

Copyright © 2016 Stuart Allen Bell

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

EQUIPPING MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
CENTERTON, ARKANSAS TO EVANGELIZE AND
ASSIMILATE INTERNATIONALS

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

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

by
Stuart Allen Bell
December 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

EQUIPPING MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
CENTERTON, ARKANSAS TO EVANGELIZE AND
ASSIMILATE INTERNATIONALS

Stuart Allen Bell

Read and Approved by:

Dr. William F. Cook, III (Faculty Supervisor)

Dr. T.J. Betts

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	1
Goals	1
Context of the Ministry Project.....	2
Rationale	4
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	5
Research Methodology.....	7
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING AND EVANGELIZING THE LOST.....	10
Overview	10
Matthew 28:16-20	10
Luke 24:44-49	17
John 20:19-23.....	23
Acts 1:8	29
Revelation 5:8-14.....	35
3. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE NATIONS.....	41

Chapter	Page
Overview	41
Understand the Gospel	41
The Situation of the Human Soul.....	47
The Church’s Strategy for Reaching the Nations	53
The Source of the Church’s Power	57
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROJECT	64
Overview	64
The Project	64
The Project Results	65
The Sermon Evaluations	68
5. PROJECT EVALUATIONS AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS	71
Summary of the Project	71
Evaluation of the Goals	72
Strengths	74
Weaknesses	75
What I Would Have Done Differently	76
Conclusion	77
Appendix	
1. EVANGELISM SURVEY	78
2. SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC.....	83
3. NORTHWEST ARKANSAS DEMOGRAPHICS	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	87

PREFACE

This project is submitted with deep appreciation for the saints at First Baptist Church Center-ton. It was my privilege to serve as their pastor from February 1998 until October 2016. They gave me the gift of learning through this venture. Through it all, Pam Varnell excelled in her role as the Best Ministry Assistant Ever. My fellow pastors were patient through the journey, offering timely encouragement and wisdom along the way. Without a doubt, our children, Emily and Matt Tyler, and Lucas and Kyla Bell, have been the greatest inspiration. Their dedication to the Lord and his kingdom bring joy each day. The deepest appreciation goes to Lisa, my loving wife of thirty-three years. It was her penetrating response to my initial question concerning the necessary demands of study, “Why should I do this?” that kept me at the work. She answered simply, bringing it all into focus: “You are called to preach the Word in the last days. These are those days! This process will help you to be the best preacher you can be. Now is the time.” Her constant encouragement has been invaluable, as well as indicative of her own deep walk of faith. So, may God get glory to Himself in this humble project. Ultimately, may Jesus’ kingdom come in this earth as it is in heaven.

Stuart Bell

Seattle, Washington

December 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to lead First Baptist Church (FBC) Centerton, Arkansas to understand, accept, and act upon their responsibility of reaching internationals living in the growing Northwest Arkansas (NWA) region.

Goals

The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of First Baptist Church Centerton with regard to the evangelization of the nations. This goal was measured by a pre-project survey given to 100 participants.¹ An appeal for willing participants was made during a Sunday morning worship service with instructions given to pick up a paper survey or QR code in the atrium following the service. The goal was considered successfully met when at least 60 of the surveys were returned within one week.

The second goal was to develop a five-week sermon series on the responsibility of our church to reach the culturally diverse NWA region with the good news of Jesus Christ. This goal was measured by a rubric given to five pastors who will gauge the biblical and theological fidelity of the sermons.² The goal was considered successfully met when at least 90 percent of the criteria of the rubric is met.

¹See appendix 1

²See appendix 2

The third goal was to preach the sermon series followed by a measurement of any increase in the knowledge and commitment of First Baptist Church Centerton to reach internationals in Northwest Arkansas. The goal was measured by a post-messages survey given to the same 100 participants, using the same previous questions, measuring any change in the understanding of the responsibility to reach and assimilate internationals into our ministry. Qualifiers for this post-message test included having pre-surveys and post-surveys to match exactly through anonymous four-digit personal codes; and each participant indicating having listened to all five messages. A t-test for measurement was used to evaluate the results of the scores. This goal was considered successfully met when at least 60 percent of the surveys were returned, indicating positive growth in the survey scores.

The fourth goal was to challenge the qualifying participants to practice the principles of the sermon series for a specific six-week time period. The goal was measured by the number of participants who actually engaged an international friend or acquaintance during this period including: intentional conversations; invitations to their homes; visitation to our church; or other opportunities to share the gospel. The goal was successfully met when at least half of the participants could report an engagement of an international friend or acquaintance during the six-week period.

