IMPLEMENTATION OF A SERMON-BASED SMALL GROUP

CURRICULUM FOR HARVEST BAPTIST CHAPEL IN

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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A Project

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the Faculty of

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by

Ricky Verndale Kyles Sr.

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APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

This labor of love has been augmented with the understanding of a family that has been supportive in every endeavor I have pursued whether it was secular or spiritual in nature. Each sacrifice along the way has been born with all the grace a man committed to ministry could ever expect or desire.

I will be forever grateful for those who have stood in the gap with me even when I was not quite aware of the road that God had for me. This has been a journey with some valleys along the way, but each time God has surrounded me with people who sometimes seemed to believe in me more than I believed in myself.

I personally want to thank my father, who instilled in me from a very young age that I possessed the ability to make something of myself. Although I am still not quite sure I have fulfilled his expectation, I can only wish I have given him some small hope, I am getting close.

No words will suffice to articulate the influence my mother had on the formulation of the person I strive to be. She is no longer living, but her memory still rings in the recesses of my mind, and outside of the persons of the godhead, she is the singular person I look so forward to seeing in heaven.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members of Harvest Bible Chapel-San Antonio (HBC-SA) to utilize a sermon-based curriculum designed to engage the learner holistically by intentionally engaging the intellectual, emotive, and volitional components of the learner.

Goals

Five goals for this project served to evaluate its effectiveness. The first goal was to assess the current understanding of the biblical health of the body, the current practice of biblical discipleship within the body and the current perceptions towards utilizing a sermon-based curriculum at HBC-SA. Core member of the church launch team participated in a church-wide survey to measure this goal. The results of the survey served as the baseline to measure whether growth was realized or not. A t-test for dependent samples was utilized to determine whether there was a positive statistical difference between the beginning and end of the project. This goal was determined to be successful by the completion of the pre-survey.

From October 15, 2014, to September 14, 2015, Harvest Bible Chapel averaged 67 people in active worship attendance. Of those 67, 70 percent, or an average of 47 of the attendees were adults over the age of eighteen. The objective was set at two

fully functional small groups employing a sermon-based small group curriculum to be operational no later than October 2015.

The second goal was to provide a framework of biblical community that facilitated an understanding of why the implementation of a sermon-based curriculum was the most effective means of members experiencing holistic learning. This goal was met through a six-week preaching series. As a matter of practice email notifications were sent on a weekly basis to members to increase awareness. Members were asked to place special emphasis on attempting to be present as much as possible during this six-week series. The measurement of what participant understood regarding holistic learning was revealed through the completion of the post-survey. This goal of holistic learning was deemed successful by an increase in those gaining the framework information, as indicated in the post survey.

The third goal was to equip small group leaders to lead their small group to engage the sermon holistically. This goal was met through a six-week training course, and the effectiveness of this training was measured via an online survey of the small group leaders. Training covered a series of "one another" concepts found throughout the Holy Writ. The one another topics were (1) Love One Another, (2) Forgive One Another, (3) Serve One Another, (4) Submit to One Another, (5) Encourage One Another and (6) Encourage One Another. The first week was titled "You are not on an Island."

The purpose of lesson 1 was to foster an atmosphere where small group leaders are not seen as isolationists who are left to fretter on their own but are part of a community empowered by the Holy Spirit to make disciples. The book *Uncommon Community* served as the training material for the small group leaders. Small group

leaders met with me to contemplate and reflect on the week's teaching so they could formulate properly a plan to apply a given week's teaching to their small group. This goal was deemed successful when small group leaders achieved a minimum score of 90 on their online survey.[1]

The fourth goal was to equip leaders to implement the proposed action plan in their small groups during weeks nine through fourteen of the project. The leaders were charged to implement the action plan in their small group and ensure each small group effectively used the sermon-based curriculum to engage the small group holistically. The small group ministry leader met weekly with each small group leader to assess his success in implementing his action plan. Completion of this goal was measured by the implementation of best practices related to holistic learning in small group that were determined during the leader training. This goal was deemed successful when all the best practices were successfully implemented.

The fifth goal was to assess the progress realized in members experiencing a higher level of holistic learning. The original participants were surveyed again and those results were compared to the answers provided in the first survey. This served to validate whether individual experienced growth in their understanding and practice of utilizing a sermon-based small group curriculum. Successful completion of the survey and evidence of significant statistical growth by 80 percent of the original survey participants were the first benchmark of success for this goal. Two open-ended questions were added to the

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[1]The goal of 90 percent was determined to be a reliable indicator of fidelity to the tenets of faithful leadership of small groups. It is understood that others may arrive at a different numerical indicator. Consistent with the biblical motif of "to whom much is given, much is required" it was desired that the standard be lofty. I believe one should live in light of Paul's admonition in Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not human masters."

post surveys. The intent was to allow participants to provide a more robust response to their experience in participating in a sermon-based small group. It was hoped additional insights might be derived from the responses. The completion of these open-ended questions constituted the second benchmark of success for this goal.

Context of the Ministry Project

This project was performed at HBC-SA located in Bexar's County in San Antonio, Texas. HBC-SA began under the leadership of James McDonald in 1988 when he joined with eighteen other individuals in northwest Chicago to form a new church. They had a vision for proclaiming the authority of the Word of God without apology, for lifting high the name of Jesus through worship, for believing firmly in the power of prayer, and for sharing the good news of Jesus with boldness. In 2000, the elders of HBC-SA felt God was leading them to plant churches nationwide. HBC-SA was planted in 2014 under the leadership of Josh De Koning. HBC-SA believes one of the crucial means of long-term viability is to not just to be a church with small groups but to be a church of small groups. Pastor De Koning believes the success of the ministry's ability to be a kingdom-focused church is heavily impacted by the quality of its discipleship ministry.

**Harvest's Approach to
Discipleship**

Harvest Bible Chapel exists within a community that is highly mobile and active. The needs are relational and spiritual and not economic, so HBC-SA has attempted to minister in a manner that addresses the needs of the people. San Antonio is a growing and

progressive community that necessitates fresh and innovative strategies to serve the community successfully.

As a means of confronting that reality, HBC-SA has employed several of the principles posited in the book *Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger.[2] Many of the traditional activities and ministries people have grown accustom to in a typical Baptist church have intentionally not been adopted by HBC-SA. For example, HBC-SA does not host a mid-week service nor hold a Sunday evening service. The old expectations of the average church attendee are no longer the reality. And though that can be lamented and debated as to its correctness, it does not change the landscape of the environment in which HBC-SA ministers. HBC-SA's leadership has assessed the situation and attempted to posit faithful fidelity to placing the kingdom first while remaining relevant to the community it attempts to reach for Christ. As a result, HBC-SA has adopted *a less is better* approach to ministry.

A person visiting HBC-SA will quickly realize that HBC-SA is being built upon four pillars: proclaiming the name of Jesus without apology, lifting the name of Jesus through worship, believing firmly in the power of prayer and sharing the good news of Jesus with boldness. Members have been intentionally freed from the traditional expectations of church membership so they are free to be involved in opportunities within their own communities. As a result, members of the congregation have been released with the church's blessings to live missionally within their communities.

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[2]Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

Historical Background

HBC-SA is a new church plant that began in 2014, and so it does not possess a regal pedigree or a rich tradition. This realization has both negative and positive implications—negative in that there is not a rich foundation of success and proven experience to build upon, but positive as HBC-SA is not bound by institutionalized expectations of how to execute ministry. As a result, almost all actions and initiatives are first-time ventures HBC-SA has an opportunity to explore. Some work and some do not, but at least the church is uniquely able to try new and fresh initiatives. This is viewed by many of the members as a unique opportunity to chart new courses and not be saddled with institutional strongholds. Very recent experiences have vividly demonstrated to the core groups of members who have established HBC-SA that being slaves to tradition has been a painful yoke that people emotionally and passionately defend, even to the point of causing dissension and turmoil in the body of Christ. The core members of HBC-SA were excited to be afforded this liberating opportunity to discard the shackles of vain tradition and to be a church that is open to what God is currently doing and not be beholden to old paradigms. This belief recognizes the practicality of some traditions but is designed to remove the need to subscribe to practices that do not serve the current needs of the congregation.

Context of the Ministry Project

HBC-SA was birthed as a church committed to escaping the pangs of easy-believism that appear to be so rampant within the evangelical church. Advancing the kingdom for Christ is HBC-SA's ultimate goal, so the leadership has implemented a methodology where the concept of surrender is prominent in all that HBC-SA attempts to

accomplish, be it worship, edification, service, or mission. These four pillars serve as the hallmark attributes HBC-SA seeks to excel in.

To combat easy-believism, HBC-SA has instituted covenant membership whereby current and prospective members affirm three essential truths as a condition of membership. They must commit to faithful attendance of Sunday Worship, active involvement in a small group, and an active participation in a service ministry. Sunday Morning Worship serves as the entry point into the ministry life of HBC-SA and the focal point of our demonstration of HBC-SA's fidelity to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Yet, the leadership of HBC-SA has been equally aware that external practices such as worship attendance can create a false sense of security for many within the evangelical church. George Barna's alarming research reveals that only 9 percent of all adults in America possess a biblical worldview.[3] Far too many people demonstrate intellectual assent to a minimum amount of facts about Christ without displaying evidence of fruits worthy of repentance (Matt 3:8).

To combat this trend, HBC-SA is committed to people experiencing not only the proper cognitive understanding, but affective and volitional transformation as well. HBC-SA has committed themselves to fostering an atmosphere where people are challenged to live as surrendered subjects to the Lordship of Christ and not to regard their relationship with Christ as mere fire insurance to avoid the flames of eternal hell.

Many competing resources have beset the average person living within HBC-SA's sphere of influence for his or her time and attention. Many people commute at least

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[3]George Barna, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years," accessed June 9, 2012, http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years.

two hours a day and thus do not possess a lot of disposable time, so HBC-SA has planned

to employ a strategy where it does a few things and does those things with excellence.

Many churches fall prey to the pressure of attempting to offer a myriad of activities so

they will appear attractive to seekers, but HBC-SA is committed to witnessing

transformation, not the appearance of busyness. It is the collective opinion of the

leadership of HBC-SA that the likelihood of transformation increases only when the

church is intentional in ministering to the hearts and hands as well as the head. To do so,

the leadership of HBC-SA has come to the conclusion that is best realized by keeping

things simple and not bombarding people with a bevy of mediocre ministry offerings.

The expectation that the average person can process a Sunday school lesson,

the Sunday sermon, the Sunday evening sermon, a mid-week Bible study lesson, along

with desired individual devotions is not viewed as practical or healthy for the long-term

health of the believer. HBC-SA has committed to scaling back the amount of

information presented to its members and instead synergizing the sermon curriculum with

the small-group curriculum, thereby eliminating many of the expectations placed upon its

members. Information overload is not producing more mature Christians. Even during

HBC-SA's short history it has been the experience of the leadership of HBC-SA that this

prevailing condition is having the opposite desired effect amongst its members. HBC-

SA's leadership recognizes that the implementation of a sermon-based curriculum can

significantly impact the affective and volitional behavior of its membership.

Rationale

Christians living in the twenty-first century exist in a time of unparalleled

demands on their time. The leadership of HBC-SA believes the Christian would be far

better served by an intentional strategy to streamline the information presented for spiritual edification through implementing a sermon-based curriculum. Four areas of concerns will be addressed.

First, this project is needed because the leadership believes a person can only sufficiently process so much data before they suffer from information overload. When people are overwhelmed with data it becomes easier to fall prey to inertia. So, instead of attempting to present two unrelated streams of data from the Sunday morning worship and the small-group fellowship, HBC-SA intends to synergize the information between the two vehicles.

The second concern involves the desire to realize an increase in the affective learning of the believer. It has been HBC-SA's desire to see its members move from being content with faithful Sunday morning worship attendance to witnessing an increase of its members connecting with a small-group and using their gifts to serve the community.

The third concern involves a potential rejection of HBC-SA's philosophy of ministry among the congregation. Most evangelicals have been accustomed to the traditional model of Sunday school and Bible classes that have no connection to the Sunday message. Some of our members have been passionately committed to this traditional model and have expressed resistance to change. It was imperative that, as the change is discussed, constant vision casting is performed so that the membership fully understands the reasoning behind this proposed methodological change. While the leadership of HBC-SA recognizes the initial trepidation with such a change, it remains convinced that the benefits of implementation substantially outweigh all associated risks.

The final concern involves the legacy of the congregation. Each church is usually marked by one overarching characteristic. Some are known as praying churches while others are known as giving churches. HBC-SA desires to be known as a *doing* church. The church is both an organization and an organism. Touching upon the organic component, the church would collapse upon itself if it does not break from the cycle of being inwardly focused. The very nature of pride increases the likelihood that head knowledge would create a haughty spirit, which does not translate into believers becoming obedient disciples for Christ. One need only look at the experiences of the Pharisees, who possessed proper orthodoxy but did not demonstrate orthopraxis. Becoming that type of church has been more difficult than anticipated. The challenge for HBC-SA is whether they will leave a legacy as a church known for being *mere hearers* of the Word or a church that is remembered for being *both hearers and doers* of the Word.

As HBC-SA continues to cast this vision, it is hoped that individual disciples would be more likely to be in tune with the corporate vision and mission of the church, and future leaders would learn affective change is just as important as accumulating intellectual knowledge. The future ministry structure and function of HBC-SA will be contingent on its members embracing the understanding that learning must target the heart as well as the head. Much of the church's vision and mission will be implemented only through an increased affective learning. Ultimately, volitional change will only be achieved through this vehicle. That is why the leadership of HBC-SA believes this project to be essential to the life of HBC-SA.

Definitions

The following definitions will be used within the context of this project.

Exegesis. Exegesis is the explanation or critical interpretation of a text so that the original message of the text is rightly interpreted.[4]

Holistic. The term "holistic" signifies an approach to learning that encompasses the whole person (i.e., it seeks to engage fully all aspects of the learner: mind, body, and spirit). The underlying holistic principle is that a complex organism functions most effectively when all its component parts are themselves functioning and cooperating effectively. This idea relates very closely to the concept of synergy, the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.[5]

Transformative learning. Transformative learning is learning that is undergirded in the evangelical belief of absolute truth. Thus, the goal of learning in the Christian worldview is to discover right answers rather than reflect upon other perspectives in the world.[6] One is not content to contemplate what the text means to the individual. Evangelicals are only concerned with how the declared truth postulates the conditions for right living for the Christian community.

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[4]Desmond T. Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 52.

[5]John Herron, "Holistic Learning," *Brainwaremap for Creative Learning, October 1, 2009*, accessed March 6, 2013, http://www.jwelford.demon.co.uk/brainwaremap/holist.html#top/.

[6]Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 26.

Limitations

The desired affective and volitional change could not be fully measured in the allotted fifteen weeks of this project. Goals as lofty as affective and volitional change have always been an ongoing challenge due to the fallen-ness of human nature. Surrender will never be able to accurately gauge the human heart, but HBC-SA is nonetheless committed to implementing practical steps to facilitate growth in the body.

Due to the time constraint of this project, there will be an intentionally narrowed focused in the training of only the small-group leaders. Given more time, equal emphasis would be devoted to both the pastors and the small-group participants. It is acknowledged that the success of the sermon-based small groups would be dependent upon the pastor who clearly and sufficiently communicated the central point of the sermon. Additionally, it is understood that the necessity of the small-group participants being trained in proper hermeneutics to recognize the central point of the sermon and deriving proper application from the sermon is a crucial and necessary component.

While the goal of increased affective learning will be measured via human measurement tools, it is understood that our Sovereign Lord for their true fidelity can only rightly judge each believer. An ever-present word of caution will be resolutely communicated: there always remains the distinct possibility that people can do all the right things but for all the wrong reasons. The leadership of HBC-SA is very cognizant of not carelessly fostering an atmosphere of false assurance. Whether the desired change had staying power is mutually dependent upon the graciousness of God and the faithfulness of both the collective church and individual believer.

The conditions that affect HBC-SA are not unique to HBC-SA and would apply in many other local contexts. So, although the results of this project are exclusively related to HBC-SA, many other churches and organizations could benefit from employing this same strategy. Results will always vary upon many types of factors such as the commitment of the people involved, time, location, and experience and skills of the leadership.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project is defined by the five previously stated goals. These goals were to (1) gather data related to the current understanding, the current practice and the current perceptions toward implementing a sermon-based small group curriculum, (2) to lead members to understand the value of employing a sermon-based curriculum versus employing the traditional model found in decentralized Sunday schools/Bible studies, (3) to train small group leaders, (4) to implement the action plan, and (5) to gather data to determine if the desired result was achieved. The completion of the goals was accomplished through a pre-survey, a six-week preaching series, small-group leader training, implementation of the action plan, and a post-survey.

Pre-Survey

The pre-survey was an anonymous survey to gauge each participant's level of current understanding, current practice, and current perceptions toward realizing holistic learning through a sermon-based small group curriculum. As previously mentioned, from September 21, 2015, to September 12, 2015, HBC-SA averaged 67 adults in active worship attendance. Of those 67, 70 percent, or an average of 47 of the attendees were adults over the age of eighteen. The objective was set for two functioning small groups

to be implemented no later than October 2015. Each participant created a unique numerical identifier so that pre- and post-surveys could be compared for statistical analysis.

Paper copies were distributed to each of the small group leaders. Small group members were given time during the small group sessions to complete the survey. Surveys were collected by the small group leader who then passed them to the small group ministry leader.

The survey consisted of three sections. The first section measured the participant's direct knowledge of what constituted holistic knowledge. The second section measured the practice of biblical community through participation in biblical stewardship. The third section measured each participant's general feelings towards participating in a sermon-based small group.

Launch Preparation

The proposed launch preparation for this project was multifaceted. Goal 2 of the projected utilized a six-week Sunday morning preaching series over specific biblical passages, teaching the truths of the needs for believers to not just pursue intellectual acumen but to equally pursue affective and volitional acumen. Each week members were given specific points to consider.

Concurrently, Goal 3 was implemented as the pastor and small group leaders met, analyzed the major teaching points of the sermon and evaluated their small group in light of the applicable biblical instruction. Training covered a series of "one another" concepts found throughout the Holy Writ. The one another topics were (1) Love One Another, (2) Forgive One Another, (3) Serve One Another, (4) Submit to One Another,

(5) Encourage One Another and (6) Encourage One Another. The first week was titled, "You are not on an Island." The training for small group leaders was the first step in an ongoing process to equip small group to proper utilize a sermon-based small group curriculum. Goals 2 and 3 ran concurrently for six weeks.

