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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN  
HERMENEUTIC OF RICK WARREN

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
William Bland Mason, Jr.

May 2005

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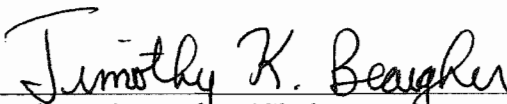
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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN  
HERMENEUTIC OF RICK WARREN

William Bland Mason, Jr.

Read and Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Timothy K. Beougher (Chairperson)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Daniel L. Akin

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Thom S. Rainer

Date April 22, 2005

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To Teresa,  
my friend, my love, my partner  
in glorifying God  
*Sola Deo Gloria!*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CLASS	Christian Life and Service Seminar
GW	God's Word Translation
MSG	The Message
Ph	New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips

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## PREFACE

Many people have helped me to finish the work you now read. Associate Dean Tim Beougher, my supervisor, not only gave me valuable advice and direction as I began focusing in on this topic, but also challenged me to do nothing less than my very best in researching and writing. Danny Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Thom Rainer, Dean of Southern's Billy Graham School also encouraged me in my focus on this topic. In addition, Professor Robert Smith of Beeson Divinity School was the first to challenge me to pursue doctoral work and to find great joy in doing so.

Many friends and family have stood beside me through prayers and support. My friends Shane Waters and Terry McIlvoy prayed for me faithfully and prodded me when I needed it most. Many times when ministry and studies were wearing me down, their words would help me to refocus and remember Who it was that called me to service. In a similar way my parents provided spiritual and financial support.

Special thanks to the members and leadership of Springfield Baptist Church, where I am pastor, for their support in my pursuit of a Ph.D. Also, the church was more than gracious in allowing me time to research and write. It is truly an honor to serve such a godly group of people.

Without a doubt my greatest thanks go to my wife, Teresa. From the night years ago when we both sensed this path was God's will to the proofreading of the

chapters of this study, she has stood with me. My completion of a Ph.D. is due largely to her unrelenting belief in me and her faithfulness as a wife and mother.

Finally, all honor and glory is due to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Truly, everything is a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. All praise is due to Him.

W. Bland Mason, Jr.

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2005

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Rick Warren**

*Christianity Today* called him, “The Most Influential Pastor in America,”<sup>1</sup> while the *Weekly Standard* referred to him as “. . . clearly among the two or three most influential Americans working from the West Coast.”<sup>2</sup> He is Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and best-selling author. Many in the Christian and secular media have recognized Warren’s growing popularity, especially in the last few years.<sup>3</sup>

Rick Warren was born in San Jose, California. He is the son, grandson and great grandson of preachers. His great-grandfather was saved under the preaching of C.H. Spurgeon.<sup>4</sup> After high school, Warren attended California Baptist College where he earned a B.A. Afterwards, Warren earned a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Forth Worth, Texas and a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Stafford, “A Regular Purpose-Driven Guy,” *Christianity Today* [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?/ct2002/012/1.42.html>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Hewitt, “The Force Multiplier,” *The Weekly Standard* [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from <http://www.weeklystandard.com/content/public/articles/000/000/002/179pnsdo.asp>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>For a list of various praises lauded to Warren, see “Rick Warren: Author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*” [on-line]; accessed 29 June 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com/pcom/specials/rickbio.asp>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>Rick Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” (held at Saddleback Valley Community Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1999), audiotape.

Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.<sup>5</sup>

Warren and his wife moved to Orange County, California and founded Saddleback Valley Community Church shortly after he graduated from seminary in 1980. At the core of Warren's success is his preaching and teaching. Today, Saddleback has more than 20,000 people each week in attendance at its weekend worship services, with more than 80,000 names on the church roll.<sup>6</sup> In the past seven years over 9,200 new believers have been baptized at the church. Due to Saddleback's tremendous growth and its unique strategy, many pastors and churches have been impacted by Warren. The Purpose-Driven Church seminar has been attended by more than 320,000 pastors and church leaders from over 120 countries.<sup>7</sup>

His books also have found widespread success. *The Purpose-Driven Church* was the winner of the Gold Medallion Ministry Book of the Year by the Evangelical Publisher's Association and was chosen as one of the "100 Christian Books that Changed the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."<sup>8</sup> More recently his book *The Purpose Driven Life* has sold over twenty-two million copies, as of April 2005, and has been used in more than 20,000 churches, representing 80 different denominations, as part of the "40 Days of Purpose" campaign. In addition, Warren founded Pastors.com, a website committed to those in ministry, which draws between 60,000 and 100,000 church leaders each day with "news,

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<sup>5</sup>"Rick Warren, Senior Pastor," [on-line]; accessed 10 April 2000; available from <http://www.purposedriven.com>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>"About Rick" [on-line]; accessed 10 June 2004; available from <http://www.purposedrivenlife.com>, rick.asp; Internet.



chat forums, sermons, and other resources for those in ministry.”<sup>9</sup>

Many church leaders have spoken up in support of Warren’s methodology of church growth and *The Purpose Driven Life*. Leith Anderson, pastor of Woodale Church in Minneapolis said, “Rick Warren is a master at communicating God’s truth and understanding culture. Listen and learn from him!”<sup>10</sup> *Church Executive Magazine* said Warren was “‘#8 in a list of the 50 Most Influential Christians in America’ – after [well-known figures such as] President Bush, Attorney Gen. Ashcroft, Justice O’Connor, and Billy Graham.”<sup>11</sup> Another list from *The Church Report* places Warren as number four, behind President Bush, Mel Gibson, and Billy Graham.<sup>12</sup> Another strong endorsement for Warren comes from megachurch pastor Adrian Rogers, of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis. He says, “Rick Warren has been used to challenge my thinking in the area of church growth in an incredible way.”<sup>13</sup>

A recent survey of pastors done by Barna research reveals the impact Warren is having on pastors and churches. When asked to list up to three individuals whom they believe have the greatest influence on churches and church leaders, pastors named

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<sup>9</sup>“Rick Warren” [on-line]; accessed 29 June 2004; available from [www.pastors.com, /pcom/specials/rickbio.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/specials/rickbio.asp); Internet.

<sup>10</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), back cover.

<sup>11</sup>“Rick Warren.”

<sup>12</sup>“The 50 Most Influential Christians in America,” *The Church Report* [on-line]; accessed 28 January 2005; available from [www.thechurchreport.com, content/view/170/32](http://www.thechurchreport.com/content/view/170/32); Internet.

<sup>13</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 3.

Warren 26 percent of the time.<sup>14</sup> He was beaten only by Billy Graham with 34 percent. When asked who was the most trusted spokesperson for Christianity he was listed third, behind Billy Graham, 58 percent, and James Dobson, 20 percent.<sup>15</sup> It is clear from this research that pastors believe Warren has had a great amount of influence on their churches and ministries.

Warren's impact has even been recognized by the mainstream media, mainly because of *The Purpose Driven Life*. Time magazine included Warren in a list of sixteen people who mattered in 2004. The article comments:

Spirituality sold well in 2004, but few did better than Pastor Rick Warren and his faith-based self-help book *The Purpose Driven Life*, which hit 20 million copies sold. Though criticized for preaching Christianity lite, Warren led by example, giving away 90% of his royalties, campaigning against hunger and expanding a drug-recovery program for prison inmates.<sup>16</sup>

The impact Warren is having on both the church and secular society in the United States may be unmatched by any pastor.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It could be argued that Warren is the most powerful pastor in American today due to the unparalleled popularity of his sermons and books. There are many strong opinions for and some against Warren, yet there has been little written about him outside of a few articles. There seems to be little attempt to examine his teaching and preaching

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<sup>14</sup>“Pastors Reveal Major Influencers on Churches,” *The Barna Update* (14 January 2005) [on-line]; accessed 21 January 2005; available from [www.barna.org, FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=178](http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=178); Internet.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>“16 People Who Mattered in 2004,” *Time* (27 December 2004) [on-line]; accessed 27 December 2004; available from [www.time.com, time/personoftheyear/2004/people/13.html](http://www.time.com/time/personoftheyear/2004/people/13.html); Internet.

objectively and in depth. This author's observation is that the vast majority of people either accept Warren's teachings without question or jettison Warren's teachings as a whole. This author has found no available resources that seek to evaluate Warren's sermons, teaching, and books objectively by critically analyzing them in small increments.

One of the overwhelming reasons for doing this research is the incredible success of *The Purpose Driven Life* and the related 40 Days of Purpose. The impact of this book and program is hard to overestimate. The number of people who are being impacted by Warren is in the millions and these same people are being exposed to his hermeneutic. Though he uses many Scriptures faithfully in the book and in the corresponding study, there are some instances where the translation he uses, where he divides the verse or verses, or the conclusions he makes, are not supported by a grammatical/historical approach to the interpretation of the passage. What makes this issue so important is what Warren is doing is not merely making a point, but modeling a methodology of interpretation that many pastors and church leaders are adopting. With his vast influence, his method of interpreting the Bible has already been adopted by some pastors and this trend is only likely to grow.

The goal of this study is to critically analyze the hermeneutic of Rick Warren as revealed in his sermons, writings, conferences, and Bible studies, giving special attention to his use of translation. The research will demonstrate Warren's rate of consistency in applying his own principles of interpretation that he has set forth in his writings and in particular his Purpose-Driven Preaching Conference. His hermeneutical method generally follows a conservative, evangelical approach to Scripture, but the

question of how consistently he applies this methodology must be examined.

### **Background of the Study**

This author first heard of Rick Warren in 1995 when this author read *The Purpose Driven Church*. It made an impact in some significant ways. First, it changed the way this author looked at the church. Having grown up in a traditional church with a full gambit of programs, not much thought had been given to the specific biblical purposes behind all these ministries and activities of the church. A second way the book made an impact was that it helped clarify the need for the church to make sure that it is contextually relevant in trying to reach its community with the gospel. Third, the book provided a detailed look into a megachurch. This author had never been exposed to a church that size. Finally, Warren offered a systematic look at the background, structure, and strategy of Saddleback Church.

Over the next few years, this author's exposure to Warren grew. A one day satellite simulcast of the "Purpose Driven Church Conference" exposed this author to Warren's teaching on a deeper level. The experience led to the purchase of Warren's "C.L.A.S.S. 101: Discovering Church Membership" for use in ministry. During that same time a friend of this author gave access to some tapes of a sermon series Warren had preached. This material further demonstrated Warren's ability as a powerful communicator who had a true gift in helping his audience see exactly how God's Word applied to them.

Then in 2002 this author read *The Purpose Driven Life* and in 2003 led his church through the "40 Days of Purpose," based on the book. This author gained much

insight from the reading and was encouraged to study Warren's hermeneutic. Though almost everything Warren said was biblically sound, questions arose about the way he used Scripture to make his points. This author had very little previous exposure to this model of using scripture in preaching and teaching. The "40 Days of Purpose" was the final impetus that influenced this author to write this study on Warren's hermeneutic.

It is easy to see the relevance of this study for pastors, teachers, and for church growth as a discipline. Warren's influence is ubiquitous through his conferences, highly popular books, the "40 Days of Purpose," his church, his sermons, and his website. More than 115,000 pastors subscribe to his weekly e-mail newsletter, "Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox."<sup>17</sup> Despite his enormous success, Warren has his critics, though this author could not find any evangelical scholar of national repute who spoke out against Warren by name except John MacArthur.<sup>18</sup> In March 2005, MacArthur went on CNN to offer an evaluation of *The Purpose Driven Life's* strengths and weaknesses.<sup>19</sup>

There are some lesser known preachers who speak out against Warren but who do so in an unbalanced way and do not evaluate parts of his teaching against the whole.

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<sup>17</sup>"Rick Warren."

<sup>18</sup>In his recent book *Fool's Gold*, MacArthur includes a review of *The Purpose Driven Life* by Nathan Busenitz. This review is also posted on the website of MacArthur's ministry Grace to You. See Nathan Busenitz, "A Sense of Purpose: Evaluating the Claims of *The Purpose Driven Life*" [on-line]; accessed 7 April 2005; available from [www.gty.org, bible\\_faqs/bible\\_content.php?qa=busentiz\\_purposedriven.html](http://www.gty.org/bible_faqs/bible_content.php?qa=busentiz_purposedriven.html); Internet.

<sup>19</sup>MacArthur went on CNN in 16 March of 2005 to voice some of his concerns about *The Purpose Driven Life*. While the interview was edited by CNN to try to make MacArthur look jealous of Warren, MacArthur explained later on his website that he had made both positive and negative remarks about the book. For the CNN interview see the transcript of "The Phenomenon of 'The Purpose-Driven Life'" *CNN Newsnight Aaron Brown* (16 March 2005) [on-line]; accessed 7 April 2005; available from <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0503/16/asb.01.html>; Internet. For MacArthur's and Grace to You's response to CNN's editing of the interview see "John MacArthur on CNN's *News Night with Aaron Brown*" [on-line]; accessed 7 April 2005; available from [www.gty.org/index/sidebar.php?id=492](http://www.gty.org/index/sidebar.php?id=492); Internet.

For example, in a recent article posted on a website for Reformed studies a writer criticizes Warren's understanding of the church from *The Purpose Driven Life* and in doing so inadvertently makes a statement verbatim from another place in Warren's teaching. He says, "What is the church? Is the church an organization? Is it a business? Is it a non-profit benevolence organization? . . . No, the church is the living Body of Christ. *It is not an organization; it is an organism*" (emphasis mine).<sup>20</sup> What the writer did not realize is that in defending his position "against" Warren, he inadvertently used the exact same words Warren uses in *The Purpose Driven Church*<sup>21</sup> and "C.L.A.S.S 101: Discovering Church Membership."<sup>22</sup> Many of those who criticize Warren have gained little respect because they often fail to evaluate his teaching as a whole, instead of merely setting up straw men to knock down.

Another reason this study is relevant is concern that Warren's influence has spread beyond evangelical and Christian circles. His book *The Purpose Driven Church* has been listed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (better known as "Mormons") as one of the top ten resources on effective missionary work. In commenting on the book, the author of the list says, "Even though this book is written by a non-member, it is definitely one of the top five missionary resources I've seen. . . . This book helps missionaries and members recognize ways they can be more effective that

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<sup>20</sup>Brian Johnson, "An Examination of Rick Warren's Teaching on 'Exponential Growth'" [online]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from [http://www.monergism.com,thethreshold/articles/questions/RickWarren\\_growth.html](http://www.monergism.com,thethreshold/articles/questions/RickWarren_growth.html); Internet.

<sup>21</sup>See Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, 16.

<sup>22</sup>Rick Warren, "C.L.A.S.S. 101: Discovering Church Membership," Saddleback Valley Community Church (Lake Forest, CA), 1999, teacher's transcript.

would take them years to come up with on their own.”<sup>23</sup> One wonders how a work written by an evangelical Christian pastor, using hundreds of Scriptures, could be so easily adopted and endorsed by a cult for their missions efforts. For these reasons, and others, there needs to be a critical evaluation of Warren.

In the process of researching and writing this study, I have come across no books and only one dissertation that has dealt with Warren directly to any significant degree. In 2001, at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, John F. Taylor wrote his Ph.D. dissertation titled “Toward the Development of a Model of Application for Contemporary Preaching (D. Stuart Briscoe, Charles R. Swindoll, Richard D. Warren).” As the title suggests his main research, as far as Warren was concerned, was with his model of application. Consequently, Taylor’s dissertation is utilized only to the degree it relates to the topic of this current study.

Several issues have arisen in my research for this study. First, the approach to Scripture that Warren delineates in his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” is a grammatical/historical approach, and he is consistent most of the time in applying it. He says, “The serious study of any text begins with understanding four things: the historical background of the text, the literary style of the text, the grammatical structure of the text, and the theological framework of the text.”<sup>24</sup> Despite statements like these, this study will show that he misrepresents texts on occasion. Specific instances in his preaching and teaching demonstrate that he does not always use the grammatical/historical approach

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<sup>23</sup>“12 Top Missionary Resources” [on-line]; accessed 14 April 2004; available from [www.missionaryhelper.com](http://www.missionaryhelper.com), resources; Internet.

<sup>24</sup>Rick Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 16.

faithfully. This issue is examined in detail in the study.

A second issue that is worth noting is Warren frequently makes use of paraphrases and loose translations throughout his preaching, teaching, and writing. It is not uncommon for Warren to use six or more different versions in one sermon. In Warren's advice on using these translations, he argues for selecting a particular Bible version because it uses one of the topical words that the preacher is preaching about. His blanket endorsement of more than fifteen Bible versions becomes apparent when he argues that preachers should use programs like Quickverse® to search many different versions to find the word or words related to the preaching topic.<sup>25</sup> While this author recognizes that certain translations and paraphrases can be helpful in preaching and teaching, this study demonstrates how Warren's widespread use of these versions has impacted his interpretation of Scripture.

Warren's writings, sermons, and conferences reveal an acceptance of every translation and paraphrase that is known by this author. Nowhere in his writings and conferences does Warren specifically deal with the issue of how to evaluate a good or bad translation of a passage. Showing his support of all Bible versions he writes, "English-speaking people should thank God that we have so many different versions to use for devotional reading."<sup>26</sup> Does Warren believe that "devotional reading" includes everything he says in his sermons, books, articles, and seminars since he makes use of such a vast number of translations in all of them? Questions arise concerning his prolific use of such a plethora of Bible versions. Does Warren believe that all translations and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., audiotape and text, 32.

<sup>26</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 325.



paraphrases are equally accurate to the original languages? Is it safe and faithful to the meaning of God's Word to base a major truth point on a paraphrase or loose translation? These and other questions about Warren's use of translation, including frequency of usage, are answered in this research.

This study also shows that his predominate methodology of preaching is what he calls "verse-with-verse expositional preaching" and that it is an inherent part of his hermeneutic. In examining the twenty-two years of Warren's sermon series, only about a dozen of his sermon series focused on one section of Scripture and only two series could be found where Warren went through a book of the Bible.<sup>27</sup> In examining messages, Warren focuses on one main text only thirty percent<sup>28</sup> of the time or less, though further study will help solidify this number. The research will show that his use of this methodology of preaching has made it easier to misuse and misrepresent texts. It is important to note because of his conservative theology and his high view of Scripture, even when Warren makes a point misusing a text, he does not teach anything conflicting with Scripture.

### **Research Sources Used for the Study**

The nature of this study demands access to a large number of primary sources. In seeking to gather these sources, it became obvious it would be nearly impossible to

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<sup>27</sup>These sermons series are listed on the Internet only back to 1983, though Warren began Saddleback in 1980. Also, it is difficult to determine an exact number of series based on a text because texts are rarely listed in the titles or with the sermons. The two series discovered through a book of the Bible are on the book of James (fifteen messages) and Ecclesiastes (eight messages). See "Full Series List" [on-line]; accessed 10 June 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/fullserieslist.asp>; Internet.

<sup>28</sup>The documentation of this statistic is seen in chap. 3.

gain access to all of Warren's preaching and teaching. In addition, the sheer volume of materials would make it practically impossible to study and analyze all of them for the purpose of this study. Before the study began, this author already had personally bought several of Rick Warren's sermon series, books, and some other materials. The Southern Seminary library and The Louisville Presbyterian Seminary library both had copies of some of Warren's tapes, including audio tapes from a 1991 conference on Southern's campus in which Warren was the guest speaker.

In addition to these materials, others had been acquired for personal use and for use in vocational church ministry. These resources include all four of Saddleback's "Christian Life And Service Seminars." Also, as this author led his church through the "40 Days of Purpose," access was gained to all the materials associated with this campaign, including sermons, small group curriculum, and follow-up materials. In addition, all five books written by Warren were acquired and a copy of Warren's Doctor of Ministry Thesis which he completed at Fuller Theological Seminary was obtained through Inter-library loan. Also, through this internet, access was gained to all the copies of Warren's free articles in the Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox series.

A collection of conference materials from Warren was acquired as well. This author has the complete DVD collection of the "Purpose Driven Church Conference" as it was taught in 1999, including the conference notebook. In addition, the "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference" was obtained several years ago. Finally, through a friend's generosity, access was gained to a copy of the "How to Communicate to Change Lives" videos that were produced by Saddleback in the mid 1990s.

In trying to gather Rick Warren's sermons, it became clear there would have to

be a limit to the number of sermons used. There are some 161 sermons series listed on the Pastors.com website with most series being four to eight messages long. A total of 678 messages are listed in the various series. Acquiring this number of messages was not only cost-prohibitive (over \$2400), it was also not reasonable for the scope of this study. The goal was to have a representative sample of weekend sermons so as to be able to give a fair analysis of his hermeneutic. The sermons series that were used for this study are seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sermon Series Used for Research

Number of Messages	Title of Series	Year
6	What God Can Do Through Ordinary You	1985
8	Achieving Through Believing	1985
4	How To Make Your Life Count	1989
10	Building Great Relationships	1991
7	Psalm 23 - Stress Busters	1995
8	Building a Great Life	1997
9	Essentials for 21st Century Living	1999
7	Clear Thinking	2000
7	The Purpose Driven Life	2002
2	Understanding the Passion	2004
4	Can You Hear Me Now?	2004
10	Christmas Messages	1991-2000

Some of the sermons were already in this author's possession, but the others were purchased to try to make sure a fair sampling of sermon series were achieved. In all there are seventy-six sermons<sup>29</sup> from eleven sermons series and a Christmas collection. All of

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<sup>29</sup>It is quickly noted that the total number of messages listed above add up to eighty-two, but only seventy-six are being used for this study. The reason for this discrepancy is that six of the messages in the eleven series are preached by Tom Holladay or another Saddleback associate pastor. Thus, only

these sermons were preached by Warren over the last nineteen years. The vast majority of sermons used for this study appear in the sermons series listed above which represents approximately 12 percent of all of the weekend messages. The percentage of weekend messages that this sampling represents is in all likelihood even higher, but it is not possible at the time of the writing of this study to gain access to how many of the messages in the total number of sermons were preached by other Saddleback pastors.

In selecting the sermon series to use for this study, the aim was to provide an adequate sampling of messages spread as evenly as possible over the last nineteen years so general trends and insight could be obtained. As mentioned, some of the series had already been acquired before the start of this project. They were purchased for personal use and without any agenda in mind in relation to Warren's hermeneutic. The other message series were added based on two criteria. First, consideration was given to the year they were preached so an even distribution over the targeted time period would be achieved. Second, there was a focus on longer series so that a good sampling of sermons from that year would be acquired. Some of Warren's series are as short as two messages and would not provide enough of a sample for the given year. In addition to these sermon series, access was gained to several other messages from special occasions and speaking engagements, as well as a small number of sermons from incomplete message series.

One other comment about Warren's sermons needs to be made. There were no messages used from Saddleback's midweek believer's worship services. In this service, Warren does not do the majority of the teaching, though he has taught verse-by-verse

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seventy-six are preached by Warren. Warren has made even greater use of his associate pastors over the last ten years.

through the book of Romans. Another Saddleback pastor, Tom Holiday, does most of the preaching at the midweek believer's service and uses the verse-by-verse method through biblical books as well as doctrinal and thematic message series.

### **Limitations to the Study**

There are several limitations to this study that must be noted. First, the focus of the study is not on Rick Warren's methodology of preaching, except where it has a direct impact on his hermeneutic. This work is not a critical examination of the verse-with-verse methodology of preaching, though an overview of Warren's philosophy behind his method is included. This author accepts this method as valid, though with inherent dangers that some other methods of exposition do not have. In Warren's case, his use of verse-with-verse preaching has served his purpose well at Saddleback Church. The research closely examines how his use of this methodology has impacted how he uses Scripture in his preaching, teaching, and writing.

A second way this study is limited is in the scope of study on Warren's preaching. The study will only go back to 1985, with most of the primary sources coming from the 1990's through the last four years. As mentioned above, nearly seven hundred sermons preached since 1983<sup>30</sup> are available for purchase on pastors.com, yet this study is not a critical analysis of Rick Warren's preaching. The scope of this study limits the amount of time and space that can be committed to analyzing Warren's sermons. For the sake of this research, weight was given to Warren's preaching, teaching, and writing since

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<sup>30</sup>Only three series from 1983 and two from 1984 are available. These sermon series add up to be only twenty-eight messages out of a two-year period; 1985 is the first year that a majority of messages are available, so this study picks up with that year.

1985. His popularity began to take off at this point and has grown to reach its pinnacle in recent years.

A third limitation of this work is that it is not an analysis of the “purpose-driven” methodology for church growth. It would be intriguing to see critical research done on this methodology and its results, but that goes far beyond the scope and purpose of this study. *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conferences and materials do make thorough use of Scripture so the methodology is examined in relation to how it reveals Warren’s hermeneutic.

Fourthly, this work is not primarily an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of various versions of the Bible. Warren’s use of many different versions raises questions about the reliability of those versions as a whole, so there will be a brief examination of the translation philosophy and development of each version Warren uses. The way Warren uses translation is only part of a total examination of Warren’s hermeneutic so this study does not go into a deep examination of biblical translations. It is accepted by this author that every version has strengths and weaknesses and that multiple translations and paraphrases can be used to promote an overall deeper understanding of Scripture.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study is first and foremost a thorough examination of Rick Warren’s sermons, teaching, writings and conferences so that an understanding of his teaching on and practice of interpreting scripture is achieved. The data was gathered by examining his Purpose-Driven Preaching conference, his book *Personal Bible Study Methods*, and other pertinent resources to ascertain his hermeneutical approach. Once his approach is

delineated, his practice of biblical interpretation is evaluated through the systematic survey of his books, teachings, and sermons. First, the major books, *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, will be treated separately, mainly due to their impact and sheer size. The conferences and Bible studies associated with these two books are included to assure a comprehensive examination. His two other books, *The Power to Change Your Life* and *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* are also analyzed.

Secondly, a representative sampling of his sermons over the last twenty years is used to establish his hermeneutic in relation to his preaching. This sampling, while not exhaustive, is thorough and provides a solid basis for evaluating Warren's interpretation. Particular attention is paid to how closely and consistently Warren follows his own teaching on biblical interpretation.

This study also evaluates Warren's use of translation by measuring the frequency of usage of each version. For the purpose of this study, the term "translation" is used only to represent true translations of the Bible from the original language, as opposed to paraphrases which are based on English versions. The term "version" is used as a generic term for all editions of the Bible, including translations and paraphrases. By using Scriptural indexes to Warren's books and surveying his sermons and teaching materials, the statistical frequency of translation usage is ascertained. These numbers are then used to analyze how and where Warren uses certain translations. As misuses of biblical texts arise in this study, particular focus is given to the translation usage at these points.

The systematic approach to Warren's hermeneutic divides the research into four major sections. The first section will deal with Rick Warren's teaching on biblical

interpretation found in his conferences and writings. This research will make clear that Warren's purpose-driven hermeneutic is based on his understanding of the purpose of the Bible. In particular, attention is focused on Warren's doctrine of the Bible as it is revealed in his writings, sermons, and teaching material. Another area examined is Warren's Bible study methodology, both for personal and teaching situations. Finally, Warren's overarching emphasis on the essential nature of application to the task of Biblical interpretation will be addressed. This section will lay the foundation for evaluating Warren's hermeneutic in all of his works.

Another major section of research will focus on Warren's preaching as a source for evaluating his hermeneutic. An explanation is given of how Warren's approach to preaching is closely related to Saddleback Church's overall philosophy of ministry. The need to preach to people's "real" needs provides the foundation for Warren's verse-with-verse methodology of preaching. This relationship between Warren's philosophy and practice are made clear. Another section provides an examination of how Warren uses Scripture as a basis for sermons and series. Categories are developed to help classify these materials. A systematic evaluation of how he uses Scripture in various sermon series over the last twenty years is included with a statistical analysis of the number of Scriptures used per sermon. An additional section gives clarification to exactly how Warren uses Scripture to make a point in a sermon. The strengths and weaknesses of Warren's verse-with-verse methodology are offered in relation to the task of interpreting Scripture.

A third major section addresses Warren's hermeneutic as it is revealed in his writings and conferences. After making several points from Warren's doctoral thesis,



there is a close examination of Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference. This research also includes examination of the material from Saddleback's Christian Life and Service Seminars (C.L.A.S.S.) which are written by Warren and are based on *The Purpose Driven Church* model. After examining that material, the focus turns to *The Purpose Driven Life* and the various Bible studies associated with the "40 Days of Purpose." The biblical basis for the 40 days approach and the interpretive trends in the material are evaluated. To assure a comprehensive examination of Warren's writings, attention is also given Warren's other books: *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* and *The Power to Change Your Life*.

A final major area of Warren's hermeneutic that is addressed is his use of translations and paraphrases as key to understanding his hermeneutic. Attention is given to Warren's approach to Bible versions as revealed in *Personal Bible Study Methods*, *The Purpose Driven Church* and conference, C.L.A.S.S. 201, and appendix 3 of *The Purpose Driven Life*. An overall list of translations and paraphrases that Warren uses is given along with a basic introduction to each version. A statistical analysis is made of the frequency of usage of various biblical texts and translations in three major areas: Warren's sermons; *The Purpose Driven Church* and its conference; and *The Purpose Driven Life*. Trends from these statistics are evaluated in light of Warren's general approach to the Bible and interpretation.

### **Thesis of the Study**

This study suggests several important findings about Rick Warren's hermeneutic. First, while Warren's teaching on biblical interpretation is sound and is

consistent with evangelical scholarship, his practice is not always consistent with that teaching. Without a doubt the vast majority of times that Warren uses Scripture, he is faithful to the meaning of the text, even if it may not be the full meaning, as is the case when he sometimes uses paraphrases. Though he does use Scripture fairly, the majority of the time, he is still subject to misusing a text on occasion. These instances never appear to be in a desire to change the meaning of the Bible, but because of his consuming passion for being both biblically based and life-oriented.

Second, Warren's verse-with-verse sermon methodology, which also appears to be the method in writing *The Purpose Driven Life*, seems to be part of the cause for his occasional clear misuses of Scripture. Warren makes use of so many passages in his preaching, teaching, and writing that it seems that sheer time constraints must prohibit him from doing a grammatical/historical study of every verse. To illustrate, take the approximately one thousand verses referenced in *The Purpose Driven Life*. Was Warren able to examine all of these in context before using them? Evidence suggests he was not.

Third, translation is the essential key to understanding how Warren goes about interpreting Scripture. His use of translation points more clearly to his desire to make application than any other element of his teaching or preaching. He will use any translation in his preaching, teaching, and writing if he believes that it provides the clearest contemporary interpretation of a passage so he can move directly to application. While this practice does not always result in the misuse of a text, it sometimes does. His use of Bible versions in this way appears to be related to his belief both in the purpose of the Bible, and in the purpose of preaching or teaching.

## Conclusion

Perhaps no one today in ministry is having more of an impact on people than Rick Warren. That fact alone makes this research very timely and relevant. While there is much to commend in Warren's approach to Scripture there are also concerns. This study recognizes the great success that Rick Warren has legitimately achieved. He is making an eternal impact for the kingdom, yet, as with all human beings, he is fallible. The effort of this study is to honestly analyze Warren's hermeneutic without giving consideration to his popularity and ministry success.