Context of the Ministry Project

The project took place within the ministry context of First Baptist Church in Centerton, Arkansas. Three distinctives made this project relevant to our work. First, the population increase of internationals in our area has been significant in the past several years.³ Northwest Arkansas, comprised of Benton and Washington counties, maintains one of the fastest growing regional economies in the nation. The region is dominated by

³See appendix 3 for the most recent demographic statistics for internationals living in the NWA area.

three large companies including Walmart Stores, Inc., J.B. Hunt Transport, Inc., and Tyson Foods, Inc. Walmart employs a substantial Indian population in its workforce, particularly in the information technology department. Also, Walmart expects vendors to maintain local offices in order to achieve business goals more efficiently. As a result, internationals associated with Walmart, related vendors, and other companies have been relocating to this area in significant numbers. Hispanics from several countries continue to make up a large portion of the international community in our area. Chief among the contributors to this Hispanic growth is the poultry industry, as well the housing and service industries.

This infusion of internationals is unmistakable in our community. For example, new Hindu and Buddhist temples are now part of the landscape. Having pastored and lived in this area for over eighteen years, it is striking to wait in traffic as area police direct Hindu worshipers attending regular temple festivals just a few miles from the church. An area-wide housing boom has been revived in recent years, with internationals often purchasing homes in the neighborhoods of our members. Local businesses are thriving with this new customer and labor base causing many of our members to have regular interaction with people from around the world. In short, the nations have come to Northwest Arkansas. This simple fact gives FBC unique opportunities to reach internationals with the gospel.

Second, FBC has seen the addition of at least two international families to key leadership positions in our ministry. In June 2012 the church added Ron Argueta as Pastor of Administration and Intercultural Ministry. Recently, he has transitioned to Campus Director, overseeing our buildings and grounds. Argueta, a native of Guatemala, has been a college student, a small business owner, and a human resources specialist—all in our area. He is uniquely qualified to help our church in reaching and assimilating internationals into our ministry. Also, Joji Varghese and his family, from southern India,

have become an integral part of our membership in recent years. As a manager overseeing hundreds of employees for his information technology company, Varghese works closely with Walmart. He also happens to be a gifted teacher in the area of Christian discipleship. Along with their ministry in our church, the Varghese family is also heavily involved in a local Indian fellowship committed to reaching South Asians with the gospel.

Third, the project was timely due to a decrease in the number of baptisms in recent years. It was essential to raise our church's awareness of the lostness of our community, particularly with internationals. We cannot take for granted the opportunity of reaching the nations right here in Northwest Arkansas. Also, it complemented our recent effort to establish weekly home groups called Connect Groups. On August 1, 2014, FBC launched thirty-five such gatherings across Benton and Washington counties. The emphasis for the groups was twofold: first, our church members must connect with each other; second, we must connect with our neighbors. This project was to encourage the Connect Groups to initiate prayer strategies for their neighborhoods as well as intentional friendships with internationals, including them in the groups and sharing the gospel with them.

Rationale

It is clear by the previous contextual survey that *now* is the time for First Baptist Church Centerton to focus its efforts on reaching internationals in our community. First, we simply cannot ignore the great opportunity God has given us to reach the nations here. Though the congregation is involved with many worthwhile global projects and partnerships, we cannot neglect our non-Christian neighbors.

Second, the addition of two key international families to our church's ministry is a clear indication of God's direction in this work. Ron Argueta, currently serving as FBC Campus Director, is beloved at FBC. He has won the hearts and the confidence of

our people setting the stage for future assimilation of internationals into our fellowship. Ron has ministered effectively in Arkansas as well as several other countries during his brief tenure on our church staff. He and his wife, Ana, have consistently demonstrated a worthy example of marriage and parenting before our church.

Joji and Seena Varghese have demonstrated to FBC the significance and unlimited possibilities of actively integrating internationals into the ministry. Varghese has proven to be one of our most effective lay teachers, regularly teaching his Doctrines 101 study to a full class during the Sunday morning Tree of Life discipleship classes. The Varghese family's weekly home group is being imitated by many of our families through the new Connect Group emphasis.