Once the preaching series and leadership training was completed, a covenant was established to serve as the covenant for each small group. The goal was for each participant to have an objective measure to judge their fidelity to the group.

The final phase of the launch preparation was to lead small group to effectively implement the sermon-based small group curriculum for approximately six week. While it should be understood the ultimate goal would be more permanent and fixed for the sake of the project, a six-week period of time was chosen.

Post-Survey

The post survey was conducted in weeks 14 and 15. Each participant took the same survey again, using a unique numerical identifier. The survey used a *t*-test for dependent sample format. The *t*-test for dependent samples involved a comparison of means from each group of scores and focused on the difference between the scores. The null hypothesis stated that there is no difference between the means for the pre-test and the post-test scores on the understanding and practices of implementing a sermon-based small group. The survey tested whether or not the preparation plan provided enough progress to reject the null hypothesis. The survey indicated the difference between the two survey results, providing the obtained value. If the obtained value was greater than the critical value, then the preparation plan was a success.

The two surveys were dependent on each other to determine whether after the preparation plan, there was a significant difference in understanding and practice of employing a sermon-based small group curriculum to experience holistic learning throughout the body.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RELFECTION OF
IMPLEMENTING A SERMON-BASED
SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

It is a universal change of the whole man. It is a new creature, not only a new power or new faculty. This, as well as creation, extends to every part; understanding, will, conscience, affections, all were corrupted by sin, all are renewed by grace. Grace sets up its ensigns in all parts of the soul, surveys every corner, and triumphs over every lurking enemy; it is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing. The whole soul shall be glorified in heaven; therefore the whole soul shall be beautified by grace. The beauty of the church is described in every part.[1]

The evangelical church is at a crossroads. Insanity is described as doing the same thing repeatedly, but expecting different results. If one reads contemporary polls, they realize that the church is suffering from a dearth of true sanctification within the body. The church is not lacking for head knowledge. The twenty-first century church has more resources at their disposal than at any time in human history and yet the leadership of HBC-SA concern is the abundant availability to head knowledge is not translating into an acceptable level of emotive and volitional knowledge.

The argument advanced in this chapter is that the Scriptures present holistic learning as requiring emotive and volitional engagement as well as intellectual assent. It is the fervent desire from the leadership of HBC-SA that its members demonstrate more acuity with the emotive and volitional components that comprise holistic learning that is

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[1]Stephen Charnock, "A Discourse of the Nature of Regeneration," accessed March 3, 2013, http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/charnock/cha01.htm.

so desperately needed in the church today. Being able to espouse the right doctrine does not necessarily or automatically translate into espousing the right practice. The leadership of HBC-SA believes one of the principal means to witness more emotive and volitional acuity is through the implementation of a sermon-based small group curriculum.

Life is lived at a frenetic pace. Technology has advanced in society such that it possesses the ability for instant access to information. Mediums like Twitter and Facebook provide the ability to know things almost virtually as they happen. Of course, this pace comes with obvious advantages, but there is a real sense that it has become too easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the data. Rainer and Geiger speak persuasively when they write, "The philosophy behind the simplicity is that users are unable to effectively process too much information, that too much information is slow and cumbersome."[2] Granted, though Rainer and Geiger related this proposition to the secular enterprise, Google, their words still has applicability to consumers in the church. Classifying members in a church as consumers may seem crass to some, but there are many common elements that both audiences share. For instance, both the secular consumer and the church attendee are finite beings who can effectively process only so much information cognitively. While it is true that the church attendee potentially possesses the Holy Spirit, God's normative means of processing information is the same for both audiences.

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[2]Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 10.

Since it has long been postulated that all truth is God's truth, it becomes imperative for the exegete to explore and attempt to understand what God has revealed in his word concerning the need for community and why fellowship is exhorted to pursue a holistic approach of affecting not just the head but the heart and hands of the individual as well. A brief mention of the basis for community will be presented here while the major focus of this chapter will be devoted to positing why the community is best served by pursuing a holistic approach toward learning. A holistic approach to teaching is defined as a teaching designed to penetrate the heart and hands as well as the head.

It is against the backdrop of Abraham B. Kuyper's famous declaration, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine! This belongs to me!'" that it is postulated that God's revelation in both testaments demand the total involvement of all man's faculties. Ranging from Solomon's exhortation to his son, Rehoboam, to James's exposition on the necessity of being a doer of the Word of God, both testaments speaks vividly to an issue that still plagues the covenant people of God today. The contemporary church, much like the Old Testament saints, has demonstrated that they have leaned far too heavily on the intellectual component of learning and have struggled to pursue and begin to master the emotive and volitional components of learning. While the New Testament serves as the principal place of instruction for the church, there still remains much wisdom to be gleaned from the Old Testament, especially concerning the need for holistic immersion.

Holistic Pleas in the Old Testament

The Foundation for Holistic Immersion

Given the dramatic experiences of the nation of Israel, one would assume it would be relatively easy to follow God in obedience, especially since they had experienced first-hand the mighty hand of God with events like the parting of the Red Sea (Exod 14), bread from heaven (Exod 16), and water from rocks (Exod 17). E. W. Nicholson believes the command to love God is central to the entire book of Deuteronomy: "Obedience would be possible only when it was a response of love to the God who had brought the people out of the land of Egypt and was leading them into the Promised Land."[3] Yet, that clearly was not the case due to the original sin nature the children of Israel inherited from their forefather, Adam. Due to Adam's fall, even though God demonstrated in unmistakable fashion that he was sovereign and benevolent and worthy of all adoration, Israel was never able to respond appropriately. Mankind took a detour into spiritual degeneration, resulting in a community of people who lived in abject rebellion from their creator.[4] Still, due to God's steadfast love for his Son (1 Pet 1:20) and his express desire to glorify himself, God generously provided a means for the Old Testament covenant people to enter into fellowship with him. While on the surface it appeared that it would have been easy to understand cognitively all that God had done, it would, in fact, require a holistic embrace of God's revelation as McConville demonstrates: "The phrase 'all your heart' might possibly be rendered 'all your mind'. The association of the words *leb*, *lebab*, heart, with the intellect is clear from Jer. 5:21;

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[3]E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1967), 46.

[4]Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 127.

Hos 7:11. The translation 'heart' is suitable, since 'heart' in Deuteronomy is typical for penetrating to the seat of the will (as in English 'heartfelt')."[5]

The Hebrew people did not possess a faulty delineation between the heart and the mind. They understood that obedience to Yahweh necessitated a total submission of their total beings to God. Block reveals this necessity for total submission: "Biblical Hebrews has no separate word for mind; one's heart/mind is both one's 'feeler' and 'thinker.' In this context, we do not need to choose between the two, for both are in the mind; the word serves comprehensively for one's inner being."[6] An Israelite was expected to engage his total being in his devotion to the Lord and that principle was to be instilled from the very beginning and consistently reinforced. That devotion was viewed not so much as an individual pursuit, but instead as a family matter pursued at every possible opportunity.[7] It starts from the inside and then must touch every aspect of a person's constitution. This is a principle that must be indoctrinated from the onset as mankind is bumping up against a well-seasoned adversary: the human heart. It is deceitfully wicked and is not to be trusted (Jer 17:9).

Because of this well-seasoned adversary, following after God requires a substantial effort, an effort that is beyond natural man's ability to perform (Rom 8:6-7). As a result, God initiated a covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. God, of course, honored his part of the covenant, and Israel was commanded to honor their portion. Israel would have understood the concept of the suzerain-vassal treaty

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[5]J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 142.

[6]Daniel I. Block, *How I Love Your Torah O Lord! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 85-86.

obligation as it was a common principle that was readily practiced in their culture. Brueggeman posits that "the core of Deuteronomy is the biblical covenant which binds Yahweh and Israel by oaths of fidelity (Yahweh and Israel each faithful to the other) and obedience (Israel obedient to Yahweh)."[8] If Israel was to be successful it would require strenuous effort on its part. Wright details how Israel was expected to engage not only its heart and soul but to also engage its might: "To this profound pair (heart and mind), the Shema add a third remarkable item; (lit.) 'and with all your very-muchness.'"[9] The covenantal relationship begins with a high calling to the Israelites, but it is a high calling that continues throughout the whole of the Old Testament revelation. Wisdom literature is replete with revelations that continue the theme of total immersion of the vassal member of the treaty between God and his redeemed people.

Holistic Immersion through Wisdom

The writings from wisdom literature continue the theme of strenuous effort on the part of man in his quest to fulfill his vassal responsibility to his suzerain lord. Solomon, one of mankind's wisest servants, admonishes his audience to pursue wisdom with all of their hearts (Prov 4:4-5). Brady, commenting on Proverbs 4:4-5, opines, "Do not simply admire wisdom, but get it for yourself. Like a professional wrestler, pin it to the ground."[10] Here, he seems to view the pursuit of wisdom as not a mere passive

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[7]Block, *How I Love Your Torah O Lord!*, 87.

[8]Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 53.

[9]Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 99.

[10]Gary Brady, *Heavenly Wisdom: Proverbs Simply Explained* (Webster, NY: Evangelical,

exercise of digesting information but a pursuit where the person must totally engage more than his or her mere mental faculty if he or she is to be successful. Brady's imagery brings to mind Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord until he secured a blessing in Genesis 32:23-34. For Jacob to secure his goal, it took more than a cognitive understanding of God's revelation; it required pursuing after God with all of his "very-muchness."[11]

Wisdom is proffered as a possession that is to be strived for heart, mind, and soul. Garrett believed it was like "a father and son were in the marketplace and the father was urging the son to spend his money on wisdom rather than on anything else. The price is the son's whole life."[12] If fallen man is to enter and remain in a vibrant relationship with his creator, it will entail all that he possesses in that pursuit. This radical concept of abject capitulation was consistent with the expectation of the vassal subject. The vassal was in effect saying that all that he was as a human being he willingly subjugated to his suzerain lord. If done faithfully, this would by necessity require the surrender of all that constituted his humanity. The vassal could not afford to pay mere lip service, as he understood his very continual existence was contingent on the benevolence of his suzerain master. Vassal kings like King Zedekiah learned first-hand the consequence of paying mere lip service to their suzerain lord when he was executed for not honoring the terms of his covenant with King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 39:6-9).

2003), 126.

[11]Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 99.

[12]Duane A. Garrett, *The Poetic and Wisdom Books* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 87.

It might appear to the casual reader that Solomon unnecessarily repeats himself when he proclaims, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom" (Prov 4:7a). In Bland's estimation, the "sequence might refer first to gathering in and collecting wisdom by rote or observation. After that one will learn to appreciate and understand wisdom. The pupil must first acquire a taste for wisdom."[13] If wisdom is to be ascertained, it first must engage the mind. But, if it is to become transformative, it must eventually affect the heart and hands as well. To bring attention to a very important matter a skillful communicator will sometimes deliberately violate a conventional rule of grammar to amplify his point. Garret adds this additional insight to the passage above: "The alternative translation, 'the beginning of wisdom is Get wisdom,' is difficult in that this it is both redundant and use an imperative phrase as a predicate. But this can be a deliberate anacoluthon (violation of syntax) meant to drive home the idea that the first step in the pursuit of wisdom is to determine to obtain her."[14] It is probable that Solomon spoke in such an unconventional fashion to ensure that the message was not glossed over or missed. The first step is intellectual, but it is only the first step.

Writing as the elder statesman, Solomon attempted to pass on to the next generation the wise counsel he had gleaned over the years from his father.[15] The church would be well served to pass the same message on to its next generation. Otherwise, the church is likely to experience the same result of Solomon's sons. Rehoboam began a

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[13]D. Bland, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College, 2002), 77.

[14]Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 87.

[15]Kathleen A. Farmer, *Who Knows What Is Good: A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 39.

legacy of men who never demonstrated affective or volitional obedience to God in any meaningful fashion. The mind must never be bypassed as the church exhorts its audience to pursue wisdom. That the church must begin with the mind is without question, but the church must equally understand it must attempt to stimulate the heart and hands with equal intentionality.

The wisdom literature, more than any book of the Bible, is designed to highlight the importance of seeking after God with one's heart. Of all things that are to be guarded, the heart is the most vital. Love, compassion, repentance, forgiveness, and life eternal begin in the heart. Paschall and Hobbs believe that "'with all diligence' (v. 23), means vigilance, alertness, and constantly keeping and guarding."[16] Michael Quicke notes further that "churches are suffering from one-dimensional engagement with Scripture: either just with the head or just with the heart" and, as a result, "[t]he two edged sword becomes a plastic butter knife."[17] The church can ill afford to maintain such a posture. If Quicke and others who share his perspective have correctly exegeted the instructions of King Solomon, the church will first seek to engage the mind but will also understand that it is only the first step in man's pursuit of wisdom.

The fast-paced, want-it-now society struggles mightily with concepts such as deliberate effort and delayed gratification. If it does not witness immediate dividends on its investments, they quickly move on the next supposed miracle fix. Wisdom is

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[16]F. H. Paschall and H. H Hobbs, *The Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers* (Nashville: B&H, 1972), 360-61.

[17]Michael Quicke, "Preaching and Heart-level Hermeneutics," Theology Network, accessed June 16, 2012, http://www.theologynetwork.org/theology-of-everything/preaching-and-heart-level-hermeneutics.htm.

normally obtained after a long pursuit and is rarely realized as a quick fix. Even Luke

records how Christ matured in wisdom and grew in stature (Luke 2:40, 52). Philips

speculates that even Rehoboam was not interested in his father Solomon's counsel. He

writes, "We can picture him fidgeting and giving vague answers to questions or staring

out the schoolroom window, his thoughts far away with his harebrained friends. . . . Get

wisdom! Get Wisdom! We can almost hear the edge in Solomon's voice as Rehoboam's

shallow mind sorely tested his patience."[18] Although God is not subject to our human

frustrations, he still must be displeased when his subjects do not gravitate to an earnest

pursuit of wisdom as they should. In Rehoboam's case, it appears that he even struggled

to master the cognitive instructions that made it very unlikely he would ever begin to

master the affective and volitional components of Solomon's instructions.

It would appear that Solomon was not alone in his yearning to see his progeny

embrace the concept of holistic learning at a very early age. The writer of Psalm 119

shares Solomon's sentiment when he writes, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By

taking heed according to Your Word. With *my whole heart* I have sought you: oh, let me

not wander from Your commandments!" (Ps 119:9-10, emphasis mine). Keil and

Delitzsch believe that "one is said to hide the word in one's heart when one has it

continually present with him, not merely as an outward precept, but as an inward motive

power in opposition to selfish action (Job 23:12)."[19] The covenant people of the Old

Testament understood that their relationship to God required more than a one-

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[18]John Philips, *Exploring Proverbs: An Expository Commentary*, *John Philips Commentary Series*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 110.

[19]C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 737.

dimensional involvement in following after Yahweh—it required both an inward and outward exertion on their part. Yet, the wisdom exhortation does not stop there. One can see this truth expressed in the seminal story of Job as he wrestles with how to respond to Yahweh's providential management of his life.

After Yahweh has dutifully humbled Job, Job exclaims, "I have heard of you by hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5). Reminiscent of the exchange Christ had with Pilate during his trial (John 14:28-38), Job realized that he was espousing what he knew about Yahweh through hearsay rather than through personal, holistic knowledge. As Rawlinson writes in his commentary on the passage, "Hitherto, i.e., I have nothing but hearsay knowledge of thee; I have not known thee in any trust sense**:** *but now*—now that thou hast revealed thy self—*mine eye seeth thee*; my spiritual eye is opened, and I begin to see thee in thy true might, thy greatness, thy true inscrutableness."[20] It is a fleeting proposition to attempt to follow Yahweh with only an intellectual devotion or even with only an affective or volitional devotion. As Job finally understood, it requires a holistic devotion of all three components: intellect, emotion, and will.

Man is thus faced with a vexing dilemma. He can pursue a course in which he may obtain earthly wisdom as defined by the accumulation of intellectual possessions or he can pursue the things of God that are not merely intellectual in nature and be commended by his suzerain lord. As Phillips says of the rich fool in Luke 12:20, "[H]e was sitting up in bed congratulating himself and making plans for early retirement, . . .

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[20]George Rawlinson, *Job*, The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 7 (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2004), 662.

but Jesus said he was a fool."[21] The possession of true wisdom is validated by the

approval of the suzerain Lord. Man, left to his own devices, is too easily satisfied

because he is in mere possession of the facts as opposed to truly becoming a diligent

disciple of all the learning components. He is boastful of his head knowledge but sorely

deficient in his heart and hand knowledge. Since the Bible is one unified message, one

can expect the New Testament to be in total cohesion with the Old, and the careful

exegete is not disappointed as he contemplates the New Testament revelation. One need

only look at the teaching of Christ during his Sermon on the Mount.

Holistic Pleas in the New Testament

The Sermon on the Mount

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ made it explicitly clear that

the wise not only cognitively understand but demonstrate their understanding by correctly

translating intellectual understanding into affective and volitional obedience.

The Sermon on the Mount stands as one of the seminal messages on how the

adherents of God are to conduct themselves as citizens of the suzerain kingdom[22]. The

vassal subject understood that his likelihood of survival and prosperity depended on his

obedience to the terms dictated by his suzerain Lord. Leon Morris, in his commentary on

the Matthew, offered this insight into those who would seek after Christ: "[I]t is one thing

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[21]Philips, *Exploring Proverbs*, 111.

[22]While the use of the term *suzerain* has a negative connotation to some within our
contemporary society, I freely employ this term in light of God's benevolent character. God is the only
Person eligible to impose obligations without restraint or fear of abuse that is associated with earthly
vassals. Puritan John Murray's treatise, *The Covenant of Grace* is a vivid example of the Puritan's frequent
employment of the term which they viewed as an altogether proper and positive portrayal of God's
relationship to His creation.

to hear what he said and even approve of it; it is quite another to obey. But it is only

obedience that results in solid achievement."[23] People demonstrating mere intellectual

assent like the *alleged disciples* in John 6 are to be most pitied for though they may have

tasted the heavenly gift but denied its power. As R. T. France succinctly states, "The

teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is not meant to be admired but to be obeyed."[24]

God is not content to allow his vassal subjects to pledge allegiance that does not

materialize in both internal and external obedience to his commands.

It is only in the context of holistic learning that one can ever begin to

approximate the level of commitment that Carson postulates. Regarding Matthew 7:24-

27, he writes, "Entrance into the kingdom, then does turn on obedience after all—not the

obedience which earns points but which bows to Jesus' lordship in everything and

without reservation."[25] If the preaching in today's evangelical churches does not

translate into obedience (volitional change) then all the accolades given to the

contemporary church are hollow and self-deceiving, both to the preacher when he is told

he has preached such a great sermon and to the parishioner who deceives himself by

attentively listening to a message that does not transform his life.