Previous research by this author into Warren's hermeneutic provided both the motivation and the foundation for completion of this current study. This author has been deeply impacted by Warren's practical insights into biblical church health. His influence has shaped how this author does ministry today, yet since first being exposed to him, there have always been questions about his hermeneutic. It is this author's belief this study is a fair and balanced look at Warren's method and practice of biblical interpretation.

## CHAPTER 2

### WARREN'S TEACHING ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

What does Rick Warren believe about the Bible? What does he say about interpreting the Bible? These are fundamental questions in a quest to firmly understand and critically analyze his hermeneutic. This chapter focuses on answering the two previous questions giving specific attention to Warren's view of the Bible, how to study and interpret it, and the importance of application in the process of interpretation. It is essential to comprehend these issues so that a thorough evaluation of Warren's hermeneutic can be completed. Later chapters not only explore what Warren's hermeneutic looks like in practice, but also evaluate how closely he follows his own principles for interpretation as they are set forth in this chapter.

#### **Warren's View of the Bible**

The first place to begin understanding Rick Warren's hermeneutic is by examining his view of the Bible. How one studies and interprets the Bible grows directly out of how one views the Bible. Evidence from Warren's works suggests that he has a high view of both the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Like most evangelicals, Warren does not shy away from explaining his faith in the Bible as God's Word: "Theologically, I am a monergist and firmly hold to the five

solas of the Reformation.”<sup>1</sup> In another place he says pointedly, “Personally, I consider the inerrancy of Scripture as a non-negotiable belief.”<sup>2</sup> This view of the Bible’s inspiration and authority emerges in many places including his sermons, his writings, his conferences, and his church’s public information and published church resources. This section will provide insight into Warren’s doctrine of the Bible using these materials.

## Sermons

Warren makes prodigious use of the Bible in his sermons though frequently it is done in the style of verse-with-verse preaching.<sup>3</sup> In listening to or reading any of his sermons it becomes clear that there is a strong emphasis on the authority of the Bible. After introducing a point in a sermon, Warren will often say, as Billy Graham does, “The Bible says. . . .” He then equates what the Bible says with what God wants the listeners to do. For example, in the sermon, “How to Make Your Life Count,” after reading 2 Timothy 3:16, Warren says, “The Bible says that God’s Word is your soul food. . . . you need to stay in the Word if you’re going to make it in the 1990’s. God says, ‘This is what I want you to do.’”<sup>4</sup>

In other messages Warren emphasizes both the nature of the Bible as God’s Word and its subsequent authority. In “How God Talks to You,” the first point in the

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<sup>1</sup>One of the “solas” being “sola Scriptura.” See “Purpose Driven Phenomena: An Interview with Rick Warren,” *Modern Reformation* [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2004; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Rick Warren, “We Must Learn to Think Like Unbelievers,” *Rick Warren’s Ministry Toolbox*, no. 24 [on-line]; accessed 22 April 2004; available from [www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com); Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Warren’s verse-with-verse preaching model is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>4</sup>Rick Warren, “Possessing Your Future” *How to Make Your Life Count*, pt. 4 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1989), sermon transcript.

message is “God Speaks to Us Through the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> He explains,

The reason we have the Bible is because God has already spoken over thousands of years and people God told to write it down and [*sic*] they did. . . . Everything in the Bible is God’s Word and it is useful. That means it’s one hundred percent reliable and it’s one hundred percent practical. You can use it in your life. . . . The Bible says everything in the scripture is God’s Word.<sup>6</sup>

Here Warren has given insight into his view of the Bible as revelation, emphasizing that it came from God through human authors. He also shares his belief that the Bible is infallible: “It’s one hundred percent reliable” and that it is applicable to contemporary people, “you can use it in your life.”

Another message where the inspiration and authority of the Bible comes out is “Using the Bible to Make Decisions.” In it the Bible is focused on as the literal Word of God and as the sole authority for making wise decisions in life. After making the point that every decision should be in harmony with the Bible, Warren says,

What I’m about to do does God say it’s OK to do in the Bible? What does God have to say about it? In life you have to decide what’s going to be your ultimate authority. It really boils down to two choices – God’s word is going to be your authority for life in which you base your decisions or the world is what you’re going to base your decisions on. The word or the world. What God says or what other people say.<sup>7</sup>

He challenges people frequently in his sermons and in *The Purpose Driven Life* to submit to the authority of God’s Word and obey. In doing that, he says people will find their lives lining up with God’s will.

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<sup>5</sup>Rick Warren, “How God Talks to You,” *Can You Hear Me Now?* pt. 2 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2004), sermon transcript.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Rick Warren, “Using the Bible to Make Decisions,” *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 6 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1999), sermon transcript.

## Writings

In many of Warren's writings, what the Bible says is simply equated with what God says, often without any explanation of how. The reason for this is because periodically Warren speaks about why the Bible can be trusted as the Word of God.<sup>8</sup> Also Warren believes that people are ultimately convinced of the truthfulness of the Word of God not by rational arguments, though he uses them, but through experiencing the truth of God's Word in their lives. He says, "When the Word of God changes our lives and makes us more like Jesus, that's when we realize what the real purpose of life is, what true joy is, and what it means for God to change the world through us."<sup>9</sup>

Warren's more popular works also emphasize the Bible as the Word of God. In the *Purpose Driven Life*, Warren makes use of almost a thousand verses of Scripture. How these verses are used will be discussed in a later chapter, but any way one looks at it there is an overwhelming emphasis on Scripture's authority. This point is often seen in the book as time after time the authority of Scripture and the authority of God, to direct our lives, are inextricably tied together. Warren will often refer to a Scripture and then immediately follow it with a sentence beginning, "God is saying. . . ," or "God wants you to. . . ."

One of the basic premises of the *Purpose Driven Life* is that life's purpose is

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<sup>8</sup>See Tom Holladay, "Building Your Life on a Solid Foundation," *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 5 (Lake Forest CA: Saddleback Church, 1999). This sermon offers classic arguments for believing the Word of God and then emphasizes how to make it the truth basis on which a person can live his or her life. Though Warren did not preach this particular sermon, it was in the middle of a series, the rest of which were by Warren, and Warren reiterates the sermon's main point in the next sermon in the series. Other places where the doctrine of the Bible is more fully explored are in Saddleback study courses C.L.A.S.S. 201 and *Foundations*.

<sup>9</sup>Rick Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods* (Mission Viejo, CA: Encouraging Word, 1981), 15.

not something that people stumble upon by their own wisdom or insight. It only comes in a relationship with the Creator God. Warren establishes on day one that we can know life's purpose because God has chosen to reveal it. He says, "Fortunately there is an alternative to speculation about the meaning and purpose of life. It's *revelation*. We can turn to what God has revealed about life in his Word" (Warren's emphasis).<sup>10</sup> He then defines what he means by "his Word:" "God has not left us in the dark to wonder and guess. He has clearly revealed his five purposes for our lives through the Bible."<sup>11</sup> All of human life is under God's authority and that same authority is inherent to the Bible as the Word of God. Thus, to hear from the Bible is to hear from God.

Another place this truth comes through is in day 24, titled "Transformed by Truth." It says, "Determine to first ask, 'What does the Bible say?' when making decisions. Resolve that when God says to do something, you will trust God's Word and do it whether or not it make sense or you feel like doing it."<sup>12</sup> In the same section Warren unapologetically makes the assertion that most people's problems in life happen because they do not submit to the authority of God's Word.<sup>13</sup>

In 1996, Warren published *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message or Mission*, which has sold more than one million copies and has been translated into twenty one languages.<sup>14</sup> Rich Karlgaard, publisher of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 187.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>"Rick Warren" [on-line]; accessed 29 June 2004; available from [www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com); Internet.



*Forbes*, called it “the best book on entrepreneurship, business, and investment.”<sup>15</sup> With such accolades by secular media, one might suspect that the book does exactly what the subtitle says not to do. Yet, there are over 360 references to Scripture in the *Purpose Driven Church*<sup>16</sup> and the Bible is held up as God’s Word throughout the book. In one place in particular he says, “Since God’s Word is ‘the Word of Life. . .’<sup>17</sup> and just a few paragraphs later says outright, “. . . all Scripture is equally inspired by God.”<sup>18</sup> As with his other writings, *The Purpose Driven Church* does not include a section outlining Warren’s specific view of Scripture, yet a very clear picture emerges of Warren’s view as one goes through the book.

The guiding principle to understand the nature and purpose of the church is from God and is revealed in His Word, the Bible. Warren argues that for most churches to grasp this principle will require a “new perspective” because most churches are not functioning in the biblical way. It is not up to Christians to determine how to “do” church. God has settled that by giving us the Bible. He says, “You must begin to look at everything your church does through the lens of five *New Testament* purposes and see how *God intends* for the church to balance all five purposes. . . . Plans, programs, and personalities don’t last. But God’s purposes will last” (emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup> It is precisely because these purposes are from God’s Word, the Bible, that they are endowed with

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Though *The Purpose Driven Church* itself does not contain a Scripture index, this author purchased one that is available through [www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com).

<sup>17</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 297.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 80-81.

God's indelible authority.

Warren stresses that a church's mission statement must reflect the purposes given in the New Testament by Christ. He says, "An effective purpose statement expresses the New Testament doctrine of the church. Remember we don't decide the purposes of the church – we *discover* them. Christ is the head of his church. He established the purposes long ago" (emphasis his).<sup>20</sup> The authority of the New Testament is the authority of Christ and therefore His church must hear His word and follow His plan.

*The Purpose Driven Church* offers a further example of the authority that Warren believes the Bible has in the life and work of the church. The entire paradigm that Warren advocates, which has five purposes of the church, is built around Matthew 22:37-40 and Matthew 28:19-20, also known as the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Though the purposes of the church are not exclusively found in these two texts, these two texts do offer concise insight into the nature and mission of the church.<sup>21</sup> Warren stands on them as having the full authority of God and argues that the five purposes are not up for debate, they are from God.

If the Bible is the Word of God, as Warren asserts, then approaching the Word of God for study must be a sacred task. Warren makes sure that his readers comprehend this truth in his book, *Personal Bible Study Methods*. He writes, "A haphazard study of the Word of God is an insult to the sanctity of Scripture. It is a slap at the holiness of

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 102-03.

God, who gave us that Word.”<sup>22</sup> Warren emphasizes that while the Bible can be studied like any other book, it is not just any other book, and thus must be treated with the respect due to the “Word of God.” Warren drives this home a few pages later in the same book when he says, “Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in your study. The best way to understand the Bible is to talk with its Author. . . . Ask God to open your eyes to His Word.”<sup>23</sup> Here, Warren seems to suggest that authorial intent is the guiding principle for interpretation and ought to be what any Bible reader is ultimately after if they want to “hear from God.” Later analysis of his hermeneutical process further validates this view.

In “What on Earth Am I Here For?” volume 1 of the Purpose Driven Life small group series, the foreword gives another good example of how the Bible is frequently referred to as being what God says: “The *Bible says* nothing about ‘lone ranger’ faith; yet more than 50 times in the New Testament, *God speaks* of a ‘one another’ type of faith” (emphasis mine).<sup>24</sup> No distinction is made between what the Bible says and God speaking. This clear emphasis on the Bible as “God’s Word” comes out to one degree or other in all of Warren’s writings, many times without any explanation. It seems to be a non-negotiable for Warren so that he writes from this perspective without feeling the need to defend it.

## Conferences

Rick Warren teaches two main conferences: the “Purpose Driven Church

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<sup>22</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 15.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup>Rick Warren, “What on Earth Am I Here For?” The Purpose Driven Life Small Group Series, vol. 1 (Lake Forest, CA: Purpose Driven, 2003), 2.

Conference” and the “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.” The first has been attended by more than 320,000 individuals from over 120 different countries.<sup>25</sup> The ministries of many pastors and church leaders are being shaped by these conferences. What do they reveal about Warren’s doctrine of the Bible? This section will examine these conference materials to further clarify what Warren believes about the Bible.

Much like the rest of Warren’s teaching and writing, the “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” is full of Scripture references that are given the full authority and weight as God’s Word. The belief in the inspiration and power of the Bible are not a peripheral issue to Warren. Early in his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” Warren states, “I am assuming that you have already settled the basics of preaching in your life. . . that you have settled the fact that effective preaching is built upon three primary commitments: the authority of the Word of God; the truth of the Word of God; and the relevance of the Word of God. Until you accept those three things . . . you’re not ready to preach.”<sup>26</sup> He actually tells the conference attenders that if they have not settled this issue, they need to close their notebook, and go sit in their car and pray until God gives them that conviction.<sup>27</sup> He believes that one of the greatest needs today is “for preachers to have a sure conviction, to believe and to demonstrate that God’s Word is the answer.”<sup>28</sup>

The “Purpose Driven Church Conference” does have many of the same

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<sup>25</sup>“Rick Warren: Author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*” [online]; accessed 29 June 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com, pcom/specials/rickbio.asp>; Internet.

<sup>26</sup>Rick Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” (Mission Viejo, CA: Pastors.com, 1999), audiotape.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

teachings as *The Purpose Driven Church* book; however, it does have some different material and thus it is helpful to briefly examine what it reveals about Warren's view of inspiration. As with the book, the conference material makes great use of Scripture to support the points that are made. One of the suggestions offered to conference attendees is to go home and lead the congregation to "study the biblical passages about the church." He then offers forty-one passages in the New Testament that can be used. Warren believes that if churches will study the New Testament, they will arrive at God's five purposes for the church: "We don't get to choose the purposes."<sup>29</sup>

In the session called "Attracting a Crowd to Worship," Warren emphasizes that the Bible gives us the definition of true worship. Using John 4:24,<sup>30</sup> he says that this is what God calls worship. He goes on to say further that style is not a concern to God because where and when we were born will determine our style, but the parameters of true worship are set up by God and revealed in His word for all Christians everywhere.<sup>31</sup> In order for a congregation to be sure their worship is pleasing to God, they should focus more attention on how He has defined it in His Word. In fact, what God has said becomes part of the very basis for worshiping God. Saddleback's definition of worship says, "Worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He's said, and what He's doing."<sup>32</sup> "Who He is" and "what He's said" are revealed in Scripture.

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<sup>29</sup>Rick Warren, "Purpose Driven Church Conference" (Foothill Ranch, CA: Pastors.com, 2003), text and DVD.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.: "God is spirit and His worshipers must worship in spirit and truth" (NIV).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

## Saddleback Information and Resources

Another place where Warren's view of the Bible can be seen is in Saddleback Church's main website which contains a clearly delineated set of doctrinal beliefs, each with numerous Scripture verses offered for support. In the Saddleback Church statement of faith the article, "What is the Bible?" states, "The Holy Spirit inspired human authors to write the books of the Bible. Every word of scripture is chosen by God himself. The Bible is God's love letter to all of humanity and is the final authority in every issue it communicates. It is complete truth, and we can trust it for all matters in this life and eternity."<sup>33</sup> This view is clearly not a limited view of authority, as a few evangelicals might hold, which argues that the Bible is only authoritative in the areas of faith and practice.<sup>34</sup>

One of the clearest places that Saddleback Church's, and thus Rick Warren's, view of Scripture appears is in the church's systematic theology course called, *Foundations*. It is written by Saddleback's longtime associate pastor Tom Holladay and by Kay Warren, Rick's wife. For these two reasons, it is certainly safe to argue that it strongly reflects the pastor's doctrinal beliefs. In the study, two sessions are dedicated to the Bible. The first session introduces the concepts of revelation, inspiration, and illumination, and then expands on the first two, leaving the third to be exclusively focused on in the next session. In defining revelation, the *Foundations* study states, "Revelation means that God has chosen to reveal his nature and his will to us through the

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<sup>33</sup>"What We Believe" [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from <http://www.saddleback.com>; Internet.

<sup>34</sup>See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 93-95.

Bible. The Bible was written so that God could show us what he is like and what he wants us to be like. An understanding of God comes solely through his decision to reveal himself to us.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly Saddleback Church and Warren hold to a strongly conservative view of the doctrine of revelation.

The *Foundations* study goes on to define “inspiration” as “the process through which God gave us the Bible. God worked in the hearts of human writers to inspire them to write down his words. God’s words written through these people are perfect, infallible, and trustworthy.”<sup>36</sup> Far from the Bible “becoming the Word of God,” as Neo-Orthodoxy asserts, *Foundations* argues for the classic evangelical position that the Bible is inherently the Word of God and that it does not contain any false or misleading information caused by “human error.” The extent of the inspiration of the Bible is summed up later in the session when the writers emphasize “two important words to understand: *Verbal*, God inspired the WORDS, not just the ideas;” and “*Plenary*, God inspired ALL, not just part” (emphasis theirs).<sup>37</sup> The foundations study clearly emphasizes the importance of the Bible in all matters in life. As with most conservative systematic theologies, the authors of *Foundations* place the introduction to revelation (two sessions on the Bible) as the first two sessions following a basic introductory session.

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<sup>35</sup>Tom Holladay and Kay Warren, *Foundations*, Teacher’s Guide, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 41.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 56.

## **Bible Study and Interpretation**

Having laid the foundation of Warren's view of Scripture, this section focuses on the process of studying a Bible passage or passages in order to arrive at an interpretation. Three main sources are used to arrive at an understanding of the hermeneutical process. The first is a book called *Personal Bible Study Methods: 12 Ways to Study the Bible on Your Own*, which Warren published in 1981. The second source is The "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference" audio tapes and workbook. Finally, Saddleback's Christian Life And Service Seminar (CLASS) "201 – Discovering Spiritual Maturity" will be utilized to help construct an accurate picture of the hermeneutical task. The types of Bible study methodologies in these three sources fall into two distinct categories. One is focused on personal Bible study and Christian growth while the other is focused on Bible study for sermon or lesson preparation. These two methods are dealt with separately in this section.<sup>38</sup>

### **Methods for Individual Bible Study**

*Personal Bible Study Methods* was written early in Warren's ministry and evidence suggests that he has not changed his approach to Scripture since then. In fact Warren still recommends this book in his C.L.A.S.S. 201 as a helpful resource.<sup>39</sup> In addition, this early work laid the foundation for much of what has been taught about

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<sup>38</sup>The only exceptions to this point are the two chapters in *Personal Bible Study Methods* that are committed to thematic and topical Bible study. These chapters share common material with the method that Warren advocates for preachers and teachers so material from them will be included in the second section.

<sup>39</sup>See Rick Warren, "C.L.A.S.S. 201 – Discovering Spiritual Maturity," Teacher's Syllabus (Foothills Ranch, CA: Pastors.com, 2003), 11.



Bible study by Warren and Saddleback over the last twenty-four years. There are principles, quotations, and references from *Personal Bible Study Methods* that appear in *The Purpose Driven Church*, in *The Purpose Driven Life*, in conference materials, and in numerous messages.

*Personal Bible Study Methods* highlights twelve ways to approach Scripture for Study: Devotional; Chapter Summary; Character Quality; Thematic; Biographical; Topical; Word Study; Book Background; Book Survey; Chapter Analysis; Book Synthesis; and Verse-by-Verse Analysis.<sup>40</sup> The book is written on a layman's level, but provides helpful insight into various methods for examining Scripture. Warren tries to help the reader to approach the Bible with respect and to make sense of its message. In the introduction, Warren argues that "what we need is a systematic, regular plan of study, whether we go through a book, study a word, analyze a person's character, study a chapter, or choose another method."<sup>41</sup> It is not enough for a person to merely open the Bible and read it, there must be true understanding and application.

Warren recommends a number of tools to be used in the Bible study process. The reference works that Warren recommends are helpful in getting a picture of how Warren himself approaches the task of interpretation. We will briefly survey them here. The first tool recommended in *Personal Bible Study Methods* and in "C.L.A.S.S. 201" is a study Bible. In 1981 when *Personal Bible Study Methods* was published there were a very limited number of study Bibles available so his only two recommendations were *The*

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<sup>40</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 5.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 15. He says, "It is a slap at the holiness of God who gave us that Word" for anyone to approach Scripture in an indiscriminate way (Ibid.).

*Thomson Chain-Reference Bible* and *The Open Bible*. In 201, Warren's recommendations still include the Thompson Chain-Reference as the best topical study Bible, but his other recommendations have changed to *The Life Application Study Bible*, *The NIV Study Bible*, and *The Disciple's Study Bible*. Warren recommends *The Life Application Study Bible* as his first choice and the "best personal study Bible."<sup>42</sup> As the name denotes, the main focus of this Bible is application and Warren makes use of its model for application in his preaching conference. This point will be expanded in a later section of this chapter.

In addition to a study Bible, Warren's other suggested resources include an exhaustive concordance, a Bible encyclopedia, a Bible dictionary, a topical Bible, a Bible handbook, a set of word studies, an Atlas, and commentaries on various books of the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Many of these are now available in user-friendly Bible programs and Warren mentions WordSearch® and PCBible® as examples. In his "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," Warren suggests Parsons Quickverse® as the best Bible program for pastors to use in preparing sermons and Bible studies. He says it is "my favorite to use because I find it the fastest and easiest to use."<sup>44</sup>

The basic methodology involved in studying the Bible is described by Warren in the introduction to *Personal Bible Study Methods*. He says,

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<sup>42</sup>Warren, "C.L.A.S.S. 201 – Discovering Spiritual Maturity," 11.

<sup>43</sup>For his explanation of each of these tools, see Warren, "C.L.A.S.S. 201 – Discovering Spiritual Maturity," Teacher's Transcript, 11-13; and Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 19-25.

<sup>44</sup>Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," text, 32. In particular, Warren mentions that Quickverse® offers some of the translations he uses: NIV, NASB, NCV, NLT, GWT, LB, NRSV, ICB, and KJV.

A serious Bible student follows these same basic steps when he approaches the Word of God. The first step is *observing* – seeing the basic facts contained in the text under study. Next comes *asking questions* – discovering additional facts by more intense observation. Third, he must begin *interpreting* – analyzing what the text means. Fourth, he must begin *correlating* what he has discovered with other biblical truths he knows; this is done by cross-referencing verses and comparing Scripture with Scripture. Finally he draws a conclusion, *applying* to his life in a practical way the truth he has studied.<sup>45</sup> (emphasis his)

While this is obviously a preliminary explanation of the Bible study process, and therefore limited, it does provide the basic outline for understanding each of the twelve methodologies Warren discusses in the book.

One of methods mentioned in the book, The Chapter Summary Method, is particularly helpful in seeing how Warren employs his Bible study process in studying one passage. He recommends taking a chapter of Scripture and studying it using a ten step process. In reading it in preparation for study Warren says, “Your goal is to feel the flow of the chapter, so don’t be concerned with the details at first. Try to capture the central message and the writer’s overall theme.”<sup>46</sup> This statement and his methodology suggest that a central part of the interpretive process is arriving at the original author’s intended meaning.

In step one, called “Caption,”<sup>47</sup> of the Chapter Summary method, the goal is to use one to five words to capture the theme of the passage. The second step, “Contents,” involves outlining or summarizing the major point or points of the passage, taking genre into consideration. Here he warns, “Don’t try to interpret the chapter; just make

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<sup>45</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 16.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>47</sup>Warren uses “C’s” as the first letter of each step to help the reader remember the method.

observations on its contents.”<sup>48</sup> The next step is called “Chief people” and focuses on who the main people are, why they are included, and what is significant about them. In the fourth step, the Bible student identifies the “choice verse” that summarizes the chapter or the “writer’s argument,” depending on the passage. The next step is to identify the “crucial words” or keys words used in the chapter. After this step, one is to list any difficulties or “challenges.” The seventh step involves utilizing “cross references” to help clarify the message of the chapter. In this step Warren is following the Reformation principle of “Scripture interpreting Scripture.”

The eighth step, called “Christ Seen,” offers great insight into a dimension of Warren’s hermeneutic. In this step Warren makes the statement, “The entire Bible is a revelation of the Person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>49</sup> He emphasizes how Jesus used the Old Testament to testify about Himself to the disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 24:27. The goal of this step is to understand how the particular chapter, from the Old or New Testament, relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ. He does not advocate forcing an interpretation, but allowing the text to reveal statements that point to Christ.<sup>50</sup>

The ninth step, “Central Lessons,” calls upon the reader to put the major principles of the passage into written form. In seeking to arrive at these points Warren calls the reader to ask, “Why does God want this passage in the Bible? What does He

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>50</sup>This “Christ-Centered” interpretation is certainly consistent with hermeneutical models from scholars like Sydney Greidanus, Graeme Goldworthy, and Bryan Chapell. See Sydney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

want to teach me from this chapter? What is the central thought the writer is trying to develop?”<sup>51</sup> Again, the guiding principle for the interpretive process here is the author’s intended meaning. “Conclusion,” the final step, turns to the process of application. Since application is a major theme and inherent to Warren’s hermeneutical process, it will be discussed later in an entire section of this paper.

### **Studying the Bible for Preaching**

The “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” is where Warren teaches his methodology for sermon development and delivery. Part of this conference material is dedicated to teaching how Warren deals with selecting and studying Scripture. The insight from this material provides a thorough understanding of how Warren approaches Scripture in developing his sermons, but also in his teaching and books.

Warren summarizes his approach to sermon development with the acrostic C.R.A.F.T.<sup>52</sup> He bases it on Ecclesiastes 12:9-11, which says, “*In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also **taught the people** knowledge; and he **pondered, searched out and arranged** many proverbs. The Preacher **sought to find delightful words** and to **write words of truth correctly**. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd” (NASB, his emphasis).<sup>53</sup> This method for preaching will be examined more closely in the chapter on Warren’s sermons, but for now this method needs to be examined for what it reveals*

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid. 49.

<sup>52</sup>See Appendix 1.

<sup>53</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 14.

about what Warren says about hermeneutics.

The first part of message development is Collect and Categorize. Warren collects Bible verses first, even when he is preaching on one single text. It is helpful to know what the Bible says about the subject. In collecting verses, it is essential to examine the context of every verse to make sure it is being used correctly. One of the ways Warren does this study is by making a list of all the words related to the subject and then utilizing software concordances to “discover all that God has said about the subject.”<sup>54</sup> For example, in developing his sermon series “The Purpose Driven Life” he made a list of fifty-six words that related to that topic.<sup>55</sup> After doing so he researched these words in eight different translations and found over one thousand verses that could have been utilized for that series though he ended up using only about three hundred. Another example Warren offers is how he looked up the word “success” in the King James Version and found only two references, but when looked up in other translations and paraphrases it can be found many times. He mentions that the *Living Bible* has thirty-six references to “success.”<sup>56</sup>

After arriving at a list of related verses, the next step is to “Categorize.” This step is completed by looking for similarities between verses and for recurring themes, and

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. Examples of words he looked up were, *God's will, the will of God, the will of the Lord, life, balance, purpose, planning, vision, counts, organization, matter, worthwhile, worthless, ability, meaning, goals, gifts, heart, work, boredom, quality, choice, faithful, called, mission, etc.*

<sup>56</sup>One immediate observation about this methodology is that words are not used consistently across translations so the true meaning of the original language can be obscured or even misrepresented. Though Warren does emphasize textual exegesis in his next point, Research, he offers no caveat here concerning misusing a Scripture by using a poor translation or failure to take into account a verse's context. This point will be expounded in chapters three and five of this study.

by grouping verses together accordingly. For help in further explaining how to do this process Warren points his listeners to chapter 4 of *Personal Bible Study Methods*, which gives an approach to a thematic Bible study. This method centers around using the six journalistic questions: who? what? where? when? why? how? By asking these questions in relation to a particular theme, one can begin to group and outline the answers and eventually draw conclusions about how the Bible deals with that theme.<sup>57</sup> Warren suggests setting up a system for collecting and categorizing and making it a habit of collecting and categorizing every day.<sup>58</sup>

The next step in Warren's process of sermon development gives the clearest explanation of his hermeneutic. What he calls "Research and Reflect" is built on Ecclesiastes 12:9a (NASB) where it says, "The Preacher. . . pondered and searched out . . ."<sup>59</sup> The "Research" comes from the phrase "searched out" and is explained by Warren as "studying with your mind,"<sup>60</sup> while the "Reflect" comes from the word "pondered" and means "listening with your heart."<sup>61</sup> The Research is the "serious" part of sermons study and is what is classically called "exegesis." What all does this involve for Warren? He says, "The serious study of any text begins with understanding four things: the historical background of the text, the literary style of the text, the grammatical structure of the text,

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<sup>57</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 16.

<sup>58</sup>Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," text, 16.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., audiotape.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

and the theological framework of the text.”<sup>62</sup> Though he refers to “text” in the singular form here, it can be assumed that Warren was advocating that a historical/literary/grammatical/theological study must be done on “each” of the texts used in a sermon to assure faithfulness to the author’s intended meaning.<sup>63</sup>

There is little explanation of the time involved in this process of exegesis, but it must be a long and involved process for Warren since he frequently makes use of ten or more different Scripture passages in a sermon. The “favorite” tool for Warren in doing exegesis is *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, and he also recommends D.A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies* as helpful in avoiding word study errors.

The reflection part of this step is what is referred to as the “devotional” aspect of sermon preparation. One reflects on a text by meditating on it and for insight. Here Warren directs people to the section on meditation in chapter one of his *Personal Bible Study Methods*. Here Warren defines meditation as “essentially thought digestion. You take a thought God gives you, put it in your mind, and think on it over and over again.”<sup>64</sup> To meditate on a text Warren gives several suggestions: visualization of the story or circumstances of the author; verbally emphasize each word in the passage discerning how that impacts the meaning; paraphrasing the text using modern words and phrases; personalize the passage by using “I” and “me” in place of names or pronouns; using a

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>The previous comment is made in the context of explaining his verse-with-verse approach to Scripture and immediately follows his step of “Collecting” and “Categorizing” texts for use in a sermon or series. The “Research” is to be done on these passages.

<sup>64</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 34.



series of questions to apply the passage to your life; and praying the text back to God.<sup>65</sup>

The previous step, “research,” provided the objective, exegetical study of the text and will help the interpreter avoid off-the-wall or misguided interpretations. The reflection step is letting the text speak to the preacher’s heart after it has spoken to his mind.

The last step in sermon development also provides further wisdom into Warren’s hermeneutic and may explain why at times he is accused of misinterpreting a text or taking it out of its context. “Trim and Tie Together” are the “T’s” in Warren’s acrostic C.R.A.F.T. Here he recommends preachers trim the number of verses they use and trim the background information that is shared in the message. He says, “You do not need to share the context of every verse. You do have to understand it yourself to make sure that you are using it in an adequate, accurate way.”<sup>66</sup> He also “warns” preachers that giving “too much detail of a passage can actually hide or dilute the power of the text.”<sup>67</sup>

### **The Importance of Application in Interpreting a Text**

In discussing Warren’s understanding of interpretation, it is nearly impossible to discuss it without focusing on application. Warren goes so far as to say that the task of studying and interpreting the Bible is not complete until the text has been applied because of why God gave the Bible. He says, “The Bible reveals how to live and how to have a relationship with God. Any other use of the Bible is secondary. If you are preaching and that message is not teaching people how to live, you are using it for a secondary

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>66</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” audiotape.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

purpose.”<sup>68</sup>

He identifies two main reasons why application is so important. First, Warren says, “You can’t really get to know the Word of God unless you apply it to your life.”<sup>69</sup> He mentions the Pharisees and Sadducees as examples of people who knew God’s Word but did not apply it. The second reason application is so important is that “studying the Word of God can be dangerous if you merely study it without applying it.”<sup>70</sup> Why is it dangerous? He offers three supports: knowledge puffs up; knowledge requires action; and knowledge increases responsibility.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Bible’s Purpose**

Warren’s unrelenting call for application of the Bible is directly related to his belief in the purpose of the Bible. One text that emerges again and again to support his view of the Bible’s purpose is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. In his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” he states, based on this text, “The purpose of the Bible is life change. It is not doctrine. It is not reproof. It is not correction. It is not training in righteousness. . . . Specifically, it wants to change two things: Our character, that we may be perfect, mature, and complete; and to change our conduct, ‘thoroughly furnished unto all good works,’ replace bad works with good works.”<sup>72</sup> In Warren’s understanding doctrine, reproof,

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Warren, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, 30.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid. 31.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>72</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

correction, and instruction in righteousness are not the end, but the means to the end.