Third, the urgency of lostness in Northwest Arkansas demanded this project. FBC must focus on those in our community who are without Christ. Hopefully, this specific challenge to reach internationals has resulted in a general awakening to the spiritual needs of *every* lost person in our community. Connect Groups must seek to win their neighborhoods for Christ. In these groups we are seeking to shift our church's evangelism focus from a "come to the church to evangelize" mindset to "win your neighborhoods for Christ" outlook. Through the project, hopefully, our church has become increasingly aware of those living around them, particularly internationals.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Assimilate. Assimilate refers to an intentional effort by FBC to welcome into our fellowship and ministry those from other nations who have moved to the Northwest Arkansas region.

Equipping. Equipping refers to the Greek word *katartismos* (see Eph 4:12): "to equip God's people for service."⁴ This project was meant to equip the members of FBC

⁴ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New*

to initiate friendships with internationals with the desire to win them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Evangelize. Evangelize refers to the Greek word *euaggelizo* (see Luke 1:19): “bring good news, announce good news.”⁵ The intent of this project was to encourage members of FBC to develop *lifestyle* evangelism whereby they will practice the telling of the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The gospel. The gospel refers to the Greek word *euaggelion* (see Rom 1:16): “God’s good news to humans, *good news* as proclamation.”⁶ Through this project our people have come to understand the totality of God’s plan of redemption: the reconciliation of sinners *to* God; the justification of sinners *before* God; the sanctification of sinners *by* God; all culminating in the glorification of sinners *with* God. They practiced the initiation of gospel conversations with their friends and acquaintances, particularly internationals.

Internationals. The term internationals refers to persons now living in Northwest Arkansas having relocated from other nations. They are to be distinguished from persons of various races who consider the United States their home country.

The lost. The lost refers to those who do have not surrendered to the lordship of Christ and are, therefore, standing in judgment before God. According to 2 Peter 3:7 God reserves a fire “for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”⁷

Three limitations have applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the survey portion of the project depended upon an effective comparison of the pre- and post-tests. To accomplish this goal each anonymous survey included a four-digit personal code

Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 526.

⁵Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 402.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible (updated ed.).

generated by each of the participants. This code was used to link the pre- and post-surveys for correct evaluation. Second, the sermons preached during the project were vital in raising the awareness of our need to evangelize and assimilate internationals living in our community. Therefore, only those surveys indicating the participants had listened to each of the five sermons were included in the statistical measurement. Third, to maximize the effectiveness of the six-week outreach effort, only those participants who had successfully completed the pre- and post-surveys were included.

Two delimitations marked the project. First, to make the most of the project's potential of creating a new church-wide awareness of lostness in our community, this project was limited to members of First Baptist Church Centerton, age eighteen and above. Second, the project was confined to a twenty-four week timeframe. This time period included six weeks each for sermon preparation; two weeks for delivery and recovery of the pre-test; five weeks for sermon delivery; two weeks for post-survey delivery, recovery, and evaluation; six weeks for engagement of internationals in the community; and finally, it also included a two-week time period to evaluate the pre- and post-surveys as well as the level of participation during the community outreach phase.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project included three items: a pre-project survey, an evaluation rubric, and a post-sermon survey. The pre-survey was used to accomplish the first goal of the project namely determining the current level of understanding of FBC with regard to our responsibility to evangelize the nations.⁸ A goal of 100 volunteers were to be given a pre-test to be filled out either on paper or online. Anonymity and accuracy was emphasized by having each participant create a personal

⁸See appendix 1

four-digit code to be used throughout the project. The participants were given one week to return the pre-surveys.

The pre-survey sought to determine the current level of understanding of First Baptist Centerton with regard to God's command to evangelize the lost. Questions were meant to evaluate each participant's knowledge of key passages of Scripture relating to evangelism. Emphasis was given to determine the awareness of participant's personal responsibility of sharing the gospel. Lastly, the goal of the pre-survey was to evaluate each participant's understanding of how to initiate witnessing encounters with internationals. A 60 percent return-rate was the mark of success for this portion of the project.

An evaluation rubric was used to accomplish the second goal of the project which is the preaching of a six-part sermon series.⁹ Five pastors were invited to read the five sermons applying the rubric to judge the biblical fidelity of each sermon. Each pastor holds at least a masters-level degree in theological training as well as at least five years of experience in ministry. After gaining at least a 90 percent rubric score on each of the sermons, the messages were preached during five consecutive Sunday morning services at FBC.