This seemingly elusive transformation can never be understood as a temporary

adherence to some stated principle. It must, as Bloomberg writes, "build a solid

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[23]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 181.

[24]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 146.

[25]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 131.

foundation that combines authentic commitment to Christ with preserving obedience."[26]

While it is granted that perfect obedience will never be realized in this life, there remains

the expectation that genuine sanctification will be realized for every believer.

While salvation is wholly of grace by faith, there is a genuine danger for those

who only express intellectual assent to the commands of Christ, their suzerain Lord. In

his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount passage, Osborne provides this insight:

"Those who merely listen without practicing these truths are fools. These are clearly the

false Christians of [Matt 7] vv. 15-23. '*To do*' occurs nine times in [Matt] 7:17-27, where

the emphasis is on putting Jesus' teaching into practice via a life centered on the will of

the Father."[27] It is never enough to listen, no matter how attentively and passionately; it

must translate into action. The person who builds correctly is considered wise while the

person who builds incorrectly is labeled as a fool.

Glasscock shares this perspective on the matter when he writes that "acting

upon is subsequent to understanding. After evaluating and considering what is said in

order to gain an accurate understanding of the will of the Father, the wise person will

apply what is learned to his life."[28] The evangelical church is littered with far too many

professing adherents who can quote all the applicable Bible verses but struggle

demonstrating genuine fidelity to those Scriptures. The church is in desperate need for

preaching that drives its adherents to action. Chappell has his pulse on the matter when

he writes, "Expository preaching does not merely obligate preachers to explain what the

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[26]Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 134.

[27]Ibid., 275.

Bible says; it obligates them to explain what the Bible means in the lives of people today. Application is as necessary for sound exposition as is explication. In fact, the real meaning of a text remains hidden until we discern how its truths affect our lives."[29] Unless the church quickly reverses this trend, it will inevitably become like the Jews who possessed a zeal for God but a zeal without knowledge. Davies and Dale, commenting on the passage, add, "Doctrine is good and a precious thing, but it is not being preached for the sake of being heard but for the sake of actions and its application to life."[30] Preaching that does not demand a volitional response from its hearers is not worth the exercise. The preacher has not successfully preached until he has confronted his audience with the need to make a choice. The audience must be confronted with a clear appeal to either obey God or to choose consciously not to obey him.

Yet, even some of the Jews of Christ's day understood the import of knowing and doing. Jesus's parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:24-27) was similar to a parable by Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya, ca. AD 120, in which he specifies the knowing and doing of the Torah as providing a firm foundation against the floods (Str-B 1:469-70). Guelich provides a helpful insight into the discussion when he postulates, "*and does them* also stands in both Matthew and Luke indicating that Jesus' word pertained to one's life and not just to one's mind or 'understanding.'"[31] Thus, this trend

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[28]Edward Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 178.

[29]Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 84.

[30]W. D. Davies and Allison C. Dale, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 114.

[31]Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 404.

is not a recent quest that has only recently been put forth. It is as old as Christianity itself.

How Christ chose to end the Sermon on the Mount is telling. The true disciple must do the will of the Father, not simply talk about it. He must build his house upon the rock to withstand the wind and flood and not upon the sand, where it will be destroyed. Paschall and Hobbs believe the point of this whole chapter is clear: "[T]he disciple of Jesus Christ cannot be blandly adjustable to all the prevailing patterns of society. He must make his choice for the 'strait and narrow way,' in the firm assurance that when the final record is in, no matter how it may look to the world, that choice will be vindicated."[32] If true, this task can easily be regarded as herculean, one that cannot be fulfilled with a mere pedestrian effort. It will require the concentrated effort of the man's total facilities to persevere. It is important to note that both the wise and foolish builders hear the teaching of Jesus. It is his teaching, not Moses' that is the standard of judgment. But it is not enough to have heard the teachings of Jesus. Hearing and knowing the teachings of Jesus are worthwhile activities only when they are applied.[33]

Spurgeon eloquently sums up the deceitfulness of head knowledge:

Beware of resting in head-knowledge. Beware of relying upon orthodoxy, for without love, with all your correctness of doctrine, you will be a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. It is well to be sound in the faith, but the soundness must be in the heart as well as in the head. There is as ready a way to destruction by the road of orthodoxy as by the paths of heterodoxy. Hell has thousands in it who were never heretics. Remember that the devils "believe and tremble." There are no sounder theoretical believers than devils, and yet their conduct is not affected by what they

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[32]F. H. Paschall and H. H. Hobbs, *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (Nashville: B&H,1972), 595.

[33]David L. Turner, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 117.

believe, and consequently they still remain at enmity to the Most High God. A mere head-believer is on a par therefore with fallen angels, and he will have his portion with them forever unless grace shall change his heart.[34]

Spurgeon is in lockstep with the thinking of the apostle Paul. Paul goes beyond the idea of "head knowledge" in Colossians 1:9. He does not use the more common term for knowledge, *gnosis*. The word Paul uses here is *epignosis*. "To know" here means more than just to be aware of or to be able to recall or identify something. Yount elaborates, "The word means a knowledge that reaches out and grasps it object and is in turn grasped by its object."[35] Much like Brady's assessment of the Proverbs passage, the use of the term *epignosis* brings to mind strenuous physical exertion on the part of the learner if he is to master his subject. A passive accumulation of mental facts will never suffice. One could argue that because of the nature of the Gospels it is imperative to derive didactic instructions from the Colossians so that the chief question then becomes what the Epistles have to say regarding the matter. Since the apostle Paul is the predominant writer of the Epistles, attention will be given to considering the insights he shared.

The Philosophy of the Apostle Paul

Paul made clear just what kind of *knowledge* he is taking about by adding the phrase "through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." Wisdom (*sophia*) and understanding (*synesis)* are two of the three chief "intellectual" virtues, according to Aristotle (the third is *phronesis*, "prudence"; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1:13).[36] While a

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[34]Charles Spurgeon, "The Deceitfulness of Head-knowledge," The Daily Spurgeon, October 26, 2009, accessed July 3, 2012, http://www.thedailyspurgeon.com/2009/10/deceitfulness-of-head-knowledge.html.

[35]William R. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 9.

[36]Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon,* The Pillar New Testament

full-orbed Gnosticism did not develop until the second century, it is widely held that the

beginning of Gnosticism was present as Paul wrote to the church in Colossae. It has been

advocated that the nature of the heresy facing the Colossians with its gnostic bent could

not have existed until much later. However, scholars have discovered incipient features

of Gnosticism present even in pre-Christian movements.

> But the idea of two worlds, the idea of the evil of matter, the idea that the body is a
> tomb, and that the flesh is evil, are ideas which are deeply woven into both Jewish
> and Greek thought. There is nothing in Colossians which cannot be explained by
> longstanding Gnostic tendencies in ancient thought, although it is true that the
> systematization of Gnosticism came later.[37]
>   A pedestrian pursuit of knowledge was never intended to equip the believers at
> Colossae to confront the maze of first-century worldviews with which they were
> confronted.[38] Given the arsenal of different competing false teachings present in the
> first-century, it necessitated what Yount refers to as "heart" knowledge for the
> church to be successful in its pursuit of fidelity to its suzerain Lord.[39]

Wright understood Paul to understand the concept of knowledge as more than

merely human or worldly intellectual skill.[40] True wisdom inevitably translates into

practical and ethical application. It moves the person exposed to it to live according to

the precepts that God has decreed. As Wright indicates, knowledge was never intended

to be esoteric or confined to a private religious experience.[41] Instead, it was expected to

become the vehicle by which man is equipped to respond appropriately to God. When he

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Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 94.

[37]William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians,* The New Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 121.

[38]Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 94.

[39]Yount, *Created to Learn*, 9.

[40]N. T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 58.

[41]Ibid., 57.

falls, he is enabled to respond with the requisite repentance. When he excels, as enabled by God, he is able to offer thanksgiving and praise to his creator. It is only when he begins to master all the components of holistic learning rather than a tangential possession of head knowledge that this is possible.

Paul used the term "knowledge" in both general and theological ways. For example, in Roman 3:20, he states that through the law one could gain knowledge (*epignosis*) of sin. Melick understands the passage to stress a true knowledge of God and his will. It was also the appropriate term for personal rather than intellectual knowledge.[42] Mere intellectual assent can never bridge the gap that separates man and God. Even the demons possess intellectual knowledge (Jas 2:19) that God does in fact exist, but they lack the requisite ability to express affective and volitional assent to this proposition. God has revealed himself as a personal being and, consequently, it is imperative that anyone attempting to relate to him must know him personally rather than just intellectually. This requires more than just the mind; it demands that the heart and will be brought into alignment as well. Tozer posits the following sentiment: "The pursuit of God requires one to move beyond the purely cognitive level. The mind may be the key starting place for this pursuit, but it is not the finish line. While we would never embark on such a journey without the mind-transforming work of the Holy Spirit, the transformation of the heart is the true objective."[43]

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[42]Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 201.

[43]Kenneth Boa, "Following Hard After God," *Bible.org*, accessed July 7, 2012, http://bible.org/seriespage/pursuit-god-part-1/.

The term "filled" is a key word in Colossians. It was likewise an important term for the false teachers. Paul used it here and in 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9-10; 4:12, and 17. It carries the idea of being "fully equipped or controlled." Paul's prayer, then, was for the Colossians to be controlled by the full knowledge of God's will, which would lead to obedience and moral excellence.[44] Reliance solely upon head knowledge is a certain recipe for disaster because the mind alone is never a strong enough faculty to combat the inherent fallen nature of man. The extent of man's fall is such that it impairs all his faculties. Man is thus in need of a radical transformation as opposed to a mundane makeover. Stimulating the mind only begins the process, yet much of the preaching and teaching in the churches today only penetrates the mind. It would seem that the adversary is rather content to allow believers to be intellectually exposed to the truth. Satan sees no harm in this exposure, but he is adamantly opposed to that truth being processed and applied on an emotive and volitional level.

The apostle Paul makes a subtle contrast between the partial knowledge advocated by the false teachers and full knowledge that is available in Christ. They (the Colossae believers) had understood the gospel (1:6). Now they needed to deepen their knowledge of his wise will, a will that is spiritual and unseen.[45] False knowledge can only puff up but full knowledge possesses the ability to bring humility and discernment. True knowledge possesses the supernatural ability to cut to the bone (Heb 4:12) and

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[44]D. S. Dockery, *The Pauline Letters*, Holman Concise Bible Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 589.

[45]R. B. Hughes and J. C. Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 611.

allow a person in a covenantal relationship with God to walk in a manner worthy of his or her calling.

The church is not lacking for vehicles who will facilitate the correct information about God. The contemporary believer is inundated with resources like *Logos*, *BibleWorks*, and *WORDsearch 9* to name just a few. That is not the issue. The church exists in an age in which information is readily available. It was Paul's fervent prayer that the church at Colossae would grow in more than just factual knowledge about God. Paul had been praying that the Colossians would have a true knowledge of God and would receive direction from God.[46] Yes, the problem with the evangelical church today is not the dearth of biblical information; it is the proper application of the biblical data. House and Garland helpfully define the applicatory goal of biblical preaching. Their definition of biblical preaching highlights the necessity for accurate application: "The goal of expository preaching of a text, or topically related texts, is bringing the listener as close as possible to the meaning of the original text, in its context, in order to apply its unchanging truth to the listener's context."[47] If the contemporary church is to live out faithfully Christian precepts, it will need to be more than a hearer of the Word of God, it will need to become a doer of the Word of God. While Paul is the principal voice in the Epistles, he is by no means the only voice. It is against the backdrop of James's teaching that I conclude by looking at the New Testament's contribution to the discussion of holistic learning.

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[46]Todd D. Still, *Ephesian-Philemon*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 283.

[47]Wayne H. House and David G. Garland, *God's Message, Your Sermon* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 50.

The Philosophy of the Apostle James

Disciples cannot be hearers only of the Word like those in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:3-9) in which the Word has not taken root.[48] They must evidence the Word of God in their lives. They must begin to demonstrate changed dispositions that arise from above. True disciples are distinguished from mere listeners. A listener is portrayed as someone who attends a lecture while a disciple is someone who hears and does what the master says.[49] The typical parishioner is deluded into thinking that he or she has experienced a true encounter with the Lord by passively partaking of a worship experience without fully understanding that it is only the first step in the transformation process.

James insists that listening to God's Word must lead to "doing" it. Only then can one truly "accept" the Word. In this exhortation by James, one sees the heart of James's pastoral concern.[50] This remains a cautionary tale for pastors in that the job of feeding God's sheep does not end with the conclusion of the Sunday morning sermon. If the Word of God is to have its intended effect, then the sermon needs to be reinforced in ways that allow the parishioner to wrestle with the truths preached from the pulpit. The parishioner will surely stumble along the way, but he must be implored and challenged not to be like the individuals James makes reference to in his epistle—those who walk away from the Word and immediately forget what they were like (Jas 1:24). It is no

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[48]Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 94.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 89.

wonder that many believers are bewildered. They are experiencing no real life change in their Christian experience. In fact, Maximum Faith research found that only 1 out of 8 eight self-identified Christians (12 percent) admitted that recognizing and grasping the significance of their sins had been so personally devastating that it caused them to crash emotionally. Only about 3 percent of all self-identified Christians in America have come to the end of their transformational journeys—the place where they have surrendered control of their lives to God, submitted to his will for their lives, and devoted themselves to loving and serving God and others.[51]

James 2:22 reads, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what is says." The New International Version's rendering of this verse reverses the order in the Greek. Hiebert explains this reversal: "The NIV reverses the order because in actual experience hearing comes before doing."[52] The importance of hearing can never be taken for granted, but if there is no doing then genuine learning has not taken place. The church cannot remain content that the message has been conveyed; it must be all the more diligent to ensure the message has been internalized and then put into practice. James masterfully demonstrates this truth with the simple object lesson of the tongue (Jas 1:26) that true religion is always demonstrated by an outward expression. Granted, there will always remain a tension of false security because someone may demonstrate a vain, outward obedience, but the church must accept this tension. While

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[51]George Barna, "Self-described Christians Dominate America but Wrestle with Four Aspects of Spiritual Depth," Barna Group, September 13, 2011, accessed July 14, 2012, http://www.barna.org/ faith-spirituality/524-self-described-christians-dominate-america-but-wrestle-with-four-aspects-of-spiritual-depth/.

[52]Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 60.

there remains a genuine danger of embracing tares amongst the wheat, the church must continue to push for demonstrated acts of external obedience to the preached word. Hiebert shares the following insight: "[D]oers" (*poietai*) is a favorite word of James. Four of its six occurrences in the New Testament are in this Epistle (1:22, 23, 24; 4:11)."[53] This is especially significant when one considers the entire epistle contains only 108 verses.[54]

In this relatively short letter, James attempts to ensure that his readers understood the weight of the matter. It is not enough to merely possess cognitive understanding of an issue. The true believer will, in fact, put into practice their understanding of his or her faith. Merely wishing a hungry man good tidings is not properly demonstrating the knowledge of loving thy neighbor as thyself. If one were to demonstrate true fidelity to the royal law (Jas 2:8), he would be expected to respond volitionally to his brother's plight. Demons would be able to understand cognitively the right thing to have done. Satan is fully able to quote various Bible passages, albeit out of context, but he does not possess the ability to express affective concern for anyone other than himself. It is only in the context of holistic learning that the believer begins to understand his responsibility to his brother. It is only in this context that he agrees with the Word of God and his heart begins to cries out "Yes Lord" in response to God's instruction. He agrees with God that he is his brother's keeper, and he is enabled by God's Spirit to meet his brother's need. William and Baker are convinced of this truth: "James insists the Word must be so integrated into believers' live they will recognize

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[53]Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John*, 118.

[54]William R. Baker and Thomas D. Ellsworth, *Preaching James* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 2.

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when and how that Word applies to each situation in life. Not to understand it or recognize its life application is inconceivable and can be explained only as people not caring to know or apply the divine word."[55] To recognize something is to be fully cognizant of it. Recognition results from intentionality; one does not merely stumble upon it. This type of learning comes with an intense effort from the learner as he is not satisfied with a cursory stockpiling of biblical data. He is committed to becoming a loyal citizen of his master's kingdom. As Richardson elaborates, "James understood being a doer of the Word involves becoming as all vassal are finite in their ability to live according to the suzerain's dictation."[56]

Conclusion

God's revelation is consistent in both testaments. His expectation is that his vassal subjects recognize him as their suzerain Lord. He expects them to utilize their entire faculties in devotion to him. It is expected that their devotion would begin in the mind but would ultimately penetrate the heart and will. If successful, it is done from a very early age as the elders of the given generation pass it on to the next generation. It is understood that man is opposed by a very seasoned foe who was well aware of the allure of pride that comes from mere intellectual assent. As a result, it is imperative that the believers pursue Yahweh not just with their minds but also with their hearts and wills.

Heroes like Job are posited as examples of individuals who became victorious only after realizing that fully seeking after God was a holistic pursuit, one in which they

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[55]Baker and Ellsworth, *Preaching James*, 35.

[56]Richardson, *James*, 94.

could not take for granted, a pursuit that requires the participation of all of their faculties. In addition, the human race can ill afford not to pay attention to Solomon's sons.

Christ continues the same perspective in his teachings, especially his Sermon on the Mount. Believers are extolled as wise only when they put into practice what they have learned. The apostle Paul reinforces this principle with his emphasis on knowledge that is concentrated on the heart over against head knowledge. Finally, James exhorts believers to be doers of the Word and reject the belief that a person is faithful to God by merely being a hearer of the Word.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR A SERMON-BASED SMALL GROUP

Transformative learning is best realized within a relational context where equal emphasis is given to the emotive, volitional, and intellectual components. The conventional means of communicating biblical truth is via sermons and Sunday school/Bible class, with the curriculum in the Sunday school/Bible class detached from the sermon message. In agreement with Gregory's belief, the art of learning entails *acquisition* (head: sermon), *elaboration* (heart: sermon-based curriculum), and *application* (hands: outworking of small groups). The leadership of Harvest Bible Chapel believes the most effective means to facilitating transformative learning is to link the sermon message with the curriculum used in small group fellowships.[1]

The Evangelical Church may be better served if it recognizes that establishing an effective learning environment is more about relationships than just the dissemination of the correct biblical data. This one-dimensional model of appealing to the intellectual delivery of biblical data, no matter how correct or orthodox, is, in the view of Harvest leaders, ineffective. The leadership of Harvest believes that the likelihood of achieving the goal of emotive and volitional transformation can be more realistically realized within the concepts of intimacy found only in intentional small groups.

