pulse of the church and thus could give a clear reading of what the church was thinking and thus what I could do to connect with the church in each sermon. And because they were heavily invested in the congregation, their enthusiasm about being missional carried much weight in moving other church members along on the journey to be missional. Each of the five members of the group suggested that I continue this in some form throughout my ministry.

Peer Group

The peer focus group also proved to be a great asset in the development of the project. The three men in the group provided valuable insight based on many years of ministry experience. Each minister's approach to the sermon they evaluated and their approach to me personally came from a different perspective. This gave me a more balanced view of the entire sermon series and of my abilities as a preacher.

Timing of the Project

The timing of this project could not have been any better had I orchestrated it. There were many factors in the life of the church that I never could have known. The most obvious example was the Block Party mentioned above which united three previously existing missions in the church to do a mission in Forest. This missional opportunity was placed on the church schedule in the middle of the series, and it gave the people a chance to be involved immediately. This was more than a “mission project” because the goal was to develop an ongoing relationship with people of our community. This was the beginning of an ongoing missional opportunity.

Short-term Outcomes

For many years, Forest Baptist Church has been involved in missions through giving to missions and through doing missions outside of Forest. This project brought the mission efforts closer to home. This has given more people the opportunity to see that God’s mission is all around them. With this being said, the church also is beginning to see that the needs are also great around the world.

Another outcome of this project was that it brought unity amongst already existing mission teams. Now these mission teams are excited not about the projects they represent but the missional efforts that represent God.

Weaknesses

Three specific weaknesses inherent in the project relate to demographics, the Wednesday night discussions, and vision casting.

Demographics

I should have given more attention to the age demographics of the church. Specifically, I should have taken note of the large number of older widows in the congregation. About 10 percent of the adults in the church are over 65 and are widowed. I did not have a representative from this group on my lay focus group. Their perspective

would have been helpful especially in the vision-casting dimension of this project. By including an older widow, I would have increased the influence in this large constituency.

Wednesday Night Discussions

Another weakness of this project was using the regularly scheduled Wednesday night discussion as a key element in the project. This weakness was multifaceted. First, for many of the older people in the congregation, who form the core of the people who attend on Wednesday nights, it was a struggle to remember something that was said on the previous Sunday morning. From their reactions, I believe this was not only an eye-opener for me but also for some of them as they recognized how quickly we all forget information.

Second, some people used the focus on the project as an excuse not to attend the Wednesday night services at all. I heard statements such as “I was not here Sunday morning; therefore, I will not be able to participate in the discussion, so I just won’t come.”

Vision Casting

While I cast the vision to the congregation related to specific missional activities that occurred during the time span of the project, I did not give clear information about some of these new missional events. Some people said knew about the events and knew that they were needed to help with the events, but they were not sure where some of the events were to be held. Lack of attention to detail is a weakness that I must address in my ministry.

Recommendations

First, I should have included an older widow in the peer group. I am not sure how much difference that would have made in the sermon evaluations or how much difference that would have made in planning this project. However, from the vision perspective, I definitely needed the buy-in from this group that carries significant influence in the congregation. I now recognize the importance of this demographic in the

church and have been working on bringing them onboard with the missional concept. I have already started by meeting with a Sunday school class of mostly widows. This was a lesson I believe will stay with me throughout my years of ministry.

Second, the Wednesday night discussion did not advance the project in the way I had planned. It, however, did allow me a venue to hear about what God had done in the lives of individuals. However, I was hoping an excitement would build around discussing what God was doing. Possibly, it would have been better if the discussion had been held on Sunday night since the sermon would have been fresh on people's mind, but that did not fit into the existing church calendar. Honestly, if I were to do the project again I would not include this segment at all.

Third, I would have developed a publicity team not to help cast the vision but to help publicize the details of the vision. This publicity team would have been made up of people in the church who grasped the vision and could have shared the details of missional events in small groups such as Sunday school classes. In fact, the lay focus group could have been used in this fashion.

Fourth, the lay focus group was very beneficial for me and for the members of the group as well. Group members suggested that I try to utilize a similar group in future sermon series. I plan to try to use a lay focus group at least once a year, especially for vision casting and to help me understand the needs of the congregation.