A follow-up post-survey was given to the qualifying participants to measure any change in their understanding of a believer's responsibility to reach the nations with the gospel.¹⁰ Only those participants who had completed the pre-survey as well as listened to each of the five sermons were qualified to participate in the post-survey. These participants affirmed having listened to the messages in person or online. The post-survey was considered to be successful upon the return of at least 60 percent of the qualified participants.

⁹See appendix 2

¹⁰See appendix 1

A t-test for dependent samples was employed to determine the degree of change in the participants' understanding on the topic of evangelization following the five sermons. The goal of the t-test was to assess a person's knowledge of a particular topic before and after an intervention, i.e., a sermon series. It served as a measurement of the effectiveness of the sermons preached during the project.

The last measurement of the project involved a simple count the number of qualified participants who actually engaged with an international friend during a specific six-week period. Engagement was to include, but not be limited to, the participants intentionally opening a conversation with an international acquaintance; or having lunch with an international friend; or inviting an international friend to church or Connect Group; or hosting an international neighbor family for dinner, etc. This goal was considered to be accomplished when 50 percent of the qualified participants actually initiate gospel conversations or contacts with international friends or acquaintances during the outlined time period.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING AND EVANGELIZING THE LOST

Overview

Jesus of Nazareth intended for his church to conquer the world. How? Not with weapons and armies, but with the good news of his resurrection. Jesus' first followers were expected to tell his story everywhere, as they went, making disciples of all peoples, in every nation, in every generation. Before ascending back to heaven, he gave orders to this end. Those orders have yet to be revoked. Today, his church has as much responsibility in proclaiming the gospel as the first-century disciples.

Each generation has its own responsibility to obey the directives of the master. This chapter will overview Jesus' command to evangelize the nations found in three of the Gospels, Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; and John 20:19-23; as well as Acts 1:8. In addition, there will be an examination of Revelation 5:8-14.¹

Matthew 28:16-20

Perhaps the most familiar expression of Jesus' final command to his church is found in Matthew's account of Jesus' life. What is commonly called the Great Commission makes up the final paragraph of Matthew's Gospel. Wilkins notes the "brevity of the final narrative in comparison to the length of the rest of the Gospel

¹This discussion on the Great Commission will be limited to Matthew, Luke, John and Acts, to the exclusion of Mark. Almost all evangelical scholars doubt the trustworthiness of the Longer Ending of the Markan account in Mark 16:9-20, including James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 497; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, (repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007) 685; and David E. Garland, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 616.

accentuates, by understatement, the radical importance of these events.”² The location of this account is on an unnamed mountain in Galilee. This location is interesting on two accounts. First, Galilee is the location of some two-thirds of Jesus’ public ministry. The backdrop of the command would not be lost on these men. They would certainly remember his intentional ministry to the masses of Galilee. The location of Matthew’s version was a reminder of Jesus’ personal involvement with hurting people. Their master expected them to carry out his commands in real time, in very real places. Second, it is removed by time and distance from other accounts of his commission. For example, the Acts account is put at the exact moment of his departure back to heaven indicating Jesus’ repeated commission prior to his ascension. It is clear that he wanted his followers to remember their mission: to tell the gospel, to all nations, in every generation.

Matthew is honest in his assessment of the disciples’ understanding of Jesus’ resurrection at this point. It has been less than forty days since the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection had begun to spread. For some, the news was still difficult to accept despite the fact that Jesus himself actually directed them to this certain mountain in Galilee. When the Eleven saw him, most of them immediately began to worship him. But, amazingly, some doubted. What does the doubting mean? Who would have doubted the resurrection upon seeing Jesus? Perhaps it is similar to Mary’s first encounter with the disciples after having met the Lord. She hurried back to the Upper Room with the news of his resurrection. To her dismay, the disciples were slow to believe. Or perhaps, like Thomas on the evening of the resurrection day, some were absent when Jesus gave orders to meet on the mountain in Galilee. When the other disciples began to speak excitedly about another meeting with Jesus, it is possible there were those who did not have the same confidence, not having the advantage of that previous meeting. Even this strains our

²Michael J Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 947.

understanding, for surely at this point each of the eleven had already had his own personal encounter with Jesus.