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[1]John M. Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), xi.

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Hull believes one of the crucial components missing in the learning environment is intimacy. He writes,

> The group's covenant works only to the extent people establish relationships and bonds to one another. Love and support provide the strongest form of accountability. Intimacy creates a safety that permits people to lower their defenses and be authentic. Only then can people deal with their obstacles, such as the sins that keep defeating them.[2]

The leaders of Harvest believe the implementation of a sermon-based small group is uniquely able to leverage the centralized proclamation of the Word. In addition, it allows for a strategic concentration that the conventional Sunday school methodology is not designed to offer. The sermon-based small group affords an intentional opportunity to deal with the real life obstacles that, according to Hull, impair the average believer from experiencing true transformation. Even in churches where the Word is faithfully proclaimed from the pulpit, the Sunday sermon may not be the best venue for people to experience the intimacy necessary to deal frankly and honestly with the issues they experience.

The pupil and, in this case, the parishioner have not experienced true learning if the transaction does not produce a tangible change in their character or conduct. Harvest's leadership is convinced that the church can no longer remain content just because the right orthodoxy has been communicated. The church must be equally vigilant as it earnestly pursues the proper orthopraxy. Bredfeldt recounts one of the compliments that he received from one of his students who emailed him and exclaimed, "I realize that I can't just deliver content; I must get people to internalize that content by engaging them in learning." He goes on to say in response to the compliment,

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[2]Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 235.

"Comments like those stoke the furnace of my teacher's heart."[3] This philosophy undergirds why it is necessary to introduce the implementation of a sermon-based curriculum at Harvest. Harvest's priority is to watch its members move from a passive accumulation of head knowledge to an active demonstration of heart knowledge measured by quantifiable growth in proper Christian stewardship—a stewardship that leads people to increase their service to their local community, get involved in mission opportunities, and participate in the rich study and application of God's Word.

How will Harvest attempt to achieve this quantifiable change in proper Christian stewardship? It will attempt to do so by implementing a small group methodology that believes transformative learning is more likely when the church properly understands and employs these three crucial principles: (1) Jesus' masterful pedagogical approach, (2) the role of the teacher, and (3) the role of the student. It almost seems sacrosanct to not consciously recognize the *sine qua non* of the Holy Spirit in a dialogue about Christian learning, so the church must readily acknowledge that nothing takes place without the unction of the third person of the Trinity. Having acknowledged this crucial fact, the focus will now shift to the remedies made available to the Christian community to achieve her goal of transformative learning. The first remedy to explore is the pedagogical approach of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' Masterful Pedagogical Approach

Some may question why the pedagogical approach of Jesus Christ would be a valid consideration within this conversation. Just as history has accurately recorded the

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[3]Gary Bredfeldt, *Great Leader Great Teacher* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 201.

pedagogy of luminaries such as Aristotle or Plato, historical documentation allows us to easily ascertain the approach Jesus employed. It is easy to overlook the insights that one can gain from a thoughtful analysis of how Jesus came to be viewed as a master-teacher, but when one begins an investigation of how pedagogy has unfolded throughout human history, the approach of Jesus Christ must receive due consideration.

The position of teacher was without peer within the Greek culture. It would not be considered an exaggeration to attach the moniker "master teacher" to Jesus Christ. The early church father Ignatius (ca. AD 35-107) referred to Jesus as "our only Teacher."[4] B. A. Hinsdale has proclaimed that Jesus "was the greatest of the greatest oral teachers.[5] Claude Jones's opening salvo in his book *The Teaching Method of the Master* declares, "Jesus Christ was the Master Teacher."[6] Ralph Sockman opined that Jesus was the "paragon of pedagogy."[7]

One must note that the significance of the legacy of Christ's impact is not only found amongst evangelical scholars. E. L. Kemp acknowledges, "Measured by the nature of the lessons he taught, by his method of presenting them, by the persons whom they reached, and by the results they have accomplished, he was the greatest teacher of all

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[4]Roy Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 17.

[5]B. A. Hinsdale, *Jesus As a Teacher* (St. Louis: Christian, 1895), 12.

[6]Claude C. Jones, *The Teaching Methods of the Master* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1957), 9.

[7]Ralph W. Sockman, *The Paradoxes of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon, 1936).

teachers.[8] Secular educators Frederick Eby and Charles Arrowood concede, "Jesus must be acknowledged as the greater teacher of all time."[9]

The chief result of Christ's incarnation was salvific in nature, but the impact of Christ's earthly life has significant implications regarding how society attempts to educate its populace. It is clear from the Great Commission and various other passages (cf. John 1:38; Matt 28:18-20; John 20:21) that there was a divine expectation that what Christ exhibited would be duplicated in His adherents. As evidenced by passages like Deuteronomy 6, there has long been an expectation of passing on truths to successive generations.[10] While there are four pedagogical approaches that are considered dominant within the education community, the focus here will be limited to two: the traditional versus the constructivist approach, as Jesus masterfully melded these two principles in his own technique.[11]

Traditionalist vs. Constructivist Pedagogies

The traditional pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, as ancient as formal teaching itself, involves the direct flow of information from teacher as sage to student as container. The traditional pedagogy can be also defined as a pre-technology education context in which the teacher is the sender or the source, the educational

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[8]E. L. Kemp, *History of Education* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1901), 101.

[9]Frederick Eby and Charles Arrowood, *The History and Philosophy of Education Ancient and Modern* (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1940), 54.

[10]This passage lays out Moses' inspired instructions to God's covenant people "to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God." It is clear that if successive generations were to continue in a covenantal relationship with their God, they had to be taught, as they did not possess the innate ability.

[11]James A. Berlin, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," *National*

material is the information or message, and the student is the receiver of the information.[12]

Traditional pedagogy, also known as Direct Instruction or DI, has been around for centuries. Young boys were received into schools (most often schools with religious purposes) that required them to be obedient, faithful, and efficient servants of the church.[13] Knowledge was understood to exist independent of the student, and his mind was considered to be a blank tablet upon which a picture of reality could be painted. Locke artfully articulated this belief when he wrote the following:

> Let us then supposed the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE [emphasis author].[14]

Constructivism Pedagogy

Whereas Locke favored the virtues of the traditional model, others seemed to give more consideration to the virtues of constructivism. Robertson made the bold assertion that he regarded Jesus Christ as the greatest constructive educator ever. It was Robertson's belief that the educational practices utilized by Jesus Christ embodied the

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Council of Teachers of English 44, no. 8 (December 1982): 765-77.

[12]Munienge Mbodila and Kikunga Muhandji, "The Use of ICT in Education," *Science Foundation Unit, 2012*, accessed May 8, 2014, www.worldcompproceedings .com/proc/p2012/FEC2651.pdf.

[13]Lawrence A. Tomei, "Learning Theories and Pedagogy: Teaching the Traditional Learner" (Ph.D. diss., Robert Morris University, 2010), 1.

[14]John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: The Tegg Cheapside, 1836), 51.

foundation of constructivism.[15] A constructivist pedagogy is a method that actively involves students and gives them a considerable voice in their own learning. In constructivist pedagogy, teachers desist from supplying all the information and, instead, facilitate learning. Teachers in this methodology coordinate and assist students' construction of learning. Proponents of this methodology would say that learners construct their own meaning from interacting with texts, problems, materials, students, adults, and other aspects of the learning environment.[16] As opposed to the traditional approach, the success of the teaching session is not wholly dependent upon the mastery of the teacher. Constructivist pedagogy recognizes that the student is an active participant and must be engaged. A small group setting, as opposed to the traditional Sunday sermon/Bible class, provides the necessary platform in which transformative learning can really flourish. Given a basic orientation of the two approaches, we will explore how Christ employed both.

Some educators believe it is within the constructivism framework the student can really flourish. Constructivism gives students ownership of what they learn, since learning is based on students' questions and explorations, and often the students have a hand in designing the assessments as well. Constructivist assessment engages the students' initiatives and personal investments in their journals, research reports, physical models, and artistic representations. Engaging the creative instincts develops students'

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[15]William H. Robertson, "The Greatest Constructive Educator Ever," *Christian Perspective in Education* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 1.

[16]Richard I. Arends, Nancy E. Winitzky, and Margaret D. Tannenbaum, *Exploring Teaching: An Introduction to Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 191.

abilities to express knowledge through a variety of ways. The students are also more likely to retain and transfer the new knowledge to real life.[17]

Christ's Synergistic Approach

The mastery of Christ's pedagogical approach was in His utilization of both the traditionalist and constructivist approaches.[18] When properly understood, the argument is not whether one approach is better than the other, as that is certainly not the approach that Christ or His apostles employed. Instead, the argument is that both are needed to increase the probability holistic learning will be realized. Jesus employed many strategies or pedagogies of instruction, including the combination of direct instruction (preaching), discussion of issues (small group), and experiential learning (small group), while also teaching through storytelling or parables (large and small group) and metaphors (large and small group). This inclusive approach can be exponentially more effective than using only one or two methods alone and is reflective of both traditionalist and constructivist pedagogies.[19]

One example of Jesus' employment of traditionalist pedagogy can be found in Luke 4:16-30. Jesus assumes the role of "rabbi" and directly addresses his hearers, with no input or dialogue with the audience. Additionally, we can witness the same type of instruction being employed by the two principal apostolic characters of the Book of Acts:

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[17]Brigitte M. Matsuoka, "Concept to Classroom," *Thirteen Ed Online*, April 1, 2004, accessed December 30, 2014, http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class /constructivism/index_sub6.html.

[18]The use of the term *synergy* is in no way to be associated with its more common association to the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). The author affirms the Reformed understanding that God works mongeristically in salvation.

[19]Harro Van Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom* (Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design, 2009), 33.

Peter and Paul. Peter preaches to the large crowd on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41), while Paul employs the traditionalist approach in Acts 13, when he speaks at the synagogue.

Yet, it is equally clear that Jesus also uses the constructivist approach at times. Constructivist learning took place in small groups as Christ asked and answered questions of His disciples (Mark 8:27-30), provided reinforcement and practiced activities (Matt 14:13-33; Luke 9:1-6), and coached and checked for understanding and accuracy of disclosed information (cf. Mark 8: 1-30).[20] As opposed to the passive accumulation of information found in the traditionalist model, the constructivist approach facilitates the ability of the student or, in the case of Christ, facilitated His disciples' ability to process the information they were exposed to and make practical applications with this data.

It is in Christ's life that we see the mixture of these two approaches. When appropriate for and warranted by the situation, Christ employed the traditionalist pedagogy, as when He taught at the Sermon on the Mount. Yet at other times, Christ used the constructivist model in small group settings. Without question, the educational pedagogies of Christ are at the center of learning and teaching methodologies in the New Testament.[21] The sermon-based small group seeks to leverage, not replace or neutralize, the strengths of the faithful proclamation of the Word in the larger context of Sunday morning worship, yet will also attempt to build upon that medium through the use of small group interaction utilizing the constructive pedagogical approach.

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[20]Brummelen, *Walking with God in the Classroom*, 117.

[21]George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 249.

The pedagogy of Jesus is germane to this discussion when one considers that America was birthed with an educational ideology that attempted to live in fidelity to the educational worldview of Christ. As a direct result of Jesus' educational methodologies and discipleship practices, Christianity is now the world's largest religion and has, in many ways, indirectly championed the educational impetus for many institutions of higher learning.[22] In fact, 106 of the first 108 colleges in America were founded by Christian denominations or upon Christian beliefs.[23]

It is easy to understand why the Christians who settled in America desired to emulate the pedagogy of Christ, due to the similarity of their goals in both the spiritual and secular dimensions. The goal in the spiritual dimension was a radical transformation of the sinful disposition of sinners and their subsequent reconciliation with God. From a secular standpoint, the goal was the well being of society. Benjamin Franklin said, "A Bible and a newspaper in every house, a good school in every district—all studied and appreciated as they merit—are the principal support of virtue, morality, and civil liberty."[24] While it can be validly posited that Franklin was not orthodox in his understanding, we can still profit from his insight, even if he did not live out the precepts in a consistent fashion. The twenty-first century church would be better served and

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[22]According to data from the PewResearchCenter, Christians constituted 31.5% of the world's population in 2010. Muslims' total was 23.2%, followed by Hindus at 15.6. See PewResearchCenter, "The Global Religious Landscape" accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12 /18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

[23]April Shenandoah, "History of America's Education Part 3: Universities, Textbooks and Our Founders," *The Sierra Times*, April 4, 2002, accessed May 1, 2014, http://www.tysknews.com/Depts /Educate/history_part3>htm/.

[24]Ashley Thorne, "U.S. Founding Fathers on Education, In Their Own Words," *National Association of Scholars*, July 2, 2010, accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.nas.org/articles/U_S_Founding _Fathers_on_Education_in_Their_Own_Words/.

experience its desired result by incorporating the synergistic pedagogical approach

practiced by Christ. This step, while crucial and fundamental, cannot be the sole factor of

consideration. Much weight must be devoted to the implementer of the approach. Thus,

attention is now turned to the role of teachers in the learning process.

Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher within the context of small groups affords the church

the best opportunity to experience the quantifiable change she so desperately desires to

witness. Osborne exemplified this heartfelt desire when he wrote, "As a Pastor, it's my

job to help people move along to spiritual maturity, to make sure that as a church we're

fulfilling both halves of the Great Commission: leading people to Christ and nurturing

them on to full obedience."[25]

While the Sunday Morning sermon would remain the central place for the

proclamation of the Word of God at HBC-SA, it is believed that small groups would

provide the best opportunity for believers to delve deeper and more intimately into the

Word of God. Osborne seems to agree: "I used to think that could be accomplished

[transformative learning] by putting together challenging sermons, forming small groups,

and helping people to identify and use their spiritual gift. But I now realize that I was

leaving out a vital first step: creating an environment conductive to spiritual growth."[26] It

is the teacher who is largely responsible for creating the environment in which spiritual

growth is made possible. As important as the sermon is and will continue to be, without

a viable platform to internalize its content, HBC-SA believes the average parishioner will

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[25]Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 27.

continue to struggle with experiencing transformative learning. The church can ill afford to believe that it will be business as usual and expect the results to be any different.

What must occur is the realization that there must be intentionality in the pursuit of transformative learning. This will take a reassessment of the roles of the teacher and the student, along with a fresh look at how Jesus developed His followers. The role of the teacher is of paramount importance, and without the teachers' passionate pursuit of their role, transformative learning will continue to be haphazardly realized, at best. If holistic learning is to take place it is believed teachers must embrace Hendricks's perspective: "The miracle of the ministry is that God handpicked us [teachers] to be his representatives to this generation. He wants to bring about change, and in doing it, you will be one of his critical instruments."[27] If one were to embrace the philosophy of Hendricks they would agree with the premise that teachers must always be viewed as more than mere caretakers who meet some minimum level of expectation so that a class can be maintained, as so often seems to be the case. Teachers must be understood as crucial and vital components in the learning process.

It is the opinion of some educators a new understanding of the relationship between the teacher and the student is necessary. In practice, this new relationship between teachers and students takes the form of a different concept of instruction. Tuning in to how students really learn prompts many teachers to reject teaching that is primarily lecture based in favor of instruction that challenges students to take an active role in learning. They no longer see their primary role as being the king or queen of the

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[26]Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 27.

[27]Howard G. Hendricks, *The 7 Laws of the Teacher* (Atlanta: Walk Thru the Bible Ministries,

classroom, a benevolent dictator deciding what's best for the powerless underlings in their care. They've found they accomplish more if they adopt the role of educational guides, facilitators, and co-learners.[28]

Hendricks recounts an encounter many people have experienced at some point in their church experience. A Sunday school superintendent assured a new inexperienced believer that she would make an excellent Sunday school teacher. The superintendent said to the young woman in question: "You'd make a wonderful teacher, Miss Smith. I realize you haven't been a Christian very long, and you feel you don't know much about the Bible—but there's no finer way to learn the Bible than to teach it." Hendricks laments, "What a sad commentary on our low regard for the teaching of God's Word. To teach children that two plus two equals four, you need a minimum of four years of higher education. To teach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ, anyone is good enough . . . and that's why it too often degenerates into a ministry of mediocrity."[29]

Who is to blame when learning does not take place, despite all the best intentions? Parents, for the most part, earnestly send their children to institutions to learn; administrators and teachers, by and large, sincerely devote their lives to the vocation of educating tomorrow's future generation with full integrity. Children, generally speaking, want to achieve and come to understand that the best means of achievement in life is education. So, despite all of the above convictions, why does society in general, and the church in particular, still struggle with the realization of

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1987), 29.

[28]Judith T. Lanier, "Redefining the Role of the Teacher: It's a Multifaceted Profession," *What Works in Education*, July 1, 1997, accessed December 30, 2014, http://www.edutopia.org/redefining-role-teacher.

transformative learning? Wilkinson believes that the blame lies principally at the feet of the educator and reveals as much when he explains,

> What an extraordinary example of the heart of the Law of the Learner, Dr. Hendricks believed that, as my teacher, *he was the one responsible for my learning* [emphasis mine]. He felt responsible, and if I wasn't learning he did whatever it took, changed his lesson plan, his style, told an irrelevant joke, even ran down the aisle and confronted me—to get my attention.[30]

It seems far too frequent in today's society that it becomes a self-defense mechanism to assert blame elsewhere, almost as a reflex action. Parents place the blame on the government, educators place the blame on uncaring and disinterested parents, and the child, taking their cue from the adults, blames the older generation altogether. It is refreshing to hear how Hendricks had such a life changing effect on Wilkinson and, probably more importantly, how Wilkinson began to understand how Hendricks came to such an ideology. One comes to understand how when Hendricks shares about the effect a simple individual with a sixth-grade education had upon him when he recruited Hendricks to join his new fledging Sunday school class. This forever-unnamed individual, who, in Hendricks's own words, "was not the most scintillating person in the world," nonetheless had a profound effect on the adolescent Hendricks. That individual act of compassion birthed in Hendricks a phrase that he coined "*a passion to communicate*," which encapsulated what Hendricks went on to develop as one of his *Seven Laws of the Teacher*.[31] One should never underestimate the power of a simple act of compassion toward another.

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[29]Lanier, "Redefining the Role of the Teacher, 31.

[30]Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 25.

[31]Hendricks, *The 7 Laws of the Teacher*, 21.