Warren's point is in line with Haddon Robinson in his book, *Biblical Preaching*. He says, "The inspired Scriptures were given so that we could be 'adequate, equipped for every good work' (II Timothy 3:16-17 NASB). It follows from this that an expositor should be able to put into words what quality of life or what good works should result from the preaching and hearing of a sermon."<sup>73</sup> Bryan Chapell is also in agreement with Warren on this point. He says, "Scripture's own goal is not merely to share information about God but is to conform his people to the likeness of Jesus Christ."<sup>74</sup> In the "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," Warren quotes John Calvin as saying, "The Word of God is not to teach us to prattle or be eloquent and subtle. . . . It is to reform our lives, so that we desire to serve God, to give ourselves entirely to him and to conform ourselves to his good will."<sup>75</sup> This is a foundational principle in Warren's hermeneutic and his subsequent teaching, preaching and writing.<sup>76</sup>

This point of the purpose of the Bible being to change lives comes out in many of Warren's writings. In the Purpose Driven Life Small Group Series, it says, "The foundation of spiritual growth is your understanding of God's Word. . . . Tremendous spiritual power is experienced when a group wrestles not only with the meaning of a

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<sup>73</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980), 109.

<sup>74</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 45.

<sup>75</sup>Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," text, 5.

<sup>76</sup>This focus on the purpose of the Bible and its relation to the task of interpretation is what inspired this author to label Warren's hermeneutic "purpose-driven."

scriptural truth, but also its meaning for their lives.”<sup>77</sup> This theme is also emphasized in *The Purpose Driven Life* where he says, “God’s Word is unlike any other word. It is alive.”<sup>78</sup> It is when God’s Word is applied that its power to change lives is realized. Another place where this point is echoed is in a sermon called, “Created to Become Like Christ,” in which Warren speaks about what God uses to make us grow. He says, “We know He uses the Bible. It takes truth to transform us. If you really want to grow up spiritually, you’ve got to get into this Book. The more you get into it, the more you’re going to grow. You need to read it and study it and memorize it and meditate on it and think about it and apply it in your life, because it takes truth to transform us.”<sup>79</sup>

People’s needs are met only when the interpretation of a biblical text is coupled with application to their lives. Giving the interpretation of a text apart from how that meaning applies to the hearer’s needs is not enough. In his manual from the 1999 “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” Warren quotes Warren Wiersbe as saying, “The way I approach a sermon has changed. I used to concentrate on what the text says . . . how I could make it mean something to somebody else. Now I ask, What does God want these people to hear? My preaching was academic; now it’s personal . . . . Everybody I talk to carries some pain. Woe to that church that doesn’t recognize people’s needs.”<sup>80</sup>

For Warren, the fact that God gave the Bible to change people’s lives

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<sup>77</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life Small Group Series*, 1:2.

<sup>78</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002), 185.

<sup>79</sup>Rick Warren, “Created to Become Like Christ,” *The Purpose Driven Life*, pt. 4 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, October 2002), sermon transcript.

<sup>80</sup>Warren Wiersbe cited in Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” 23.

necessitates that any interpretation of that Word be coupled with application. It is in doing application that God works: “The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make us like the Son of God. To become like Jesus, we must fill our lives with his Word.”<sup>81</sup> It is not the mere proper interpretation of that Word that impacts people, but the application that unleashes God’s power in people’s lives. Warren says, “Preaching that changes lives brings the truth of God’s Word and the real needs of the people together through application.”<sup>82</sup>

To support the argument for linking interpretation and application together, Warren frequently quotes a saying from D.L. Moody: “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.”<sup>83</sup> In the preface to his book, *Answers to Life’s Difficult Questions*, Warren writes,

Only the Bible can be totally depended on to provide truthful insights into the causes and cures for our personal problems. God’s Word has stood the test of time. It is just as relevant and applicable today as it was thousands of years ago. It contains the answers to life’s most difficult questions. However, it is not enough to simply say, ‘The Bible is the answer.’ It is important for Christians to show how the Bible answers life’s questions.<sup>84</sup>

This understanding of Warren’s approach to interpretation provides the foundation for evaluating how he uses Scripture in his sermons, books, and conferences. For him, interpretation and application cannot be separated because of the purpose of the Bible.

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<sup>81</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 185.

<sup>82</sup>Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 296.

<sup>83</sup>See Rick Warren, *Answers to Life’s Most Difficult Questions* (Foothill Ranch, CA: Encouraging Word, 1999), 10. Also found in Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 5; and Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 229.

<sup>84</sup>Rick Warren, *Answers to Life’s Most Difficult Questions*, 9.

## How to Apply a Text

The importance of application to the interpretation of Scripture can be seen in the fact that for Warren the most important part of studying a passage for preaching is application, not exegesis. He says,

Application is not something you tack onto the end of the message. It is the message! It is the message! *Interpretation is not the message*. Observation is not the message. Correlation is not the message. Application is the message and if you have not applied it you have not preached. You may have given a Bible lecture. You may have increased the knowledge of the background of some of some words in the Scripture, but you have not preached. *Application is the message* if you are preaching according to the *purpose of God*, the *purpose of the Bible* and the *purpose of preaching: to change lives to make people like Christ*.<sup>85</sup> (emphasis mine)

For Warren, there is no more important part of the sermon than application, and therefore the reason to study and preach the text should be application. Like Spurgeon once said, “Where application begins, there the sermon begins.”<sup>86</sup>

So how does Warren tie interpretation and application together in the process of studying a text? He believes that in preparing for a message the preacher should spend much time and attention on application.<sup>87</sup> For example, in his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” text, he includes a diagram, called the Application Pyramid, from the *Life Application Study Bible*. In the diagram, nine key questions are asked:

People: Who are the people & how are they like us today?

Place: What is the setting & what are the similarities to our world?

Plot: What is happening, is there any conflict or tension, and how would I have acted or felt in that situation?

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<sup>85</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” audiotape.

<sup>86</sup>Cited in Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 251.

<sup>87</sup>Warren presents a systematic way to prepare messages in his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.” An outline of the process can be seen in Appendix A.

Point: What was the intended message for that audience?

What is the purpose of the passage?

What did God want them to learn or feel or do?

Principles: What are the timeless truths?

Present: How is this relevant to our world today?

Parallels: Where does this truth apply to my life?

(*At home, work, school, church, neighborhood*)

Personal: What needs to change in me?

(*A belief, value, attitude, or action*)

Plan: What will be my first step of action?<sup>88</sup> (his emphasis)

He states that the second question, or the underlined one, is more important to answer than the first.<sup>89</sup> He clearly wants preachers today to not get lost in the world of the Bible so as to be ineffective in preaching to the world of today. Indeed because the Bible was written in the past and needs to be applied to people today it not only requires “explication,” but also application.<sup>90</sup> For Warren exposition and interpretation by necessity lead to the most important task: application.

Another model that Warren proposes using to arrive at application is based on an approach first described in 1981 in his *Personal Bible Study Methods*.<sup>91</sup> To help in the process of arriving at application for a text or texts, Warren suggests the following questions built around the acrostic A-P-P-L-I-C-A-T-I-O-N-S:

**A** ttitude to adjust?

**P** romise to claim?

**P** riority to change?

**L** esson to learn?

**I** ssue to resolve?

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<sup>88</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 18.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 183.

<sup>91</sup>See Warren, *Bible Study Methods*, 35.

C ommand to obey?  
 A ctivity to avoid or stop?  
 T ruth to believe?  
 I dol to tear down?  
 O ffense to forgive?  
 N ew direction to take?  
 S in to confess?<sup>92</sup> (emphasis his)

Thinking through these questions will help any person studying Scripture, and in particular preacher and teachers, arrive at solid application that is based on the unchanging truth of the text and yet is truly “life-oriented.”

Warren’s understanding of the importance of application in a message does not mean that there is a radical reinterpretation of the message of the Bible. He says, “The message must never changed; ‘it is the faith once delivered for the saints,’ says Jude. We do not have a right to change the message. It must never change. But the applications and how we communicate must change with every new generation.”<sup>93</sup> John Stott remarks similarly when he says, “It is across this broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture (more still in the case of the Old Testament) that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. Our task is to enable God’s revealed truth to flow out of Scriptures and into the lives of men and women today.”<sup>94</sup> Preaching the Bible to people today does not mean the meaning is changed to make it relevant, but simply that its relevance is made clear to a contemporary culture. Warren believes the Bible contains “timeless truths” that are relevant to people throughout history and today.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 19.

<sup>93</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” audiotape.

<sup>94</sup>John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.

<sup>95</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text and audiotape.



## Conclusion

This chapter has delineated Rick Warren's view of Scripture and his approach to the hermeneutical task. In addition, there has been an exploration of the unique emphasis that Warren places on application and its inextricable relationship to interpretation. In concluding this chapter a few summary points are in order as they relate to additional chapters. First, Warren's view of the Bible is clearly evangelical and he places a special emphasis on it being "God's Word." The implications of this view will be examined more closely in the next few chapters as Warren's sermons, books, and conferences are evaluated in terms of how the Bible is used. A second observation is that Warren has a clear approach to interpreting a text that emphasizes a grammatical/historical study which seeks to arrive at the author's intended meaning. He is also careful to warn of "proof-texting." How consistently Warren applies his own method of interpretation will be evaluated in subsequent chapters.

Finally, as Warren emphasizes the absolute necessity of application of a biblical text, what will that look like in his teaching and preaching? When he states, "God wants you to. . ." does Warren consistently stand on a solid exegetical understanding of the verse he uses to make his point? Are there places where in a desire to touch a felt-need that he stretches the meaning of a text clearly beyond what the author intended? The answers to these questions will emerge as the research now moves from Warren's theory to his practice of interpretation.

## CHAPTER 3

### WARREN'S HERMENEUTIC AS REVEALED IN HIS PREACHING

“Preaching is the single most powerful tool for directing a church for health, for vitality and for growth. Nothing even comes close to the power of preaching and teaching.”<sup>1</sup> From these words, it is not difficult to see the great respect Rick Warren has for the task and role of preaching in the church today. Like most successful preachers, Warren has his own style and technique, which in his case, often draw both positive and negative remarks. In particular, one of the accusations against Warren’s preaching is the way he makes use of Scripture. This chapter is devoted to examining Rick Warren’s preaching ministry in relation to his hermeneutic, giving special regard to the philosophy behind his verse-with-verse method, the various ways he uses Scripture in his sermons, and the way he makes a point using Scripture.

#### **Why Warren Preaches the Way He Does**

Every preacher’s style is the result of some kind of decision. Many preachers simply follow the style of preaching under which they grew up or were saved, while others stick to what was taught them in seminary, whether that be narrative, topical, expository or some other method. Still others seek out their own style and method.

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<sup>1</sup>Rick Warren, “The Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” (held at Saddleback Valley Community Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1999), audiotape.

Warren falls into this final category. The reasoning behind Warren's method of preaching is well developed and is the result of his overall philosophy of ministry. This section will examine the background and the evolution of his verse-with-verse preaching methodology.

### **Know the Fish and Their Needs**

Saddleback Church was organized around the five biblical purposes of the New Testament church: evangelism, discipleship, ministry, fellowship and worship.<sup>2</sup> Everything Saddleback does is filtered through these five purposes. These purpose are expressed clearly in Saddleback's mission statement:

To bring people to Jesus and *membership* in his family, develop them to Christlike *maturity*, and equip them for their *ministry* in the church and life *mission* in the world, in order to *magnify* God's name.<sup>3</sup> (his emphasis)

Warren describes the purposes in relation to specific activity: "We bring them in as *members*, we build them up to *maturity*, we train them for *ministry*, and we send them out on *mission*, *magnifying* the Lord in the process"(his emphasis).<sup>4</sup> The entire church is guided by these purposes, thus it is a "purpose-driven" church.<sup>5</sup> This purpose driven model plays an intrinsic role in Warren's view and practice of preaching.

By the time the church was 20 years old, Saddleback was the second largest

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<sup>2</sup>See Acts 2:42-47.

<sup>3</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 107.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>5</sup>Saddleback Valley Community Church has organized its purpose driven strategy around two models: "The Life Development Process," which is the discipleship model, and "The Concentric Circles of Commitment," which help the church discern each person's level of commitment. See Appendix 2 for diagrams. In sum, the church leaves little to chance. Everything is intentional.

attended church in America and had been the fastest growing in the U.S. for the previous three years.<sup>6</sup> This growth did not come from recent changes or developments at the church, but from principles built into the church when it was planted. From the very beginning Saddleback was a congregation geared to reach the unchurched. Warren felt God wanted the church to be focused on “reaching the unchurched for Christ, people who for one reason or another did not attend any existing church.”<sup>7</sup> This is Saddleback’s claim to fame. It has mainly grown, not by transfer growth from other congregations, but by reaching people who had no affiliation with any church.<sup>8</sup>

Warren planted Saddleback Church to target the unchurched population of Saddleback Valley. Before holding their first service, Warren went about finding out everything he could about the unchurched people of the area, and what their wants, needs, preferences, and hurts were. He used demographic data and extensive personal surveys<sup>9</sup> to find out what the unchurched people of Saddleback Valley were like. From this data, Saddleback’s target was acquired: “Saddleback Sam.”<sup>10</sup> Saddleback Sam was a character Saddleback developed who reflected the values, demographics, and views of a typical

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<sup>6</sup>“Rick Warren, Senior Pastor” [on-line]; accessed 10 April 2000; available from <http://www.purposedriven.com/>; Internet.

<sup>7</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 39.

<sup>8</sup>By 2000, over 9,000 people had received Christ at Saddleback and almost seventy-five percent of its members were baptized at the church. See “Rick Warren, Senior Pastor.”

<sup>9</sup>Warren spent the first twelve weeks after moving into the community going door-to-door talking to people. He asked a series of five questions: (1) What do you think is the greatest need in this area? (2) Are you actively attending any church? (If they said, “yes,” Warren would thank them and move on) (3) Why do you think most people don’t attend church? (4) If you were looking for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for? (5) What could I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people? See Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 191.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 170.

Saddleback Valley citizen. Warren also found that one of the four most prevalent complaints about church is that it “is boring, especially the sermons. The messages don’t relate to my life.”<sup>11</sup> He believes that it was a failure of preaching, not the Bible, that caused people to have this attitude. What needed to change was not the message, but the method.

One of Warren’s core assertions about preaching to the unchurched is that the message must not be changed. He says, “It is a myth that you must compromise the message to draw a crowd. Jesus certainly didn’t. You don’t have to *transform* the message of the Bible but you do have to *translate* it into terms the unchurched will understand” (his emphasis).<sup>12</sup> The message of the text or texts guides the truth that is communicated, but the particular cultural situation of the people to whom you preach guides the style. This approach is a standard practice among missionaries who deal with various cultures. If the Bible is not communicated in a culturally relevant way then the understanding of God’s Word is obscured.

Warren used the information he gained about the people of Saddleback Valley to begin evaluating his own preaching. Using the question, “Would this message make sense to a totally unchurched person?” he examined his sermons from the previous ten years, throwing out all but two.<sup>13</sup> On this point, Warren does nothing to answer the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 191. This complaint had strong ramifications for Warren as he developed as a “purpose driven” preacher.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 230. While these kinds of statements are found again and again in Warren’s teaching about preaching, his actual practice of preaching reveals that he is subject to “stretching” a text beyond its original intent at times. It is this author’s belief that this is done in an effort to preach practically to people’s needs and contradicts Warren’s own teaching on not changing the message. This issue is explored in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 293.

question, “What is the foundation for believing that the Word of God faithfully taught will make sense to the unregenerate mind?” Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 2:14 make it clear that a lost person cannot make sense of spiritual truths unless the Spirit is at work. Paul says, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (NASB). Warren does say that his method of preaching tries to overcome the obstacle of apathy towards the Bible by starting on the common ground of human felt needs. He cites Paul as the example of this method when he spoke to the philosophers in Athens.<sup>14</sup> It is this approach that Warren says grabs people’s attention, disarms their prejudices, and sparks interest in the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Though he is intent on dealing with the cultural obstacles that keep people from hearing the sermon clearly, Warren does not address the spiritual obstacles that are at work.

In general terms, Warrens says that there are six things he knows about any audience he is going to speak to and these help shape his sermon. They are,

1. Everybody wants to be loved.
2. Everybody wants their lives to count.
3. No matter how wealthy or successful life is empty without Christ.
4. Many of these people are carrying loads of guilt.
5. Many are consumed with bitterness.
6. There is a universal fear of death.<sup>16</sup>

These concerns are to be used by the preacher to help “contextualize” the sermon. He says, “The Bible determines our message, but our target determines, when, where, and

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>16</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

how we communicate it.<sup>17</sup> He reiterates this same point in an article when he says, “The crowd does not determine whether or not you speak the truth. The truth is not optional. But your audience does determine which truths you choose to speak about. To unbelievers, some truths are more relevant than others.”<sup>18</sup> In another place he further explains that not only are the truths to be shared determined by the audience, but also the organization of the message. He says, “The text should determine the substance of your message but the way people hear should determine the structure of your message.”<sup>19</sup> By understanding people’s needs and showing how the Bible answers them, the preacher brings a message that is both biblical and relevant.

Warren’s approach to sermon development is not only guided by the study of people’s needs, but also by study of the psychological way people react to different stimuli. In one of his *Ministry Toolbox* articles Warren emphasizes what gets people’s attention based on a study of the Reticular Activating System in the human brain. This system is a filter at the base of the brain stem that “sifts and sorts the things you see, hear, and smell – forwarding only a few of those stimuli on to your consciousness.”<sup>20</sup> According to Warren there are three things that always get through the Reticular Activating System. The first is something a person considers valuable. A second is something that is seen as unique. The third thing that gets through is something a person

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<sup>17</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 157.

<sup>18</sup>Rick Warren, “A Primer on Preaching Like Jesus,” *Rick Warren’s Ministry Toolbox*, no. 78 (November 2002) [on-line]; accessed 22 April 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com>; Internet.

<sup>19</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

<sup>20</sup>Warren, “A Primer on Preaching Like Jesus.”

feels threatened by.<sup>21</sup> He argues that showing the value of the Good News is the way Jesus taught and the best way for preaching today to the unchurched.<sup>22</sup>

Thinking of the audience's needs is an essential part of sermon development in Warren's eyes. He uses the "needs, hurts, or interests" of the congregation as the basis for starting his sermon each week. After establishing this basis, he then seeks to show how the Bible offers the answer.<sup>23</sup> In defending this position, he asserts that Jesus used this methodology in his ministry. He uses the Sermon on the Mount as an example of a needs oriented message. He says,

Jesus began by sharing eight secrets of genuine happiness. Then he talked about living an exemplary lifestyle, controlling anger, restoring relationships, and the issue of adultery and divorce. Next he spoke of keeping promises and returning good for evil. Then Jesus moved on to other practical life issues like how to give with the right attitude, how to pray, how to store up treasures in heaven, and how to overcome worry. He wraps up his message by telling us to not judge others, encouraging persistence when asking God to meet our needs, and warning us about false teachers. Finally, he concludes with a simple story that emphasizes the importance of acting on what he's taught: Put into practice what you've just learned! This is the kind of preaching that we need in churches today. It changes lives!<sup>24</sup>

Jesus addressed people's felt needs through his sermons and this is one of the reasons people flocked to hear him share the "Good News."

Jesus' example and the purpose of the Bible (life change) are central reasons Warren believes in "felt-needs" preaching, but he also includes God's revelation of Himself as a basis. He says, "God chooses to reveal himself to man according to our

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



needs. Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with examples of this.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on to demonstrate how many of the names of God in the Old Testament are “need” oriented.<sup>26</sup>

It is an overstatement for Warren to argue addressing felt needs was Jesus’ main approach to preaching to the people of His time. One could argue that the predominate “felt need” of the Jews of Jesus’ day was for freedom from Roman occupation. Since Jesus did not address this issue, but instead focused on spiritual freedom found through forgiveness, it seems he did not begin every sermon with the felt needs of the people. Jesus had a way of addressing people’s true needs, regardless of whether they were felt needs.

Warren believes that preaching life-oriented messages not only makes the message simpler and easier to understand, it makes it easier for people to obey. A recent Dateline NBC program featured a documentary and interview with Warren. Josh Mankowitz, the reporter said, “He has a simple message that avoids divisive political issues and instead embraces traditional Christian values, like people helping one another.”<sup>27</sup> The documentary then showed Warren speaking to his congregation about helping those in prison and those who are sick, like a person with AIDS or terminal cancer.<sup>28</sup> The documentary went on to speak about how Saddleback is deeply involved in

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<sup>25</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 295.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Josh Mankowitz, “Pastor with a Purpose,” Dateline NBC, 3 October 2004 [on-line]; accessed 30 November 2004; available from [www.saddlebackfamily.com](http://www.saddlebackfamily.com); Internet.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

these various ministries. Warren considers it a compliment to be called a “simple” preacher because it means people understand his message and consequently find it easier to obey.<sup>29</sup>

### **Verse-With-Verse Expository Preaching**

Warren’s research and study of the unchurched led him to arrive at his new methodology for preaching which he calls “verse-with-verse” or “topical” exposition.<sup>30</sup> This methodology, like the rest of Saddleback, is “Purpose-Driven.” He uses verse-with-verse exposition when preaching to the unchurched and prefers verse-by-verse exposition when preaching to believers. The verse-with-verse approach is the best approach in evangelizing the unchurched, according to Warren.<sup>31</sup> Thus, at Saddleback’s weekend services, which are aimed at reaching the unchurched, the predominate preaching style is verse-with-verse. Warren likes to call it teaching systematic theology to the unchurched without using the commonly associated jargon.<sup>32</sup> The style used in Saddleback’s mid-week believers service is predominately verse-by-verse, often through a book of the Bible, because Warren believes this is more effective in edifying the church.<sup>33</sup> He has preached through the book of Romans in the mid-week service multiple times since the

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<sup>29</sup>Rick Warren, “How to Communicate to Change Lives,” pt. 1 (Saddleback Valley Community Church, Mission Viejo, CA, 1997), videocassette.

<sup>30</sup>Rick Warren is by no means the only preacher using this methodology, but is arguably the most well known. He does not give credit to any preacher as being influential in his adopting this model.

<sup>31</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 294.

<sup>32</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

<sup>33</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 294.

church started, each time taking thirty-six weeks to do so.<sup>34</sup>

Since Warren describes himself as an “expository” preacher, it is important to understand what is meant by that term. Expository preaching is a term that gets thrown around quite a bit in evangelical circles, but there seems to be some misunderstanding as to exactly what makes a sermon expository in nature. Defining expository preaching is the first step in understanding whether Warren’s methodology qualifies for the label. Haddon Robinson’s classic definition points to the fact that expository preaching is a methodology, not a particular shape of a sermon. He said, “*Expository preaching 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*”<sup>35</sup> (emphasis his). Ramesh Richard’s definition gives particular emphasis to the importance of application; he gives his definition in his book *Scripture Sculpture*: “*Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness*”<sup>36</sup> (his emphasis). A working definition for this study, developed by this author, builds off of the previous definitions: “Expository preaching is the

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<sup>34</sup>See “Romans: Grace, The Truth That Transforms” advertisement [on-line]; accessed 10 June 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com, pcom/specials/romans.asp>; Internet.

<sup>35</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

<sup>36</sup>Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 17.

contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text or texts that is derived through historical, grammatical, and literary study which is communicated to, then through, the preacher to specific listeners so that the sermon informs, inspires, and influences them toward God and away from sin.”

How does Warren define expository preaching? In his “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” he explains the “futility of labels” and that he has found over thirty definitions of expository preaching, some of which contradict each other. He shares Clyde Fant’s explanation from *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*: “The only question that matters is ‘Does the sermon involve itself with the truth of God’s Word?’ When it does, you have genuine preaching, and all the modifiers of the term become superfluous. If you use God’s Word to bring light and change in people’s lives, then preaching has occurred, regardless of the method used.”<sup>37</sup> Warren then adds his definition of expository preaching: “When the message is centered around explaining and applying the Bible for life change.”<sup>38</sup> Based on Warren’s definition and the one developed for the purpose of this study, is Warren an expository preacher? The following sections will answer that question as Warren’s sermons are critically analyzed.

### **Survey of How Warren Uses Scripture in Sermons**

After delineating Warren’s teaching on his sermon methodology, attention now will be given to Warren’s practice of preaching. This section will focus on his use of Scripture in developing sermons, trends in Scripture usage, and how Scripture is used to

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<sup>37</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

make a point in a sermon. A representative sample of sermons will be used for this analysis, including various series from 1985 through 2004. The sermon series were obtained without any agenda related to their hermeneutic and are evenly distributed over the nineteen years. The particular sermon series were chosen for two reasons. First, series were chosen as a representative series from various years so that no time period was over or under represented. Second, series were selected with consideration given to length so that a good sampling of sermons from that year would be achieved. Longer series were preferred to shorter ones. There are seventy-six weekend messages from these series that will be used to arrive at conclusions about Warren's hermeneutic. This sampling represents approximately 12 percent of all of Warren's weekend messages.<sup>39</sup> A few additional non-series messages that Warren preached will be utilized as well.

### **Types of Sermons and Series**

Three categories emerge as one surveys Warren's preaching and the way he makes use of Scripture as the basis for sermons and series.<sup>40</sup> The first is Scripture Interprets Scripture, where an entire series is dedicated to preaching one passage of Scripture systematically. These series will teach a passage verse-by-verse, phrase-by-phrase, or in some cases word-by-word. The second category that emerges is Scripture for Scripture messages where one main text guides the outline of all the points while other Scriptures are offered for further support of each point. The third category is the Scripture and Scripture messages where the points are unified around a particular topic or

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<sup>39</sup>This percentage could be even higher when consideration is given to the fact that Warren has his associate pastors preach various messages throughout the year.

<sup>40</sup>These categories are named by this author and do not appear in any of Warren's materials.

theme, and Scripture is utilized from many different places in the Bible for support.

**Scripture interprets Scripture.** This term is more related to a type of series Warren preaches, though it has direct implication on each message as well. Warren uses this type of sermon series to explore a biblical passage in deep detail. An example of this type of sermon series was the 1991 series, “Building Great Relationships.” The ten messages in the series were dedicated to examining Paul’s teaching on love in 1 Corinthians 13. The first sermon in the series, “Life’s Greatest Aim,” provides a verse-by-verse exposition of the whole chapter. Subsequent messages take the terms Paul uses to describe love in verses 4 through 6 and expands on them in detail. An example of how Warren uses other Scriptures to interpret the Scripture is the outline of his message, “Reducing Rivalry in Relationships,” from that series:

I Cor. 13:4 *"Love does not envy."*

### **1. How envy ruins relationships**

#### **\* It causes conflict**

*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" James 4:1 (NIV)*

#### **\* It kindles resentment**

*"Our lives were full of resentment and envy. We hated others and they hated us." Titus 3:3 (LB)*

*"For where you find envy ... there you find disorder and every evil practice." James 4:1 (NIV)*

#### **\* It makes me miserable**

*"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones!" Prov. 14:30 (NIV)*

## 2. How to overcome envy in relationships

### a. Resist comparing myself to others

"We do not dare classify or compare ourselves ... (It) is not wise." 2 Cor. 10:12 (NIV)

"Let everyone be sure to do his very best, for then he will have the personal satisfaction of work done well, and won't need to compare himself with someone else." Gal. 6:4 (LB)

### b. Recognize my uniqueness

"You (God) created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb." Ps. 139:13 (GN)

### c. Rejoice in what I have

"It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else." Eccl. 6:9 (GN)

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Phil 4:11 (NIV)

### d. Respond to others in love

"Love does not envy." 1 Cor. 13:4

"Love your neighbor as yourself." Matt. 22:39 (NIV)

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." Rom. 12:15 (NIV)

### e. Refocus on pleasing God

"Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." Col. 3:2 (NIV)

"Don't be envious of sinful people; let reverence for the Lord be the concern of your life. If it is, you have a bright future." Pr. 23:17 (GN) (his emphasis)<sup>41</sup>

Warren uses the "Love does not envy" phrase from 1 Corinthians 13:4 to teach from the

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<sup>41</sup>Rick Warren, "Reducing Rivalry in Relationships," *Building Great Relationships*, pt. 4 (Saddleback Valley Community Church: Mission Viejo, CA, 1991), sermon transcript.

Bible how envy hurts love and how one can overcome envy. This sermon is an example of how Warren utilizes many different biblical texts to clarify one main text.

The Building Great Relationships series is not an anomaly when looking at Warren's series over the last twenty years. Warren finds particular sections of Scripture to be a good foundation for a series, though this is not something he does every single year. An example of this type of series would be "The Road to Recovery" series where Warren's final message is focused on showing how the eight Beatitudes, in Matthew 5:3-10, were the basis for the entire eight-part series. He emphasizes that everything from the series is based on Jesus's principles. He says,

We've been in a series for eight weeks that I've been calling The Road to Recovery – overcoming your hurts, habits, and hangups that have messed up your life. As I've studied this series I have been amazed at the striking similarities between the steps for recovery and the Beatitudes. In fact, when you look at them you find out that the Beatitudes Jesus gave 2000 years ago are simply a summary of the steps to recovery and as we close this series I want you to see what has been the biblical basis for all that I've been sharing in the past 8 weeks.<sup>42</sup>

This series also is a foundational element in the Celebrate Recovery Program developed by John Baker and Rick Warren. The program is used for recovery from substance abuse, divorce, sexual addiction and other problems. The steps the participants go through involve going through each of the Beatitudes. It is being used in many churches, and also prisons in at least four states.<sup>43</sup> Along with the *Purpose Driven Life*, Celebrate Recovery

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<sup>42</sup>Rick Warren, "Recycling My Pain," *The Road to Recovery*, pt. 8, sample paragraph [on-line]; accessed 13 January 2004; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/view.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/sermons/view.asp); Internet. This series seems to be a modified version of an earlier series of eight messages called "Don't Worry – Be Happy!" Though this author did not acquire this series due to budgetary restraints, the sample paragraphs from the series, available on-line, showed that it too was based around the Beatitudes. See Rick Warren, "Don't Worry – Be Happy!" sample paragraphs [on-line]; accessed 13 January 2005; available from [http://www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/view.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/sermons/view.asp); Internet.