Wilkins suggests three interpretations as to the “but some (*hoi de*) doubted” difficulty in 28:17. First, according to Wright, Davies and Allison, van der Horst, and McNeil, it appears a number of the eleven disciples were still unbelieving at this point. Some of the men had come to believe, but not all of them. Perhaps they were still struggling with Jesus’ new form and appearance. Second, to Wallace and Hagner *hoi de* is to be translated “they,” suggesting that *all* of the disciples actually doubted Jesus at this point. In a sense, they remained uncertain according to Matthew. Third, some scholars, including Carson, do not see *hoi de* referring to the disciples, but to other followers of Christ who had come to be a part of their group. Those holding to this view refer back to 28:10 and “my brethren” to establish a separate group of doubters who made up Jesus’ audience that day.³

While it appears the third option explaining the *hoi de* difficulty is perhaps the simplest and most agreeable solution, France takes up a version of option one. He notes how the preciseness of Matthew’s statement limits the eleven disciples as the only ones present in this account. Next, the fact that Matthew uses *hoi de* following a clause referring to the disciples as a group indicates the phrase is “best understood as introducing a countercurrent within that group, affecting some but not all of them.” France suggests the “hesitation” felt by the disciples can be explained by their “loss of confidence,” as Peter felt in walking on the water (11:31). Or perhaps the disciples were confused on how to relate to their Lord in his risen state, he was familiar, but so different. Finally, France intimates that for some of them it was their first encounter with Jesus after having deserted him in the Garden of Gethsemane.⁴ Whatever the situation, upon seeing

³Wilkins, *Matthew*, 948-49.

⁴R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 1111-12.

Jesus, most in the party began to worship the risen Lord. We observe that Jesus does not condemn them for doubting, only for unbelief. We can only assume that the doubters were soon convinced, as it appears that he offered his command to all who were present.

Matthew's emphasizes of the nearness of Jesus at the commissioning of the disciples in 28:18 can be considered a bookend to his earlier emphasis on Christ's nearness to us. In 1:23 he offers commentary on the angel's encounter with Joseph in quoting Isaiah 7:14: "Behold the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which translated means, 'God with us.'" So, here on the mountain, Jesus came close to them to speak these words. And he promised to stay near to them as they went about the work of making disciples, even to the end of the age. Of course, it was natural for Matthew to be taken with this thought of Jesus' presence. He had been ostracized by his countrymen due to his despised occupation as a tax collector, it was Jesus who personally called Matthew to follow him as a disciple. It was Jesus who came to Matthew's house to eat and fellowship with his sinful friends, breaking sharply with the first century Jewish prejudice. Jesus came near to Matthew when all others had cast him aside as a traitor of Israel. Matthew could never get over this nearness.

The Great Commission is rooted in Jesus' authority. Earlier in his ministry Jesus declared himself to be the judge of all things (John 5:22, 30). Now on the mountain in Galilee, freshly risen from the grave, and soon to return to his Father, Jesus once again declares his supreme position as the living judge of all things in this final command to his church. His authority gives confidence to the church in its work of evangelism. While the enemy will seek to discourage the advance of the gospel, his followers can rest knowing that by his authority the message will be sounded out to all generations. There is no government or ordinance of man that can overrule Jesus' authority. He does not have a little authority, he has *all* authority. That little band of disciples must have been overwhelmed at his bold assertion, but as they reflected upon it, and as they began to

declare the gospel in the face of severe persecution, they must have remembered it with assurance.

In light of this pre-eminence of their Lord, the disciples were ordered to *go*. The gospel is meant to advance. There is never a time for Jesus' church to settle down to occupy old territory. Rather, the church is to continually advance, always encroaching upon Satan's territory for the sake of souls. It is an unnatural picture to see his church in a stationary, complacent, status-quo position. *Going* with the gospel is to be the ever-present habit of his followers.

The authority of Jesus' command is connected to the supreme place gained by his submission to the Father, as well as his passion for the redemption of humanity. He declares his "all authority" position and places his command squarely on it. France sees this as an "echo" of Daniel 7:14: "To him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him."⁵ With such a commanding status, Jesus assures his followers that they will have his authority to overcome any obstacle in the evangelizing of the nations. Of course there will be governments and religious groups who will oppose the preaching of the gospel (Matt 10:16-20; 24:9). Intimidation would be used to keep the disciples from going. Despite these threats, rather than succumbing to the manmade laws used by the enemy to keep them at bay, the church with its higher authority compelling them, and authorizing them, will go at all costs to the nations.

It is interesting that Jesus puts the Great Commission in the context of the trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. Each convert is to affirm and declare his new faith in light of the godhead. According to Mounce, "This is the only occurrence of the formula from the first century, with the possible exception of *Didache* 7.1⁶ (a church manual normally

⁵R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1112.