Theological Reflection

The core theological impact of this project obviously revolves around the idea of being missional. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God reveals his heart to reach all nations by using his people as his missional instruments. The missional pattern of life begins with a missional God. The biblical basis for the vision of being a church on mission is clear.

The missional idea, thus, is not new; however, the term is fairly new. Sometimes familiarity with a term makes the meaning harder to grasp. Being "on

mission with God” or being “a missionary” is such a term. God has called all of his followers to be missional and be “on mission” with him. All are to be “missionaries.” All his followers are to view every area of their lives as missional.

Three theological reflections have surfaced through this project. First, the reality has set in that “missional” covers both people who know Christ *and those* who do not yet know him. Being missional calls for God’s people to respond in God’s ways to *all* people. Therefore, being missional affects those within the church as well as those who have not yet been reached.

A second commonly held view of being missional or being a missionary is that one must have a specific assignment. However, being missional life is not assignment-driven; rather it is life-driven. One is to be missional in the day-to-day comings and goings of life. In essence, the missional life is allowing God to use a believer wherever he or she is. The missional life does not begin when one *enters* a “mission field,” because one is always *on* a mission field.

The missional life theologically hinges on understanding why it is important: It is the very heart of God. God-followers in the Old Testament, Jesus himself, and the believers in the early church all exhibited the missional life as demonstrating the heart of God. It is the biblical model; therefore, one must live the missional life if one is to reflect the heart of God. One cannot be changed by God and not reflect the heart of God.

Third, this project showed how important vision is to the life of a church. While not everyone in the church has bought into the new direction at Forest Baptist, most of the people of Forest Baptist Church are excited that the church now has a clear vision.

Personal Reflection

The writing of this project paper has forced me to improve my attention to detail. I have been forced to think through all that I have written. In the future, this process will help me in communicating both in writing and in speaking. At times, this

process has been painful, but the result has been worth it. Through this project, I have learned a great deal about my preaching and the importance of dealing with the details.

As for the project itself, the use of the lay focus group was without a doubt one of the highlights of the entire project. I plan to try to incorporate a similar group in my ministry when new directions are being introduced in the church. This group gave great insight and allowed me to get know a group of people in a more intimate way. Also, I saw how much the group appreciated being part of the sermon preparation process. At the conclusion of the project, they talked about how helpful it had been for them to think through the overall picture of a sermon.

I also learned a great deal about how people respond to change, especially a major change in thought. Many people are now open and ready to do whatever it takes. However, there are many who are not willing to do anything differently. The amazing thing to me is the influence of negative feelings. However, consistency of the message can overcome negative feelings. Change comes slowly, and I learned that it is always more of a process than I had previously thought.

As a pastor, leading a congregation can be a difficult task. The reality is that pastors make wrong decisions, and then they are often faced with the choice to admit their failures or attempt to cover them up. I, as pastor, made mistakes in this project, such as not including a widow on the peer focus group or using the Wednesday night service for the discussion group. I acknowledged my mistakes and have learned a great deal about the value of admitting my mistakes.

Finally, the importance of the pastor casing a vision for the congregation was amplified through this project. I have learned much about people, about vision, and about myself. About people: They want to be led, but often they do not follow without grumbling. About vision: Vision is an absolute necessity. People who buy into the vision will go to great lengths to see the vision come to fruition. About myself, as a husband, father, pastor, and Bible teacher, I must use my time in the most effective way

in order to be more effective in each of these areas. Each one is a calling and blessing. I believe that this doctor of ministry project has sharpened my tools to be more effective in each of these areas of my life.

Conclusion

Forest Baptist Church has taken many positive steps on the missional journey. While the process is only beginning, the project has laid a firm foundation for a major transition in the thought patterns and actions of the congregation. The church's strong missions background provided a strong entry point on which to build not only support of missions but on which to actually be missional. A person in the Wednesday Night discussion wrote it best when he wrote of the direction set forth in the project, "Stay the current course—exciting times are coming to Forest!"