<sup>43</sup>Jon Walker, "Saddleback, over 20 years, joined by thousands committed to tithing, missions" Baptist Press Release [on-line]; accessed 4 May 2000; available from [www.sbc Baptistpress.org](http://www.sbc Baptistpress.org); Internet.



is being credited with cutting violence in California prisons by one-third.<sup>44</sup>

Without getting full access to the over 160 sermon series, it is difficult to assert exactly how many times Warren has based an entire series of messages around one passage, but a survey of the series list yields more than the two mentioned above.

Another series that Warren based around one passage is “Stressbusters,” preached in 1995. This series was made up of seven sermons based on Psalm 23. The list of messages follows the themes of the verses:

1. God’s Antidote to Worry – Psalm 23:1
2. God’s Antidote to Busyness – Psalm 23:2
3. God’s Antidote to Damaged Emotions – Psalm 23:3a
4. God’s Antidote to Indecision – Psalm 23:3b
5. God’s Antidote for Dark Valleys – Psalm 23:4
6. God’s Antidote to Your Hurt – Psalm 23:5
7. God’s Antidote to Fearing the Future – Psalm 23:6<sup>45</sup>

The final sermon, “God’s Antidote to Fearing the Future,” is an evangelistically oriented message that helps people understand that through Christ they can have faith in where they will spend eternity.<sup>46</sup> Other series that are based around one Scripture passage

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<sup>44</sup>Don Thompson, “Religious study credited with cutting prison violence,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (13 May 2004) [on-line]; accessed 21 September 2004; available from [www.saddleback.com, flash/s\\_PDFs/Religiousstudyc creditedwithcuttingprisonviolence.pdf](http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s_PDFs/Religiousstudyc creditedwithcuttingprisonviolence.pdf); Internet.

<sup>45</sup>Rick Warren, *Stressbusters*, pts. 1-7 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1995), sermon transcripts.

<sup>46</sup>See Rick Warren, “God’s Antidote to Fearing the Future,” *Stressbusters*, pt. 7 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1995), sermon transcript. It is not uncommon for Warren to use the final message to “draw the net.” Both a discussion this author had a few years ago with a Saddleback staff member and Warren’s “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference” confirm that, while they do give opportunity for people to receive Christ each week, they often wait until the final sermon in a series

include “Nine Secrets of Healthy Relationships,” which follows Galatians 5:22-23, and “The Lord’s Prayer Path to Inner Peace,” which uses Matthew 6:9-13.<sup>47</sup> It has also been established that Warren has preached through at least two books in Saddleback’s weekend services. In a series called, “Developing a Faith that Works,” Warren preached through the book of James in 1986.<sup>48</sup> A few years later in 1992, Warren preached through Ecclesiastes in a series called, “Answering Life’s Toughest Questions.”<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting the series through Ecclesiastes was preached approximately thirteen years before the writing of this current study and that Warren has not preached through a biblical book in the weekend services since.<sup>50</sup>

**Scripture for Scripture.** These types of sermons make use of one central passage to guide the main points of the sermon. Other scriptures are added to reinforce the points made from the central text. These sermons appear sometimes as the first sermon in a series through a passage. An example of this occurrence would be the first sermon in the “Building Great Relationships” mentioned above. The sermon, “Life’s Greatest Aim,” offers an outline with primary points and subpoints of all thirteen verses of 1 Corinthians 13. Other times, one or more of these types of messages will appear in a

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to give a detailed presentation of the gospel and subsequent invitation. Over the years this has proven to be most effective in leading people to faith in Christ.

<sup>47</sup>See Appendix 3, or for a current updated list, see “All Weekend Series” List [on-line]; accessed 25 February 2005; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/fullserieslist.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/sermons/fullserieslist.asp); Internet.

<sup>48</sup>See Rick Warren, “Developing a Faith That Works” audio samples [on-line]; accessed 13 January 2005; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/view.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/sermons/view.asp); Internet.

<sup>49</sup>See Appendix 3 and Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 150.

<sup>50</sup>Based on the listing and descriptions of sermon series available on [pastors.com](http://pastors.com), this author was not able to find any other biblical books Warren had preached through in the weekend services.

series of messages otherwise made up of Scripture and Scripture sermons. An example of a Scripture for Scripture message is the seventh of eight messages in the series “Achieving Through Believing.” The title of the message is “God’s Strategy for Your Success” and is based on Joshua 1. The outline is as follows:

God never asks us to do anything without His help. He gave Joshua a 5 point strategy for success:

v. 7-8: The Guarantee: If you do what I have said, you will be successful

**1. BE CLEAR IN YOUR DIRECTION** (vs. 1-4)

**2. BE CONFIDENT IN YOUR DESIRES** (vs. 6, 7, 9)

Three things that can destroy your confidence:

\*Experiences

\*Emotions

\*Excuses

**3. BE COMMITTED TO YOUR DECISION** (vs. 9b)

Three sources of discouragement

\*Problems

\*Pressures

\*People

**4. BE CORRECTED BY YOUR DEFEATS** (vs. 7)

Example - Chapter 7:1-13

The Defeat at Ai

**5. BE CONSCIOUS OF GOD'S DEPENDABILITY**

God promises us four things if we obey Him

\*His power (vs. 5a)

\*His protection (vs. 5b)

\*Prosperity (vs. 8b)

\*Presence (vs. 9b)(his emphasis)<sup>51</sup>

Though his subpoints under points two and three were not directly based on a verse, Joshua did experience all of these to one degree or other either serving under Moses or in leading Israel himself. The subpoints under points four and five are clearly from the text or from the book of Joshua.

In all, twenty-two of the eighty-two messages that have been obtained for this study fall into the Scripture for Scripture category. If the sample that is being used is a representative sample of Warren's sermons, then he preaches verse-by-verse through one main text approximately 27 percent of the time in weekend services at Saddleback. This percentage does not include series that are focused around one text of Scripture, as in the Scripture Interprets Scripture category, except when one of the sermons deals with the passage as a whole such as the first in the series from 1 Corinthians 13. In these cases, each sermon gets its topic or thrust from the guiding passage, but the individual points are built off other scriptures, thus they are very similar to verse-with-verse sermons. The one exception to this rule is any series through a book of the Bible, like James and Ecclesiastes, but that has not been included in the figure since that is an anomaly.

One additional point that is worth noting in looking at the Scripture for Scripture sermons is that there appears to have been more of these types of sermons

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<sup>51</sup>Rick Warren, "God's Strategy for Your Success," *Achieving through Believing*, pt. 7 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1985), sermon transcript.

earlier in Warren's preaching. Both the series *Achieving through Believing* and *What God Can Do through Ordinary You* are full of verse-by-verse, or Scripture for Scripture, sermons. Both of them were preached in 1985. The later of the two series is made up of only this type of sermon.<sup>52</sup> More recent series like *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living* and *The Purpose Driven Life* only have a total of one sermon, out of seventeen, that are verse-by-verse. It is interesting to note that the Christmas collection of ten sermons, acquired for this study, holds very closely to the overall trend of categorizing Warren's sermons. Three of the ten sermons, or thirty percent, are verse-by-verse and the rest are verse-with-verse, referred to as Scripture and Scripture for this study.<sup>53</sup>

**Scripture and Scripture.** The predominate approach to sermon development that Warren advocates in both his Purpose Driven Preaching Conference and *The Purpose Driven Church* is the verse-with-verse method. This emphasis is carried over into his weekend messages. If one includes the sermons where he uses a word as the guiding theme for a message, like in the Fruit of the Spirit series called, *Nine Secrets of Healthy Relationships*, and one includes the messages that are based around a phrase or brief verse, such as in *Stressbusters* and *The Road to Recovery*, then Warren preaches verse-with-verse around 70 percent of the time.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>See Rick Warren, *What God Can Do Through Ordinary You*, pts. 1-6 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1985), sermon transcripts. This series is the only series, outside of the rare book series like *James*, that this author found of Warren's that is made up of entirely verse-by-verse sermons.

<sup>53</sup>Rick Warren, *Christmas Collection*, pts. 1-10 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1991-2000), sermon transcripts.

<sup>54</sup>This percentage was arrived at by subtracting the percentage of verse-by-verse sermons from one hundred. The additional three percent is left to account for the rare occasion when Warren preaches through a book.

According to pastors.com the sermon series that is most often purchased is the 1999 series called Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living.<sup>55</sup> The first message, The Five Essentials of Life is listed as the second most purchased of all of Warren's sermons.<sup>56</sup>

Below is the outline of points and texts used in that message:

**1. I Need Power to Live on**

*"Even youth grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary."* Isa. 40:30-31 (NASB)

*"Be still, and know that I am God."* Ps. 46:10 (NIV)

**2. I Need People to Live with**

*"God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone...'"* Genesis 2:18 (NIV)

*"Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together. If one falls down, the other can help him up."* Eccl. 4:9-10a (NCV)

*"Let us not neglect our meeting together..."* Heb. 10:24-25 (NLT)

**3. I Need Principles to Live by**

*"I am a pilgrim here on earth; I need a map – and Your commands are my chart and guide."* Ps. 119:19 (LB)

*"Everyone who hears My words and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock."* Matt. 7:24 (NCV)

**4. I Need a Plan to Live out**

*"God has made us what we are, in Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."* Eph. 2:10 (NCV)

*"God gives us many kind of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service to God, but it is the same Lord we are serving."* 1 Cor. 12:4-5 (LB)

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<sup>55</sup>See "Top 10 Best Selling Series" [on-line]; accessed 14 November 2004; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/bestsellingseries.asp](http://www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/bestsellingseries.asp); Internet.

<sup>56</sup>See "Top 10 Best Selling Sermons" [on-line]; accessed 14 November 2004; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/bestsellingsermons.asp](http://www.pastors.com, pcom/sermons/bestsellingsermons.asp); Internet.

### 5. I Need a Purpose to Live for

*“The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me – to tell people the Good News about God’s grace.” Acts. 20:24 (NCV)*

*“The thing you should want most is God’s kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you.” Matt. 6:33 (NCV)*

*“Jesus has the power of God. His power has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know Him.” 2 Peter 1:3 (ICB)<sup>57</sup> (his emphasis)*

This sermon is a good example of how Warren focuses on the needs of his listeners and then seeks to help them see how the Bible provides the answers. The five principles shared in this message are the basis for the rest of the eight sermons in this series.

### Trends in Scripture Usage

After considering how Scripture is used in Warren’s overall sermon development, it is helpful to look at how Scripture is used in individual points. How many texts does he use in an average sermon? To answer that question one must define what is meant by a unit of Scripture. A unit of Scripture is constituted by whatever amount Warren uses, whether that is a part of a verse, designated with a small letter following it, or a group of verses from one chapter of Scripture tied together using ellipses. For the purpose of this research, each time Warren includes a unit of Scripture in his sermons, it is counted. Verses from the same section of Scripture, but which appear in different parts of the sermon will be counted separately. When Warren uses one Scripture text for the outline of his message, that text will only count once, but any other

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<sup>57</sup>Rick Warren, “The Five Essentials of Life,” *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 1 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1999), sermon transcript.

supporting verses will be counted as well.

Based on the above guidelines, Warren on average uses approximately 11.2 scripture texts in each of his sermons. In Table 2, below, are the averages from each of the series that have been obtained for this study:<sup>58</sup>

Table 2. Scriptures Per Sermon

Title of Series	Scriptures Per Sermon
What God Can Do Through Ordinary You	3.8
Achieving Through Believing	7.6
How to Make Your Life Count	9.8
Building Great Relationships	12.2
Psalm 23 - Stress Busters	12.0
Building a Great Life	13.4
Essentials for 21st Century Living	10.4
Clear Thinking	10.6
The Purpose Driven Life	17.1
Understanding the Passion	14.5
Can You Hear Me Now?	15.3
Christmas Messages	9.8

This representative sample of Warren's sermons gives a picture of the frequency of Scripture usage in his sermons over the last twenty years.

Several observations can be made from the list above. First, the earlier series have less Scriptures per sermon than the later series because many of the sermons in these series were based around one main text. The later series tend to have more Scriptures used than the earlier ones because more of the sermons in these series follow the verse-with-verse model than the earlier ones. A second observation is that Warren may be

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<sup>58</sup>These sermon series are listed in chronological order except the Christmas series, which is a collection of the ten Christmas messages Warren delivered between 1991-2000.



moving away from preaching verse-by-verse sermons, or that when he does do it, he is includes even more supporting Scripture than he used to. The later series do contain more verse-with-verse sermons than the earlier ones, but without access to all of the recent and earlier sermons, it is difficult to say conclusively whether he is moving away from verse-by-verse preaching. Another observation is that the series with the most Scripture used is The Purpose Driven Life series. The reason this series uses so much Scripture is likely because it is based on *The Purpose Driven Life* in which Warren utilizes almost one thousand passages.<sup>59</sup>

In looking at the sermons, some trends arise as to the length of the Scripture passages Warren uses. First, at times Warren will simply make use of a part of a verse. Examples of this include 1 Corinthians 15:10a from the Living Bible: “Whatever I am now it is all because God poured out such kindness and grace upon me.”<sup>60</sup> He uses this point to emphasize that grace is a gift from God and that everything good in life is from God.<sup>61</sup> Though Paul’s point in the text was related to the argument the Corinthians were having over Paul’s authority, he clearly was emphasizing that everything he had was from God. This example is not uncommon for Warren’s sermons. At times he will use part of a verse because it is unnecessary to share the entire verse to make the point. Other times, Warren will use part of a verse because the rest of the verse does not support what he is saying. An example of this would be from the message, What on Earth am I Here For? in

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<sup>59</sup>See Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 325.

<sup>60</sup>Quoted in Rick Warren, “Living By Grace,” *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 2 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1999), sermon transcript.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

The Purpose Driven Life series. Here he uses Proverbs 16:4a: “The Lord has made everything for His own purpose.”<sup>62</sup> The rest of the verse in the God’s Word Translation says, “. . . even wicked people for the day of trouble.” Warren does not include this second part of the verse and he does not give any reason. It may be related to his desire to always say things in a positive, encouraging way.<sup>63</sup> It appears that the majority of times Warren uses part of a Scripture, the reason is related to the first example, where it was unnecessary and would simply have added phrases to the sermon body. The way he used just part of a verse in the second example seems to be more of an exception.

Another trend in how Warren makes use of various Scripture lengths in a sermon is he utilizes a complete verse or verses, sometimes spread over a chapter of Scripture. Warren makes frequent use of texts from books like Proverbs, Psalms, and James, which are not as tied to a context and are thus easily explained. Proverbs 12:26 was used in the sermon, *How God Talks to You*: “The godly give wise advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray” (NLT).<sup>64</sup> Later in that same sermon, he uses a conglomeration of parts of four consecutive verses together: “God speaks again and again, in dreams, in visions of the night...[sic] as they lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that and gives them wisdom and instruction, causing them to change their minds, and keeping them from pride...[sic] and from falling into some trap”(Job

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<sup>62</sup>Warren does not use an ellipsis here though the verse clearly continues. The period gives the misleading feeling that the statement is complete when it is not.

<sup>63</sup>See Warren, “The Purpose Driven Preaching Conference,” text, 26.

<sup>64</sup>Rick Warren, “How God Talks to You,” *Can You Hear Me Now?* pt. 2 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2004), sermon transcript.

33:14-17, LB).<sup>65</sup> The reason Warren gives for cutting down texts is to cut down on time in the sermon used for reading Scripture when parts of the verse, or even verses, are not needed to make the point.<sup>66</sup>

### **How Warren Makes a Point Using a Text**

Having delineated Warren's approach to preaching and evaluated the way Warren uses Scripture in his sermons, the question comes to mind, "Exactly how does Warren use Scripture to make a point in his sermons?" This section will consider the relationship between the points of his sermons and the Scripture used to support those points.

### **How Directly Are His Points Based on Texts?**

The fact that Warren believes in the inspiration and authority of God's Word and that he utilizes Scripture in an extensive way in his sermons suggests that Warren is an expository preacher according to the definition that this author has put forth. Yet, as has already been demonstrated, Warren will at times crop a text down to eliminate truths that contradict or modify the point he is trying to make. Even if he qualifies as an expository preacher in a broad sense, the question still remains, to what degree are Warren's sermon points derived from biblical texts? In a survey of his sermons, Warren uses Scripture in several different ways to make his point.

An initial way Warren makes use of Scripture is by utilizing a direct point built

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference."

off of a Scripture. In these instances, the meaning of the Scripture is simply and directly placed into a sermon point. An example of this would be from the sermon *Telling the Truth to Each Other* in the *Building Great Relationships* Series. One of the points Warren makes is that in order to build great relationships, people need to, “Tell the truth lovingly.” He then makes use of Ephesians 4:15 to support this point: “Speak the truth in a spirit of love” (GN). This Scripture is followed by Ephesians 4:29: “[Speak] only what is helpful for building others up, according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen”<sup>67</sup> (NIV). The first text is used to support the point while the second is used for further clarification. After quoting the second verse Warren gives this explanation: “If you're doing it for their benefit it's in love. If you're doing it for your benefit, it's not. Speak only what is helpful – sometimes the truth hurts but in the long run it's helpful. But why are you doing it? It may be the truth, but if it's not helpful, don't share it. You only share what is helpful, building others up for their needs.”<sup>68</sup> Many times Warren will use Proverbs and other texts to make the direct point he is trying to make and which require no contextual explanation.

One place where Warren seeks to make a direct point, but clearly misrepresents the text is in the third message in his *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living* series. In this message, titled *You've Got to Get Connected*, Warren's primary text, before he makes any points, is Genesis 2:18: “It is not good for man to be alone”<sup>69</sup> (NIV). One might

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<sup>67</sup>See Rick Warren, “Telling the Truth to Each Other,” *Building Great Relationships*, pt. 9 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1991), sermon transcript.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Rick Warren, “You've Got to Get Connected,” *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 3 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1999), sermon transcript.

assume that this text is used for supporting how men need women and vice versa, but it is not. After citing the passage, Warren says, “You were made for relationships. You were created for connections. Psychologists call this a universal need to belong. Even Jesus needed *friends*. The Bible has a very important word about connecting *people* at the deepest level. That spiritual connection is called fellowship”<sup>70</sup> (emphasis mine). Nothing is mentioned about the context of Genesis 2:18 being when God created Eve for Adam because Adam was incomplete without her. If Warren’s interpretation of this text to mean just general “relationships” is taken to its logical conclusion one might find people using it to justify homosexuality. This text is clearly about the relationship between man and woman in the created order and in marriage, not general relationships between people.<sup>71</sup> In a survey of Warren’s sermons used for this research, this type of misuse of a text is not very common.

Another way that Warren makes a point using Scripture is through a clear inference from the Scripture. Though this category may seem very close to the previous one there is a clear distinction. When Warren utilized a direct point from a text, the meaning of the text and the meaning of the point are the same, with no interpretation or explanation needed to clarify it. In making a direct inference, the meaning of the Scripture and the point are closely associated, but other elements require there to be an explanation to tie them together. An example of this type of Scripture usage in a point comes from the second sermon in the Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living, titled, Living By

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>This author would hardly argue with Warren that people need relationships with other people, but this text is too specific to make generalizations about all relationships from it.

Grace. In this message one of Warren's points is that grace is "Available to Everyone."

He uses Romans 4:16 to support this point: "The promise is not only for those people that live under the law of Moses. It is for anyone who lives with faith like Abraham"<sup>72</sup> (ICB).

Though the text clearly infers the point, still an explanation is needed to relate this verse to the availability of grace to all people now. Warren gives this explanation:

Who are the people who live under the law of Moses? The Jews. The Jewish people, the nation of Israel, live under the law of Moses – the Old Testament. This verse is saying that God's grace is available not just to Jews who live under the law of Moses but is available to everybody with faith.

That's good news. It's not just for Jewish people. It's for all of us. All of us can come to God in the same way – through faith in the grace of God through His Son Christ. It's available to everybody.<sup>73</sup>

In these types of points Warren will offer an explanation, like he did above, to help the listeners, especially the unchurched, make the connection between the point and the text.

Another example of a direct inference point is in the message, God's Antidote to Worry from the Psalm 23 series Stressbusters which Warren preached in 1995. In this message Warren makes the point that one of the antidotes to worry is, "Believing God Will Take Care of Me." This point is based on Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need"<sup>74</sup> (NIV). Warren clarifies this verse by helping his listeners to understand the Old Testament role of the shepherd:

If I believe that God is going to take care of me, I'm not going to worry. How does making God my shepherd show the antidote to stress in my life? If I let the Lord be my Shepherd how is that an antidote to worry? You have to know what shepherds

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<sup>72</sup>Rick Warren, "Living By Grace," *Essentials for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Living*, pt. 2 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1999), sermon transcript.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Rick Warren, "God's Antidote to Worry," *Stressbusters*, pt. 1 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1995), sermon transcript.

do.

1. A shepherd *provides*. He provides food, shelter, the basic necessities for his sheep.
2. A shepherd *protects*. He defends against enemies, harm.
3. A shepherd *guides*. He leads sheep when they're confused and don't know which way to go.
4. A shepherd *corrects*. Any problem that comes along, he corrects it.

The amazing thing is this: God has promised to do these four things in your life if you'll trust Him, if you'll let Him be your shepherd.<sup>75</sup>

Warren shares this explanation so that his listeners can see the role of a shepherd and understand that if they will make God their shepherd, he will take care of them.

Another category of ways Warren uses Scripture to make a point is through character principles. In these instances, Warren will use a narrative passage, or a passage where a person's experience is central, and will derive his point or points from it. An example of the character principle point is the sermon, "How to Prepare for a Miracle" in the Building a Great Life series. Here Warren's outline shows how each point is derived from the story:

### **1. Admit that I have a need**

*"When Jesus... saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them ... so he began teaching them. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came and said, 'This is a remote place. Send the people away so they can go and buy something to eat.' But Jesus answered, 'You give them something to eat!' They said, 'That would take eight months of a man's wages!'" Mark 6:34-37 (NIV)*

### **2. Assess what I have already**

*"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked, 'Go and see.' When they found out, they said, 'Five small loaves of bread and two fish.'" Mark 6:38 (NIV)*

*"Jesus asked this only to test them, for he already had in mind what he was going to do." John 6:6 (NIV)*

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

### 3. Give God whatever I have

*"Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish... He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people..." Mark 6:41 (NAS)*

The boy gave what he had... *willingly, cheerfully & immediately.*

### 4. Expect Him to multiply it

*"Everyone ate and had enough. Afterwards they collected 12 baskets full of ... leftovers!" Mark 6:42-43 (Ph)*

*"All things are possible with God." Mark 10:27 (NIV)<sup>76</sup>*

After introducing the story from Mark 6, Warren draws a parallel between the characters of the original story and the listeners to his sermon. He says, "When you have a problem and need a miracle, you need to do four things. They're all a part of this story."<sup>77</sup> The principles he shares from the story are the principles that the listeners are told to follow. This category of sermon point is based on the idea that stories in the Bible provide timeless principles that can be applied to today.<sup>78</sup> Warren makes frequent use of this type of preaching.

One difficulty with this approach to sermon point development is that there is a danger in equating the biblical situation of the story to the situation of listeners today. In the example mentioned above one of the central points of this story is to emphasize Jesus' power and authority as superior to human abilities because He is God. There is no indication in the text and no commentator was found who believes that Jesus was giving a

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<sup>76</sup>Rick Warren, "How to Prepare for a Miracle," *Building a Great Life*, pt. 8 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 1997), sermon transcript.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>See Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference."



recipe on what to do when a miracle is needed. In addition there are no examples in the book of Acts or in New Testament churches where these steps, derived from this story, were used to bring about a miracle. At the same time, there are many similarities between the principles Warren derives from this story and the experiences of many Old Testament characters such as Moses, Joshua, and David. In this sense Warren's principles are in-line with the biblical principles of man's dependance on God and the need for greater faith in God.<sup>79</sup> The text might have been better served in a sermon by pointing to these principles as a greater way to connect with God and position oneself for God to work. To make this text a recipe for a miracle is to clearly stretch it beyond its original intent.

The danger of using character or narrative points lies in extrapolating principles from a context that does not directly relate to the context of contemporary listeners, and thus misrepresenting God's Word. In speaking about biographical or character preaching Sidney Greidanus warns, "It imposes an interpretive 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."<sup>80</sup> The place of stories and events in salvation history must be considered before making the leap to contemporary times.

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<sup>79</sup>There is nothing in the Mark 6 story that suggests that the disciples "expected" the miracle that Jesus performed, but Jesus did it anyway. Warren tells his listeners to "expect him to multiply it." While this principle cannot be derived from this story, one can easily observe that Jesus celebrated and responded to faith when he saw it as in the case of the centurion in Matthew 8:5-10; he chastised his disciples for having "little faith" as in Matt 8:26; and that he called people to greater faith as in Matt 17:20. Thus, Warren's point is biblical, though not necessarily from the passage he cites.

<sup>80</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36. While Greidanus is wholly against this type of preaching, this author believes this preaching can be helpful as long as the biblical context and current context are not equated and the principles that are derived from the story are consistent with the rest of the Bible and the overall theme of the kingdom of God. Ideally, the principles from the story can be found explicitly stated somewhere else in the Bible. This protects the preacher from misrepresenting God's Word.

Another example of where Warren stretches a character point beyond the Scripture's original intent is in the message *Possessing Your Future*, from the *How to Make Your Life Count* series. This message is based around Joshua 1. In it, he suggests that people need to "Set Up a Plan" and he bases this on a couple of passages. First, he uses 1:2-3, "Moses, my servant, is dead. Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan river . . . I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses" (NIV). As a second supporting text, he uses 1:11a: "So Joshua ordered . . . the people 'Get your supplies ready'"<sup>81</sup> (NIV). Warren says, "God says you've got to plan for the future."<sup>82</sup> The issue in Joshua 1 is not Joshua coming up with a plan to "possess his future," but making sure he was plugged into God's covenantal plan for Israel. At best one might infer the point that a person should seek to get in touch with God's plan for them in the kingdom of God.<sup>83</sup>

Warren also makes this type of error in dealing with the apostle Paul. In a sermon called *You've Got to Have a Dream*, in the *Achieving through Believing Series*, Warren says Paul is an example that people should "establish a goal." To justify this point he uses Philippians 3:13-14: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me

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<sup>81</sup>Rick Warren, "Possessing Your Future," *How to Make Your Life Count*, pt. 4 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1989), sermon transcript.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Greidanus argues that biographical preaching fails to interpret individual stories in light of the one underlying story of the kingdom of God. Warren fails on exactly this point here. See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 36.

heavenward in Christ Jesus”<sup>84</sup> (NIV). Warren goes on to explain, “I can’t think of anything that helps people more in a personal way than to establish some goals for their life. That’s acting in faith. They are statements of faith.”<sup>85</sup> Was Paul exhorting the Philippians to sit down, and write down some goals for their life? Clearly Paul had one goal in life, Christ, and it seems to be a manipulation of the text to postulate that people should write down life goals as part of achieving their “dream” in life. While setting goals may be an excellent principle for living wisely in life, it is not the point of Philippians 3:13-14. The principle for listeners today is that they should have the same goal in life that Paul had, not that they should figure out some goals for themselves. While certainly not the case in all his sermons, Warren does have a tendency to make these kinds of unwarranted extrapolations when trying to make a character point.

### **Translation: The Key to Warren’s Interpretation**

Warren says, “Some pastors criticize ‘life application’ preaching as shallow, simplistic, and inferior. To them, the only real preaching is didactic, doctrinal preaching. This attitude implies that Paul was more profound than Jesus, that Romans is ‘deeper’ material than the Sermon on the Mount or the parables. I call that heresy!”<sup>86</sup> Warren believes that the most powerful, life-changing type of preaching is preaching for life

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<sup>84</sup>Warren does not quote the passage in the sermon, but puts the reference in the outline and makes mention of Phil 3 and “The famous passage where Paul says I press toward the mark.” See Rick Warren, “You’ve Got to Have a Dream,” *Achieving Through Believing*, pt. 2 (Mission Viejo, CA: Saddleback Valley Community Church, 1985), sermon transcript.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 229.

application. This conviction is clearly seen in the way Warren often goes right for application in his points and spending little to no time interpreting a text or teaching theology.<sup>87</sup> One of the clearest ways Warren cuts through interpretation is to use various translations.

He interprets the passage by using the translations that convey the meaning he believes the passage contains. He often uses five or more translations in each topical message. His choice of translation for each point in his message is always guided by his desire to make clear and concise application to his listeners. In other words, translation is interpretation which leads to application.<sup>88</sup>

One example of how Warren uses translation to cut down on the need for explanation is in the message, *Thinking Clearly About Sex*, in the series *Clear Thinking*. The primary verses for the sermon is 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7. In this case Warren quotes The Living Bible: “God wants you to be pure and to keep clear of all sexual sin . . . . For God has not called us to be dirty-minded and full of lust but to be holy and clean.”<sup>89</sup> In the sermon, Warren quotes this text and gives no explanation. The Living Bible paraphrase gives the interpretation to the listeners so Warren can move right to application. If Warren had used the New American Standard Bible translation of this text, he would have had to take a moment to explain some terms. It says, “For this is the

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<sup>87</sup>For Warren interpretation is not complete until application has been made. He said, “*Interpretation is not the message*. Observation is not the message. Correlation is not the message. Application is the message and if you have not applied it you have not preached.” See Warren, “Purpose Driven Preaching Conference.”

<sup>88</sup>Chapter 5 of this present work offers a full exploration of Warren’s use of translations in his preaching, writing and teaching. For that reason, this treatment of Warren’s use of translation will be brief.

<sup>89</sup>Rick Warren and Kay Warren, “Thinking Clearly About Sex,” *Clear Thinking*, pt. 4 (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2000), sermon transcript.

will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality. . . . For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.” The Living Bible gave the interpretation in language that the unchurched could understand where the New American Standard Bible, while accurate, used terms that would have required time in the message to explain.

While Warren’s use of various translations and paraphrases can cut down on the time needed for explanation, it can also obscure or misrepresent the original intent of the passage used. One example of this misrepresentation is in the pre-campaign message used for the “40 Days of Purpose.” One of the points in the message, called Don’t Waste Your Life, is that God wants “My whole life.” One of the verses Warren uses to support this point is Proverbs 3:6 in The Living Bible: “In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.”<sup>90</sup> While this paraphrase is not vastly different from other more literal translations, it does change one important term: “success.” The New American Standard Bible says, “and He will make your paths straight.” The term “success” is highly loaded in contemporary culture and can easily bring the idea of money, power, and prestige, especially to the unchurched. While God may grant a person these things in life, it is not the promise of Proverbs 3:6. Unfortunately, Warren does not help his listeners to define the meaning of “success” in biblical terms. He simply says, after quoting the text, “I don’t know anybody who doesn’t want to be a success. You want to be a success? The Bible tells you how, right there –

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<sup>90</sup>Rick Warren, “Don’t Waste Your Life,” *Preparing for 40 Days of Purpose* (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2002), sermon transcript.

‘in everything you do, put God first and he will crown your efforts with success.’”<sup>91</sup>

### **Implications of Warren’s Hermeneutic in His Sermons**

Each year, over 36,000 of Rick Warren’s sermons are sent out to those who have purchased a sermon subscription from pastors.com.<sup>92</sup> This number does not include the plethora of Warren’s sermons that are bought individually, or in series, off of the same website.<sup>93</sup> It is obvious that Warren’s sermons are making an impact outside of Saddleback Church. Based on the research that has been set forth in this study, this section will highlight implications of Warren’s hermeneutical process in relation to his preaching.