⁶Didache 7:1: "Concerning baptism, you should baptize this way: after first explaining all things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in flowing water."

dated second century A.D.) Elsewhere baptism is said to be ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 8:16; 19:5).” He suggests that in this final charge to his disciples it “seems quite natural” for Jesus to include the authority of the full-fledged Trinitarian model.⁷

This constant advancing of the church demonstrates an ever-present sense of urgency associated with the gospel. Because of sin, mankind is in a desperate situation before their all-holy, all-powerful creator: separated and undeserving of heaven (Rom 3:9-10, 23). Jesus warned of a “sentence of hell” that rests upon every sinner (Matt 23:33). He described a “fiery hell” and “an unquenchable fire” that awaits the unbeliever (Matt 9:23, 18:9; Mark 9:43). Should they die in that condition, there occurs a forever separation between God and humans. But to demonstrate his love, God sent his Son to die for the sins of the world (Rom 5:8). He now offers eternal life to anyone who believes on this provided savior (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24). Now, God’s plan of redemption for the human race involves the witness of his church. The church is to announce salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. To accomplish the assignment, the church must go beyond itself—outside its walls, past its limited circle of influence to all places with the gospel. And the church must go with haste.

It must have been a daunting assignment for these humble men to think about going far away. As his plan began to settle upon them, perhaps they realized the cost of being a follower of Christ. Going means separation from loved ones. Going involves risk. Going demands a cost that someone must pay. However, the one with all authority said to do it. No obstacle can be used as an excuse for staying safe. For example, today our missionaries are forbidden in many countries to openly preach the gospel. They are considered lawbreakers if they enter the country with the aim to speak of the resurrection

⁷Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 268.

and the exclusivity of Christ. So what is the church to do? Surrender? Hardly! We have been given the authority from Jesus, the King of Heaven, to go despite these man-made laws. The missionary will do what it takes, even developing a legitimate platform to gain entry into the country. Access to some peoples is another great challenge. Harsh climates, inaccessible roads, language barriers and the like must be overcome. Someone must go. Missionary biographies are replete with the heroism of such witnesses for Christ. Luke's account of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin have inspired many. When commanded by the high priest to "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" their response was emphatic: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge, for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20).

The simplicity of Jesus' order to his church is highlighted by the only imperative in the Great Commission: "make disciples." According to Wilkins this command is accomplished by three subordinate participles: "go," "baptizing," and "teaching."⁸ Carson observes, "Baptizing and teaching are not the means of making disciples, but they characterize it."⁹ The church knows *what* to do with the gospel, to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus, leading unbelievers to voluntarily surrender their lives to him as Lord. The church also knows *how* to do this by baptizing new believers as the outward marker of their new faith. Following baptism a teaching ministry must occur for new disciples to know Jesus' will. This teaching is not limited to only the words of Jesus. All of the Bible points to God's plan of redemption through the savior. Since Jesus is the focus of all the Bible, God expects his followers to be constant learners of the full story found within its pages.

⁸Wilkins, *Matthew*, 954.

⁹D. A. Carson, Walter W. Wessel, and Mark L. Strauss, "Matthew," in *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 668.

The scope of Jesus' command to make disciples is to *all* the nations. The church's tendency has been to define *nations* by political boundaries that are constantly shifting with the ebb and flow of history, but the word suggests the church is to focus on *peoples*. As Keener suggests, "In many nations a variety of different peoples coexist. Thus Christ commands us to sensitively reach each culture, not merely some people from each nation."¹⁰ This truth demands the utmost creativity and courage to reach each culture. It also destroys the complacency too often associated with the work: "We have missionaries in each country. Isn't that enough?" Reaching the nations involves a commitment to reaching many people groups imbedded within. This will involve every resource available to the churches who would dare to wholeheartedly join the work.

Matthew's account is instructive in the urgency of the Great Commission, as well as its scope. All nations must be reached. All peoples must be evangelized. All believers must be marked by baptism. All generations of the church must carry on this work. And it is to be continued, against all opposition, and at all costs, to "the end of the age." Such is the Great Commission of our Lord.