Does the common thread and trajectory of this storyline now become apparent? The nameless teacher captivated the heart of Hendricks, and Hendricks spurred on a future protégé—Wilkinson—who, in turn, contributed to the legacy of teachers impacting future generations with his one of his most recognized works *The Seven Laws of the Learner*. It is not necessarily better curriculums or new methodologies lacking in the church; instead, is the church needs teachers who understand and embrace the belief that they are the single most important factor in the equation that determines whether or not transformational learning will take place. It is certainly no stretch to say that without Christ, there would be no disciples who changed the world. Additionally, the success of this endeavor is not contingent upon master teachers when measured by such attributes as eloquence, skill, or even charisma. No, the success of this enterprise only requires teachers who possess the passion to communicate biblical truth; when done it is more likely their students will grow in Christian stewardship.

The average Christian educator, much like Bredfeldt's student before his epiphany, has become content with far too little. The Christian discipler is called to help others move from word to concepts to Christian action—doing the Word, not hearing only![32] Educational psychologist George Mouly wrote, "Transfer of training is the cornerstone on which education must ultimately rest; unless the [student's] learnings help him to meet more effectively situations … later in life, he is essentially wasting his time.[33]" The challenge is formidable, but not impossible, if the teacher first understands

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[32]William R. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 11.

[33]George Mouly, *Psychology Applied to Teaching* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973), 906.

and then embraces the role he plays in the learning process. In fact, it was Gregory's

opinion that it is a virtual certainty that if the teacher employs the proper principles, then

learning is certain to follow. He wrote,

> Teaching has its natural laws as fixed as the laws of the planets or of growing
> organisms. It is a process in which definite forces are employed to produce definite
> results, and these results follow as regularly and certainly as the day follows the sun.
> What the teacher does, he does through their natural effects. Causation is as
> certain—if not always so obvious nor so easily understood—in the movements of
> mind as those in matter. The laws of mind are fixed as material laws.[34]

If eloquence or charisma do not ensure success, but educators like Gregory

strongly believe that success can be a certainty, then the logical question is what principle

increases the likelihood that the desired outcome takes place? As opposed to subjective

elements, which will widely differ in each individual, the proper selection of the correct

framework serves as the key criterion that will ultimately determine success or failure.

Educator Role: Framework

According to Mezirow, educators have three perspectives from which to

choose: *subject-oriented*, where learning is primarily the attainment of a body of

knowledge or set of skills; *consumer-oriented*, where learning is seen as responding to

and meeting the needs initiated by individuals; or *emancipatory-oriented*, where learning

is seen as leading to freedom from personal or societal constraints.[35] Cranton believed

that of the different approaches advanced by Mezirow, the emancipatory approach was

best able to achieve transformative learning.[36] One of the positive consequences of

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[34]Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, 1.

[35]J. Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 18.

[36]Mezirow, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, 166.

employing an emancipatory learning approach is its relationship to a concept in adult education literature termed, "really useful knowledge." Really useful knowledge is created when individuals and groups begin to reflect upon their experience with each other in ways that lead to greater insight and understanding and which enable theories to be developed and linked to strategies for bringing about changes.[37] The leadership of Harvest acknowledges that the typical church employs the subject-oriented or consumer-oriented models with minimal success. This understanding grounds their desire to incorporate the emancipatory model into the life of Harvest, as it understands that there is nothing more important than creating an environment in which transformative learning has a genuine opportunity to transpire.

The educator can continue to advance the old paradigm of disseminating information (subject-orientation), follow the popular trend of meeting felt needs (consumer-orientation), or he can choose to incorporate a methodology where students are challenged to wrestle with the substance of the declaration of the Word of God in all of its fullness. Even as the parishioner sits under sound biblical preaching from the pulpit on a Sunday morning, he does so as a passive recipient of divine truth. Many a member shares in the frustration espoused by Augustine when he said, "As soon as the book leaves my hand, all my feeling for it vanishes."[38] Augustine was expressing what many contemporaries believers experience each Sunday. They leave the Sunday morning worship without a vehicle to delve deeper and engage in profounder reflection.

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[37]John Clarke, C. Critcher, and Richard Johnson, eds., *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 227.

[38]Stephen R. Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 188.

Augustine went on to say in the matter, "When you come to a passage that seems useful to you, make a firm mark against them, which may serve as a lime in your memory, lest otherwise they may fly away."[39] The church can either passively continue to hope transformative learning happens on the student's own initiative, or it can actively facilitate the environment where students can make the firm mark that Augustine earnestly sought in his own life.

Participation in a sermon-based small group can bring the student into direct contact with other like-minded believers. It is in this context where the student is presented with a legitimate platform to become actively engaged with the proclaimed biblical truth. The teacher, along with other fellow small group participants, is afforded the opportunity to directly engage the student, to challenge, to comfort, to rebuke, to console—whatever is needed to spur the student into more Christlikeness.

While curriculum and orthodoxy are of vital importance, Osborne demonstrates that he has his pulse squarely on the matter when he says, "The process is more important than the curriculum."[40] The small group affords the teacher opportunities that the pastor preaching from a pulpit never has. The small group leader is afforded a means to present, as Mezirow posits, "an organized effort to help the learner challenge presuppositions, explore alternative perspectives, transform old ways of understanding, and act on new perspectives."[41] Granted, the person delivering the Sunday message possesses the ability to do the same, but the preacher is only able to do so in an abstract,

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 134.

[41]J. Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,

impersonal sense. He would not be able to, nor should he, personally target certain

members of the congregation in the delivery of his message, but within a small group

context, the leader can and should possess the freedom to personalize the discussion.

That is one of the small group's chief benefits. The sermon is primarily a one-way

interchange, whereas the small group facilitates a dialogue. This point is crucial because

all of the onus for learning should never reside in the teacher alone. Hendricks' words

are insightful at this point:

> This law [Law of the Teacher] embraces the philosophy that I, as a teacher, am primarily a learner, students among students. I am perpetuating the learning process; I am still en route. And by becoming a student again, I as teacher will look at the education process through a radically new— and uniquely personal— set of eyes.[42]

Two concepts stand out in Hendricks's comments. First, teachers must embrace a radical

posture, and they must be personal in nature—the radical nature being they do not sit in

superiority over the students; they only view themselves as co-laborers in the quest for

sanctification. Secondly, they display a personal interest because they genuinely care

about the welfare of those under their charge. They long, as Bredfeldt longed, to hear

testimonies of changed lives. They embrace a *first amongst equal* approach because they

humbly realize that they can only lead from where they have first-hand experience. The

teacher must, as Gregory wrote, "be one who KNOWS the lesson or truth or art to be

taught.[43] In opposition to the view that the student is a "blank state," one still maintains

that the teacher must assume and sustain a very visible and active role in the learning

process. Yet, the role of the student must not remain minimized or be taken for granted.

1991), 167.

[42]Hendricks, *The 7 Laws of the Teacher*, 27.

[43]Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, 5.

Role of the Student

As crucial as the implementation of Christ's synergistic approach and the role of the teacher are, these truths in no way alleviate the student's role in the quest for learning. Even as the input of the student is considered, it cannot be separated from the role of the teacher. For example, according to Cranton, one of the missing facets in the student is the ability for critical self-reflection. While Cranton demonstrates full awareness that the student is ultimately responsible for whether or not learning takes place, she goes on to posit that "the educator who has created an environment conducive to learner empowerment has set the stage for working toward transformative learning."[44] One of the crucial factors one must consider is the perspective through which the teacher understands the proper role of the student.

Educators like Mark Barnes, whose book *Role Reversal: Achieving Uncommonly Excellent Results in a Student-Centered Classroom* was named one of the best professional books by *Teacher Librarian*, believe the key for success for students in the twenty-first century is to create an environment where students manage themselves and all but eliminate themselves from traditional classroom management.[45]

Does the Christian teacher mimic the societal understanding that Wilkinson held when he wrote the following? "We've been asking people whenever we travel how they would define the responsibilities of a teacher. Over and over again they say, 'to teach the facts' or 'to cover the material' or 'to complete the lesson plan.' The focus of all

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[44]Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 166.

[45]Mark Barnes, *Role Reversal: Achieving Uncommonly Excellent Results in a Student-Centered Classroom* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2013), 4.

these definitions is upon anything but the student's learning."[46] If the student has not learned, then it does not matter how elaborate the lesson plan was or how well the teacher has understood the finer points of the material. It does not matter if every jot and tittle of the information was conveyed during the allotted time; if the student has not learned, then the exercise must be regarded as an object of failure.

While such a sentiment could surely be considered unwarranted hubris, one must note that the student enters the classroom not as a neutral entity, but as a person who is fallen and a hopeless slave to his depraved mind. As a result, desperate times demand decisive and provocative remedies—remedies like the one offered by Wilkinson when he states, "The essence of the Law of the Learner is the three words. '*Cause to Learn*.'"[47] The experience that Hendricks relates regarding the superintendent's low standard of the presence of a warm body fulfilling the role of teacher can no longer be tenable in the church's quest for transformative learning.

The landscape has dramatically changed, and while all offspring of Adam have been born with a sinful nature, the complexity of the background the students brings has been made infinitely more challenging. Consider the influences of a person who has lived in a primarily agrarian culture. The amount of data this student would have been exposed to and had to deal with would be minimal, comparatively speaking, in relation to today's world. The student's environment would have been limited to his family, his school, and his church, which would typically be small and in close proximity. Yet, with the advance of the Industrial Age, the invention of electronics, and the explosion of information

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[46]Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, 25.

[47]Ibid., 42.

available to the typical student in the twenty-first century, students are bombarded with

disparate messages that negatively impact the educational system's ability to advance a

healthy environment in which to learn. The church, though not with malice, only adds to

the problem with its blind devotion to the traditional model.

While many in society yearn to return to a time when life was simpler, we will

never be able to go back to those times. Yet the demand is still before society to educate

the next generation. If the church is to remain relevant, it must improve in the two

following chief areas: (1) it must expect and make room for the student to be an active

learner and (2) it must connect with the student on an emotive basis.

Active Learner

The following statement is consistent with the complexity of today's world:

> In today's complex world, simply knowing how to use tools and knowledge in a single domain is not sufficient to remain competitive as either individuals or companies. People must also learn to apply tools and knowledge in new domains and different situations. Industry specialists report that people at every organizational level must be creative and flexible problem solvers (Lynton, 1989). This requires the ability to apply experience and environments for active learning: a definition knowledge to address novel problems. Consequently, learning to think critically, to analyze and synthesize information to solve technical, social, economic, political, and scientific problems, and to work productively in groups are crucial skills for successful and fulfilling participation in our modern, competitive society.[48]

It is the view of one prominent American educator that the present educational system

has done a poor job of setting up the next generation for success.[49] While the church's

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[48]Scott R. Grabinger and Joanna C. Dunlap, "Rich Environments for Active Learning: A Definition," *Research in Learning Technology* 3 (1995): 5-6.

[49]The United States is in a "real state of crisis," Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, as findings of a study showed that American adults fare poorly in mathematical and technical skills needed for a modern workplace compared to their counterparts in most other developed nations. Duncan's comments were made during a panel during NBC's fourth-annual Education Nation Summit, a gathering on the state

impact is mitigated slightly through families that send their children to receive a Christian

education, the majority of Christian children are still educated in the secular school

system.[50] Education is receiving increasing pressure from changing global economic

circumstances and complex societal needs. Yet, according to Lynton, "At this time

. . . education is far from fully contributing to the economic well-being of this country

[United States]."[51] Public and private institutions are demanding employees who can

think critically and solve a range of problems, who can move easily from task to task, and

who can work efficiently and effectively in team situations; yet they claim that those

people are difficult to find.

The church faces the same challenges cloaked in different languages and

needs. If discipleship is to be experienced, it will only be achieved when the body of

Christ is lovingly confronted with the necessity of being fully immersed in the pursuit of

transformation. This pursuit can certainly begin with active and worshipful devotion in

the corporate Sunday morning worship, but members can begin to think critically about

the biblical message being communicated and adequately begin to address and solve their

prevailing spiritual problems only when the church correctly sees students as active

learners and not passive participants.

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of education in America. The study, based on tests developed by the Organization for Economic
Cooperation and Development, a coalition of mostly industrialized countries, may be the most detailed look
at education around the world yet. See Elizabeth Chuck, "U.S. in a 'Real State of Crisis,' Education
Secretary Says," *NBC News*, accessed June 4, 2014, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/other/us-real-state-
crisis-education-secretary-says-f8C11354527.

[50]According to the Council for American Private Education, only 10 percent of students
enrolled in PK-12 program attend private schools. See Council for American Private Education, "Facts and
Studies," accessed May 19, 2014, http://www.capenet .org/facts.html.

[51]E. Lynton and S. Elman, *New Priorities for the University* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,
1989), 23.

The moniker "active learner" is a recent entry into the educational conversation; the educational community first took serious note of this philosophy in the 1980's. Bonwell and Eison made a presentation to the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) that caused quite a stir. In this report, they presented a variety of methodologies for promoting "active learning". They provided research that indicated that for learning to be achieved, students must do more than just listen: they must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. They posited that the key was understanding related to the three learning domains referred to as knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA), and that this taxonomy of learning behaviors can be thought of as "the goals of the learning process."[52] They strongly believed that the most crucial factor was that students must be engaged in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Active learning engages students in two aspects – doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.[53] When one considers the structure of the typical Sunday sermon, one should quickly concede the chance for such action is practically nil to non-existent. Yet, the sermon-based small group affords the opportunity to take the issues raised from the sermon and "unpack" the "big idea" and afford people the opportunity to engage in higher-order thinking in ways the Sunday morning sermon never could. One chief component in the process is realizing that the student must be actively engaged in the process, but this cannot be the sole component. The church must always remember

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[52]B. Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification Educational Goals* (New York: McKay), 107.

[53]Alexander Renkl et al., "From Example Study to Problem Solving: Smooth Transition Helping Learning," *Journal of Experimental Education* 70, no. 4 (2002): 293-315.

that the student is being affected by his emotive challenges, which are diverse and complex. Those issues rarely manifest themselves in the context of large gatherings like the Sunday morning worship service, but the small group environment affords the perfect platform for those emotive issues to be raised and addressed.

Emotive Connectiveness

Wilkinson mused, "Can you imagine what would happen in classrooms across the country if teachers returned to their rightful heritage? If they walked down the aisles, not with their outlines and notes, but with their students?"[54] Wilkinson believes that it would spark a revolution, that learning would soar and that students would experience a whole new world. It is imperative to understand that if the emotive quality of the students is not taken into consideration, the likelihood of transformative learning is greatly diminished. A speaker in a large context like a worship service is not in a position to even have situational awareness of the emotive issues of the vast majority of the people in the audience. This observation is not meant to cast aspersions, but simply to recognize the reality of the situation. The traditional Sunday school model has the same shortcomings, as there is rarely any emotive attention paid to the students.

Maurice Elias, a leading psychologist, researcher, and expert on SEL (social and emotional learning) from Rutgers University, explains the dangers of omitting social-emotional programs from the educational process. He maintains,

> Many of the problems in our schools are the result of social and emotional malfunction and debilitation from which too many children have suffered and continue to bear the consequences. Individuals in class who are beset by an array of confused or hurtful feelings cannot and will not learn effectively. In the process of

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[54]Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, 27.

civilizing and humanizing the student, the missing piece is, without doubt, social and emotional learning.[55]

The parishioner who sits in the pew is not afforded the opportunity to have his situation addressed. Every parishioner is beset with an array of confused or hurtful feelings at various points in his Christian journey. That is part and parcel of every Christian fellowship, and there will never be any escape from that truth. Yes, the preaching from the pulpit can speak to issues that touch that pain, but the person in the pew is rarely able to really deal with his issues in that setting.

The question that confronts the educator is which relational approach they will attempt to incorporate. They will choose between being subject-oriented, style-oriented, or student-oriented. Some will choose the subject-oriented model because they are rightly concerned with communicating biblical truth, and there is much to commend for such a perspective. Others will gravitate towards the style-orientation, and there are legitimate reasons that might make this a palatable approach, due to personality styles of the teacher and type of students that comprise the small group. Yet, it is the student-oriented model that can properly address the social and emotive void found in every student. Wilkinson believes the person who espouses this model is categorized by the following sentiment: "I love my students. I feel more like they're my friends than my students."[56] The strength of the student-oriented model is that students are more likely to view the leader as friend or encourager or very much "in touch" with them, whereas the

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[55]Maurice Elias, *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting* (New York: Randolph House, 1999).

[56]Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, 50.

subject-oriented teacher is more likely to be regarded as a scholar or very cerebral.[57] The need for subject-oriented or style-oriented teachers is better served in a pulpit gathering.

If transformative learning is to take place, three components must be work in concert: implementation of the constructive pedagogy as modeled by Christ, effective employment of the role of the teacher (not marginalizing the importance of the teacher by simply being satisfied with a warm body), and embracing the philosophy that learners must be active participants who will bring emotive and social baggage to the classroom and are not to be viewed as passive recipients or blank slates.

Learning is more than the mere dispensing of the correct information; it is about cultivating learning in the context of loving relationships. It is more dependent upon teachers who care, rather than teachers who beam with superior intellectual prowess, as Hendricks can easily attest. Teachers who reject the subject and consumer-oriented approaches to teaching will drive this reformation. It will be driven by teachers who passionately embrace the ideology Hendricks postulates when he exclaims, "The miracle of the ministry is that God handpicked us [teachers] to be his representatives to this generation."[58] When teachers embrace this ideology, there will be grounds to expect they would be better able to teach an emancipatory-oriented approach where learning is seen as leading to freedom from personal or societal constraints. In others words, they will teach with the expressed desire to witness a transformation in the heads, hearts, and hands of the students under their charge.

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[57]Wilkins, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, 51.

[58]Hendricks, *The 7 Laws of the Teacher*, 29.

CHAPTER 4

THE SIXTEEN-WEEK PROJECT

In order to assess the merit of employing a sermon-based small group curriculum in small groups at Harvest Bible Chapel-San Antonio (HBC-SA), a sixteen-week project was launched in September of 2015. At the time of the project, there had already been a track record of success regarding the benefits of employing a sermon-based biblical community in small groups. The project's phases of information gathering and treatment were completed in January 2015 with a plan to implement best practices for realizing holistic learning through the employment of a sermon-based small group curriculum.

Successful completion of this project was defined by five goals. These goals were (1) to gather data related to the current understanding of biblical community, (2) to provide a framework of biblical community that helps believers understand why the implementation of a sermon-based small group is the most effective means to experiencing holistic learning, (3) to equip small group leaders to lead their small groups to engage sermons holistically, (4) to equip leaders to implement the proposed action plan in their small groups during weeks nine through fourteen of the project, and (5) to gather data to determine if significant, statistical growth has occurred. The completion of the goals was accomplished through a pre-survey, preaching series, teaching of small group leaders, implementation of new directives, and a post-survey.