The verse-with-verse approach to sermon development, for which Warren is most known, has several strengths and weaknesses. One strength of this approach is that it allows for systematic teaching of doctrinal points. There is value in systematic theology as it helps give people a framework in which to make sense of specific biblical passages as well as real world events. Systematic theology is an essential element in the shaping of a biblical worldview which many Christians lack today. Verse-with-verse preaching can focus on a specific doctrine allowing people to understand the Bible’s major points on that doctrine. Taking the doctrine of God as an example, a verse-with-verse sermon can focus on major points like God’s omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, his eternal nature, and His redemptive plan by using verses from all over the

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>E-mail correspondence with author 7 January 2004.

<sup>93</sup>This author attempted to get some totals of the number of sermons that have been purchased from pastors.com, but was unsuccessful. The organization did not make their records available.

Bible for support. It would be difficult, at best, to use any one passage of Scripture to give such a comprehensive teaching of this doctrine. A series dedicated to preaching through a biblical doctrine can serve to organize and summarize the main biblical points into a order that helps Christians make sense of the doctrine.

Verse-with-verse preaching is also helpful in giving a view of the whole Bible's teaching on a practical topic such as marriage. While there are many good passages on marriage, none of them gives a comprehensive biblical picture of marriage. A verse-with-verse sermon could utilize essential points from many texts to help give a picture of how the Bible views marriage. Topical expository sermons can also address other topics like a biblical understanding of vocation and biblical principles of leadership. Certainly this type of preaching can be helpful in edifying the body of Christ.

The verse-with-verse methodology also has some weaknesses. First, it fails to emphasize books of the Bible are individually inspired in their organization.<sup>94</sup> God did not organize the Bible as a systematic theology with a chapter on each doctrinal point, though He certainly could have. God inspired the various writers to write the books of the Bible at specific times in specific places and specific ways. For this reason, the organization of the individual books must be inspired as well. While not all passages or books are as useful to the same degree, they are all inspired and therefore should be taught systematically. One of the failures seen in Warren's verse-with-verse preaching is that his messages consistently treat all books of the Bible like they are full of proverbs.

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<sup>94</sup>“The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” states, “We affirm that the whole Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.” See “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” [on-line]; accessed 29 April 2005; available from [www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/chicago.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/chicago.htm); Internet.

Verses are used with little mention of context. Since Warren preaches verse-with-verse approximately seventy percent of the time, one wonders how the new believers or unchurched in Saddleback view the Bible. Is it seen simply as a book of Proverbs?<sup>95</sup>

Another weakness of the verse-with-verse methodology is that it allows for easy proof-texting and misrepresentation of Scripture, even when it is not intended by the author. At times when preparing this type of message, the preacher can have a biblical point in mind, but find it difficult to locate a Scripture that explicitly states the point. The challenge is then to trim a text or find a translation that makes the point clearer. If this type of preaching is the predominant type used, as in the case of Warren, there is a constant challenge to be systematically bringing Scripture texts together in a powerful and provoking message. If this type of preaching were balanced with verse-by-verse teaching then the pressure to “find” a text with a certain point would not be as great.

Warren does not seem to see that there can be a balance. In his Purpose Driven Preaching Conference Warren categorizes sermons only as verse-by-verse through books of the Bible, or verse-with-verse topical exposition. As mentioned before Warren believes that the later is most effective in preaching to the unchurched, yet he preaches verse-by-verse in the weekend services about thirty percent of the time. He offers little evidence to show why doing verse-by-verse exposition through a book of the Bible is always ineffective with the unchurched. He anecdotally makes a comment about biblical illiteracy, but he has preached through James in the weekend services and does use chapters of Scripture for sermon series. Also, his endorsement for his mid-week service

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<sup>95</sup>In Warren’s defense, the mid-week believers’ services are characterized by verse-by-verse teaching and anyone who goes through C.L.A.S.S. 201 is taught the basic structure of the Bible.



series through the book of Romans would make one think it would be effective in reaching the unchurched:

It is the *basic handbook of Christianity*. This one letter has helped to change history. Martin Luther started the Reformation because of the book of Romans. John Wesley started the Wesleyan revivals. *Augustine became a Christian* because of the book of Romans. . . . I go verse-by-verse through the book of Romans, unlocking the *deep spiritual truths that transform lives* and build the body of Christ.<sup>96</sup> (emphasis mine)

With such a glowing endorsement, one would think it could be effective in the weekend services too.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, there is no reason to draw a firm distinction between verse-with-verse preaching and verse-by-verse preaching and their effectiveness in communicating with the unchurched. Both models have merit. The key is in communicating the truths of the text or texts in a clear, accurate, and relevant way.

### Conclusion

The preaching of the Word of God is a powerful tool and is an essential part of any healthy church. Rick Warren is a firm believer in the place and power of preaching and one can hardly argue with his success. At Saddleback's Easter weekend in 2002, Warren preached and more than 2,400 people made commitments to Christ.<sup>98</sup> In 2004, in

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<sup>96</sup>Warren, "Romans: Grace, The Truth That Transforms," advertisement.

<sup>97</sup>Romans is a hefty book and this author is not necessarily advocating that Warren should preach it over thirty-six weekends at Saddleback. The point was shared to simply show how preaching a book in context in a relevant way can transform lives as well as verse-with-verse preaching can.

<sup>98</sup>Tim Stafford, "A Regular Purpose-Driven Guy," *Christianity Today.com* (8 November 2002) [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com, ct/2002/012/1.42.html>; Internet.

their Easter service, Warren preached to 39,600 people.<sup>99</sup> Just one year later, in 2005, Saddleback's Easter service drew more than 45,000 people, with more than 4,000 of them committing their lives to Christ.<sup>97</sup> These numbers seem more like a Billy Graham Crusade than church services and because of that some might say what Warren says, "Never criticize what God is blessing."<sup>98</sup> Yet, no one Christian leader should be above honest, biblical evaluation. In the case of Warren's preaching, there is much to commend, not because these principles get results in Warren's preaching, but because they are true. The strengths of his approach lie in his commitment to the Word of God and his relentless belief that it has the power to change lives. He also should be commended for his desire to communicate God's Word clearly to today's world so that no cultural obstacle stands in the way of people hearing it.

At the same time, Warren has misrepresented texts in a desire to communicate principles to the unchurched. Though this author could not find anywhere that Warren does this in a way that makes a patently unbiblical point, he still misrepresents the original intent of the passages. Correcting this occasional error would be as simple as following his own advice about knowing context and doing a grammatical, historical study of the text before using it. The preacher's goal must always be to let the truth of the text speak, for that is how the power comes for a sermon to change people's lives and that

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<sup>99</sup>Bryon Dobson, "A Man of Purpose: The humble celebrity," *Tallahassee Democrat* (1 May 2004) [on-line]; accessed 21 September 2004; available from [http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s\\_PDFs/TallahasseeDemocratAManofPurpose5104.pdf](http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s_PDFs/TallahasseeDemocratAManofPurpose5104.pdf); Internet.

<sup>97</sup>"4,000 Saved During Saddleback's Easter Services" [on-line]; accessed 11 April 2005; available from [www.pastors.com/article.asp?printerfriendly=1&ArtID=8144](http://www.pastors.com/article.asp?printerfriendly=1&ArtID=8144); Internet.

<sup>98</sup>Rick Warren, "Purpose Driven Church Conference" (held at Saddleback Church, Foothill Ranch, CA, 1999), DVD's and text.

is what biblical preaching is truly about.

## CHAPTER 4

### WARREN'S HERMENEUTIC AS REVEALED IN HIS WRITINGS AND CONFERENCES

In the December 27, 2004 issue of *Time* magazine, Rick Warren was named one of the “16 People Who Mattered in 2004.”<sup>1</sup> In referring to Warren’s growing influence, *New York Times* commentator, David Brooks said, “There are two conversations going on in this country. I’m in the establishment conversation, but somehow I need to get into the Rick Warren conversation.”<sup>2</sup> Much of the reason for his recent acclaim is tied to his book, *The Purpose Driven Life* which is selling an average of 833,000 copies per month.<sup>3</sup> The truth is that Warren’s success has been building for a long time, though *The Purpose Driven Life* clearly carried him to a whole new level. Even before *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren’s writings, conferences, and sermons had brought him great recognition among evangelicals. The journey really began when Warren planted Saddleback Church in 1980 and published his first book, *Personal Bible Study Methods* in 1981.

This chapter focuses on Warren’s hermeneutic as it is revealed in each of his

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<sup>1</sup>“16 People Who Mattered in 2004,” *Time* (27 December 2004) [on-line], accessed 27 December 2004; available from [www.time.com, time/personoftheyear/2004/people/13.html](http://www.time.com/time/personoftheyear/2004/people/13.html); Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in Mark Tabb, “Purpose-Driven Life – 100 Weeks a NY Times Bestseller”(December 2004) [on-line]; accessed 2 January 2005; available from [http://www.pastors.com, article.asp=1&ArtID=7700](http://www.pastors.com/article.asp=1&ArtID=7700); Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

works, including conferences and Bible studies. These works will be reviewed systematically and in logical groupings. *The Purpose Driven Church* and the “Purpose Driven Church Conference” will be evaluated together because of common materials. Warren’s doctoral thesis will be included in this section because of common material. Other related materials, like Saddleback’s C.L.A.S.S. 101-401 will be incorporated because they share content and are part of the Purpose Driven Church strategy. The second group of materials that will be analyzed will be *The Purpose Driven Life* and resources from the “40 Days of Purpose” campaign.<sup>4</sup> Again, these will be grouped together because they are complementary. Finally, Warren’s two other books, *The Power to Change Your Life* and *Answers to Life’s Difficult Questions* will be examined along with several articles Warren has authored.

### ***The Purpose Driven Church and Conference***

Though dwarfed by the sales of *The Purpose Driven Life*, *The Purpose Driven Church* has sold over one million copies in twenty languages.<sup>5</sup> It is the foundational work for understanding the mission and methods Rick Warren has implemented at Saddleback to lead it to be one of the largest churches in America. This section will examine Warren’s hermeneutic as it revealed in *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference and materials. Special attention is given to Warren’s doctoral thesis as it contains many of his early thoughts that were later fully developed in *The Purpose Driven*

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<sup>4</sup>The one exception for the resources for the “40 Days of Purpose Campaign” is the sermons that are included for the weekend services during the campaign. These have been dealt with in conjunction with all of Warren’s sermons.

<sup>5</sup>“Welcome to Pastors.com” [on-line]; accessed 30 November 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com>, aboutus/#2; Internet.

*Church*. Warren’s Ministry Toolbox articles that he posts on his website and e-mails out weekly will not be evaluated even though they share common material.<sup>6</sup>

### **Warren’s Dissertation**

In 1993, Rick Warren completed a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. His doctoral thesis project was titled “New Churches for a New Generation, Church Planting to Reach Baby Boomers, a Case Study: The Saddleback Valley Community Church.” A survey of this thesis reveals striking similarities to *The Purpose Driven Church*, which was published just a couple of years later in 1995.<sup>7</sup> Nowhere in *The Purpose Driven Church* does it say that his thesis was the basis for the book, yet the similarities are too striking to be a coincidence.<sup>8</sup> The final chapter in the thesis, called “Why I Believe in Church Growth: The Biblical and Theological Basis,” offers some insight into the hermeneutic that emerges more fully in *The Purpose Driven Church*.

At the beginning of the chapter Warren explains his desire to base his understanding of church growth on God’s Word: “At the beginning of the new church I had to settle these basic issues: Does God want the church to grow numerically? Why

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<sup>6</sup>The material from these articles will not be dealt with in detail because the articles will quite often simply be an excerpt from *The Purpose Driven Church* book or conference.

<sup>7</sup>See Rick Warren, “New Churches for a New Generation, Church Planting to Reach Baby Boomers, a Case Study: The Saddleback Valley Community Church” (D.Min. project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993), table of contents.

<sup>8</sup>It is beyond the scope of this present work to compare and contrast all of the differences between the two works by Warren. One example of the similarities is seen in the section in both works arguing that quality and quantity are not mutually exclusive. Many of the concepts and phrases are the same, and Warren even uses the same illustration of what he would do if his three children were lost on a hiking trip. *Ibid.*, 358-59, and Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995), 50-53.

should the church grow numerically? Should numerical growth goals be set? I searched the Word of God for answers to these questions.”<sup>9</sup> The Bible is Warren’s authority in the life of the church.

Warren explains that churches are meant to grow numerically by offering six biblical reasons for this kind of growth. The first reason for numerical church growth is that “God’s Word Commands Numerical Church Growth.”<sup>10</sup> To support this point, Warren offers five biblical texts: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8.<sup>11</sup>

A second reason that Warren offers is “The Needs of the People Demand Numerical Growth.” Using Matthew 25:41, 46,<sup>12</sup> Warren emphasizes the need by reminding people of the reality of judgment and hell. He also reminds the reader that “Christ’s love compels us. . .” (2 Cor 5:14), that it is God’s will for none to perish (2 Peter 3:9), and that even one lost person is important to God (Luke 14:4).<sup>13</sup>

The next reason Warren offers for numerical church growth is that “Jesus Believed in Numerical Church Growth.”<sup>14</sup> He quotes Matthew 16:18, “. . . I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (NIV), to emphasize that Jesus

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<sup>9</sup>Warren, “New Churches for a New Generation,” 340.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 342.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 342-43.

<sup>12</sup>“Then He (God) will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ . . . . And they shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life” (NIV). Ibid., 344.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 346-48.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 348.

expects the church to grow.<sup>15</sup> Warren cites Matthew 5:5; 5:13,14; 8:11; 24:14; and 26:13 to argue that “Jesus had a world vision.”<sup>16</sup> To further clarify this point, Warren explains how the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-23), the Parable of the Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9), the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31-32), the Parable of the Yeast (Matt 13:33), and the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) show the imagery of growth that clearly emphasizes quantity.

The fourth reason that Warren offers for numerical growth is, “The Nature of the Church Implies Growth.”<sup>17</sup> Here Warren uses Colossians 2:19 in Today’s English Version: “Under Christ’s control, the whole body is nourished and held together by its joints and ligaments, and grows as God wants it to grow”(his emphasis).<sup>18</sup> To emphasize the New Testament image of the church as “the body of Christ,” he references Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:12; Colossians 1:24; and 2:19.<sup>19</sup> He also uses The Living Bible version of Ephesians 4:16<sup>20</sup> to show how “the concepts of health and growth go together when talking about the church.”<sup>21</sup>

The fifth biblical reason to support numerical growth is, “The New Testament

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 348-49.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 351.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. It seems Warren’s practice of underlining Scriptures for emphasis, which is seen clearly in his sermons, goes at least as far back as his dissertation.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>“Under his direction the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” Warren’s emphasis. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



Demonstrates Numerical Growth.”<sup>22</sup> To chronicle this growth, he utilizes these verses from the book of Acts: 1:15; 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14, 28; 6:1, 7; and 21:20. He asserts that based on evidence from the final verse, that up to half of the city of Jerusalem may have been converted to Christianity within approximately twenty-five years of Pentecost.<sup>23</sup>

A final reason for believing in numerical church growth is, “The Fulfillment of Prophecy Demands Numerical Growth” (NIV).<sup>24</sup> To support this point he quotes Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”<sup>25</sup> It is not only Christ’s desire for the church to grow, it is also his promise that once the gospel has reached every nation, he will return.

Warren’s doctoral thesis provides insight into Warren’s desire to be biblical in his approach to church ministry. He cites text after text to argue for the model of growth that he developed at Saddleback Valley Community Church. The passionate approach to being biblical which is seen in his thesis carries over to his other writings as well.

***The Purpose Driven Church: Book, Conference, and Materials***

In 1995, *The Purpose Driven Church* exploded onto the church growth scene with many praises. The accolades that were showered on Warren and the book were second to none in the field of church growth. From Bill Bright to Robert Schuller, Jerry

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 352.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 353-54.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 355.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Falwell to Ed Young, Jr, the “who’s who” of evangelicals seemed sold on the book and the approach to church growth that it espoused.<sup>26</sup> With a foreword and ringing endorsement from W.A. Criswell and endorsements from secular management experts like Peter Drucker,<sup>27</sup> the book seemed destined to make an impact. Even *Forbes* magazine called it “the best book on entrepreneurship, business, and investment.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite its enormous success, *The Purpose Driven Church* has received strong criticism as well. Much of the criticism draws attention to the book’s “unbiblical approach” to many different issues.<sup>29</sup> Warren has been accused of substituting “General Systems Theory” for biblical ecclesiology and community.<sup>30</sup> Others have criticized him for his relationship to Robert Schuller and the striking similarities between some of Warren’s teachings and those of New Age leaders Bernie Siegel and Neale Donald Walsh.<sup>31</sup> Another salvo that has been launched at the Purpose Driven Movement is that it utilizes Carl Jung’s personality theory, especially in relationship to the approach to

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<sup>26</sup>See Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, inside cover.

<sup>27</sup>Drucker called Saddleback’s model “the most significant sociological phenomena of the second half of this century.” Peter Drucker quoted in “Rick Warren” [on-line]; accessed 29 June 2004; available from [www.pastors.com, pcom/specials/rickbio.asp](http://www.pastors.com/pcom/specials/rickbio.asp); Internet.

<sup>28</sup>*Forbes* magazine, quoted in “Rick Warren”

<sup>29</sup>Though a few criticisms are mentioned here, the aim of this work is not to defend Warren’s teachings against these accusations; however, as Warren’s use of Scripture is examined it will become more clear what the basis is for many of his teachings.

<sup>30</sup>Larry Spargimino, *What You Need to Know about the Purpose Driven Church* (Bethany, OK: Southwest Radio Church, 2004), booklet, 4-6.

<sup>31</sup>Warren Smith, *Deceived on Purpose: The New Age Implications of the Purpose-Driven Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Magalia, CA: Mountain Stream Press, 2004). This book cited a place in *The Purpose Driven Life* where Warren actually quotes Dr. Bernie Siegel, a respected New Age leader. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

ministry placement called S.H.A.P.E.<sup>32</sup>

With such strong support and opposition, it is important to look at the Purpose Driven paradigm to see how and if it reflects the teachings of the Bible. Warren makes great use of Scripture in the book, citing 362 texts,<sup>33</sup> but the question arises, “How does he use Scripture to support what he writes?” Warren’s hermeneutic as revealed in *The Purpose Driven Church* shows his overall goal was doctrinally driven. Warren sought to examine the biblical teaching on the purpose, the nature, and the organization of the church and what it means to be a member of Christ’s church. Warren used passages that spoke directly to the church and others that spoke indirectly to help clarify his points. The book is, in essence, the culmination of Warren’s study into the doctrine of ecclesiology.<sup>34</sup>

The fifth chapter of *The Purpose Driven Church* gives an example Warren’s hermeneutic at work. The chapter, titled “Defining Your Purposes,” focuses on helping churches understand the biblical purposes that God has for the church. Warren sends the reader to the Bible to look up forty-three passages to discern the purposes of the church.<sup>35</sup> He encourages churches to focus on both the “nature” and the “tasks” of the church as they are revealed in Scripture by seeking the answer to four questions: “Why does the church exist?; What are we to *be* as a church? (Who and what are we?); What are we to

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<sup>32</sup>James Sundquist, *Who’s Driving the Purpose Driven Church?* (Bethany, OK: Rock Salt Publishing, 2004).

<sup>33</sup>A few texts are used more than once and were counted once for each occurrence.

<sup>34</sup>While this author would argue that *The Purpose Driven Church* is focused around a biblical ecclesiology, it does neglect important dimensions of ecclesiology like the prophetic voice of the church.

<sup>35</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 98.

*do* as a church? (What does God want done in the world?); How are we to do it?”<sup>36</sup> Later in the chapter he explicitly encourages a doctrinal approach to hermeneutics: “An effective purpose statement expresses the New Testament doctrine of the church.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, one must study and interpret the doctrine of the church from the Bible to be able to arrive at an effective purpose statement. As Warren led Saddleback through the study of New Testament passages on the church, they decided to focus in on two biblical passages as statements that summarize them all: “The Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).”<sup>38</sup>

Warren’s focus on helping churches to explore biblical ecclesiology for themselves is also seen in the “Purpose Driven Church Conference.” Early in session one of the conference, he encourages attenders to go home and “Lead your members in a study of the biblical passages about the church: Christ’s ministry on earth; the images of the church; the New Testament churches; and the commands of Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Doing this study will help the church to arrive at a purpose statement. According to Warren, the first characteristic of a “Good Purpose Statement,” is that it is biblical.<sup>40</sup>

At the core of Warren’s ecclesiology are the five biblical purposes of the church: worship; ministry; evangelism; fellowship; and discipleship. Warren frequently cites the places where Jesus gave the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) and the Great

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>39</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference” (held at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA, 2003), DVD and text, vii.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., ix.

Commission (Matt 28:18-20)<sup>41</sup> as the most concise explanation of the purposes of the church.<sup>42</sup> In the “Purpose Driven Church Conference” Warren also specifies Acts 2:41-47, Ephesians 4:11-16, and John 17:1-26 as passages where all the purposes appear together. The first two passages reflect the five purposes well, but John 17 is more problematic. The way Warren quotes selective verses from John 17 serves as an example of his doctrinally driven hermeneutic:

**Jesus’ ministry modeled these 5 purposes: John 17:1-27**

Vs. 4 “I have brought You glory on earth” (WORSHIP).

Vs. 6 “I revealed You to those whom you have me out of this world” (EVANGELISM).

Vs. 8 “I gave them the words You gave me” (DISCIPLESHIP).

Vs. 12 “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe” (FELLOWSHIP).

Vs. 18 “As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (MINISTRY).<sup>43</sup> (emphasis his)

In evaluating Warren’s usage of these verses, all but the last point seem to have textual support. An implication of the final point may be “ministry,” but there is nothing in the verse, or in the context of this passage, to suggest that is what Jesus meant. In fact, the reason Jesus “sent” his disciples into the world is probably more related to proclamation of the good news since the context mentions “the word” in verse 17 and 20. Also, some would argue that prayer is the sixth purpose of the church and that could easily be supported by the current context of John 17, as well as other passages such as Acts 2:42-

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<sup>41</sup>Warren sometimes includes v. 18, as in his dissertation and *The Purpose Driven Church*, 96, 368; in other places he cites only vv. 19-20, as in *The Purpose Driven Church*, 102, 104.

<sup>42</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 102.

<sup>43</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference,” text, x. Also cited in Rick Warren, “The Purpose Driven Church Simulcast,” Oak Hills Church of Christ, San Antonio, TX, 24 April 1999, notebook, 8.

47.

In further support of each of the five purposes of the church, Warren offers several biblical texts. The purpose of worship, which Warren explains as “celebrating God’s presence,”<sup>44</sup> is supported by Matthew 4:10 (NIV): “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”<sup>45</sup> This text appears in the context of the temptation of Jesus and is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13. The original message was to the nation of Israel and the context in Matthew is related to personal temptation to worship Satan or any other false god. There are implications of this text’s meaning for the church, but Warren makes direct interpretation for the church when he says, “Notice that worship comes before service. Worshiping God is the church’s first purpose.”<sup>46</sup>

Other texts Warren uses to support the biblical purpose of worship are Exodus 20:3, Psalm 34:3 and Psalm 122:1. His use of each of these offers further insight into his hermeneutic. Warren quotes Exodus 20:3 in the King James Version: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Without offering any interpretation of the context of Israel and the Ten Commandments, Warren makes immediate application: “There is an inborn urge in each person to worship. If we don’t worship God we will find something else to worship, whether it be a job, a family, money, a sport, or even ourselves.”<sup>47</sup> What Warren says is true, but without any interpretation offered, the reader who is not biblically knowledgeable is left believing that this text is a command to the church, not to the nation

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>45</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 103.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 116.

of Israel, with implications for the church and contemporary Christians.

Psalm 34:3 and Psalm 122:1 are used in a similar way as Exodus 20:3. Psalm 34:3 (RSV) says, “O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together”<sup>48</sup> and clearly emphasizes the corporate nature of worship, but originally it was a psalm used by the nation of Israel for worship. Psalm 122:1 (GN) is applied in a similar way with no explanation. It says, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the Lord’s house.’”<sup>49</sup> By not offering any contextual interpretation Warren seems to be equating the worship in a church building with the worship in the Old Testament temple. Again, there are clear ramifications here for the church, yet Warren bypasses the interpretive task in favor of application.

The second purpose of the church, evangelism, is described as “communicating God’s Word.”<sup>50</sup> After drawing attention to the present participle “going” in the Great Commission, he reminds his readers that Christ actually gave five Great Commissions: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47-49, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8.<sup>51</sup> Also, in both the “Purpose Driven Church Conference” and *The Purpose Driven Church* Paul’s words from Acts 20:24 are used for support of the purpose of evangelism.<sup>52</sup> The Living Bible says, “Life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus – the work of telling others the Good News about God’s mighty kindness and

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<sup>48</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference,” xi.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 104.

<sup>52</sup>In the “Purpose Driven Church Conference,” Warren uses the New Century Version to quote this passage while in *The Purpose Driven Church* he uses the Living Bible.

love.”<sup>53</sup> After citing this verse in *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren makes this statement: “This is an important responsibility of every Christian.”<sup>54</sup> This interpretation is not fair to the unique calling Paul had. Would Warren also include all believers in the promise of suffering that Christ gave to Paul in Acts 10:15-16? While all believers are called to be witnesses, and Paul is an example, not all are called to be evangelists, pastors, teachers, or missionaries. Paul even mentions this point in Ephesians 4:11-16, one of the passages Warren uses to support the five purposes. He would have been far better off to hold up Paul simply as an encouragement or an example than to equate Paul’s call with every believer’s call. Later, he uses 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 as further support for the call to evangelism.<sup>55</sup> In this text, Paul uses “we,” in the sense of the Corinthians, and thus all believers. Warren is much safer in the usage of this text to support the call to evangelism than he was with the previous one.

The purpose of fellowship, meaning being “incorporated into God’s family,” is also supported by numerous texts. He rightly focuses in on the New Testament doctrine of baptism, as expressed in the Great Commission, as pointing to a person’s connection to the church. He says, “Baptism is not only a symbol of salvation, it is a symbol of fellowship. It not only symbolizes our new life in Christ, it visualizes a person’s incorporation into the body of Christ.”<sup>56</sup> In supporting the biblical concept of fellowship,

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<sup>53</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 116.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 105. This point is clearly seen in Eph 4:4-6 (NASB): “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (emphasis mine). Curiously, Warren never cites this passage in *The Purpose Driven Church* or “Purpose Driven Church Conference.”



Warren frequently cites Ephesians 2:19 in the Living Bible: “You are a member of God’s own family and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian.”<sup>57</sup>

The fourth purpose of the church, discipleship, is found in the Great Commission phrase, “teaching them to obey.” Warren refers to this purpose as “educating” or “edifying” God’s people.<sup>58</sup> For support of this purpose, Warren uses Colossians 1:28 in the New Century Version: “We continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God’s presence *as a mature person in Christ*” (his emphasis)<sup>59</sup> He also uses the Living Bible version of Ephesians 4:12b-13: “. . . building up the church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity. . . until all become full grown in the Lord.”<sup>60</sup> This second text is an example of how Warren commonly edits Scripture texts to clarify the point he is trying to make and to reduce the need for excessive explanation.

Warren uses the second greatest commandment as a concise reference to the fifth purpose of the church, ministry. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” means “demonstrating God’s love to others by meeting their needs and healing their hurts in Jesus’ name. . . . The church is to minister to all kinds of needs: spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical.”<sup>61</sup> He reminds the reader of Jesus’ teaching that “giving a cup of

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<sup>57</sup>See Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference,” text, xi; Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 106; Warren, “The Purpose Driven Church Simulcast,” text, 9; Warren, “C.L.A.S.S. 101: Discovering Church Membership,” 1.

<sup>58</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 106.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference,” xi.

<sup>61</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 104.

‘cold water in his name was considered ministry and would not go unrewarded.’<sup>62</sup> The church’s purpose in relation to ministry is based on Ephesians 4:12 (NRSV): “. . . equip the saints for the work of ministry.”<sup>63</sup> Warren argues that the church should be “up front” about explaining that every believer has a ministry and that when people give their lives to Christ, they are committing to be a minister for him the rest of their lives.<sup>64</sup>

As with many of his sermons and other writings, Warren makes use of the wisdom from the book of Proverbs throughout *The Purpose Driven Church*. Though clearly not used as a part of his developing the doctrine of the church, Warren references Proverbs to support his emphasis on “wise living.” He cites it fifteen times, more than any other Old Testament book, and as much or more than many New Testament books. His first reference to Proverbs serves as an example of his desire to submit his life to God’s wisdom. He quotes Proverbs 28:26 from the Living Bible: “A man is a fool to trust himself! But those who use God’s wisdom are safe.” Following this text he explains, “Before anything else, you must first get God’s perspective on your situation.”<sup>65</sup> Using Proverbs is common for Warren and serves his intentions well because the verses in the book require little, if any, interpretation and are almost always application oriented in their wording.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 32.

## Evaluation of Scripture Usage

In evaluating *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference and materials, several points are worth noting. Though Warren bases the five purposes of the church on biblical texts, some of the practical points given in the book are not based on biblical texts, though they are stated with “authority.” For example, the two diagrams that Saddleback Church is organized around are the 5 Circles of Commitment and The Life Development Process.<sup>66</sup> Though both are helpful in “keeping the balance” of the five purposes, there is an important distinction between the two. The first is descriptive and the second is prescriptive. Listen to how Warren describes them: “The concentric circles represent a way of understanding the different levels of commitment and maturity in your church. The baseball diamond represents a process for moving people from little or no commitment to deeper levels of commitment and maturity.”<sup>67</sup> Anytime the task of growing believers is systematized, that system must be evaluated biblically. In this case, there seems to be an unbiblical hierarchy of seekers and believers, especially in relation to The Life Development Process. He is to be applauded for seeking to disciple people with intentionality, but at the same time, the man-made system must not be given biblical authority.

Clearly Warren’s desire was to put the purposes in a logical order, yet it is difficult to support this sequence biblically. For example, while C.L.A.S.S. 401 – Discovering My Life Mission helps members learn to be a witness, it gives the

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<sup>66</sup>See Appendix 2.

<sup>67</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 129.

appearance that this is an activity for the more mature believers in the Saddleback congregation. There are many new believers who will begin witnessing to lost friends and family immediately upon coming to Christ, even before completing C.L.A.S.S. 101. Warren would not prohibit or limit a new believer from witnessing in any way, but the church is also not set up to equip a new believer to do so. The same point could be made in relation to ministry. C.L.A.S.S. 301 - Discovering My Ministry is aimed at helping a Christian to learn his or her spiritual gifts and put them to practice. Does the Bible prohibit a new believer from getting involved in areas of ministry, other than deaconship, eldership, or teaching?<sup>68</sup> No, yet, Saddleback Church would not allow someone to take 301 until they have been through 101 and 201.