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT EVALUATIONS

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to apply biblical passages to lead Forest Baptist Church to become missional. This research is being conducted by Scott Fortenberry for purposes of project research. In this research, you will give feedback on your understandings of being missional. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please rate the following statements.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10
Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

- 1. Giving to the Cooperative program makes me “missional.” _____
- 2. Expository preaching requires application to my life. _____
- 3. Missionaries are the only people who should study culture. _____
- 4. The church should primarily focus on the needs of its members. _____
- 5. Our community knows we are here, and they will find us. _____
- 6. Only the “called” should be involved in missions. _____
- 7. Missions are done overseas only. _____
- 8. Expository preaching helps me to apply the Scripture. _____
- 9. The way our church is doing things is the best way to reach our community. _____
- 10. I am personally involved in missions. _____
- 11. I am willing to make whatever changes necessary to reach our community. _____
- 12. I view everyday as mission opportunity. _____
- 13. God is a missionary God in the Old Testament. _____
- 14. The early church reached its communities. _____
- 15. Jesus was concerned about being on mission with God. _____

APPENDIX 2

TEN-WEEK SERMON SERIES

Genesis 12:1-3 “God is Doing What?” God’s missional heart is revealed with the call of Abraham.

Exodus 19:3-6 “The Proposal.” God’s proposal to his people is to be a nation of priests.

Jonah 3:1-10 “Revolution.” God’s revolution begins in the lives of his servants.

Mark 2:13-17 “Risk it All.” Jesus risks it all for the sake of those who will come to know him.

Luke 19:1-10 “Sticks and Stones.” Jesus involved his life with the sinners such as Zacchaeus in order to reveal his missional heart.

Matthew 28:18-20 “We Are on a Mission from God.” Jesus gives a clear call to his followers to live lives making disciples of all nations.

Acts 1:8 “Are You Plugged In?” The Holy Spirit empowers Christ-followers to live missional lives.

Acts 17:16-32 “Meeting Them Where They Are.” Paul engages the culture in Athens.

Acts 18:1-11 “Club or Church.” The message of the gospel must be shared in ways in which the culture can understand.

Acts 13:1-3 “Just Do It.” Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to serve as missionaries.

APPENDIX 3
SERMON EVALUATION

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to apply biblical passages to lead Forest Baptist Church to become missional. This research is being conducted by Scott Fortenberry for purposes of project research. In this research, you will give feedback on your understandings of being missional. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name: _____ Pastor: Scott Fortenberry

Sermon:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10
Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly agree

1. _____ The sermon focused on the biblical text.
2. _____ The sermon's introduction was a "doorway" into the text.
3. _____ At least one contemporary illustration was used as a "window" into the text.
4. _____ The sermon was interesting.
5. _____ The sermon was inspiring.
6. _____ I have a much better understanding of the passage after hearing this sermon.
7. _____ The pastor made *specific* application from the biblical text to the congregation.
8. List one specific application the pastor made.

9. Describe one application **you** might make based on this sermon.

10. What advice, correction and/or encouragement do you have for the preacher?

APPENDIX 4

WEDNESDAY NIGHT DISCUSSION

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to apply biblical passages to lead Forest Baptist Church to become missional. This research is being conducted by Scott Fortenberry for purposes of project research. In this research, you will give feedback on your understandings of being missional. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Do you think last Sunday morning's message applies to you? If so, how?

How specifically does last Sunday morning's message apply to Forest Baptist Church?

What changes will be required in order to make these applications

In the church?

In my life?

Suggestions for the implementation of these changes:

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING SELECTED BIBLICAL TEXTS TO LEAD FOREST BAPTIST CHURCH, FOREST, MISSISSIPPI, TO BE A MISSIONAL CHURCH

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In chapter 1, Forest Baptist Church is described. The church needed to transition from being a mission-event church to being a church whose members live missional lives in their community. This required a new approach to its entire ministry.

In chapter 2, the biblical mandate of God's missional purpose is explored. Throughout the Old Testament, God's missional purpose is revealed. Then Jesus, in his incarnation, was completely missional. Finally, the early church modeled the missional approach.

Chapter 3 focuses on the process of applicational preaching through applying selected biblical texts to the situation at Forest Baptist Church. The sermons in the project were designed to lead the church to deal with the pertinent scriptural issues that would lead to a "missional" approach to ministry.

In chapter 4, the methodology used in the project is presented. Chapter 5 includes an analysis and evaluation of the project's implementation. These two chapters could serve a field guide for any church seeking to make a similar transition to being missional.

VITA

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