The first goal was to assess the current understanding of proper exegesis and application of a sermon, the current practice of biblical community, and the current perceptions toward biblical community in small groups at HBC-SA. This assessment was done using a pre-survey, which took the form of 25 multiple-choice questions that utilized the Likert scale. The *t*-test for dependent samples was then used to analyze the project data following the post-test survey.

The second goal was to provide a framework of holistic learning that addressed a biblical understanding and practice of sermon-based small groups through a six-week preaching series.[2] The preaching series took place on Sunday mornings at HBC-SA; the series was also available online.

The third goal was to equip small group leaders to lead their small groups to function according to sermon-based small groups through a six-week training course.[3] During the course of the preaching series and the implementation phase of best practices, small group leaders met with the small group pastor and senior pastor to develop best practices derived from the lessons learned from the book *Uncommon Community*.

The fourth goal was for the equipped leaders to implement the needed changes in their small groups and bring them into alignment with the leaders' new understanding of holistic learning. The fifth goal was to assess the progress made toward holistic learning through the use of a post-survey. The second survey evaluated the progress individuals had made in their understanding and practice of holistic learning and whether this understanding had any impact on experiencing holistic learning through their participation in a sermon-based small group.

Goal 1: First Survey (Weeks 1 and 2)

A pre-survey was created to assess the current understanding of proper exegesis and application of a sermon, the current practice of holistic learning in a sermon-based small group, and the current perception toward sermon-based small groups at HBC-SA. The survey included the following four main sections.

Biographical Section

The pre-survey began with an information section. The information section asked each participant to give their birth date in numeric form. This was used as the unique numerical identifier so that the surveys could be compared in a t-test for dependent sample analysis. Additional information collected included the gender of the participant and the length of time he or she had been a believer. These questions provided opportunity to provide further perspective to the data that was collected during the pre- and post-surveys.

Current understanding of proper exegesis and application in a sermon.

This section sought to learn what participants already understood about the role of employing the sermon as the curriculum in small groups. This section was important because the goal was to discover what people already understood regarding how to understand and apply a sermon and not to just intellectually engage with a sermon.

This section of the survey tried to discern what participants understood about (1) the central/point of the sermon, (2) how the message fit into the overall message of the Bible, (3) whether the message was being lived out in time and space, and (4) whether they felt the message reached the emotive or volitional level. The responses to these questions served as the basis of understanding.

Current practice of holistic learning in sermon-based small groups. The five questions in this section were designed to measure how members felt they were doing in the areas related to holistic learning in sermon-based small groups. The actions these questions were designed to measure were directly related to the questions in the previous section. Did what participants understand about holistic learning affect their current practice?

For example, during the previous sixteen weeks, were participants (1) consistently challenged to follow God holistically, (2) spending time in prayer for those in and out of their small group, (3) actively working to share their faith, (5) implementing lessons learned in small groups. The goal was to discern where they were right now and then, at the end of the project, survey them again to see if their experience in holistic learning through participation in sermon-based small groups had changed.

Current perceptions toward biblical community in small groups. The remaining questions were designed to gauge the individual's perceptions toward holistic learning in sermon-based small groups. The areas measured were perceptions related to spirituality, participation, sharing, relevancy, and outcome. This section is important because it indicates the potential for an individual to have a good understanding of holistic learning in sermon-based small groups even if that person does not exhibit holistic learning because of their perceptions on holistic learning in sermon-based small groups.

The small group leaders determined the method of survey collection. Copies of the survey were made available to each participant in the small groups. Regularly attending, non-member adults were also included in the survey. The reason non-member,

active participants were included is because HBC-SA is a new church plan, and several

members who had expressed interest in participating in small groups had not yet become

official members of the church. These active participants attended worship and had

expressed a willingness to participate in small groups, and, because of their active

participation, their input was important. All active adult participants of the church were

notified and encouraged by email and public announcements to participate in the project

survey.

The pre-survey was distributed to the small group participants during the week

of September 20th. A two-week period of time was allotted to provide adequate time for

participants to reflect and minimize the effect of people who may not have been present

in the first week. The two-week survey process was completed, and the goal was deemed

successful.

Goal 2: Treatment: Preaching Series (Weeks 3-8)

There were two facets to the treatment for this project. Goal 1 concentrated on

equipping small group leaders to exegete and apply the sermon, while the second goal

was concerned with the six-week preaching series. The goal of the preaching series was

to provide a framework for holistic learning through employing a sermon-based

curriculum in small groups. The preaching series, delivered during the Sunday morning

worship service, included handouts for participants to follow along. To provide an

opportunity for those who could not attend church on a given Sunday to participate, the

messages were recorded and placed on the church website in an mp3 format so that

participants could listen to them when it was convenient for them.

The heart of the message series was to walk through an understanding of how the concept of fellowship enabled the early church to realize fully holistic learning. A healthy understanding of small groups provided the perfect environment to pursue and persevere in deep relationships based on following Christ.[1] The preaching series titles were as follows:

1. "The Folly of the Lone Ranger," September 20, 2015

2. "The Folly of Love," September 27, 2015

3. "The Folly of Bitterness," October 4, 2015

4. "The Folly of Human Autonomy," October 11, 2015

5. "The Folly of Human Individualism," October 18, 2015

6. "The Folly of Selfishness," October 25, 2015

The preaching series was designed to walk the church through the New Testament teachings that emphasized God's desire for his body to experience holistic learning. This journey was critical to the success of the project and to the church gaining a clear picture of how God expected his followers to pursue Him with their total being and to not be satisfied that they possessed proper orthodoxy. God is equally, if not more, concerned that they possess a proper orthopraxy through a vibrant relationship with him and through their relationship with Jesus Christ and his body. Once the church had a grasp of that concept, they progressed to understand how the early church flourished and turned the world upside down. The early church's example is a blueprint to realizing holistic learning. The early church took the teachings of Jesus and endeavored to engage their total being to emulate him. The desired outcome of the treatment was for

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[1]James MacDonald, *Uncommon to Learn* (Elgin, TX: Harvest Bible Chapel, 2013), 108.

participants to understand the value of holistic learning and then be moved to follow the example of the early church. Increased experience in holistic learning through the employment of sermon-based small groups at HBC-SA was the aim. The following is a summary of the progression of the preaching series.

Week 1: The Folly of the Lone Ranger

Week 1 of the preaching series focused on how God established the church to function in the context of community as opposed to the world's championing of individualism. Individual ruggedness and grit are seen as virtues, which mean one has arrived. Admitting that one needs something or somebody else can be seen as signs of weakness. While one can properly laud the technological advances of the digital age in many ways, the advances also serve to isolate one more and more from others. It should not surprise the observant Bible reader that the first malediction was when God said it was not good that Adam be alone. In this light, the opening illustration used in Week 1 was about the once-popular T.V. show *Gilligan's Island*, where seven individuals find themselves isolated on a deserted island. Surprisingly, the central character, Gilligan, attempts to isolate himself even further by moving away from the others to the other side of the island. It is there, in a cave, that Gilligan quickly realizes that it is not the intended bliss and solitude he anticipated when he withdrew from the others. While this might have been the expected outcome of someone attempting to survive in isolation, the twist in the plot surfaces when the other castaways realize that Gilligan, for all of his foibles and peculiar ways, was still a part of the community. They came to miss his unique sense of humor. They came to fondly reminisce about his clumsy ways. They realized Gilligan uniquely contributed to the dynamics of the group.

Isolation is our human instinct and yet God wants His people to be the exception. God's followers will be a people of community. Though sin drives Christians to remove themselves from each other, God calls them to enter in with each other. Christians do not just need others; they are created for one another![2] "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out all sound judgment" (Prov 18:1).

Every human being, because of sin, has areas of his or her life that are negatively affected by sin. No one is presently constituted as originally designed. Adam, even before the fall, was incomplete until Eve was formed from his side and only then was it considered "good" for Adam because a suitable helper was found.

The godhead reveals themselves in the context of community, and it is in the context of community that one finds the church thriving and flourishing in the New Testament. The early church was birthed under the cover of community. It was in the context of community that Paul and Silas rejoiced while under arrest. It was in the context of community that Paul and Timothy forged a relationship that ensured the next generation of believers would be equipped with the truths of the gospel.

The first Christians realized the danger of being alone, so they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."[3] It is imperative for the church in the twenty-first century to realize the authentic Christian life is not an individual sport. Even in individual sports like tennis and golf the success of the tennis players and golfers is heavily influenced by those they partner with to reach the top of their respective professions. Behind sport luminaries

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[2]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 9.

[3]Ibid., 13.

such as Tiger Woods and Serena Williams are a cadre of team members who are foundational and crucial to their success.

Week 2: The Folly of Love

The second message was preached using 1 John 4:7-8. It is here that the beloved apostle taught about the need to demonstrate one's fidelity in loving God through one's ability to love others, even when they are hard to love. A person identified as "Mike" was used as an illustration. Mike was described as an individual who would be classified as "high maintenance." Mike has a lot of baggage, his marriage is in trouble, he is having trouble at work, and he struggles with his relationship to his son as well as his mother-in-law. Mike always has an issue, and his issues dominate the small group time. Mike's small group has reached the point where they are spiritually exhausted from trying to minister to Mike's issues.

This message examined the issue of how sin affects one's ability to love people as God has called one to love. One area that must me addressed if Christians are ever to become victorious in the pursuit of loving others is to admit they easily revert to loving themselves more than others. It is only when one begins to contemplate fully the state of Christ's love for believers that they can begin to practice biblical love. Churches, and if one is not careful and intentional, small groups will be littered with people who do not feel loved. Why? One may talk about love and even tell others that he or she loves them; however, people will only begin to feel loved when Christians start showing love to them.

This point was illustrated through a story taken from the life of Booker T. Washington, found in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*. Washington recounted how he had to endure the wearing of a very uncomfortable shirt under very austere conditions.

Washington's older brother "generously agreed to put it on in my stead . . . till it was 'broken in.'" Loving others is, frankly, uncomfortable—even painful. However, acts of love like Washington's brother showed Washington are the most memorable, and give one an idea of what it means to love another.[4]

Week 3: The Folly of Bitterness

Week 3 focused on Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." The introduction to this passage was the story of young woman named Jane. After attending her small group for two years, Jane exploded out of frustration and said, "I am never going back to that small group." Just when Jane had left her guard down after getting burned on a couple of occasions from past experiences, a member of the group betrayed Jane's trust by revealing some things that Jane had shared with her small group.

Jane, wanting to follow Bible's instruction regarding issues resulting from a confrontation with a fellow believer, spoke with the offending sister. The offending sister profusely apologized, yet Jane was now faced with a dilemma many believers experience at one point or another. Jane knew the right thing to do but did not feel she could do so with integrity. She concluded it would be best for everyone that she join another small group.

The ability to forgive serves as the crucible for healthy relationships. Since every person is contaminated with sin, all relationships are tainted by acts that injure the individuals connected in those relationships. Small groups are not immune to sinful

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[4]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 22.

people falling short of the standard for proper human interaction. Leaving one group for another group will never be the answer. Choosing to forgo interacting with a small group to avoid the possibility of being hurt is not the answer either. Remembering that as Christ chose to enter into a relationship with believers, fully cognizant that we would disappoint him, Christians should place themselves in the same vulnerable position with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Believers all know that as they pursue life together, conflict will arise, hurts will occur, and relationships will fall short of expectations. It is at this point that believers need to be willing to live out the mandate in Scripture to "forgive one another."[5]

Week 4: The Folly of Human Autonomy

The sermon in week 4 dealt with the issue of freedom. Americans have a great sense of adoration and veneration for the concept of freedom. Our heritage is built upon our fight for freedom. We cherish the concept of liberty. Much blood has been shed winning and defending this concept.

While there is nothing inherently evil about freedom, there is a sense in which freedom brings one into conflict with living in fidelity to the ways of God. If one is not careful, freedom can be used as a cloak for sinful actions. Ephesians 5:13 reads, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Believers are "free indeed" when they place their trust in Christ but that freedom should compel them to live as surrendered subjects as opposed to independent agents. Believers are called to live as servants, even

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[5]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 34.

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leaders, when properly understood, and they are expected to be servants as opposed to lords or masters. In fact, Jesus said his disciples must willingly embrace the mantle of servanthood: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave (Matt 20:25-27).

The story of a couple named Brad and Melissa were used as an illustration. Brad and Melissa were invited to join a small group. The small group leader spoke with Brad to make him aware of the meeting times and other basic information about the group. During the course of the conversation, Brad let the leader know that he and his wife would not be able to make the next meeting because they were moving that weekend. The leader ended the conversation by stating he hoped to be able to see Brad and Melissa the following week.

Immediately after hanging up with Brad, the leader was convicted. He knew this was a perfect opportunity to put service into operation. There was only one problem. The leader did not want to serve that weekend as he had other plans. Yet, to his credit, the leader did bring the matter to the small group when they met, and all the members were on board with helping Brad and Melissa.

What happened next, according to the group leader, was extraordinary. The group experienced a deeper sense of community, and Brad and Melissa were empowered to become part of the group quicker. A simple act of service radically changed both the people being served and the people doing the service. If one observes the world, one will find plenty of groups seeking community. Gangs have their brotherhood. Biblical

community is different because people are not attending the group to meet their personal

agendas or desires. They attend in order to serve one another.[6]

**Week 5: The Folly of
Human Individualism**

Week 5's sermon was closely connected to the previous lesson's sermon.

Since Americans cherish their freedom and autonomy, the concept of submission seems

to be a hostile intrusion into the human experiment. American society continues to move

in the direction where submission is seen as oppressive, and yet one finds in the godhead

the concept of submission displayed in splendid harmony. God the Son lives in perfect

submission to God the Father. God the Holy Spirit lives in perfect submission to God the

Son. The Father is never in submission to the Son or the Spirit, and the Son is never in

submission to the Spirit. Yet each member of the godhead is equal in essence, sharing all

attributes of deity and worthy and deserving of worship. Peter, while living under the

oppressive Roman government, penned the following: "Likewise, you who are younger,

be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another,

for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Pet 5:5).

Becoming a member of a small group can be daunting. Many believers, if they

are honest, would admit to having the following thoughts: "I have to admit. I am

struggling with my small group. Every week we break off into guys and girls for

'accountability' time. We go downstairs and it starts feeling like an AA meeting with

lots of sharing about our weakness and our struggles. Guys are 'holding each other

accountable' by calling each other when they are tempted and praying for each other. All

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[6]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 46.

of it is way too much for me. I see my faith as my own and I am not a fan of everyone

being in my business. I pray before I go to bed, read my Bible, and attend church. I don't

need anything else."[7]

If Christians are ever to experience the sense of community God knew, they

must seek to live in community with other believers. This includes being "in each others

business" and submitting to one another. It is countercultural and an act that necessitates

great humility. When believers submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph

5:21), they experience something beautiful—they experience the fellowship God

intended (Eph 4:25).[8]

Week 6: The Folly of Bitterness

A joke pastors are fond of telling is "What is the greatest thing about leading

God's people? God's people. What is the worst thing about leading God's people? God's

people. People, even people who one knows love them, can say some very hurtful things.

Sadly, they often cause pain while thinking they are offering encouragement.[9]

Often, even when one thinks that he or she is helping people, his or her words

can be downright hurtful. There was a couple who were experiencing difficulty having

children. They decided to share their issue with their small group. While the group was

sincerely trying to help, their comments only caused the couple deep pain. Some of the

things said to them were as follows: "Just wait until you have kids and you'll see. It's not

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[7]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 54.

[8]Ibid., 56.

[9]Ibid., 66.

as fun as it seems. They're so much work." Another said, "At least you don't have to worry about getting fat. Being pregnant stinks."[10]

When confronted with statements or acts one finds offensive, one has two options: he or she can give others the same benefit of the doubt one would want others to give or one can assume the worst and take offense. Engaging in biblical community is a challenge because believers are striving to grow in their faith with sinful brothers and sisters. No one gets it right every time. That is why encouragement has to be anchored in one's hope in Christ.[11]

Goal 3: Equip Small Group Leaders (Weeks 3-8)

The third goal was to equip small group leaders to lead their small groups to function in biblical community. This goal was met by utilizing the six-week message series in conjunction with going through the book *Uncommon Unity*. The effectiveness of this training was measured by using an online survey that assessed what the leaders understood about biblical community in small groups from the training material (see appendix 2).

The six topics were as follows:

1. You Are Not an Island

2. Love One Another

3. Forgive One Another

4. Serve One Another

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[10]McDonald, *Uncommon to Learn*, 67.

[11]Ibid., 68.

5. Submit to One Another

6. Be Devoted to One Another

At the end of the project, both small group leaders participated in an online survey.[12] Goal 3 was deemed successful when the small group leaders scored above 90 percent on the online survey, indicating an understanding of the material and the basics of biblical community in small groups. The collective score of all of the small group leaders was 95 percent, showing that Goal 3 was successfully met. From Week 1 to the implementation of best practices, there were three stages.

Stage 1: Training and Document Creation

Stage 1 included discussion that produced the Harvest Bible Chapel-San Antonio Small Group Ministry Covenant (see appendix 3). This document came from the discussions related to holistic learning in sermon-based small groups as derived from the preaching series. Six principles were identified as vital to the health of the small group. The six tenets were servant attitude, committed participation, spiritual maturity, time commitment, credible testimony, and teamwork and unity. Having a servant attitude was established as the qualifier of what it means to have spiritual vitality within the small group. Without a servant attitude an individual will not experience victory in other areas. As believers commit to living out the principles of the covenant, it is hoped that the result will be transformed lives that praise God and find favor with God and man.

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[12]See appendix 2.

Stage 2: Evaluation in Small Groups

Stage 2 took the Small Group Ministry Covenant, reviewed it with the adult small group members, and had them evaluate themselves in light of what the document proposed. The responses to the document were unanimous in their approval. Here is a general summary of each of the small group's responses after evaluating their small group based on the document: Group 1—"We are a new church plant and we want to experience body life that translates into tangible action" and Group 2—"We are not seeking the status quo. We want our involvement in small groups to be our vehicles to experience genuine biblical community like the early church." This stage gave the small group leaders and me the encouragement that we were moving in the right direction and that we had the support of the body to move in this direction.

Stage 3: Best Practices Formulation

The next discussion took into consideration everything that had taken place to develop at least one best practice for each of the six tenets of the small group covenant—servant attitude, committed participation, spiritual maturity, time commitment, testimony, and team unity. The best practices initially developed were understood to be a "living document" that would change over time as the small group ministry grew.

For the basics of servant attitude it was decided the best place to begin was with a member's immediate family. Each member was challenged to find an area to serve a member of his or her family, with preference given to one's spouse if the member was married. Each member shared with the group the practical steps taken to serve a member of his of her immediate family.