In addition, there are serious questions as to how Warren uses Scripture in the C.L.A.S.S. 301 - Discovering My Ministry. The acrostic S.H.A.P.E. is used as a guide to help evaluate members and to assist them in finding a ministry in which to serve. The acrostic and associated Scripture are taught in the following outline in 301:

### **MY S.H.A.P.E. WILL DETERMINE MY MINISTRY**

#### **S SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

*"... Each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."*  
1 Cor. 7:7b

#### **WHAT AM I GIFTED TO DO?**

#### **H HEART**

*"God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose..."* Rev. 17:7 [sic]

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<sup>68</sup>It is not clear from Saddleback materials whether they would prohibit a new Christian from helping in a ministry, but it is clear that they would not allow him or her to go through C.L.A.S.S. 301 until 101 and 201 were completed. In other words, they may not keep new Christians from serving, they just are not set up to equip them to find their unique place in ministry at that point.

*"For it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose!" Phil. 2:13 (NEB)*

## **WHAT DO I LOVE TO DO?**

### **A ABILITIES**

*"There are different abilities to perform service..." 1 Cor. 12:6*

*"I (God)... have given him **skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...**" Exodus 31:3*

*"... our **competence** comes from God." 2 Cor. 3:5b*

## **WHAT NATURAL TALENTS AND SKILLS DO I HAVE?**

### **P PERSONALITY**

*"No one can really know what anyone else is thinking or what he is really like, except that person himself." 1 Cor. 2:11 (LB)*

## **WHERE DOES MY PERSONALITY BEST SUIT ME TO SERVE?**

### **E EXPERIENCES**

#### **\* WHAT SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES HAVE I HAD?**

*"There has been enough time for you to be teachers -- BUT you still need to be taught... (you are) without any **experience** in the matter of right and wrong." Heb. 5:12-13*

#### **\* WHAT PAINFUL EXPERIENCES HAVE I HAD?**

*"Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways." Prov 20:30 (GN)*

*"God helps us in our troubles, so we **are able to help others** who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God." 2 Cor. 1:4 (GN)*

#### **\* WHAT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES HAVE I HAD?**

*"Always remember what you have learned. You [*sic*] **education** [*sic*] is your life -- guard it well!" Prov. 4:13 (GN)*

\* **WHAT MINISTRY EXPERIENCES HAVE I HAD?**

*"Because of **the service by which you have proved yourselves**, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel..." 2 Cor. 9:13 (Warren's emphasis).<sup>69</sup>*

Though all of these elements are useful in helping a Christian serve in a ministry, the acrostic relies on weak biblical evidence after the first point: spiritual gift. The second point, "Heart" is based on the text Revelation 17:17<sup>70</sup> in the NIV. This text does not support the idea of a believer's heart being geared to serving God. A full reading of the verse makes this point shockingly clear: "For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled." This verse was clearly misused in this case. What is ironic is that in his "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," Warren actually mentions this text because in searching the Bible he found that it has the word "purpose" in it. Yet he warns conference participants that this text clearly cannot be used to explain God's purpose for Christians.<sup>71</sup>

Another misuse can be seen in the next point in the acrostic: Abilities. He cites 1 Corinthians 12:6 to support each person's unique abilities; however, this text appears in the context of a chapter on spiritual gifts. This text would be better suited in supporting his first point than in arguing for "abilities" in this way. The second text, Exodus 31:3 offers better evidence of God giving abilities to people so that they may serve Him in a

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<sup>69</sup>Rick Warren, "C.L.A.S.S. 301 - Discovering My Ministry" ( Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2003), teacher's syllabus, 9-10.

<sup>70</sup>The original outline wrongly cites 17:7.

<sup>71</sup>Warren, "Purpose Driven Preaching Conference," (held at Saddleback Valley Community Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1999), audiotape.

particular capacity.

The textual evidence offered for the fourth point in S.H.A.P.E, Personality, does not speak about personality at all. Paul writes 1 Corinthians 2:11 in the context of explaining how the Spirit knows the mind of God and believers have received that same Spirit. Certainly Paul is not arguing that each person has a unique personality that helps to equip them to serve in certain ministries.

The fifth element of the S.H.A.P.E. acrostic is Experience. While Hebrews 5:12-13 does speak about experience, it is related to Christian growth and the discernment of good and evil, not serving in ministry. In the final point under “Experience” Warren tells the 301 attendee to ask themselves, “What ministry experiences have I had?” and bases the question on 2 Corinthians 9:13. The context of this passage is the monetary gift that was taken up for the church in Jerusalem and does not speak of “ministry” in general. At best Warren could use this text to help Christians evaluate their “service” to the body of Christ through financial giving.

As mentioned before S.H.A.P.E. may be a very helpful guide in assisting Christians to find their place in ministry, however biblical priority must be given to the first point, Spiritual Gift. In the New Testament the believer’s call to serve the body of Christ by using their spiritual gift or gifts is clearly emphasized in passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:3-8. If the other elements of the acrostic are raised to the level of spiritual gifts, it does not do justice to the emphasis of the New Testament. In this situation a Christian could be encouraged to serve in a ministry that fits all of the other elements of S.H.A.P.E., but which does not make the greatest use of his or her

spiritual gift.<sup>72</sup>

Another observation about Warren's hermeneutic in *The Purpose Driven Church* is that he makes selective choice of texts to support his points. This use of Scripture can be seen in the argument that Jesus focused on felt needs in order to attract crowds. Warren says,

People crowded around Jesus because he met their needs – physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, and financial. . . . Jesus often met a felt need in order to establish a beachhead for evangelism in a person's life. . . . Jesus frequently asked people, 'What do you want me to do for you?' . . . It is my conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart. . . .the most likely place to start is with the person's felt needs. As I pointed out earlier, this was the approach Jesus used.<sup>73</sup>

There are several problems with these generalizations about Jesus' ministry. The times in Jesus ministry where he healed people, cast out demons, or provided a miracle are not fundamentally related to his ministry methodology, but to his messianic identity. Paul Alexander, in a review of *The Purpose Driven Church*, summarizes issues surrounding Jesus' use of the phrase, "What can I do for you?":

Jesus is only recorded as saying this five times in all four gospels combined, three occurrences of which are the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus, and perhaps a companion (Mt 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-51; Luke 18:35-43). In each of those passages, His question is a response to the blind men's request "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David! Son of David, have mercy on us" (or a similar variant). In each passage the men twice acknowledge Jesus as the Son of David – they already believe He is the Messiah. Jesus' question, then, is not intended as an evangelistic foray. He's proving their faith is well placed, and rewarding it. When Jesus poses

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<sup>72</sup>One clear example of which this author is personally aware is a vice-president of a company who, after joining a local church, was encouraged to get involved in administration and leading adults. He was ultimately not satisfied, though he clearly had a passion to lead in the business world, experience, abilities, and a suitable personality. After several years serving in these areas with little joy, he stepped down and began to evaluate. After prayer and reflection, he felt called to work with children, and found the greatest joy in getting down in the floor in his suit on Sunday mornings and teaching Bible stories to four and five year olds.

<sup>73</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 219.



the question in Mark 10:35-45, it is in response to the disciples' desire for status in the kingdom – no replicable ministry method here. John 1:38 comes closest to making Warren's point, when Jesus asks his eventual disciples "What do you seek?" They ask where he's staying, and he tells them to "come and see." But "what do you seek?" is too broad to necessitate a felt needs oriented interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

Another issue related to holding up Jesus' methodology of meeting felt needs in order to be able to teach people is the whole issue of miracles. If Jesus did these miracles to reach people and Warren advocates that churches follow his methodology, then churches need to provide miracles for people so they will come and hear the message. To this author's knowledge there are no references in the Gospels to Jesus meeting people's felt needs using anything less than supernatural power. In addition to this evidence, the evidence from Paul's ministry suggests not that it was need-meeting that drew people to the church and to Christ, but the power of faith, conviction and the message of Christ crucified.<sup>75</sup> In the early church, ministry was not primarily the means to get people to listen to the gospel, but the result of people having already received the gospel.

Another dimension of Warren's argument for Jesus' "seeker-sensitive" methodology was that he was sensitive to people at different "degrees of spiritual understanding and commitment."<sup>76</sup> He cites Mark 12:34 where Jesus made the comment, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"<sup>77</sup> as an example. No one would disagree that when Jesus talked with individuals he dealt with them where they were spiritually, but to

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<sup>74</sup>Paul Alexander, "A Review of *The Purpose Driven Church*," [on-line], accessed 27 December 2004; available from [http://www.9marks.org\\_partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID598014|CIID1918134,00.html](http://www.9marks.org_partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID598014|CIID1918134,00.html); Internet.

<sup>75</sup>See 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:4-6, 17-30 for examples.

<sup>76</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 134.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

extrapolate from this point that Jesus was seeker-sensitive when dealing with crowds is unjustified. Warren goes on to say that it was not until after three years of public ministry among the people that He finally challenged them: “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’”(Mark 8:34 NIV).<sup>78</sup> Warren further explains: “Jesus was able to ask for that kind of commitment from the crowd only after demonstrating his love for them and earning their trust.”<sup>79</sup> Like the previous example, Warren tries to use an example or two to make generalizations about Jesus’ approach. In looking at Matthew’s gospel, Jesus said many challenging and controversial things throughout his ministry. Even before he said, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden . . .” (Matt 11:28), which Warren considers “sensitive,” Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount which has radical commands. In Matthew 8:18-22, Jesus calls his followers to a sacrificial obedience that lets nothing stand in the way of serving, including family. Even in chapter 11, before Jesus says, “Come unto me. . .”, he chastises “this generation” for wanting to be entertained (11:16-19), and condemns the unbelief of the people of major cities (11:20-24). Jesus was not “insensitive” to people, but followed the principle of “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.” For Warren to assume that all who come through the doors of Saddleback, or any church, belong to the previous category, those needing comforting, is not biblically warranted.

Another observation about *The Purpose Driven Church* is that it does not

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

reference any texts from the book of Revelation. Though Revelation is certainly a unique book, it does contain relevant texts like Christ's instructions to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chaps. 2-3). These texts offers clear biblical teaching on churches being faithful to their purpose in varying degrees and how Christ viewed them. Revelation also gives clarity to issues surrounding Christ's return to gather the church (chaps. 5-19), the completion of the Great Commission (5:9, 7:9, 14:6, 19:1, 19:6), and to the final destruction of the church's greatest enemy (20:1-15). Certainly these issues are relevant to developing a biblical ecclesiology.

*The Purpose Driven Church* and related materials also lack any biblical emphasis on spiritual barriers between the church and the lost. Warren's attitude towards barriers is reflected in the "Purpose Driven Church Conference": "The question we need to be asking is 'What are the barriers preventing growth in my church and as a church leader your first task is to discover what those barriers are and then remove them so growth can happen automatically.'"<sup>80</sup> While Warren gives a great amount of time and energy to overcoming cultural or artificial barriers to the people hearing the gospel, he spends no time discussing the spiritual barriers. In fact he makes the statement, "It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart."<sup>81</sup> This position does not seem to take into account biblical texts like Paul's description of the lost in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB): "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the

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<sup>80</sup>Rick Warren, "Purpose Driven Church Conference."

<sup>81</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 219.

minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” This text suggests that no amount of “seeker” sensitivity is going to win someone to Christ because the issue is fundamentally spiritual.

The lack of material on prayer in *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference demonstrates a lack of emphasis on an important spiritual dimension of ecclesiology and discipleship.<sup>82</sup> Prayer does not go unmentioned, but by the space given Warren apparently assumes that churches already know how to pray effectively. He says, “A prayerless ministry is a powerless ministry. But it takes far more than prayer to grow a church. It takes skilled action.”<sup>83</sup> If prayer is so important that a “prayerless ministry is a powerless ministry,” then why does Warren spend such little space (2 pages) talking about prayer? Could a church not put to practice everything else he says in the book, yet fail to see any true spiritual fruit because there is no prayer? Certainly churches should be wise in organizing and carrying out their purpose, but all of the human activity in the world, even in the church, is fruitless unless God is at work and the Bible says He works where there is prayer.<sup>84</sup> Despite the failure to emphasize prayer in the life of the church, Saddleback does strongly emphasize prayer on an individual level through C.L.A.S.S. 201, sermons, and other materials.

One startling observation about *The Purpose Driven Church* is how it has been

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<sup>82</sup>Prayer is not even referenced in the subject index to *The Purpose Driven Church*, though items like name tags, Disneyland, cats, signage, and maps can be found.

<sup>83</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 58.

<sup>84</sup>Matt 7:7-11; 9:38; 18:19; 21:22.

adopted by non-Christian groups like Mormons<sup>85</sup> and New Age groups.<sup>86</sup> In addition, an entire article was written in *Forbes* magazine on the business principles that can be derived from *The Purpose Driven Church*. The principles were not just a few – the writer, *Forbes* publisher Rich Karlgaard, identified and explained ten principles that did not need to be altered for a business to use them.<sup>87</sup> He says directly, “Were it a business, Saddleback would be compared with Dell, Google, or Starbucks.”<sup>88</sup>

### ***The Purpose Driven Life* and “40 Days of Purpose”**

It is hard to overstate the impact that *The Purpose Driven Life* has had. More than 27,300 copies of the book are selling every day in the United States and this has pace continued on for over two years.<sup>89</sup> It is being read by everyone from military men and women in Iraq to corporate executives and professional athletes.<sup>90</sup> The success of the book has led Warren to stop receiving a salary and to pay Saddleback Church his salary back for the last twenty-four years.<sup>91</sup> In addition, he gives 90 percent of his royalties from

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<sup>85</sup>“12 Top Missionary Resources” [on-line]; accessed 14 April 2004; available from [www.missionaryhelper.com/resources/](http://www.missionaryhelper.com/resources/); Internet.

<sup>86</sup>A New Age group attended the “Purpose Driven Church Conference” a few years ago. Warren did not exclude them and made the point that it was a great opportunity to engage them with the truth.

<sup>87</sup>Rick Karlgaard, “Purpose Driven,” *Forbes* (16 February 2004) [on-line]; accessed 21 September 2004; available from [http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s\\_PDFs/FORBESPurposeDriven21604.pdf](http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s_PDFs/FORBESPurposeDriven21604.pdf); Internet.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Mark Tabb, “Purpose-Driven Life - 100 Weeks a NY Times Bestseller.”

<sup>90</sup>Sonja Steptoe, “The Man with the Purpose,” *Time* (29 March 2004) [on-line]; accessed 21 September 2004; available from [http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s\\_PDFs/TIMETheManWithThePurpose32904.pdf](http://www.saddleback.com/flash/s_PDFs/TIMETheManWithThePurpose32904.pdf); Internet.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

the book to Saddleback and charitable foundations he and his wife have established to fight poverty, illiteracy, and diseases, like AIDS, around the world.<sup>92</sup> He says, “I don’t think God gives money or fame for your own ego” and has told God, “Obviously, this is Your money, God, and this is Your platform, so what do You want me to do with it?”<sup>93</sup>

The campaign associated with *The Purpose Driven Life*, called “40 Days of Purpose,” has also seen great success. More than 25,000<sup>94</sup> churches from 80 different denominations in a dozen countries have gone through the “40 Days of Purpose.”<sup>95</sup> A recent article on pastors.com sums up the impact of the whole Purpose Driven movement: “40 Days of Purpose and the Purpose Driven movement have become a world-wide phenomena featured in over 300 newspapers, magazines, radio shows, and TV shows including USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Fox News, ABC, NBC, Forbes, and Time magazine.”<sup>96</sup>

This section will be dedicated to evaluating Warren’s hermeneutic in *The Purpose Driven Life*, the “40 Days of Purpose,” and associated Bible studies and materials. Though a thorough evaluation will be made, it is beyond the scope of this work to evaluate how Warren interprets each of the more than seven hundred Scripture

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Cited in James Smith, “Legislators Welcome Rick Warren in Session’s Final Week,” *Florida Baptist Witness* [on-line]; accessed 21 October 2004; available from <http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com,2523.article.print>; Internet.

<sup>94</sup>Tobin Perry, “Saddleback’s 2004: Most Baptisms in Its 25-Year History” [on-line]; accessed 21 January 2005; available from <http://www.pastors.com,article.asp?printerfriendly=1&ArtID=7885>, Internet.

<sup>95</sup>“Rick Warren.”

<sup>96</sup>“The Saddleback Story” [on-line]; accessed 28 September 2004; available from [www.saddleback.com,flash/story.asp](http://www.saddleback.com,flash/story.asp); Internet.

passages that are quoted in the book.<sup>97</sup> Scripture usage will be examined on a whole, giving special attention to trends and examples of usage so a thorough analysis of Warren's hermeneutic is achieved. Materials from the "40 Days of Purpose" will be used in conjunction with the corresponding sections from the book, rather than being evaluated separately.

### **The Biblical Argument for 40 Days**

Rick Warren's purpose in writing *The Purpose Driven Life* is so the reader ". . . will know God's purpose for your life and will understand the big picture – how all the pieces of your life fit together."<sup>98</sup> In order to help achieve this goal Warren divides the book into chapters for daily reading over a 40 day period. The days are divided up into five chapters, after the introductory week, each dedicated to one of God's purposes for people:

1. You Were Planned for God's Pleasure
2. You Were Formed for God's Family
3. You Were Created to Become Like Christ
4. You Were Shaped for Serving God
5. You Were Made for a Mission<sup>99</sup>

Each day's reading is concluded by a verse and a point to remember and a question for

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<sup>97</sup>Because Warren's use of sixteen different translations for approximately 700 passages plays such an integral part of his hermeneutic in *The Purpose Driven Life*, this section will not be as extensive as the section on *The Purpose Driven Church*. Analysis of *The Purpose Driven Life* will carry over to the next chapter, which is on Warren's use of translation.

<sup>98</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 9.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 7-8.

further reflection based on the day's reading.

The "40 Days of Purpose" is a church campaign built around the *The Purpose Driven Life*. While each individual involved in the program is reading the book, weekly Sunday School and Small Group lessons further clarify the purpose and help build fellowship. In addition Warren includes eight weekend message transcripts, including a pre-campaign message, that are designed for the church pastor to use in worship during the campaign. The overall effect is a comprehensive, church-wide focus on the principles set forth in *The Purpose Driven Life*.

*The Purpose Driven Life* makes reference to approximately one thousand Scripture passages, though only 733 are quoted with a translation referenced.<sup>100</sup> Even in the introduction to the book, before Day 1, Warren's hermeneutic begins to emerge. He makes the assertion, "The Bible is clear that God considers 40 days a spiritually significant period. Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for his purposes, he took 40 days. . ." <sup>101</sup> Without any further qualification, Warren provides the evidence for his assertion in list of biblical examples:

1. Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain.
2. Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai.
3. The spies were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 325-334. In an apparent self-contradiction, Warren writes in the introduction that he uses "over a thousand" verses from English translations and paraphrases, and in Appendix 3, states that this book uses "nearly a thousand quotations from Scripture." In addition, the inside of the bookcover says over 1,200 Scriptures are referenced or quoted. See Ibid, 11, 325, bookcover. Of the Scripture references, 733 are large enough quotations from a passage to warrant citing a version. The rest are only references or simply brief quotes like "God is love" from 1 John 4:8. See Ibid., 24. Occasionally, Warren will quote a verse and give its version in the body of the text so that no endnote is created, but this is a rare occurrence.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid, 9.



4. David was transformed by Goliath's 40-day challenge.
5. Elijah was transformed when God gave him 40 days of strength from a single meal.
6. The entire city of Ninevah was transformed when God gave the people 40 days to change.
7. Jesus was empowered by 40 days in the wilderness.
8. The disciples were transformed by 40 days with Jesus after the resurrection.<sup>102</sup>

There are a number of biblical issues that arise with Warren's initial assertion and supporting evidence. Attention will be given to the assertion first and then to the supporting evidence.

Warren's point that the Scriptures leave no doubt that 40 days is a "spiritually significant period" is overstated. Did some important spiritual events happen in a few biblical characters' lives during a 40 day period? The answer is yes, but there are far more biblical characters who never had a "40 day" period of spiritual renewal. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not and Joseph's "transformation" took many years of his life in slavery and jail. Samuel, Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah did not have significant 40 day periods in their lives. It is biblically impossible to assert that the apostle Paul missed God's purpose in his life, yet he never got to go through a 40 day experience but Warren says "*whenever* God wanted to prepare someone for his purpose, he took 40 days . . ." (emphasis mine). The problem is not the idea of having a 40 day campaign for people to connect with God in a focused way, but that it is set up as a biblical paradigm. Indeed Warren might have been able to provide evidence to support his first statement

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 10.

about 40 days being a significant period in the Bible, but his second statement uses “whenever” and that means “always.” It would not have weakened the book or its focus to have simply stated that “In the Bible, God sometimes used 40 day periods to help people grow closer to Him.”

The biblical evidence Warren offers to support the idea of 40 days being a spiritually significant period is questionable. First, one might argue that the entire earth had a significant transformation during Noah’s “40 days.” Everyone on earth was wiped out except for Noah and his family. This story is a unique experience and this author is not sure how it could be applied to the spiritually lost except to encourage them to repent and put their faith in Christ before the “40 days” of God’s judgment comes.

Moses’ experience on Mt. Sinai was also a unique experience as he was receiving the Ten Commandments from God. This 40 days was also transforming for the community of Israel as they decided to make a golden calf and engage in pagan worship, bringing God’s judgment after Moses returned. There are similar problems with using David and Elijah since they were part of only a small minority of people in their times who were serving God.

The spies that went into the Promised Land for 40 days is also a poor example to use. Ten of the twelve spies came back and had lost their faith that God wanted them to go into the land. Only two returned who had the faith to go in and take the land and there is nothing to suggest that they did not have this same attitude before they left.

Ninevah did “change” in 40 days after Jonah preached to them, but it was not because they found their “purpose.” The nation “repented” because they were threatened with judgment from a holy God. Oddly, in another place Warren argues that fear is not a

good motive for people to repent and turn to Christ.<sup>103</sup>

The two references to 40 days from the New Testament may serve best for Warren's point that 40 days can be used by God to help people get focused spiritually. People like Bill Bright have advocated and participated in fasts for 40 days as a time to focus on prayer and spiritual renewal based on Jesus' period in the wilderness. Certainly God can use a 40 day period of intentional and concentrated focus to "prepare people for his purposes," but it cannot be set up as a biblical paradigm as Warren has done in *The Purpose Driven Life*.

### **Hermeneutic Trends in *The Purpose Driven Life***

One of the trends that emerges in *The Purpose Driven Life* is that Warren sometimes will not offer a clarifying interpretation when the Scripture used clearly demands it for there to be an honest application to his listeners. Sometimes an explanation may not be necessary for the reader to grasp the meaning of a text, but at other times it is essential to making the meaning clear so that a fair application can be made.

This trend can be seen from early on in the book. The theme of the first week is getting the perspective that people exist for God, not the other way around, and that he has a purpose for people. He attacks the entire "self-help" movement using the Message paraphrase<sup>104</sup> of Matthew 16:25: "Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my

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<sup>103</sup>Rick Warren, "A Primer on Preaching Like Jesus," *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox*, no. 78 (November 2002) [on-line]; accessed 22 April 2004; available from <http://www.pastors.com>, Internet.

<sup>104</sup>A detailed discussion of Warren's use of translation and its relationship to his hermeneutic can be found in chapter five of this current study.

way, to finding yourself, your true self.” Warren offers no explanation or interpretation of this passage in relationship to Christ, who said it. The lack of interpretation leaves the text open to a broad range of meanings all of which would be difficult to associate with Christ, who said the words in the verse. Take the concept of “self-sacrifice.” One might say that Jim Jones and David Koresh were “self-sacrificing.” Also, the term “finding yourself” is loaded with contemporary psychological baggage. People today “find themselves” while doing things like going to a spa, doing yoga, or taking a trip. Warren clearly did not mean to leave it open to these kinds of misinterpretation, but without any reference to Christ or further explanation anywhere around this Scripture reference, it leaves room for misunderstanding of what Christ meant when he said it.

Though Warren sometimes will offer a Scripture with little or no interpretation, at other times he will introduce a text after giving a basic explanation of its meaning. For an example of where he gave explanation, on Day 22, Warren uses Philippians 2:13 to make a point, but before doing so he gives this explanation:

You cannot reproduce the character of Jesus on your own strength. New Year’s resolutions, willpower, and best intentions are not enough. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to make the changes God wants to make in our lives. The Bible says, “*God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey and the power to do what pleases him.*”<sup>105</sup>

Warren helps to prepare the reader for the verse by making the point first and then sharing the text to help drive it home.

Another example of Warren offering some interpretation of a text to help make application is in Day 29 where he uses Matthew 20:28. He says, “You are commanded to

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<sup>105</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 174.

serve God. Jesus was unmistakable: *'Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life.'* It is the heart of the Christian life. Jesus came 'to serve' and 'to give' – and those two verbs should define your life on earth too."<sup>106</sup> Though Warren uses a translation that does not capture the "ransom" language<sup>107</sup> that pointed to Jesus' unique purpose in giving his life, the context and the essence of the text make the same point: Christians are called to serve like Christ.

In Day 17, Warren deals with why it is so important for a Christian to have a church family. He uses Ephesians 2:10 in speaking about the Christian's responsibility to "share in Christ's mission in the world," but before he quotes the text he offers this commentary:

When Jesus walked the earth, God worked through the physical body of Christ; today he uses his spiritual body. The church is God's instrument on earth. We are not just to model God's love by loving each other; we are to carry it together to the rest of the world. This is an incredible privilege we have been given together. As members of Christ's body we are his hands, his feet, his eyes, and his heart. He works through us in the world. We each have a contribution to make. Paul tells us, *"He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing"*(The Message).<sup>108</sup>

Warren helps the reader to understand that good works are the way Christ works through the church in the world, that good works are part of God's plan, and that good works are the responsibility of each believer as a part of the body of Christ.

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>107</sup>Warren's use of translation and its impact on his hermeneutics will be examined in the next chapter.

<sup>108</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 135.

Another trend that emerges upon close examination of the book and associated materials is the usage of the Old Testament references to Israel being applied directly to Christians today, and sometimes simply to people in general. An example of this direct application is in Day 2 where Warren uses Isaiah 46:3-4 (NCV) to show how God made “you in order to express his love.”<sup>109</sup> He gives no context of the passage but applies it directly to his readers by saying, “God says, *‘I have carried you since you were born; I have taken care of you from your birth. Even when you are old, I will be the same. Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you. I made you and will take care of you’*” (Warren’s emphasis).<sup>110</sup> Warren did not use all of verse 3 because it clearly would have confused the reader. The New American Standard Bible shows the meaning of the two complete verses more clearly: “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by Me from birth and have been carried from the womb; even to *your* old age I will be the same, and even to *your* graying years I will bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I will carry *you*; and I will bear *you* and I will deliver *you*” (emphasis mine). This message was to Israel and appears in the context of God showing how great he is compared to all the false Gods of the other nations. Warren presents the text as God speaking to all people.

Another example of applying the Old Testament promises to Israel directly to people today comes in the “40 Days of Purpose” small group curriculum. In session one, “What On Earth Am I Here For?,” Warren makes use of Jeremiah 29:11 in the Living

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

Bible: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.’”<sup>111</sup> In the video, after Warren quotes this text, he says, “You have no idea the tremendous things God wants to do in your life if you will begin to live according to his purposes. It will increase the motivation in your life a hundred fold.”<sup>112</sup> The original context of Jeremiah 29:11 makes it clear that God is speaking these words to Israel. There may be application to contemporary Christians, but there is no application for those who are unsaved, though Warren does not seem to make that distinction.<sup>113</sup>

In Day 11, “Becoming Best Friends with God,” Warren uses Exodus 34:14 to make the point that it is an amazing thing that God wants each person as a “close friend.” The New Living Translation, which Warren uses for this text, says, “*He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you.*”<sup>114</sup> He includes this explanation after the text: “God deeply desires that we know him intimately. In fact, he planned the universe and orchestrated history, including the details of our lives, so we could become his friends.”<sup>115</sup> There are several problems with this usage. One, Warren does not use the

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<sup>111</sup>Rick Warren, “40 Days of Purpose Small Group Curriculum” (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2002), study guide, 5.

<sup>112</sup>Rick Warren, “40 Days of Purpose Small Group Curriculum” (Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2002), video.

<sup>113</sup>He does make the comment at the end of the session one video that God will ask people two questions in eternity: what did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?; and what did you do with your life? He then offers to help people pray to receive Christ. He does not make clear that the “plans” God has for a person are appropriated only through Christ and that without Christ, a person will completely miss his or her “purpose” in life.

<sup>114</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 86.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 86-87.

entire verse, which says, “You must worship no other gods, but only the LORD, for he is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you” (NLT). Warren does not use an ellipsis in his quotation of this passage to show that he did not use the whole verse, nor does he make any reference to it in the endnote, which should have read “Exodus 34:14b.” Another problem is he did not use the whole text, or a more literal translation because the point he was making would not have been supported since the focus is not on “friendship” but on our command to worship God because he is a jealous God.<sup>116</sup> The New Living Translation rendering is not without merit since the emphasis on Israel as God’s bride is clearly emphasized in the verse and context, but to apply this text merely to “friendship” with God does not do justice to its true meaning. In addition, as with the previous examples, Warren applies a text given to Israel to all people in general.

As in the last example, Warren will frequently make use of part of a verse, rather than quoting the whole verse. He defends his use of “phrases” this way:

Also, since the verse divisions and numbers were not included in the Bible until 1560 A.D., I haven’t always quoted the entire verse, but rather focused on the phrase that was appropriate. My model for this is Jesus and how he and the apostles quoted the Old Testament. They often just quoted a phrase to make a point.<sup>117</sup>

While no one would argue with Warren about chapter and verse headings being in the original Greek and Hebrew, sentences were in the original. The question of using a phrase to make a point must always be submitted to the contextual meaning of that phrase. As in some of the examples mentioned, Warren will quote a phrase because the rest of the verse may undermine his point. In other words, the meaning of the phrase he

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<sup>116</sup>The NASB says, “. . . for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. . .”

<sup>117</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 325.



uses takes on a different meaning than the one he assigns to it when it is considered in the context of the sentence or section of Scripture from which it was taken. Warren's citing of Jesus and the apostles as examples also lacks strong merit since they were inerrantly inspired by God to use the phrases they did. While this point certainly does not forbid "fallible" preachers or teachers of today from using phrases from Scripture, the weight is on them to adhere strictly to the original authorial intent, lest they find themselves at odds with the Author.

### Other Books

In addition to *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren has published three other books. In 1981, Warren published his first book *Personal Bible Study Methods*,<sup>118</sup> which has also appeared under the title *Dynamic Bible Study Methods*. Warren's third book, which came after *The Purpose Driven Church*, is called *The Power to Change Your Life* and was published in 1998. One year later, *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions*<sup>119</sup> came out. This section will briefly overview some of the trends in these last two works.

There is a different approach to hermeneutics in *The Power to Change Your Life* and *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* than in Warren's more popular books. *The Power to Change Your Life* is a systematic look at the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians

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<sup>118</sup>The nature of the book makes examining Warren's hermeneutic at work a little difficult. The relevant insights into gaining a systematic understanding of Warren's hermeneutic appears in chapter two of this present work. For this reason, this book will not be examined in this section.