The best practice for committed participation was to establish a goal of 80 percent attendance for both the corporate worship as well as the small group meeting. It was decided that prompt attendance was one small way to demonstrate God's worth to believers.

The best practice for spiritual maturity was the identification of someone who the member classified as "hard to love" and an action plan developed to minister to that person. It could be as simple or complex as the member decided, but it had to be a plan that forced the member to acknowledge his or her own sinfulness before God. The plan also had to demonstrable an attempt to minister to the individual.

The best practice for time commitment was the ability to prioritize one's time. Christians demonstrate how much they love God and their fellow small group members by being on time and coming prepared spiritually for the small group session. Believers grant grace when life events happen, but they make being on time a priority because they want to do all things unto the Lord with excellence.

The best practice for testimony was decided to be the willingness and ability to share one's testimony. Sharing a testimony presupposes that one is living a life worthy of being shared. Yet, many believers even when they are seeking to walk with God, find it frightening to share their faith. Each small group member committed to ask God for "divine counters." Since God is sovereign and ultimately responsible for orchestrating "divine encounters," times to share one's faith were not assigned. It was expected that if members were actually seeking "divine encounters" that God would be found faithful and testimonies would be a regular staple of the small group dynamic.

Finally, the best practice for team unity was the recruitment and nurturing of accountability partners, preferably within the group, who would help to hold the member accountable in the area of devoting a sufficient amount of time to pursuing spiritual disciplines. While there is no one-size-fits-all model in pursuing spiritual disciplines, there is a lifestyle that is objectively pleasing to God, one that is not due to a lack of time commitment.

Goal 4: Best Practices Observation (Weeks 9-14)

Goal 3 established best practices to be advocated in all of the adult small groups. Successful completion of Goal 4 was determined when all of the best practices were clearly articulated to each of the small group members. Again, the best practices established were (1) selection of a family member (preferably the spouse) to serve, (2) consistent (80 percent or higher) worship and small group attendance, (3) selection and ministering to hard-to-love individuals, (4) punctuality commitment, (5) sharing one's faith, and (6) recruitment of an accountability partner. All of these best practices were implemented.

Each member of the small group identified a family member that they attempted to serve. It was the desire that this initiative would not become a situation where a member performs a singular act of service, checks a box, and then reverts back to the status quo. It was agreed that this would be an ongoing initiative. Each small group was encouraged to develop a regular interval where the progress of each member was assessed.

The committed participation best practice far surpassed the 80 percent attendance threshold in both corporate worship and small group attendance. This practice will continue to be monitored, but this best practice was considered met.

The best practice for ministering to a hard-to-love individual is a work in progress. Each member selected his or her individual. This is a best practice that is slowly and judiciously pursued if it is to be done with excellence. It was decided that the beginning pursuit of this initiative would be centered in prayer and personal reflection before tangible steps were attempted. This practice was considered to be on track because individuals were selected and corporate small group prayer as well as individual prayers were performed.

The best practice concerning time commitment is closely associated with attendance. This practice was considered fully implemented as each small group experienced 100 percent compliance regarding punctuality. It was understood that this was not intended to become a legalistic ambition. Grace would be provided to members when life events affected their ability to arrive on time for small group sessions. When members were not able to arrive at the agreed upon time that fact was always communicated when it was practical to do so.

The best practice of testimony was too early in the process to fully give an assessment. It was considered to be on track as each member expressed a willingness to commit to sharing his or her faith as God provided the "divine opportunity." There is a general confidence that there will be a consistent flow of testimonies of small group members experiencing "divine opportunities" to share their faith in the coming months.

Goal 5: Second Survey (Weeks 15 and 16)

The fifth goal was to assess the progress made toward holistic learning. A second survey was needed to assess the current understanding, practice, and perception of sermon-based small group ministry in the church. The second survey had the original twenty-five questions with an additional two open-ended questions. The intent behind the two open-ended questions was to allow group members to express more robust responses. It was hoped that a common theme might arise to provide further perspective to the implementation of a sermon-based curriculum.

An email was sent out to both small groups, asking all members to participate in the survey. Some of the small group participants, at the time of the second survey, were new to the church and were not at the church to take the first survey. For the purpose of this project, their information could not be used, but the information from their survey was still useful to gain insight into new participant's views on employing a sermon-based curriculum in small groups. For church participants who took both surveys, their survey results were the basis for this project. Successful completion of this part of Goal 5 was to have 80 percent of the original respondents take the second survey. Those numbers were achieved and the goal was met. Specific details for goal success will be offered in the next chapter.

The data from the first survey was entered into an Excel spreadsheet. All of the survey questions needed the data responses converted from a letter to a numerical value. This conversion was necessary for the statistical analysis of the project.

Once the second survey was completed, the conversion process took place again. Two columns were created with corresponding data. Each person who took the

survey used his or her date of birth as a unique identifier. After the second survey was completed, each respondent's pre- and post-survey results were compared. To analyze the two data samples, the data analysis function in Excel was used, specifically the option t-Test, which paired two samples for a mean. The mean difference was set to "0," with Alpha at .05. This analysis will be reviewed in chapter 5.

Conclusion

Even though man lives in an age where the availability of information is at an all-time high, the church still seems plagued with inertia. Yet, all is not lost and all is not bleak. The church, with intentionality and a renewed commitment, can push back against the darkness. Harvest Bible Chapel was birthed with a commitment to being a church of small groups who come together to experience holistic learning. They are not satisfied with the status quo, but they understand how times have changed and how people, even God's people, have changed as a result of the rapid change in society. Gone are the days when things moved slowly. Everything moves at a fast pace. If the church is to remain relevant, and it shall, it must, without compromising biblical integrity, it must change how it attempts to connect people to God.

One technique is to adopt a *less is better* methodology in the arena of Bible study. Instead of offering the traditional Sunday school or Bible Class model, which is not connected to the Sunday morning worship sermon, the intent is to scale back and use the sermon as the curriculum for the small group. This approach allows for a more meaningful engagement with the sermon in a venue that allows for questions, reflection, and contemplation. There are fewer opportunities to experience information overload. It

is better to know a few things and know them well as opposed to knowing a lot of things but not knowing them well at all.

Change takes time. For many at HBC-SA, however, change has begun. The process for the project was relatively short related to the amount of time it takes to change opinions of those in church. This process of changing minds has only just started.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine if the utilization of a sermon-based small group curriculum would lead to more holistic learning. Holistic learning is defined as learning that impacts the volitional and emotive components as well as the intellectual components of the learner. This chapter serves to evaluate whether the project was successful in increasing the churches understanding of small groups, increasing the participation in small groups, and changing their perceptions of small groups. This evaluation contained seven sections. Section 1 evaluates the project's purpose by asking, "Did this project guide members to experience holistic learning through the employment of a sermon based small group curriculum?" Section 2 is an evaluation of the project's goals. Does a statistical analysis reveal that the goals of the project were met? Section 3 and Section 4 evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the project and section 5 offers suggested modifications to the project. Section 6 outlines some theological reflections and Section 7 covers personal reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project, to assess whether the employment of a sermon based small group curriculum leads to more holistic learning, was met as of the completion of the project. The results of the survey also indicated that the project was

successful ($t_{(17)}$ =2.171, p = .0222).[1] Additionally, four major components contributed to the fulfillment of the project's purpose: (1) participation by the adult church participants, (2) participation by the small group leaders, (3) the preaching series, and (4) Harvest Bible Chapel's historical success.

The first component that contributed to the fulfillment of the project's purpose was the participation of adult church participants. One of the best experiences from this project was the genuine willingness and high level of eagerness the members of HBC-SA displayed throughout the process. They understood the academic requirement for the completion of the project and all throughout the process communicated their willingness to assist in any matter. Additionally, one of the things that made it easier is that the senior leadership of HBC-SA had previous experience in the employment of a sermon-based small group. Although the survey was directed to adults only, the whole church was part of the experience because of the preaching series and the public discussions that ensued as the senior pastor communicated his vision of the church to this new church plant.

The second component that contributed to the fulfillment of the project's purpose was the participation of the small group leaders. These four men were dedicated through this process as evidenced by their faithful leading of their small groups, and by talking to their small group participants about the value and benefits of employing a sermon-based small group curriculum. In a meeting with the small group leaders the document, Harvest Bible Chapel-San Antonio Small Group Ministry Covenant was created.

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[1]See appendix 4, table A4.

The third component that contributed to the fulfillment of the project's purpose was the series of messages preached titled "The Folly." The intent of the series was to expose the body to the transformative powers the church experienced when they pursued God in a holistic manner. As adult participants learned the meaning of holistic learning, understood the need for volitional and emotive connectiveness, and the created purpose of God's people living in authentic fellowship, then the church would begin to witness transformation on a scale not previously realized. This message series was the catalyst for the entire project.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The data and other detailed information provided in this section will offer substantial evidence that the goals of the project were satisfied. Five goals were used to determine the effectiveness of the project.

The first goal was to assess the current understanding of biblical community, the current practice of biblical community, and the current perceptions toward biblical community in small groups in HBC-SA through a pre-survey. The goal was determined to be a partial success at the completion of the pre-survey. Statistical significance was realized in the cognitive domain. Concerning the current practice and perception there were indications of change that tend towards, but did not reach, statistical significance. One key to the success of the survey was the recruitment of two small groups that consisted of a minimum of ten adult participants. A total of 19 adults participated in the first survey.

The data was reviewed in four parts to determine overall success. The first part of the survey, "Current Understanding of Biblical Community in Small Groups,"

showed statistically significant changes ($t_{(17)}$ = 3.67, p = .0010).[2] The aim of this section was to learn what participants already understood about biblical community in small groups. Analysis showed that the increase in understanding was a result of the treatment and not by chance. This result is typical and was expected as cognitive change is often the first step in the process of holistic learning. The participant has to first process the information cognitively and then begin to implement it in the affective and volitional domains.

The second part, "Current Practice of Biblical Community in Small Groups," showed a change did not reach statistical significance ($t_{(17)}$ = 1.57, p = .0677).[3] This result is to be expected due to the relative short time span of the project. If a deeper cognitive understanding had indeed taken place within the body, then one would expect a greater affective and volitional change in output over a longer period of time. This lack of demonstrated growth in affective and volitional change is a natural limitation that a short-term project like this entails.

Similarly, no tangible growth was realized in the participation of biblical community in small groups. The third part, "Current Perceptions toward Biblical Community in Small Groups," also showed a change that failed to reach statistical significant ($t_{(17)}$ = 1.51, p = .0677).[4] This section measured an individual's perceptions of the validity of small groups. By the end of the project, the data did not show an increase in an individual's perception of the importance of biblical community in small groups, yet

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[2]See appendix 4, table A1.

[3]See appendix 4, table A2.

[4]See appendix 4, table A3.

this should come as no surprise. The lack of demonstrated growth in affective learning confirms the nature of the challenges all Christian leaders face on a regular basis. Behavioral changes rarely take place in dramatic fashion. All things are possible with God, and when dramatic and swift transformation take places it is to be celebrated. Yet, the normative experience is that change will typically be slow and methodical, realized over an extended period of time, a period of time certainly longer than fifteen weeks.

The second goal was to provide a framework of biblical community that addressed an understanding and practice of biblical community in small groups. The process to meet the goal was accomplished through a six-week sermon series. The sermon series started on September 13, 2015 and concluded on January 3, 2016. The sermon series helped participants gain a clear understanding of biblical community and how that understanding would become the catalyst to experiencing holistic learning.

The desired outcome was an increase in understanding and an increase in practice by those gaining the framework information. As stated in Goal 1, the data shows that the project as a whole, and all three parts of the survey individually, demonstrated significant statistical growth. In the area of current understanding of proper exegesis and application, the survey had three questions. The question in this section that indicated the greatest growth was Question 3, which realized an increase of 22.75 percent. Question 3 reads, "I regularly take notes while the sermon is being preached." The next question with the greatest growth was Question 4, which realized an increase of 13.45 percent. Question 4 reads, "I am likely to discuss the sermon with family and friends within the week of the sermon being preached." The answers to this question showed that a

person's understanding of the sermon is a key component in the pursuit of holistic learning.

While the overall numbers concerning current practice and perception regarding biblical community did not produce statistically significant changes there were positive indicators that progress was being made. There were a couple of areas where the data showed that there was statistically significant growth in the practice of holistic learning in small groups that could not be explained by random chance. The top two areas in this section that showed significant growth were found in Questions 6 and 9. Question 6 realized a growth of 7.5 percent while Question 9 realized a growth of 7.05 percent. Question 6 reads, "I regularly experience conviction directly as a result of a challenge or exhortation from the sermon." Question 9 reads, "I regularly leave my small group empowered that I had experienced an encounter with God." These two questions indicated that participants took their new understanding of biblical community and began to put it into practice.

The third goal was to equip small group leaders to lead their small groups to function in biblical community through a six-week training course. The effectiveness of this training was measured by an online survey of the small group leaders to measure their understanding of biblical community in small groups from the training model. This goal was deemed successful because the training was completed and the adult small group leaders scored a minimum of 90 percent on their online surveys.

Both small group leaders met with the senior pastor and the small group pastor and, based on their understanding of the training material, constructed a working document to evaluate all small groups (see appendix 3). The goal was to take the material

as presented in the sermon series and create a working document that outlines the basics of small groups. Once the basics were agreed upon, a sample list of best practices were outlined for small groups to implement. This goal was deemed successful when the small group leaders scored a minimum of 90 percent on an online survey, showing agreement with the document and thereby agreeing to the basic characteristics of small group life. The total group score was 95 percent. This goal was deemed successful as a result of this survey.

The fourth goal called for an implementation of best practices in small group life. These best practices were created from the small group characteristics outlined by the small group leaders. Group leaders took the Harvest Bible Chapel Small Group Covenant and talked to their group about the content and application of the principles outlined in the covenant. From these basic characteristics a list of best practices were created:

1. Internal Servanthood: Selection of family member to serve (preferably one's spouse)

2. Worship and small group attendance

3. External Servanthood: Selection and ministry to hard-to-love individuals

4. Punctuality Commitment: Value the time of the other members of the group

5. Accountability Partner: Granting permission to another to speak into one's life

Of the best practices, at least one best practice was implemented from each division in each small group. These best practices are the beginning of a proper functioning small group. As participants and small groups grow, other best practices will be developed to meet the needs of people.

The fifth goal had two benchmarks for success. The first benchmark was to survey 90 percent of the original participants again to determine whether or not the proposed treatment created significant statistical growth in holistic learning through the employment of a sermon-based small group. Survey 1 had 19 participants. To reach 90 percent participation, 17 participants were required to take the second survey. The second survey had 18 participants. The first benchmark of success for Goal 5 was achieved.

The second benchmark of success for Goal 5 included an additional two open-ended questions to allow the participants to determine their motivation for answering the survey the way they did. It was hoped that a common theme might arise to provide further perspective on the success of the implementation of a sermon-based curriculum. This benchmark was deemed a success given that each of the 12 participants provided input to both of the open-ended questions. The insights gained from those interviews are included below.

Many respondents came to the conviction that the church's decision to utilize a sermon-based small group curriculum directly contributed to their ability to grow as believers. The common theme was that their participation in a sermon-based small group provided the proper forum for serious reflection and contemplation. One respondent remarked, "[Participating in a sermon-based small group and discussing] the sermon after a few days of reflection and internalizing God's truth makes the sermon more applicable to daily life."

Strengths of the Project

There were four primary strengths of this project. The first strength was that the project was biblically-based. Deuteronomy 11:13 reads, "And if you will indeed

obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your wine." Therefore, the Bible is the perfect foundation to measure one's self and one's church. This project started in Exodus with a look at the biblical injunctions for holistic immersion and went through the Bible to the epistle of James. The central passage regarding holistic immersion was Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:24-27). Having the Bible as the basis of what the church does takes the discussion out of the human realm and forces the observant believer to take it into the realm of God's wisdom. While God-fearing people may still disagree as to what a specific passage may indicate, this project rests upon the understanding that biblical truth must remain of upmost importance to the church if she is to experience holistic learning.

The second strength of this project was that the project was undergirded by a sermon series that involved the entire church even though only two small groups would be launched during this season of church life. If experiencing holistic learning through the employment of sermon-based small groups is that important, then the teaching on holistic learning should be given the attention it deserves. Sunday morning is the one time during the week when the pastor has the attention of the entire church body. By delivering the sermon series on Sunday morning, the whole church became involved, even those not actively participating in the project. This strategy also impacted the youth in the church. Teenagers were not part of the research for this project, but the teens of the church participated in the sermon series, which means they were exposed to the basics of the biblical instruction for believers to experience and seek after holistic learning. A

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third strength of this project was that it was viewed as a beneficial exercise and not just

an academic project a fellow member needed to complete for his studies. Due to Harvest

Bible Chapel's long history of utilizing the sermon as the basis for the small group

curriculum, there was already credibility attached to the concept. As a result, the senior

leadership as well as most members were eager to participate in the project.

The final strength of this project was that it gave the church a place to begin to

move forward. Many church projects are seen as stand-alone projects. The data is

collected and discussed, but church continues as usual. That will not be the case with this

project. The Small Group Covenant is now the foundational document for Harvest Bible

Chapel's small group ministry. The small group leaders of the church will continue to

add to the document and bring future revisions to the church for consent and review.

This document will be considered a "living document," which allows for the continual

implementation of the best practices of small groups to guide the church forward to

function in holistic learning.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project had four main weaknesses. The first weakness was related to

timing. Harvest Bible Chapel is a new church plant; thus, the church is still in its infancy.

The decision to have only two small groups participate was made by the senior pastor so

that there were not more small groups than there were qualified leaders. Because of this,

the number of participants was relatively low. The question of quality versus quantity is

a never-ending dilemma but, in this case, wisdom of quality outweighs the desire for

quantity.

The second weakness of this project, and seemingly the main weakness, was the context of the project. Due to life circumstances and my family's relocation to Texas, the project was completed with a new church. This presented challenges, but, thankfully, the members of HBC-SA were very accommodating. I was a new member and had no previous connection with the church. There was no established prior relationship that I was able to leverage. So, I worked from a position of a newcomer seeking grace as opposed to having already established credibility through a prior relationship and demonstrated leadership. This challenge was mitigated due to the fact that Harvest Bible Chapel had adopted a discipleship model with an emphasis of employing the sermon as their curriculum for small groups. So, in God's providence, what may be seen as a weakness can equally be viewed as a positive.

The third weakness of the project was a lack of tracking regarding whether or not the 19 participants who took both surveys and on whom the results are based, heard all 6 sermons about the importance of biblical community. The data shows that the project as a whole saw statistically significant growth, and the growth was not a result of random chance. There would be greater confidence in the results if it could be determined that the 19 adult participants did in fact hear all of the sermons.

The fourth weakness was the online survey of the small group leaders to determine if they had learned and agreed with the small group characteristics outlined in the study. Due to time constraints the survey created was far too simple and not well thought out. The results from this survey would carry greater weight and reveal much more had the survey been given more consideration much earlier in the planning.

What I Would Do Differently

This project was a huge undertaking. Primarily due to my relocation to Texas, I had to adapt quickly. I was originally scheduled to perform this project as part of a church plant in Northern Virginia, but those plans were dramatically changed. As a result, I was forced to complete this project, not as part of the pastoral team who had direct oversight over the small group ministry, but as a member of an entirely different ministry, which I was only a member and not part of the recognized leadership structure. In a perfect world, I would have performed this project in a context where I had more direct input in the direction of the ministry. God's providential oversight determined that was not to be the case for me. That was a situation I was not accustomed to, but it became a situation I slowly began to understand was out of my control. Once I began to come to this realization, I was determined to get the project completed. This project has become a vivid illustration of how God often has a way that is profoundly different than the one a person envisions.

Another area I would definitely modify was the organization and structuring of the survey questions. In hindsight, I realized I needed to be more strategic in the formulation of the questions. I realize now that I did not attempt to classify the questions into different groups. The survey questions were good, but they were not grouped in a manner that made for easily categorization. The implementation of best practices is an area that I now understand needed to proceed at a much slower pace. Attempting to incorporate five best practices within a sixteen-week process was too aggressive. It would have been better to spread the best practices over a longer period of time. It would have been better to accomplish a best practice and then move to the next best practice.

Granted, that approach would probably only allow the completion of one or maybe two best practices. Yet, I understand that quality is to be preferred over quantity in cases like this.

The last modification has the most significance for me. After much reflection, I would love to see if the response to the implementation of a sermon-based small group curriculum is affected by age. Believers who are closer to my age (above 50) grew up in the culture where the Sunday School/Bible Class curriculum was detached from the Sunday morning sermon. Would they resist this change or would they be willing to adapt? Due to the demographics of the two small groups that were launched as part of the church plant, there was not a significant range of ages of individuals participating in the project to ascertain how the more senior saints would have responded. To summarize, the biggest change would be to narrow the scope of the project. Much was learned, but future projects need to have a narrower focus.

Theological Reflections

As with any attempt to look at a particular biblical principle, there are many theological implications one can easily surmise. I have chosen the following three implications: (1) the necessity of strenuous effort, (2) the necessity of bold preaching, and (3) the necessity of works. While Adam was created in idyllic circumstances, the fall has dramatically altered man's ability to relate properly to his creation. Just as man's ability to till the ground was never intended to be laborious, man's ability to live in harmony with his creator was not intended to be strenuous. Yet, as one learns from the Old Testament, because of the fall, man's ability to respond properly to God requires wisdom. This pursuit of wisdom is done only by strenuous effort.

Man's chief faculties are sometimes defined as heart and soul or, at other

times, as heart and mind. Christopher Wright believes the Shema necessitates a third

category. He suggests that the faculty of might was paramount according to the Old

Testament revelation. Wright is convinced that if Israel was ever to live in fidelity as a

vassal subject, she would do so only by engaging with God "with all [its] very-

muchness."[5] What Wright is postulating is that this engaging with God required an effort

of considerable might or strength that is was far beyond natural man's ability to perform

(Rom 8:6-7). Yet, if Israel were going to uphold their end of the bargain, it would come

as a result of strenuous effort in the same way that mankind, after the fall, could reap fruit

from the ground only through the sweat of his brow. Gary Brady uses the analogy of a

professional wrestler "pinning wisdom to the ground."[6] The implication is clearly one

where the believer is not seen as a passive recipient in his pursuit to gain wisdom.

Granted, God must take the initiative in establishing the relationship, and God has His

role as the suzerain lord, yet that does not mitigate the fact man has a necessary role to

play in the process—an active role, not a passive one, that requires all the strenuous uses

of the faculties graciously available to him. Most would agree with Bland that the

acquisition of wisdom starts with the faculty of the mind, but, if this wisdom is to be

transformative, it must reach and impact the emotive and volitional components as well.[7]

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[5]Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 99.

[6]Gary Brady, *Heavenly Wisdom: Proverbs Simply Explained* (Webster, NY: Evangelical, 2003), 126.

[7]D. Bland, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College, 2002), 77.

One of the human means available to experience this biblical concept of wisdom is the art of bold preaching. When one begins to contemplate the great sermons in human history, the Sermon on the Mount should come quickly to one's mind. The Sermon on the Mount stands as one of the seminal messages on how the adherents of God are to conduct themselves as citizens of the suzerain kingdom. If Christ is indeed Lord, then he is to be obeyed according to the dictates of his commands. It is clear that Christ's expectation was one of abject obedience that affected all areas of the human dimension. In this light, Morris writes concerning Christ: "[I]t is one thing to hear what he said and even approve of it; it is quite another to obey. But it is only obedience that results in solid achievement."[8] If the church is to understand the imagery of vassal subjugation, then she will realize her validation of her possession of wisdom will materialize in both internal and external obedience to the commands of Christ.

One of the commands from the pages of the New Testament is the admonition of the apostle Paul to his young protégé Timothy when he exhorts Timothy commit to preaching the word in and out of season. If the preaching in today's evangelical church does not translate in obedience (volitional change), then any accolades given to the contemporary church are hollow and self-deceiving. Carson echoes this sentiment when he discusses Matthew 7:24-27. He posits, "Entrance into the kingdom, then does turn on obedience after all—not the obedience which earns points but which bows to Jesus' *lordship in everything and without reservation*" (emphasis mine).[9]

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[8]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 181.

[9]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 131.

The church vitally needs a renewal of preaching that by the grace of God empowers a believer to live as if he or she has been transformed. Bryan Chappell offers keen insight when he elaborates on the need for expository preaching in the church today. He believes it obligated the preacher to demonstrate what the Word meant in the lives of people today. Chappell was convinced that if the truth of God's Word did not tangibly affect the believer's life, then, in essence, the true meaning of a given passage remained hidden.[10] No matter how effective a sermon-based small group may be organized, if the sermon is not properly exposited, then the small group is doomed to fail from the onset.

The last implication to be discussed is the issues of works. While salvation is wholly of grace, works are still integral to the Christian life. James was keen on the concept of action. The Greek word for "doers" (*poietai*) is found six times in James' short epistle. It is obvious that hearing precedes the ability to do, but there can also be no dispute that learning has not taken place unless there is an associated "doing" in response to the auditory message. Demons are able to gain intellectual assent to all of the truth claims found in the Bible, but their downfall is their refusal to grant emotive and volitional assent to these claims.

No one will ever live in any semblance of fidelity to the commands of God by accident. It will come as a result of an intentional pursuit where the Word of God becomes integrated into the believer's life as he or she recognizes when and how that Word applies to each situation in life. An adversary is alive and well. He will expend all of the resources available to him to thwart the child of God at every turn. If the believer

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[10]Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 84.

is to experience victory on a consistent basis, it will be due to his diligent pursuit of his total being in the enterprise. Half efforts where one continues to believe that one can get intellectual assent to truth claims will never suffice because the adversary is presented as a foe whose cunning is not to be underestimated or taken for granted.

Personal Reflections

I believe I am a more grateful believer as a result of completing this project. My life has changed dramatically during the past few years. Many times I gave serious consideration not to not complete the project, but I refused to yield to the temptation. While I concede that one of the principal reasons was financial in nature, I was equally motivated to complete the task at hand for other reasons that are rather mundane in nature. One being that completing what I start has always been an important virtue in my life. Thankfully, this trait was passed on to me from an early age by my father. He was relentless in his insistence that each of his sons take serious the commitments they made. That has served me well in my marriage, and it served as a motivating factor to complete this project.

As I look back over the last few years, I have learned much regarding ministry. The church that I was a member of when I entered this program went through a very contentious church split. I was serving as part of a pastoral team that consisted of a senior pastor and three associate pastors. I was one of the three associate pastors with specific oversight over the discipleship ministry. The senior pastor resigned due to issues that were not able to be resolved. The church expressed deep hostility toward the associate pastors remaining on the church staff. The other two associate pastors and I decided to resign to avoid being the source of conflict and ill feelings that would be

associated with asking us to leave. Whether our actions were right or not will one day come to light when we meet Christ, but we believed it was the best way to keep peace within the body of Christ.

I was then confronted with having to complete my project with no home church. I took it for granted that the transition would be easy. God apparently had a different plan in mind as the transition turned not to be as easy as I would have thought. The other two associate pastors and I attempted to plant a new church. I originally thought I would be able to complete the project as part of this new church plant, but the church plant never gained traction and folded after about a year. I was again left without a church home, and, to add to the complexity of my life at that time, I was retiring after twenty-eight years of military service and transitioning back to civilian life. Since I only had a year left in the Northern Virginia area, I made the conscious decision to delay attempting to complete the project. The final year of military life is typically very hectic. For example, due to the preparation of moving, my family and I lived for almost five months in a hotel with most of our possessions in storage. I made the decision that it would be impractical to attempt to complete the project during this very transitory time of my life. As a result, I spent almost two years without the stabilization needed to complete the project. If I were able to write the script for my life, I certainly would not have chosen to write it in this fashion. Yet, I am more convinced that God has sovereignly orchestrated it in this exact manner for me because it was the best for my edification, and it was the best means for him to be glorified. I remain convinced that my ministry project has a real chance to make a meaningful impact on the body of Christ.

How God chooses to use it is left to him. He has promised to be the potter as I yield and accept the fact that I am the clay.

One of my passions in ministry is to see believers grow in their faith. This is one of the reasons why serving as a pastor who emphasizes discipleship has been the most natural fit for me in my prior pastoral roles. I believe employing a sermon-based small group methodology is the most effective means to transform believers. It is that belief that gave me the motivation to complete the project. If God decides to open another door for me to serve in a pastoral role, I want to be able to use this project as a means of credibility to present a plan to a church as to how I can use my gifts and callings in the role of Pastor of Discipleship or even as a Senior Pastor.

Conclusion

At of the completion of this project, I will be 52 years old, I hope that I still have a nice stretch of time remaining to be engaged in meaningful ministry. I want to finish my remaining time in ministry having the greatest impact possible. I believe that the employment of a sermon-based small group in conjunction with the employment of my gifts and callings in some leadership capacity is the best means that I can serve the body to the glory of God. Many churches are dormant and are not effective in their pursuit of discipleship. It is my hope that God will grant me favor and allow me to experience this heart-felt desire.

No one knows what the future holds. If the rapture were to take place as I write this last paragraph, there will be countless students, like myself, who would have just recently graduated from seminary or college. That would mean they would have completed their studies with the full intention of entering the ministry and yet God, in

His sovereignty, would have allowed them to complete their matriculation with His full

knowledge that they would never get a chance to employ that education. Maybe that

will describe me. I do not know. What I do know is that whatever time I have left I

want to use it serving the kingdom of God. I hope to use this experience and all the

things I have learned to help fellow believers learn in a holistic fashion how to stimulate

their emotive, volitional, and intellectual components. May God grant this request. If

He does, to Him be all the glory.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your opinion of the effectiveness of implementing of a sermon-based curriculum. This research is being conducted by Ricky Kyles for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply answer the questions before we begin training and you will answer the same questions after we complete the training. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Your Date of Birth: _____/_____/_____

Your sex: Male   Female

I have been a believer for _____ (specify duration of time in years of months).

Place an X in the box that best represents your opinion of each statement.

1. I leave worship with a good understanding of the central point/big idea of the sermon (head knowledge).

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. The sermon assists me in understanding how the particular message fits into the overall message of the Bible.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I regularly take notes while the sermon is being preached.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I am likely to discuss the sermon with family and friends within the week of the sermon being preached.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I believe that participating in a small group can assist me in my spiritual walk.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. I regularly experience conviction directly as a result of a challenge or exhortation from the sermon.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I believe that participating in a small group that uses the sermon as its curriculum empowers me to take the next step in response to the sermon.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I attend my small group with a sense of expectancy that my participation will make a difference both in my life and the lives of others.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. I regularly leave my small group session empowered knowing that I had an encounter with God.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. Small-groups are an essential component in facilitating discipleship.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

11. I take proactive steps to ensure I am able to attend my small groups faithfully.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. I am developing authentic relationships with members of my small groups.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. My life would be missing a chief component if I were not part of my small group.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. Attending my small group is done because I genuinely experience change that draws me closer to God and to other believers.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. I have developed a deeper sense of community directly as a result of being in my small group.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. I believe my church does a good job of providing an atmosphere where I am challenged to follow God with my total being: head, heart, and hands.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. Due to my experience in my small group I am likely to share my experiences in a very positive manner.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

18. I find myself practicing spiritual disciplines (e.g., praying, fasting, Bible reading) more as a result of participating in my small group.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly   Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Agree   Strongly
Disagree   Somewhat   Somewhat   Agree

19. My small group does a good job of challenging its members to take tangible steps of spiritually holding its members accountable.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly   Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Agree   Strongly
Disagree   Somewhat   Somewhat   Agree

20. I am likely to express my frustrations with the members of my small group.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly   Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Agree   Strongly
Disagree   Somewhat   Somewhat   Agree

21. I find myself excited about the general direction of my church.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly   Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Agree   Strongly
Disagree   Somewhat   Somewhat   Agree

22. I am witnessing the hand of God directly as the result of participating in my small group.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strongly   Disagree   Disagree   Agree   Agree   Strongly
Disagree   Somewhat   Somewhat   Agree

23. I believe the church's decision to use the sermon as the curriculum for the small group will be/has been a positive change.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

24. I believe implementing a sermon-based curriculum positively impacts HBC-SA's ability to live out its four pillars.

      1. Proclaiming the Word without Apology
      2. Lifting High the Name of Jesus
      3. Believing Firmly in the Power of Prayer
      4. Sharing the Good News of Jesus with Boldness

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

25. I believe implementing a sermon-based curriculum is the long-term solution of witnessing transformation within the life of Harvest Bible Chapel.

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

The following survey will be taken by the adult small group leaders.

True or False

1. The extent of the involvement in small group ministry must have intentionality and does not happen without commitment or by accident.

2. Commitment to the study of the Word of God is a chief quality of both the small group leader and the members of the small group.

3. Fellowship is necessary component to a successful small group dynamic.

4. Prayer is an essential component to a successful small group ministry.

5. The location of where the small group is a chief consideration as to the success or failure of the group.

6. The tolerance of gossip or other malicious speech really has no bearing on the success of the small group.

7. It is important that group members spend time sharing meals together.

8. The leader of the group must be a highly skilled teacher or exegete of the Word of God.

9. Trust is easily built and maintained within a group so that should never be the concern of small groups.

10. The relationship of the small group leader and the senior leadership of the church has no real bearing on the health of the church or the small group.

APPENDIX 3

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY COVENANT

The purpose of the Small Group Ministry at Harvest Bible Chapel-San Antonio (HBC-

SA) is to facilitate an atmosphere that promotes and advances the worship of God

holistically.

I realize that the following elements are crucial to the effectiveness, quality and safety of

our ministry together. As a member of my small group I agree to the following

principles:

1. **Servant Attitude**: I commit to developing and demonstrating a servant's attitude and heart, with the understanding that participating in my small group is an act of privileged service to God and this local body. I will seek to serve as opposed to being served, trusting that God will providentially make my needs according to His wise counsel.
2. **Committed Participation at Harvest Bible Fellowship** – I commit to regularly attend the worship services at Harvest Bible Fellowship, to participate in all aspects of church and small group life as I am able, and to submit myself to the leadership of HBF and their authority.
3. **Spiritual Maturity** – I understand that service that is pleasing to God requires that I have an ongoing relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. I commit to seek a deeper and more dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ as a follower of Him through involvement in opportunities that will encourage and facilitate growth in this relationship and with other believers.
4. **Time Commitment** – I commit myself to faithful participation. I agree to be on time and prepared for the start of all scheduled times. If I am unable to participate or will be late, I will make every effort to contact the leader to whom I am responsible.
5. **Testimony** – I understand that the church is looking to me to model a lifestyle of progressive sanctification. I commit myself to living a consistent lifestyle that is honoring to God and worthy of imitation.
6. **Teamwork and Unity** – I commit myself to be accountable to each member of my small group. I will strive to protect the unity of the team and to share in the

responsibilities of the small group. I will endeavor to deal with each small group member with an attitude of patience and understanding and to have a "teachable spirit."

<div align="center">

HBC-SA Small Group Covenant

I have read and agree to enter the HBC-SA Small Group Covenant.

</div>

Signed _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 4

t-TEST SURVEY RESULTS

Table A1. Survey section 1

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	20.27	22.11
Variance	6.918300654	5.516339869
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.642202566	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-3.666666667	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000955639	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001911278	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

Table A2. Survey section 2

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	26.44	27.27
Variance	4.026143791	5.977124183
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.50096298	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-1.56736958	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.067726328	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.135452655	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

Table A3. Survey section 3

	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	86.38	88.77
Variance	46.83986928	48.77124
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.527434415	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-1.507639571	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.075002564	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.150005129	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

Table A4. All sections

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	133.1111111	138.1666667
Variance	82.45751634	121.6764706
Observations	18	18
Pearson Correlation	0.531864539	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	17	
t Stat	-2.171269237	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.022178442	
t Critical one-tail	1.739606726	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.044356883	
t Critical two-tail	2.109815578	

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTATION OF A SERMON-BASED SMALL GROUP
CURRICULUM AT HARVEST BIBLE CHAPEL,
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
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This project examines the processes for establishing an effective curriculum for Harvest Bible Chapel. Chapter 1 examines the context of the church and community, develops the goal for completing the project, and posits the philosophy of ministry and rationale for the project.

Chapter 2 addresses the biblical perspective of holistic learning, first by exploring the Old Testament and then the New Testament. Holistic learning is defined as learning that targets the emotive and volitional dimensions as opposed to learning in which only the intellectual dimension is stimulated.

Chapter 3 examines the varying components of learning. The components that are addressed include the roles of the teacher and the learner, advantages of spiral learning as opposed to linear learning, and the advantages small groups have on learning.

Chapter 4 records the implementation process of the project. A detailed description is given to each step of the project. The goal of this project is that any leader would be able to implement this project for their ministries by following the steps listed.

Chapter 5 evaluates the project. The purpose of this chapter is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the project and to record theological and personal reflections concerning the project.

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