<sup>119</sup>After reading and evaluating these books, it is this author's opinion that the *The Power to Change Your Life* and *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* are based on sermons by Rick Warren. The organization of the material and outline of the chapters looks very much like his sermons. This author was unsuccessful in getting clarification about the source of these two books from pastors.com. They did not know if the chapters were originally sermons.

5:22-23. The title of the chapters shows the flow:

1. The Power to Change Your Life
2. God's Part and My Part in Changing Me
3. Becoming a More Loving Person
4. The Choice to Rejoice
5. Peaceful Living in an Uptight World
6. Developing Your Patience
7. Putting on a Little Kindness
8. Living the Good Life
9. The One Who Can Be Counted On
10. A Gentle Approach
11. Developing Self-Control
12. A Productive Life<sup>120</sup>

After two introductory chapters, Warren follows the list of the fruit of the Spirit, explaining each in detail.

Several observations can be made about Warren's hermeneutic in *The Power to Change Your Life*. First, he explains the context and gives an interpretation of passages more often than in his other works. For example, in chapter seven on kindness, Warren uses Colossians 3:12, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." He explains: "Notice the word *clothe*. The Greek word literally means 'put on.' What Paul is saying

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<sup>120</sup>Rick Warren, *The Power to Change Your Life* (Foothills Ranch, CA: The Encouraging Word, 1998), table of contents.

here is that when you wake up in the morning, you ought to get dressed spiritually and emotionally as well as physically. . . Paul says kindness is a choice.”<sup>121</sup> Other examples of Warren offering interpretation include where he uses Revelation 2:4-5, explaining the context and making two textual points<sup>122</sup> and where he uses Proverbs 3:5-6 and writes several paragraphs intertwining explanation and application.<sup>123</sup>

An additional observation from *The Power to Change Your Life* is that Warren makes great use of the book of Proverbs. In one chapter he quotes Proverbs seven times<sup>124</sup> and six times in another.<sup>125</sup> This extensive use of Proverbs is probably related to Warren’s general desire to limit the time needed for explanation and to apply biblical truth to the lives of his readers as directly as possible.

If *The Power to Change Your Life* seems modeled after a “Scripture Interprets Scripture” sermon series, then *Answers to Life’s Difficult Questions* seems like a collection of verse-by-verse sermons. The book’s subtitle is *Encouragement For Your Most Common Fears and Struggles* and bases each chapter around people’s common life experiences.<sup>126</sup> Each chapter’s subject is related to a character: stress – Jesus; failure – Peter; depression – Elijah; above average living – Jabez; peace – Moses; discouragement – Nehemiah; problem – Jehoshaphat; crisis – Paul; change – Jacob; personal messes –

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>124</sup>Chapter six, “Developing Your Patience.”

<sup>125</sup>Chapter nine, “The One Who Can Be Counted On.”

<sup>126</sup>Rick Warren, *Answers to Life’s Difficult Questions* (Foothills Ranch, CA: The Encouraging Word, 1999), table of contents, 5.

Samson; suffering – Joseph; and loneliness – Paul.

An example of how Warren uses a biblical character's experience to make application to contemporary life is seen in chapter five, "How Can I Have Peace of Mind?" In this chapter Warren focus the reader on Moses' experience as shared in Hebrews 11:23-27. His points and supporting texts were:

1. The Issue of Personal Identity: Know Who You Are (v.24).
2. The Issue of Personal Responsibility: Accept Responsibility (v.25).
3. The Issue of Priorities: Decide Your Priorities (v.25).
4. The Issue of Perseverance: Face Your Difficulties (v.27).<sup>127</sup>

Moses' life serves as an example to Warren's readers. Warren offers this closing application to summarize the message of the chapter: "Peace of mind comes when you accept responsibility, choose God's priorities, and then confidently persevere."<sup>128</sup>

The chapters in *Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* appear very much like Warren's verse-by-verse sermons, but with even less additional Scripture quoted. All of the major points Warren makes are derived from the biblical text he uses. The "lessons" are supported through verse reference and quotation. The bulk of the chapters are detailed descriptions of the narrative used with the main points, appearing in bold, being application oriented. Application does appear very clearly in the text as well, but is more intertwined with exposition than in most of Warren's writings.

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 51-60.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 60.

## Conclusion

Rick Warren's writings offer a wide-range of Scripture usages. His passionate desire to apply the Bible in relevant ways comes through as clear as anything in his writings. Just the sheer volume of verses quoted and referenced in his books, conferences and teaching materials suggest that, as chapter two demonstrated, he believes in the authority of Scripture in the life and teaching of the church. His focus on applying Scripture is as clearly seen in his writings as it was in his sermons. It would be difficult for a person to read any of his books and wonder, "what should I do about that?"

At the same time, this focus on application also causes problems. At times Warren's desire to make a point using Scripture causes him to get overly zealous and take a passage out of context. An example is his use of Old Testament texts directed to Israel as points directed toward contemporary people in general. The inclusion of Scripture certainly strengthens the points he makes in his writings, but he could use less Scripture in some of his writings and make the same points. *The Purpose Driven Life* could probably have half as many Scriptures as it does and it would not weaken its message. In doing so Warren would have opportunity to explain more verses in context so faithful application could be made to the listener.

There is still great value in Warren's writings overall since all of his main points are biblical and even when he stretches a text, the point he makes is not in contradiction to biblical doctrine. In these cases it seems he simply tries to take a point of practical life wisdom and find biblical evidence to support it. Warren's passion for practically applying biblical wisdom is something Christians need since they are called not only to believe in biblical truth, but to act on it as well. One must also remember that

Christians are not called to merely put to action part of the Word, but all of the Word. It could be argued that Warren's approach to Scripture usage limits the range of biblical doctrine to which his listeners are exposed.

## CHAPTER 5

### WARREN'S USE OF TRANSLATION/PARAPHRASE AS KEY TO HIS HERMENEUTIC

In analyzing Rick Warren's hermeneutic thus far, the focus has been on his doctrine of the Bible, Scripture usage in his sermons, and Scripture usage in his books, conferences and other writings. One significant area of Warren's hermeneutic is left to be examined: his use of translation. This topic was reserved for the final major chapter of this study because it builds on the rest of the chapters, and proves to be a significant key to understanding Warren's overall hermeneutic. Though his desire to make application drives his hermeneutic, his use of translation is the primary means for achieving that goal.

Unlike most pastors and teachers, Warren does not prefer to quote Scripture from one main translation, occasionally offering others for clarification. Warren uses approximately eighteen different versions of the Bible in his preaching, teaching, and writing. This chapter will analyze how Warren makes use of these versions in his materials. Major divisions of the chapter will focus on translation usage in Warren's sermons and in usage in *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference. A larger final section will be dedicated solely to *The Purpose Driven Life* because it is the most significant example of Warren's use of translation. In it, Warren quotes 733 Bible passages in fifteen versions.<sup>1</sup> Two preliminary sections will deal with what Warren says

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<sup>1</sup>See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 325.

about Bible versions and the task of translation as it relates to the specific versions cited by Warren.

### **What Warren Says about Translations**

The second half of the twentieth century brought many new English translations and paraphrases of the Bible. Consequently, pastors, teachers, and lay people have more options to consider when it comes to what translation to use for personal devotions, teaching, preaching, or writing. Even over the twenty-four years of Warren's ministry, several significant translations and revisions have been published. This section will delineate Warren's attitude toward translation as it is revealed in his sermons, books, conferences, and Bible studies.

The earliest reference to translation comes in Warren's *Dynamic Bible Study Methods*. In this book Warren argues that while no translation is perfect, each one can help contribute to a clearer understanding of God's Word.<sup>2</sup> The "greatest benefit" derived from these various translations comes in comparing them and through this process, the ". . . many possible meanings and usages of a word can be found. . ."<sup>3</sup> Warren does not offer any directions on how to sort through the translations to arrive at the one meaning of the text, though he does explain the difference between a translation and a paraphrase. He makes note that a paraphrase requires the writer's inclusion of his interpretation at various points.<sup>4</sup> He advocates usage of paraphrases for "light devotional reading," but

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<sup>2</sup>Rick Warren, *Dynamic Bible Study Methods* (Mission Viejo, CA: Encouraging Word, 1981), 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



argues that an “accurate and respected translation” should be used for “serious Bible study.”<sup>5</sup> The versions he recommends in this book are The New International Version, The New American Standard Bible, and the Amplified Bible.<sup>6</sup> The rest of *Dynamic Bible Study Methods* does offer clear help in using Bible reference works to help sort through “various possible meanings” and arrive at the original meaning and contemporary application of a text.

Another place where Warren references translation is in *The Purpose Driven Church* and the associated conference. This material appears in the context of instruction on how to plan and lead a seeker sensitive service. Warren advises pastors and church leaders to, “*Read Scripture from a new translation*” (his emphasis).<sup>7</sup> He says, “With all the wonderful translations and paraphrases available today, there is no legitimate reason for complicating the Good News with four-hundred-year-old English.”<sup>8</sup> He makes note that the King James Version was commissioned because the king wanted a “*contemporary version*” (his emphasis).<sup>9</sup> Warren seems to assume that all pastors and teachers are as equally qualified as he is to weigh the basic merits and shortcomings of translations and paraphrases because he gives no comment on study. He sums up, “Clarity is more important than poetry.”<sup>10</sup> The conference material makes the same basic

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>7</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 297.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

point.<sup>11</sup>

In C.L.A.S.S. 201 - Discovering Spiritual Maturity, Warren gives further advice about using translations. He recommends that for Bible study, those attending the class should buy as many different translations as they can afford and a complete concordance to match at least one translation.<sup>12</sup> In speaking about what versions a Christian should read in his or her quiet time Warren says:

I suggest for reading a couple of the modern translations. The Good News translation is excellent and very readable. The Good News was translated by the American Bible Society and the purpose of it was to be used to teach English as a second language overseas. It has a very simple vocabulary for those of us who don't have a very big vocabulary.

The Living Bible is a paraphrase. The Phillips is a paraphrase. But they're very good for Bible reading.<sup>13</sup>

Also in 201, Warren wrongly refers to Phillips paraphrase as a “translation” twice when he quotes a passage. The first time was for Ephesians 4:13 where Warren references it as “Phillips translation.”<sup>14</sup> The second time he does this is in reference to Scripture memory: “One to memorize right now is 1 Timothy 4:7 in the Phillips translation. This is kind of the theme verse for this class. 1 Timothy 4:7 *‘Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit’*” (Warren’s emphasis).<sup>15</sup> While these references may have been inadvertent or Warren simply grouping Phillips’ paraphrase under the greater heading of

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<sup>11</sup>Rick Warren, “The Purpose Driven Church Conference” (held at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1999), DVD and text.

<sup>12</sup>Rick Warren, “C.L.A.S.S. 201 - Discovering Spiritual Maturity”(Lake Forest, CA: Saddleback Church, 2003), teacher’s transcript 12.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>14</sup>He actually says “translation” in the teacher’s transcript instead of how it is referenced in the student syllabus simply as – (Ph). See Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 15.

“translation,” constant reference to it this way could give the impression that it is on par with scholarly translations like The New International Version or The New American Standard Bible.

Another place where Warren speaks about translation is in Appendix 3 of *The Purpose Driven Life*. Warren offers his justification for using so many translations and paraphrases in the book. The justification is two fold. One, he emphasizes that every translation has its limitations. He makes the point that the Bible used 11,280 Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words where an average English edition uses only about 6,000 words.<sup>16</sup> While this point makes sense and shows how different versions could be useful, his second point is not as valid. Warren’s second reason for using so many versions is related to familiarity. He says, “We often miss the full impact of familiar Bible verses, *not* because of poor translating, but simply because they have become so familiar” (his emphasis).<sup>17</sup> He used paraphrases intentionally so that people would see God’s truth in “*fresh ways*” (his emphasis).<sup>18</sup> In a concluding comment he says, “English-speaking people should thank God that we have so many different versions to use for devotional reading.”<sup>19</sup>

Based on this comment, and comments from his *Dynamic Bible Study Methods*, Warren must believe that his sermons, writings, conferences, and Bible studies

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<sup>16</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 325. This point seems to have great merit, but when one considers that Warren has a tendency to use translations and paraphrases that have a lower reading level, and thus use a smaller vocabulary, the strength of the argument lessens.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

all tend to be “light devotional” material since he makes such prolific use of translations and paraphrases. In the case of *The Purpose Driven Life* the reference to it being “light devotional reading” seems to be in contradiction to the fact that Warren cites approximately one thousand Scriptures. Most devotional material will quote one short passage and offer commentary and application where Warren quotes an average of sixteen passages in the text of each chapter.<sup>20</sup> Certainly Warren’s aim was to give a comprehensive Biblical study of the five purposes God has for every believer. With its extensive, and at times exhausting, use of Scripture *The Purpose Driven Life* appears to be a detailed study of Scriptural teaching, not rudimentary devotional material.

Warren’s most recent comment on what translation a lay person should read came in a 2004 sermon series called, “Can You Hear Me Now?” In encouraging his congregation to read the Bible, he said, “I would recommend the New Living Translation.”<sup>21</sup> This comment follows Warren’s overall emphasis on dynamic equivalence translations and paraphrases. He provides encouragement to consider different versions when studying the Bible, yet he does not offer any criteria to evaluate those versions.

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<sup>20</sup>The endnotes reveal that there are 657 passages quoted using a translation in the text of the forty chapters. Thus, dividing 657 by 40 = 16.4. This number does not include the Scripture texts used for “week” or “day” headings.

<sup>21</sup>Rick Warren, “How God Talks to You,” *Can You Hear Me Now*, pt. 2 (Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA: March 2004), sermon transcript.

## **Lost in Translation**

From the Wycliffe Bible, which was first produced in 1382,<sup>22</sup> to Today's New International Version, the N.T. being published in 2003, the English Bible has seen many different versions all seeking to communicate the message of the original. The methodology used by each translation committee, or person, to reach this worthy goal has varied. This section of the chapter will focus attention on the basic issues involved in translation work and will overview the various translations Warren utilizes.

### **Approaches to Translating the Bible**

In considering the work of Bible translation, there are two main approaches and one unique approach. The first philosophy of translation is called word-for-word or essentially literal, also called formal equivalence. In this approach translators "attempt to render the exact words of the original language into the receptor language."<sup>23</sup> This approach is fueled by the conviction that the words, not just the thoughts, of Scripture are divinely inspired. Word-for-word translations of the English Bible have a long history. Leland Ryken writes, "Until the middle of the twentieth century, English Bible translation was governed by the assumption that the goal of Bible translation was to translate the words of the original Hebrew and Greek texts insofar as the process of translation allows."<sup>24</sup> As will be seen later, Warren makes modest use of these types of translations.

The second philosophy of translation is called thought-for-thought or dynamic

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<sup>22</sup>Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 57.

<sup>23</sup>Philip Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1991), 87.

<sup>24</sup>Leland Ryken, *Bible Translation Differences* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 6.

equivalence, also called functional equivalence or idiomatic. According to Eugene Nida, thought-for-thought translation is defined as “the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent in the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and second in terms of style.”<sup>25</sup> The translator’s job is to understand the original thought in context and to communicate that thought in contemporary language in a way that the meaning is made as clear as possible. Nida further explains:

Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.<sup>26</sup>

This approach focuses as much on how a reader will grasp the thought of a text as it does on what the text meant in its original context.

A final unique category of translation is called paraphrase. In paraphrases, the author uses an already existing translation to “paraphrase” the meaning in contemporary vernacular. Paraphrases are an interpretive commentary on a literal English version, not a translation from original language manuscripts. For this reason paraphrases cannot be relied on as a translation though they may be helpful in explaining the meaning of a text in contemporary language.

### **Versions Warren Uses**

As mentioned earlier, Rick Warren relies on approximately eighteen different

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<sup>25</sup>Eugene Nida cited in Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*, 90.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 90-91

translations in his sermons, conferences, and writings. The following translations appear at least once in his writings, sermons, Bible studies, or conferences:

1. AMP – The Amplified Bible
2. CEV – Contemporary English Version
3. GW – God’s Word Translation
4. JB – Jerusalem Bible
5. KJV – King James Version
6. LB – Living Bible
7. MSG – The Message
8. NAB – New American Bible
9. NASB – New American Standard Bible
10. NCV - New Century Version (also called ICB - International Children’s Bible)
11. NEB - New English Bible
12. NIV – New International Version
13. NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
14. NLT – New Living Translation
15. NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
16. RSV – Revised Standard Version
17. Ph – New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips
18. TEV – Today’s English Version (also called GNB - Good News Bible)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>This list was arrived at through careful survey of the resources acquired for this study. With only a limited number of sermons available for this study, it is not possible to determine at this time if Warren ever makes use of any other versions. It is unlikely that Warren does use other versions than the ones listed above because the rest of Warren’s writings, conferences, and Bible studies do not yield any translations other than the ones listed.

These translations can be grouped together according to the categories just described.

The first grouping of translations are the word-for-word, or essentially literal, translations. The first version Warren uses in this category is The New American Standard Bible (NASB) which was first published in 1971 and was based on the American Standard version of 1901. A new edition was published in 1995. The second word-for-word translation that Warren uses is the King James Version which was originally published in 1611. Two other word-for-word translations that Warren utilizes are the Revised Standard version which appeared in 1952 and the New Revised Standard which was published in 1990 in an effort to update the English, including “eliminating masculine-oriented language concerning people.”<sup>28</sup>

An unusual translation that Warren uses at times is the Amplified Version which is neither word-for-word nor thought-for-thought. The AMP seeks to give the full meaning of the original languages by including synonyms and definitions in parentheses in the text. The goal was to give a “fuller and more revealing appreciation” of the “divine message” of the original text.<sup>29</sup> This version was completed over many years and was fully published in 1965.

Warren also uses dynamic equivalent, or thought-for-thought translations in much of his material. These translations include the New American Bible, the official

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<sup>28</sup>Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*, 156. Metzger was chair-person of the revision committee of the NRSV. While the International Bible Society lists the RSV and NRSV as “thought for thought” translations, Leland Ryken lists them as essential literal and this author follows his lead. See “Translations” [on-line]; accessed 31 January 2005; available from [www.ibs.org, bibles/translations/index.php](http://www.ibs.org/bibles/translations/index.php); Internet; and Ryken, *Bible Translation Differences*, 32.

<sup>29</sup>“Amplified Bible Background and History” [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2005; available from [www.gospelcom.net, lockman/amplified](http://www.gospelcom.net/lockman/amplified/); Internet.



translation of the Roman Catholic Church, which was published in 1970 and updated in 1991. A second translation from this category that Warren uses is the popular New International Version which has been adopted by “millions and millions of readers.”<sup>30</sup> It was originally sponsored by the International Bible Society and was first published in 1978. A third translation, and its revision, that Warren uses are the Catholic based Jerusalem Bible and New Jerusalem Bible. The Jerusalem Bible is based on work originally done by European scholars and then translated into English by the British in 1966, while being compared to the Hebrew and Greek.<sup>31</sup> The updated New Jerusalem Bible was published in 1985.

Warren shows a special favoritism<sup>32</sup> for the recently published New Living Translation which was completed by more than ninety scholars of differing theological backgrounds. This version, which was published in 1996 by Tyndale, sought to be faithful to the original languages, but to do so in modern English. A fifth dynamic equivalent version that Warren uses is the Good News Bible, also called Today’s English Version. This American Bible Society translation was published as a New Testament in 1966 and as a complete Bible in 1976. It came about because of a need missionaries had for a simple English version to use to teach English as a second language overseas.<sup>33</sup> A sixth translation that Warren uses is the New English Bible which was originally

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<sup>30</sup>Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*, 80.

<sup>31</sup>Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*, 123-24.

<sup>32</sup>Obviously Warren did not use this translation in any of his material prior to the 1996 publication date, but since that time, it is one of his most frequently cited versions.

<sup>33</sup>Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*, 167.

published in 1970 and was a fresh translation seeking to present the message into present day English, while avoiding “archaism, jargon, and all that is either stilted or slipshod.”<sup>34</sup>

A seventh translation, the New Century Version also appears under the title the International Children’s Bible, and was originally developed as a translation for children to read. The New Century Version appears in two editions, one for adults and one for children. The translators took a simplified translation for deaf people<sup>35</sup> and used the latest Greek and Hebrew editions to arrive at the final edition. Another thought-for-thought translation Warren uses is the Contemporary English Version which was completed by the American Bible Society in 1995 using Eugene Nida’s dynamic equivalent theory. It made use of over one hundred translators, biblical scholars, and English language experts so that an original version could be developed that would be even more readable, especially by young people, than the Good News Bible.<sup>36</sup> A final idiomatic translation that Warren utilizes is the God’s Word Translation which originally began as a project by William F. Beck in 1936 and was finally completed by a team of Bible scholars and pastors in 1988. This translation is one of the least well-known of the versions Warren uses.

Warren also cites versions from another group called paraphrases. As mentioned, these are not translations, but paraphrases done by one person. The first of

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup>It was simple in that it used a limited vocabulary.

<sup>36</sup>Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*, 170-71.

these is Phillips: *The New Testament in Modern English*.<sup>37</sup> J.B. Phillips was a pastor and originally began translating books because his youth group could not grasp the Authorized Version. After being encouraged by C.S. Lewis, Phillips published the entire New Testament in 1958 and revised it in 1972. He was astounded that his translation was being used by Bible study groups as an authoritative version and he felt the need to seriously revise it to make it more accurate.<sup>38</sup> Though revised, it still remained a “free translation.”

Another paraphrase Warren uses is *The Living Bible*, paraphrased by Illinois businessman Kenneth Taylor. Using his daily commuter time between Wheaton and Chicago, Taylor paraphrased the ASV into modern vernacular. Many people, especially the young, found his paraphrases of books brought the Bible alive and his work led to the establishment of the Tyndale publishing company which published the complete Living Bible in 1971.

The final paraphrase that Warren uses is the recently published *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. This version has been published in three parts: the New Testament in 1993; the Old Testament Wisdom books in 1997; and the Old Testament prophets in 2000. The Introduction to *The Message* explains that the goal was to “convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, [of the Bible] into the way we actually think and

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<sup>37</sup>Phillips is being included in the paraphrases, even though J.B. Phillips did work with the original languages, because it is such a free translation that at points he varies greatly from even the “thought” of the text. Thus, it is more a paraphrase than a translation.

<sup>38</sup>He also updated the Greek text he used to the United Bible Societies’ Greek text of 1966. See Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, *So Many Versions: Twentieth-century English Versions of the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 69-88.

speak.”<sup>39</sup> Warren uses *The Message* because it communicates biblical truth in a simple and direct way.

One of the reasons that Warren makes so much use of dynamic equivalent translations and of paraphrases may be the influence of Fuller Theological Seminary. As noted in an earlier chapter Warren received his Doctor of Ministry from Fuller. In his doctoral thesis, which he completed in 1993, he made use of several different translations, though he clearly preferred using the NIV. Charles Kraft is Professor of Anthropology at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary and in his book, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*, he clearly favors idiomatic translations over more literal ones. He argues that those who translate word-for-word rather than thought-for-thought are not being accurate and are acting “irresponsibly.”<sup>40</sup> In wording that sounds strangely like Warren, Kraft says, “A perception of irrelevance is, for example, a frequent response to Bible reading, not because the material is irrelevant, but because it is translated poorly.”<sup>41</sup> After emphasizing that the language of the Bible was originally in language that common people could understand he says,

Translations of that kind of English (e.g., the Good News Bible, Phillips’ New Testament, the Living Bible, and the New English Bible) fit God’s message most effectively into the vehicles that are most like he originally chose. Christian communicators do well to imitate God in their use of Bible translations as well as in every other aspect of their attempts to communicate his message.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Cited in “Translations.”

<sup>40</sup>Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Marknoll: Orbis, 1996), 127. Other scholars in the field of missions support the dynamic equivalent approach to translation. See William Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon: Mercer, 1991).

<sup>41</sup>Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*, 127.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 127-28.

As a student at Fuller, Warren may have taken a course under Kraft, but even if he did not, he seems to hold to the same sentiment when it comes to versions of the Bible. Later sections of this chapter will demonstrate Warren's strong tendency to use more thought-for-thought or paraphrastic versions.

Warren interprets a passage by using translations or paraphrases that convey the meaning he believes the passage contains. His choice of translation for each point in his sermons and writings is always guided by his desire to make clear and concise application of the Word of God to his listeners. In other words, translation is interpretation which leads to application.

Warren is not alone in viewing translations as interpretations. According to Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Meaning is communicated via surface structure. As we approach the Bible, we must decode the meaning from the surface structure of Hebrew or Greek and then encode that meaning in another surface structure, namely English. This is what takes place every time the Bible is translated. Therefore, all translation is an interpretation."<sup>43</sup> Fee and Stuart note, "The very fact that you are reading God's Word in translation means that you are already involved in interpretation. . ."<sup>44</sup> These translations, as Warren uses them, are aimed at giving a modern interpretation of the text to the listener. Warren would agree with Moisés Silva when he says, "Clear English versions of the Bible communicate to the modern reader the main (and therefore most important)

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<sup>43</sup>Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation," *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1987): 323.

<sup>44</sup>Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 28.

point of any passage without recourse to obscure points of grammar.”<sup>45</sup> Warren uses various translations to help make the main meaning of the text as clear as possible in his sermons and to cut down on unnecessary exegetical information which would impede clear and immediate application. This practice is the purpose driven hermeneutic at work.

### **Trends in Warren’s Use of Translations in Sermons**

As noted in chapter three of this study, Warren makes use of many different passages of the Bible in each of his sermons. How does Warren use translation in these messages? How many translations does he use per sermon? This section will answer these questions by examining the trends of translation usage in Warren’s sermons, offering statistical insights for support.

As mentioned above, Warren makes use of eighteen different translations throughout his works. His sermons are no exception to this habit of using many translations, though he does not make use of the *New American Bible*.<sup>46</sup> Table 3, below, shows the list of translations and the percentage of the time Warren uses them in the seventy-six sermons utilized for this study.

Several points are important to note in considering Warren’s translation usage in his sermons. First, Warren’s earlier sermons relied heavily on the New International Version. In the first two series, *Achieving through Believing* and *What God Can Do through Ordinary You*, Warren uses the NIV over 95 percent of the time. This trend may

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<sup>45</sup>Moisés Silva, “God, Language, and Scripture” in *Foundations for Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 201.

<sup>46</sup>This translation is only cited in *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Table 3. Translation Usage in Sermons

Translation	Percentage of All
AMP	0.8
CEV	1.7
GW	1.9
JB	0.2
KJV	0.8
LB	23.6
MSG	4.4
NASB	0.7
NCV/ICB	8.2
NEB	0.2
NIV	32.9
NJB	0.1
NLT	8.1
NRSV	0.3
RSV	0.2
PH	3.1
TEV/GN	12.7

be related to the fact that these sermons are predominately verse-by-verse through a passage, instead of verse-with-verse. Another point worth noting is that several of the translations that are listed above were first published during the last twenty years. This fact, along with the frequency of usage of some of the newer translations, suggests that Warren is continually embracing new versions for sermon development. One translation that seems to be emerging as a favorite is the NLT. Though it represents only 8 percent of all of Warren's quotations, one has to consider that it was not published until 1996. The three most recent sermon series show that Warren uses the NLT as much as the NIV, and more in at least one series.<sup>47</sup> Thirdly, no one series uses all the above translations,

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<sup>47</sup>Can You Hear Me Now? is the series. In four messages Warren uses the NIV fifteen times and the New Living Translation eighteen times.

but *The Purpose Driven Life* comes closest in using thirteen. In the final sermon in this series, Warren uses an amazing ten different translations and paraphrases.

In considering these statistics, the question arises, “how many translations does Warren use in an average message?” The answer is 4.5, but this number does not tell the whole story of the last twenty years of Rick Warren’s preaching. One might expect that over the last twenty years as Warren has embraced new translations that have come out that the number of translation he uses in each sermon has gone up and it has, but the numbers paint an even more dramatic shift than might have been expected. The two earliest series acquired for this study, from 1985, revealed a solid commitment on Warren’s part to the New International Version. Out of a total of fourteen messages, only one uses any other translation. The final message in the *Achieving Through Believing* series uses the Living Bible and the Good News Bible in conjunction with the NIV.<sup>48</sup> The latest three series used for this study show the extent of the shift that has happened. *The Purpose Driven Life*, *Understanding the Passion*, and *Can You Hear Me Now?* have all been preached in 2002 or later. These sermons use an average of 8 translations per message. While many new translations have become available since his first two series, the evidence suggests that his tendency to use different translations is on the increase, even faster than the new versions are arriving.

Warren uses translations so freely that he will join two verses from two different translations into one citation. Though only seen three times in the sermons acquired for this study, an example of this comes in “Building a Life of Faith” in the

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<sup>48</sup>It seems clear from these two series that even though other translations were available and Warren would use them on occasion, he was committed to using one version in his preaching.



Building a Great Life series. Under the point faith is “Giving When I Don’t Have It,” Warren cites this passage: “*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but whoever sows generously will reap generously... And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others’* 2 Cor. 9:6+8 (NIV/NLT)” (Warren’s emphasis).<sup>49</sup> This example shows the flexibility Warren has with using translations in his messages.

### **Trends in Translation Usage in *The Purpose Driven Church* and Conference**

Another area that needs to be examined in order to get a good picture of Warren’s translation usage is *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated Conference. This section will overview translation uses in these two resources, offering statistical insights as to the frequency of translation usage.<sup>50</sup>

When Warren published *The Purpose Driven Church* in 1995, there were a fair number of translations available to be used, but he lists the copyright information for only six: NIV; NRSV; LB; TEV/GNB; NCV; Ph; and MSG.<sup>51</sup> Though Warren does not include the copyright information for them, he cites three other translations as well: KJV;

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<sup>49</sup>Rick Warren, “Building a Life of Faith,” *Building a Great Life*, pt. 2 (Saddleback Valley Community Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1997), sermon transcript.

<sup>50</sup>This author has located little material that criticizes Warren’s translation usage in these materials. This lack of criticism may be because he does not make use of different translations nearly to the extent that he does in his sermons or *The Purpose Driven Life*. Also, *The Purpose Driven Church* does not contain an index of passages and translations used, making it very difficult to evaluate trends without extensive work.

<sup>51</sup>Though the copyright material is included in the front of the book, this author was unable to locate one passage cited from The Message paraphrase.

NASB; and JB.<sup>52</sup> In all, Warren makes use of nine different versions for his Scripture quotations in *The Purpose Driven Church*.

The NIV was designated as the “default” version for the book, but he does make frequent use of the other translations as well. The translations and their frequency of occurrence in *The Purpose Driven Church* are shown in Table 4, below:

Table 4. Versions Used in  
*The Purpose Driven Church*

Version	Percentage of References
JB	1.3
KJV	1.3
LB	16.6
NASB	3.9
NCV	6.6
NIV	62.9
NRSV	1.3
Phillips	2.6
TEV	3.5

Several points are worth noting. One, Warren’s preference for the NIV that was seen in his sermons is even stronger in the *The Purpose Driven Church*. Two, Warren relies on paraphrases almost 20 percent of the time in making his case for being a purpose-driven church. Third, word-for-word translations are only used 6.5 percent of the time, meaning 93 percent of the quotations in *The Purpose Driven Church* are from dynamic equivalent translations or from paraphrases. Since the hermeneutic in *The Purpose Driven Church* is predominately driven by a doctrinal approach, the question arises, “Is Warren building his

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<sup>52</sup>There are fifteen citations in the book of these three versions. For specific examples see Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 63 (NASB), 87 (KJV), 243 (JB).

methodology for churches off of weaker versions of the Bible?” A final point would be related to Warren’s point that paraphrases are good for light devotional reading, but not for serious Bible study. Why would Warren then use paraphrases throughout a book written mainly to pastors<sup>53</sup> to argue for a biblical model of church health? *The Purpose Driven Church* is a serious study of the New Testament doctrine of the church, yet it uses paraphrases for support, which, in Warren’s own words, are useful for “light devotional reading.”

The emphasis on the NIV in *The Purpose Driven Church* is also seen in Warren’s other books, *Personal Bible Study Methods*, *The Power to Change Your Life*, and *Answers to Life’s Difficult Questions*. These three books also designate the NIV as the central version used for Scripture quotations.

The “Purpose Driven Church Conference” is similar in that its default version is the NIV, but in it Warren uses a total of eleven different translations: JB; KJV; LB; The Message; NASB; NCV; NEB; RSV; Ph; and TEV/GNB. In the ten sessions, Warren quotes 117 passages of Scripture. The big three versions that Warren uses are the NIV, sixty-four percent of the time, the Living Bible, used fifteen percent of the time, and the TEV which was used about nine percent of the time. The others were used four times or less in the whole conference.

As with his preaching Warren takes great liberty with his use of translation, even to the point of using consecutive verses together with parts from different translations.

An example of this is in the session on small groups:

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<sup>53</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 7.

*“When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them – because their problems were so great and they didn’t know what to do or where to go for help. **They were like sheep without a shepherd**, Jesus said to His followers, ‘There are so many people to harvest but only a few workers to help harvest them. Pray to the Lord, who owns the harvest, that He will send more workers to gather His harvest.’”* Matthew 98:36-38 (NIV/LB).<sup>54</sup> (Warren’s emphasis)

In this unusual reference, Warren has used a translation and a paraphrase together. He utilizes multiple translations, even when quoting one passage, in a desire to capture the message he believes the passage communicates. The usage of a “clear” translation(s), gives Warren the opportunity to move directly to application after the passage is cited.

### **Trends in Translation Usage in *The Purpose Driven Life***

By far the most significant example of Warren’s use of translations is his *magnum opus*, *The Purpose Driven Life*. In it he makes use of sixteen<sup>55</sup> different versions in over seven hundred quotations.<sup>56</sup> This segment of the chapter will look at Warren’s explanation for his use of so many translations, offer a statistical analysis of his translation usage, and evaluate the trends that emerge.

In the introductory chapter to *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren points to his desire to let “the Bible speak for itself. . . .”<sup>57</sup> He then shares with the reader that he uses

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<sup>54</sup>Rick Warren, “Purpose Driven Church Conference.”

<sup>55</sup>Warren cites only fifteen in his list of the translations he uses, but this author located one that was cited in the endnotes, but was not included in the original list: the JB. He does use and list the NJB, but not the JB, a different version. In addition, in one endnote for the NASB, Warren cites the 1978 edition in particular, where the rest are from the 1973 edition. See Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 325-34. Finally, one version he lists but which does not appear in any of the endnotes or Scriptures listed in chapter or day headings is the NAS. For the sake of this study this author is assuming that the NAS is used for one of the rare Scriptures referenced in the body of the text along with its version.

<sup>56</sup>As mentioned in the previous chapter, Warren references approximately one thousand Scriptures, but he only quotes 733 in significant enough length to cite a version.

<sup>57</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 11.

fifteen translations and paraphrases for “several important reasons.”<sup>58</sup> The reader is sent to Appendix 3 to hear his explanation for why he uses so many translations. There, Warren explains his two main reasons for using different versions. First, as mentioned earlier, he points to the limitations of all translations. He does not want “nuances and shades of meaning” to be missed so he believes it is “always helpful to compare translations.”<sup>59</sup> While the intention makes sense, there are several problems with this line of thinking. First, any version, especially more dynamic equivalence and paraphrastic ones, has the potential to communicate the “nuances” of a passage in a creative way that also happens to introduce new nuances and shades of meaning not in the original. Surely, Warren does not intend to misuse or misrepresent a text, but as noted in a previous chapter, he does misuse texts periodically. These instances are frequently related to what version he uses.

A second problem is a danger in using so many different translations because of how translators use certain words to represent the words of the original language. They generally seek to be consistent throughout the version, but not across versions. Different translating boards, or paraphrasers, have different agendas and may use the same English word to mean two different things in the original. There is the potential for two verses from two different versions to appear close to each other and use the same language, however upon closer study of the original, the words are not the same. One of the translations may be following an essentially literal approach where the other is a

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

paraphrase where great liberty was taken in producing the version. In this case, the reader would naturally assume that the words in both verses mean the same thing and represent the original language when in fact they may not.

A final problem related to Warren's first point is the argument that it is helpful to compare translations. While it can be helpful to do so, that is not what Warren is asking the reader to do. The reader is asked to assume that Warren has compared different versions and arrived at the definitive translation that captures the biblical author's original intent in the clearest possible way. By doing so, Warren is not only controlling the version the reader gets, but he concordantly decides on the interpretation of the passage for the reader. As mentioned above, all translations are interpretations and a corresponding truth is that the less literal the approach to translation, the greater the level of interpretation involved. As will be seen below, Warren relies heavily on thought-for-thought translations and paraphrases, all of which represent various levels of interpretation. In essence, when is the reader to understand what they are reading is a close interpretation of what the Bible literally says, or a loose one? With no reference to version in the immediate context, how is even a mature believer to know what version is being used without the inconvenience of digging through the endnotes at the back of the book?

Warren's second argument for the use of so many translations is not even related to translation. He argues that people are so familiar with certain passages that they "skim over it and miss the full meaning." For this reason, he has chosen to use paraphrases so that people can see God's truth in "new, *fresh* ways"(his emphasis). While a paraphrase can certainly be helpful in interpreting a passage and can catch the nuances of a passage

in a powerful way, they are also merely paraphrases, not translations. If the Word of God is what is powerful, then the clear translation of that Word must be essential. Yes, people can get used to a certain translation of a passage, but if it best captures the meaning of the original, then it ought to be used. A paraphrase can always be included afterwards to further clarify the point, but by its very definition the paraphrase is not based on the original, which is what is powerful. The point he makes in his first argument that the original meaning should be seen clearly seems to contradict his second point that the truth needs to be seen in new, fresh ways. If a translation is a clear representative of the original, then it does not need to be replaced by a “fresh” one.

There are also problems with Scripture usage related to the layout of the book. Warren has made it extremely difficult to for the reader to see what verse is being quoted and what version used. By putting all references and translations in endnotes, Warren has cut down on the length of his chapters, which was probably his goal or the goal of his editorial board, but he has also short-circuited the readers’ opportunity to make sense of the passage for themselves. The reader is left to take Warren’s interpretation of every passage, not knowing what passage or version he uses.

Another point is related to authority. There is a lot of authority that comes when Warren says in the book, “The Bible says. . . ,” yet the reader has to go to great lengths to verify that authority. When a paraphrase is used and Warren introduces it by saying, “The Bible says. . .” the impression is given that whatever version he uses is an accurate translation of the original words. An example of this is in Day 6 when he quotes the Message paraphrase of 1 Peter 2:11: “*You’re cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his*

way.”<sup>60</sup> Compare The Message version of this passage to the New American Standard Bible which is more of a word-for-word translation: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” Though the Message does not contradict the NASB, it clearly does not capture some of the nuances that are in the original. For example, the Message totally ignores the concepts of “aliens” and “strangers.” Warren could not have merely quoted the NASB here because it would have required some explanation, so instead he uses a simpler version that is less faithful to the full meaning of the original, and then moves directly to his point.

It seems that Warren’s use of translation is related, in part, to his desire to not have to take up any space in his book to explain the meaning of text. He likes working quotations of Scripture that do not have any cultural or linguistic requirements to apply to the listeners. In order to work Scripture into *The Purpose Driven Life*, he uses a paraphrase or translation that requires the least explanation. The problem is that not all passages in the Bible can be legitimately applied without explanation, even if a paraphrase makes it seem so.

After Warren gives his reasoning for utilizing so many translations in *The Purpose Driven Life*, he lists the ones he uses. In Table 5, below, there is a list of translations<sup>61</sup> Warren uses and the percentage of time each one is used:

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>61</sup>As mentioned above Warren includes NAS in his list, yet no reference appears in the endnotes or chapter and day headings. This author counted one reference, assuming that it and the version reference appear somewhere in the body of the book.



Table 5. Versions Used in  
*The Purpose Driven Life*

Version	Percentage of References
AMP	0.5
CEV	7.4
GW	4.1
JB	0.1
KJV	1.6
LB	10.5
MSG	16.0
NAS	0.1
NASB	1.0
NCV/ICB	8.5
NIV	17.0
NJB	0.5
NLT	19.0
NRSV	0.7
Phillips	1.1
TEV/GN	11.8

In evaluating Warren's translation usage, several points are worth noting. First, Warren's most favored translation is the New Living Translation, which he uses 19 percent of the time. This trend is consistent with his recent sermon series, as mentioned above. Though the NLT is predominate, Warren's old faithful NIV is his second most used translation at 17 percent. Warren seems to have a strong preference for these two translations, as together they represent well over one-third of all Scripture references. A second point is that Warren clearly favors the dynamic equivalent translations over either the word-for-word or paraphrases. The dynamic equivalent translations make up nearly 70 percent of all of the references. Another point worth noting is that Warren was almost nine times as likely to use a paraphrase as he was an essentially literal translation. He uses paraphrases 27.6 percent of the time while using word-for-word translations only 3.3 percent of the

time. This frequency of paraphrase usage is similar to what was seen previously in Warren's sermons.

### **Conclusion**

There are several issues that arise in evaluating Warren's use of such a large number of translations. First, though Warren offers warnings and comments about paraphrases in certain places, his practice seems to suggest a blanket endorsement of all translations and paraphrases as equally valid representations of God's Word. Whether it be the Message, the Living Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, the New Living Translation, or the King James Version, Warren uses them and introduces the passage often by saying, "The Bible says. . . ." In other places Warren will quote the passage and say, "God wants you to. . . ." Is it truly fair to the authority of God's Word to use any and every passage in every version in such a way? This author has not found anywhere that Warren warns or advises of the potential that a Bible version could have for not representing the original intent of a particular passage. He also makes no warnings about potentially inserted or added nuances created because of the approach of a particular translation's or paraphrase's board. Though every translation and paraphrase has some value, they are not all equally valuable in representing the Word of God. There is very little emphasis on this distinction in Warren's writings, conferences, and sermons.

The previous point builds into another area concerning Warren's translation usage and his audience of listeners and readers. Since Warren consistently cites so many translations, especially in recent years, and he offers no clarifying explanation for evaluating translations or paraphrases, what is the effect on his audience? What

perception of the Bible do they have? By using so many passages in so many versions, do people come to understand the Bible merely as an endless collection of proverbs or insights, of which there is no one really good translation? The unchurched Warren preaches to each weekend and the biblically illiterate who may read *The Purpose Driven Life* may arrive at such conclusions. This point is not made to demonize the use of other translations and paraphrases in preaching, teaching, and writing, but to emphasize that a relentless use of them without any qualification must have some impact on how people perceive the Bible.

Warren rightly believes the examination and usage of multiple translations can help one to better arrive at the author's original intent. Fee and Stuart echo this thought when they say, "The trouble with using only *one* translation, be it ever so good, is that one is thereby committed to the exegetical choices of that translation as the Word of God. The translation you are using may be correct, of course; but it also may be wrong."<sup>62</sup> No translation accurately represents the original in every verse and so it can be helpful to examine other English versions, especially an interlinear translation. When one has examined these translations, one might find that a certain version truly does capture the meaning of the original language in a clear and concise way that does not add any additional meanings. In this case, a preacher, teacher, or writer has the authority of the Word of God on their side.

Another point is related to his usage of paraphrases approximately 30 percent of the time. Is it fair to say "The Bible says . . ." and to quote from a paraphrase? Since

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<sup>62</sup>Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 28.

Warren believes that the inspiration of Scripture goes beyond the thoughts to the very words<sup>63</sup> and a paraphrase is not even based on those words, does it have the full authority of the Bible? At least a dynamic equivalent translation, which Warren uses approximately 60 percent of the time, has been taken from the original languages, but a paraphrase has not. It is not a good practice to endow a paraphrase with the full authority one would give to a good translation. Also, a related question arises: Is it fair to base a major truth point on a paraphrase or loose translation when a more literal translation does not support it or does not support it as strongly? These are not peripheral issues for someone who chooses to use so many versions.

Even as one examines various translations to arrive at the meaning of a text, one must be cautious about reading meaning into the text that is not originally there. Authorial intent must be the fundamental guiding principle in hermeneutics and in selecting and using a translation. Fee and Stuart rightly say “A *text cannot mean what it never meant*” (their emphasis).<sup>64</sup> No matter how wonderful a certain version’s rendering of a passage is, if it takes away or adds to the author’s intended meaning, it is hindering communication of the Word. As one goes about making use of various translations, the principle of authorial intent must be kept central.

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<sup>63</sup>See chap. 2 of this current study.

<sup>64</sup>Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 26.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Rick Warren is enjoying a tremendous time of success in his life. *The Purpose Driven Life* continues to sit at or near the top of the bestsellers list and the 40 Days of Purpose continues to have thousands of churches sign up for participation. In addition, Warren is seeing his most fruitful time as pastor of Saddleback Church. In 2004, a total of 3,319 people joined the church, making it the largest numerical growth the church has seen in any one year of its history.<sup>1</sup> In addition, in 2004 Saddleback had a record number of baptisms, with 2,029 passing through the waters. These numbers show that 61 percent of the new members were by baptism, which has always been the focus of Saddleback Church.

Warren's success was part of the motive for doing this study as his impact on people, and especially pastors, continues to grow. Many pastors and churches are making use of Warren's and Saddleback's materials without any consideration as to how Scripture is used. While much of the material is helpful and can be adopted, a careful examination should be made to assure that every Scripture is used in a biblically

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<sup>1</sup>Tobin Perry, "Saddleback's 2004: Most Baptisms in its 25-Year History," *pastors.com* [online]; accessed 21 January 2005; available from [www.pastors.com, article.asp?printerfriendly=1&ArtID=7885](http://www.pastors.com/article.asp?printerfriendly=1&ArtID=7885); Internet.

appropriate way.<sup>2</sup> The research suggests some important conclusions about Warren's understanding of Scripture, his use of Scripture, and his practice of using various Bible versions. These issues will be dealt with in the larger fields of his preaching, teaching, and writing.

In relation to his sermons, Warren seeks to be relentlessly biblical in what he says. For this reason he uses many passages to support the points he makes. Yet, it seems at times that Scripture is used to serve his message instead of his message serving Scripture. He does not necessarily make unbiblical points in his sermon, but at times seems to make quasi-biblical points. They are not contradictory to Scripture, but are not directly inferred from a historical/grammatical exegesis of a passage. An example of this was given in chapter 3 where Warren used Philippians 3:13-14 to argue that people need to "establish a goal." Often times these kinds of misuses are the result of Scripture being used to serve the point instead of the point serving Scripture. In a recent article on [crosswalk.com](http://crosswalk.com), Albert Mohler discussed how preaching to felt needs can impact a sermon in this exact way:

Without doubt, few preachers following this popular trend intend to depart from the Bible. But under the guise of intention to reach modern secular men and women 'where they are,' the sermon has been transformed into a success seminar. Some verses of Scripture may be added to the mix, but for a sermon to be genuinely biblical, the text must set the agenda as the foundation of the message – not as an authority cited for spiritual footnoting.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>This author has used many of Warren's resources in ministry, but has always altered them. The Scriptures that were used and their translations, and the points that were made were all examined and edited as biblical evidence suggested. The largest area this author edited was in the area of translation, with the goal being to use one main translation for each resource. A few others translations were kept and paraphrases were retained on occasion when they helped further explain a biblical truth.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Mohler, "The Urgency of Preaching," *weblogs* (25 June 2004) [on-line]; accessed 30 June 2004; available from [www.crosswalk.com, news/weblogs/mohler/1270337.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/1270337.html); Internet.

The danger for any preacher who attempts to be biblical, including Warren, is that somehow the message of the Bible is misrepresented or is not kept primary in the sermon.

As has been established, Warren's sermons are being used by many different preachers, either in original or altered form. Warren's sermons are a helpful resource for any pastor seeking to apply biblical truth to his congregation, but they must be used with wisdom. While many of his outlines can be helpful for use in a verse-with-verse sermon, they must not be adopted without careful study of the biblical texts used. Though it is certainly convenient to be able to download an entire sermon transcript, at times Warren's use of different versions and his stretching of a biblical text can misrepresent a biblical author's intent for a passage. Every preacher will be held responsible for what he preaches so careful guard should be made against the misinterpretation of Scripture. Kevin Vanhoozer says, "When we use an author's words for our own purposes we transgress the norms of interpretation, 'just as we transgress ethical norms when we use another person merely for our ends.'"<sup>4</sup>

In relation to Warren's use of Scripture in his materials, a few points related to the larger field of evangelism and church growth are in order. First, Warren's approach to Scripture has had an impact on how he presents the gospel. His use of Scripture to explain the central tenets of the gospel does not seem to be consistently presented in his materials. Though it is clearly presented in some places, other places where Warren invites people to receive Christ do not contain a full explanation of the gospel. In his Christmas message called, "When God Messes Up Your Plans" Warren gives this gospel

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<sup>4</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 400.

presentation and prayer:

*How to Establish A Spiritual Base for My Life*

*Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and showed He was God by coming back to life. 1 Cor. 15:2-4*

*Accept God's free forgiveness for my sins. Rom. 3:22*

*Switch to God's plan for my life. Mark 1:15; Rom. 12:2*

*Express my desire for Christ to be the director of my life. Rom. 10:9*

*If you are willing to take these four steps, then pray this simple prayer:*

*"Dear God, I believe You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die for my sins so I can be forgiven. I'm sorry for my sins and I want to live the rest of my life the way You want me to. Please put Your Spirit in my life to direct me. Amen"* (his emphasis).<sup>5</sup>

This plan offers several important gospel points. Faith, repentance, and acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord are all emphasized. Contrast this explanation with the one from *The Purpose Driven Life*, which only emphasizes "committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ" by "receiving and believing."<sup>6</sup> This step of salvation is done through "the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and receive you.'"<sup>7</sup> There is no emphasis on repentance or why Jesus had to die on the cross for people to be forgiven. Warren is truly gifted at speaking biblical truth in a way that unchurched people can understand, even if they do not receive it. So why does Warren only use less than half of a page in *The Purpose Driven Life* to explain the steps involved in the most important decision a person can make? This failure to clearly and powerfully explain the gospel is hard to understand in light of other places where Warren gives a clear presentation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Rick Warren, "When God Messes Up Your Plan," *Christmas Messages*, pt. 9 (Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1999), sermon transcript.

<sup>6</sup>Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>See Rick Warren, "God's Great Passion for You," *Understanding the Passion*, pt. 2 (Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA, 2004), sermon transcript; and Rick Warren, "What Difference Does Christmas Make?" *Christmas Messages*, pt. 3 (Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA, 1993), sermon



Along these same lines, there are some doctrinal points that Warren does not emphasize in relation to teaching and preaching the gospel. While Warren and other Saddleback staff members like to focus on describing the “benefits of knowing Christ,”<sup>9</sup> there seems to be a strange omission of the dangers of not knowing Him.<sup>10</sup> Hell is merely described in terms of not being with God,<sup>11</sup> while heaven is often described in great detail. Certainly it is not appropriate to scare people into the kingdom of God, but neither is it appropriate to not offer a biblical understanding of the repercussions of not receiving Christ. Warren is an excellent communicator and has the ability to give a biblical description of hell without trying to manipulate people. The benefits and vision of heaven is well described for those who listen to Warren or read his books, but the reality of hell, beyond merely mentioning it, is rarely described. In his dissertation, Warren uses Matthew 25:41, 46 to say “we need to continually remind ourselves that eternal punishment awaits those who die without Christ.”<sup>12</sup> It would helpful for Warren to expand on this concept in some of his sermons and other writings.

One of the reasons for this lack of description of hell may be related to Warren’s overall failure to explain the doctrine of God’s holiness. Hell does not make

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transcript.

<sup>9</sup>See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 298.

<sup>10</sup>Out of 76 sermons used for this study, only 20 mention hell. In these sermons Warren merely mentions hell as a reality and moves on to talking about heaven. No description of hell is offered.

<sup>11</sup>The one exception to this description was found in “God’s Great Passion for You,” where Warren described hell as a place that God created for the devil and demons. See Warren, “God’s Great Passion for You,” sermon transcript.

<sup>12</sup>Rick Warren, “New Churches for a New Generation, Church Planting to Reach Baby Boomers, a Case Study: The Saddleback Valley Community Church” (D.Min. project, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993), 344.

sense unless it is understood in light of God's holiness and righteous judgment. Warren's sermons do not emphasize the holiness of God except in a few places where it is mentioned that He cannot be around sin. While the term "holy" certainly is not going to be understood by the average lay person, Warren prides himself on communicating biblical concepts to the unchurched. He could give an entire message series to the holiness of God and, by using his verse-with-verse methodology, could give a thorough biblical picture of God's unique nature. Not only would this series serve to motivate his people to live for God, it could also help clarify why hell has to exist and why God has to judge people.

Another area that seems to be lacking is the spiritual dimension of winning people to Christ, discipling them, and building a church. *The Purpose Driven Church* seems to have more of a focus on organizational warfare against the devil and a lack of focus on the spiritual dimension of warfare. While he rightly sets up the Word of God as the guiding principle for growing a church, there is a shortage of focus on prayer. In *The Purpose Driven Church* Warren explains that prayer and doing the right things is not enough.<sup>13</sup> He says that there must be skill involved too. The point for him is that doing all the right things with skill will cause the church to grow and be fruitful. He fails to recognize that a lack of the spiritual dimension can keep a church from growing no matter how skilled or hard-working a leader may be. Any truly biblical ecclesiology should be transferrable to third world nations and places where persecution happens, but Warren would seem to suggest those people either fail in faithfulness to the Word or "skill"

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<sup>13</sup>Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 56-57.

because if they had them, their churches would be growing. Nowhere does Warren say that a person can serve wisely and faithfully in a place and see little growth because of the hardness of the hearts. Israel rebelled against God himself when he led them out of Egypt. What is to say that a church or community will not rebel against a faithful pastor or leader? The other side of this is that we should “never criticize what God is blessing,” but the question arises what is the standard for measuring what God is blessing versus what man is blessing? Is Warren arguing that there is no way that men can build up a group of people called “a church?”

This study has focused on Warren’s hermeneutic, but some areas of further research are warranted. It would be helpful to see a comprehensive study done on the content of Warren’s gospel as it is presented in his sermons, writings, and conferences. How biblical is it? How often does he share it? How detailed is his presentation? These questions are relevant and should be answered.

Another study that should be done is a biblical examination of the purpose-driven movement. Taking all materials and resources into account, one could provide a systematic comparison of the movement to biblical evidence. As more and more churches adopt the purpose-drive philosophy, a study of this sort would provide valuable information for pastors, teachers, and denominational leaders.

## APPENDIX 1

### HOW TO CRAFT A MESSAGE

Purpose Driven Preaching Conference, 1999, text 31 (Warren's emphasis)

**C**ollect and Categorize

**R**esearch & Reflect

**A**pply & Arrange

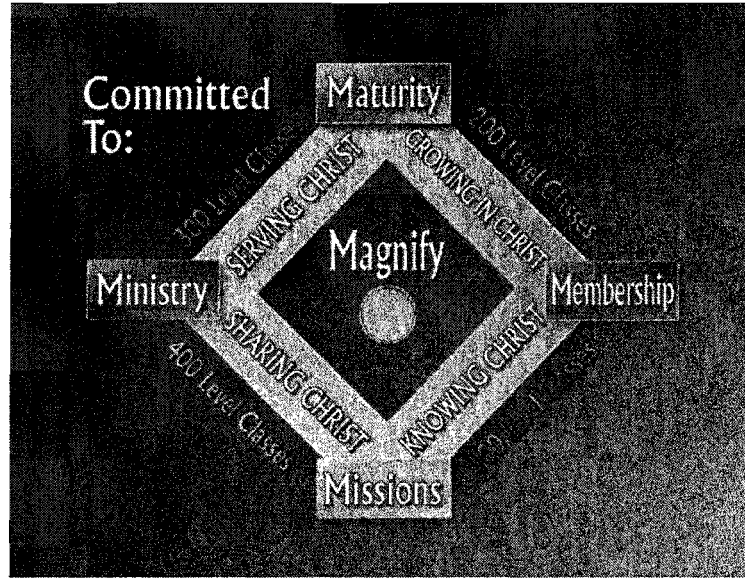
**F**ashion & Flavor

**T**rim & Tie Together

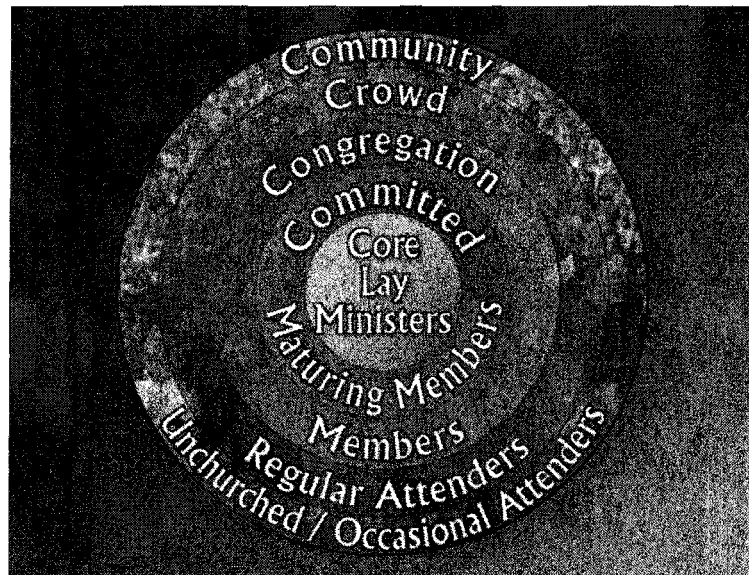
*“DO YOUR BEST TO PRESENT YOURSELF  
TO GOD AS ONE APPROVED,  
A WORKMAN WHO DOES NOT NEED  
TO BE ASHAMED AND  
WHO CORRECTLY HANDLES  
THE WORD OF TRUTH.” 2 TIM 2:15*

APPENDIX 2

SADDLEBACK DIAGRAMS  
Saddleback Valley Community Church  
Life Development Process:



Concentric Circles of Commitment



APPENDIX 3

RICK WARREN'S SERMON SERIES

At Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA  
From [www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com)

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Series #</b>	<b># Messages</b>
Upside Down Living	7/18/2004	161	7
Stop Following and Start Leading	6/12/2004	160	4
Reenergizing Your Life	4/18/2004	159	3
Can You Hear Me Now?	3/7/2004	158	4
Understanding The Passion	2/22/2004	157	2
God's Extreme Makeover	1/25/2004	156	4
How To Have A Great Year	1/4/2004	155	3
God's Gifts at Christmas	12/7/2003	154	3
The Life of Moses	11/9/2003	153	2
Character Recall	9/28/2003	151	3
Using What You've Got	9/7/2003	150	2
The Single Reality	8/3/2003	149	4
The Marriage Matrix	5/25/2003	148	4
Seeing Through God's Eyes	4/27/2003	147	4
Getting Ready For Easter	4/6/2003	146	2
Blessed To Be A Blessing	3/2/2003	145	4
Parenting Series	2/16/2003	144	2
Breaking Out Of The Debt Trap	2/2/2003	143	2
The Race of Life	1/5/2003	142	2
Jesus, Isn't He Amazing?	12/8/2002	141	2
Your Spiritual Journey	11/17/2002	140	2
What's Holding You Back?	9/15/2002	138	2
The Lords Prayer Path to Inner Peace	8/12/2002	137	8
What to Do When	7/17/2002	136	4
Living The Better Life	4/28/2002	135	5
The Journey Of Life	2/24/2002	134	4
Using God's Gifts To Me	2/16/2002	133	4
Frequently Asked Questions	12/30/2001	132	4
Come Home For Christmas	12/8/2001	131	3

50 Days Of Love	12/2/2001	130	8
Rebuilding Your Life	10/1/2001	129	2
Reconnecting With God	9/2/2001	128	4
What Would Jesus Say...	8/5/2001	127	4
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## ABSTRACT

### A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN HERMENEUTIC OF RICK WARREN

William Bland Mason, Jr., Ph.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005  
Chairperson: Dr. Timothy K. Beougher

This dissertation analyzes Rick Warren's hermeneutic based on his writings, conferences, sermons, and Bible studies. Chapter 1 introduces the topic giving special attention to Warren's popularity and the need for an examination of his hermeneutic.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that Warren's purpose-driven hermeneutic is based on his understanding of the purpose of the Bible. In particular, Warren's doctrine of the Bible, his Bible study methodology, and his emphasis on the essential nature of application to the task of Bible interpretation are addressed.

Chapter 3 examines Warren's preaching as a source for evaluating his hermeneutic. This chapter gives an explanation of his verse-with-verse methodology and how he uses Scripture to develop sermon series, individual messages, and the preaching points within his messages.

Chapter 4 addresses Warren's hermeneutic as it is revealed in his writings and conferences. The chapter focuses on *The Purpose Driven Church* and its associated conference and materials, *The Purpose Driven Life* and the various Bible studies associated with the "40 Days of Purpose," and Warren's other books.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Warren's use of translations and paraphrases as key to understanding his hermeneutic. An overall list of translations and paraphrases used by Warren is given along with a statistical analysis of the frequency of translation usage in his various works.

A final chapter offers a conclusion to the study. An evaluation of overall trends, strengths, and weakness of Warren's purpose-driven hermeneutic is included. This chapter also gives a summary of the conclusions that the research has supported and an examination of some implications of Warren's hermeneutic to the greater field of church growth preaching.

## VITA

William Bland Mason, Jr.

### PERSONAL

Born: February 27, 1972, San Antonio, Texas  
Parents: William, Sr. and Eleanor Mason  
Married: Teresa Lynn Hershenson, May 21, 1994  
Children: Hannah Lindsey, born November 19, 1997  
Sarah Bethany, born June 6, 2001

### EDUCATIONAL

Diploma Gloucester High School, Gloucester, Virginia, 1990  
B.B.A. Campbell University, 1994  
M.Div. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997

### MINISTERIAL

Minister of Music and Youth, Friendship Baptist Church, Bunnlevel, North Carolina, 1993-1994  
Minister of Students, Highland Baptist Church, Shelbyville, Kentucky, 1995  
Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Bethlehem, Kentucky, 1995-1999  
Pastor, Springfield Baptist Church, Springfield, Kentucky, 1999-

### ACADEMIC

Grader, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000  
Research Assistant, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002