Luke 24:44-49

Luke's view of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is different than the other Gospel writers. As the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, he comes to the account with far less of a historical context than Matthew, Mark, or John—all steeped in Jewish life. He would not have had the benefit of the generations of teachings from the rabbis or the regular reading of the Scriptures in the local synagogues. Luke represents the *every-man* of the church. We don't know the details of his conversion, but it is certain he was a meticulous historian as well as an able physician. His close companionship with the

¹⁰Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 401.

apostle Paul must have translated into many unique relationships with the other apostles including Peter.¹¹

Likely, Luke spent the two years of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea gathering details on Jesus' life and ministry. Surely, he would have had access to the other apostles, in nearby Jerusalem, who would help him to compile his own account of Jesus' life. His purpose was to acquaint his friend Theophilus about the new way of Christ (Luke 1:1-4). Later Luke would continue his influence in Theophilus' life by detailing the first thirty years of the church's life in the book of Acts (Acts 1:1-2).

One comes to Luke's account of the commission of Jesus' church with a sense of urgency. Luke gives his account of Jesus' commission during his first visit with a group of his followers. It was in the Upper Room, on the evening Jesus rose from the dead. We know that ten of the disciples were there (Thomas being absent), along with a group of women and others.¹²

Prior to the Upper Room encounter, Luke relates the women's encounter with two men inside Jesus' tomb as they observed the place of his burial. The *men* were actually angels, marked by their sudden appearance, as well as their radiant clothing. These angels enjoyed the great honor of being dispatched from heaven to announce the news of Jesus' resurrection to his followers—in keeping with another group of angels commissioned to sing to shepherds at his birth (Luke 2:8-14).

In what is a common theme in Luke's account, the disciples demonstrated an ability to forget. They forgot not only Jesus' words concerning himself, but also the words of Moses and the prophets who pointed to the coming Messiah.¹³ This is apparent in the next section in the lengthy report of Jesus' appearance to two men as they walked

¹¹See Luke's "we" accounts in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16.

¹²See Luke 24:33; John 20:19-25

¹³Luke 9:22, 44-45; 18:31-34; 24:44-47

from Jerusalem to their nearby village of Emmaus. He first rebuked them for being so “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe in all the prophets” (Luke 24:25). Next, during that walk, “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). They would most certainly have an appreciation for the Scriptures after that journey.

Later that day, in the Upper Room, Jesus first convinced the disciples of his physical resurrection. He invited them to see and touch his body. He ate a piece of fish before them. Then he spoke again concerning the Scriptures. He affirmed what he taught to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, specifically that the whole of the Old Testament was a testimony of Him. Garland observes how Luke at both the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth, and the ending of his ministry in Jerusalem, announced that he was the fulfillment of Scripture.¹⁴

The Old Testament needs to be understood or explained by the person of Jesus as its focus. God the Son came to this earth, invading our time and space, to fulfill the “Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Carroll sees the inclusion of the Psalms along with the Moses and the prophets as having special significance: “Yet there is one new detail: the link between the meaning of Jesus’ messianic vocation and the Scriptures has become truly comprehensive, with the addition of the ‘the psalms’ to ‘Moses and the prophets.’”¹⁵ Having given them this important frame of reference, upon which to build their theology, as well as practice in proclaiming his good news, Jesus “then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Their sorrow was evaporated by joy. Their fear dissipated at the nearness to Jesus. Now, they were able to understand the Scriptures as never before. Passages once difficult to understand became clear in the light of Jesus’ life and suffering. The church today has the same joy

¹⁴David E. Garland, *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 966–67.

¹⁵John T. Carroll, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 492.

and courage as we understand the completion of God's plan of redemption by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Upon this foundation of fulfilled Scripture, specifically those passages pointing to His suffering and resurrection, Jesus presents his plan for evangelizing the nations. First, Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of Isaiah's suffering savior in Isaiah 53. While the Jews anticipated a coming messiah, indeed from the lineage of David (Ps 89:36-37), it appears they missed, or overlooked, the fact that this savior would also suffer. Bock states, "It is crucial to appreciate that fulfillment centers on the person of the Christ. It is in the promised Son of David that these events are fulfilled."¹⁶ Second, the resurrection of the Christ was essential to Old Testament prophecy concerning the Christ: "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will you allow Your Holy One to undergo decay" (Ps 16:10). The prophets gave a clear word concerning the resurrection of the Christ. Third, an anticipation of the ministry and work of Christ is woven into the Old Testament (Ps 22; 23; +Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-5). Peter said as much in his defense before the Sanhedrin: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross, He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:30-32).

It was from this foundation of Scripture that Jesus commissioned his disciples. Garland notes that this inclusion of proclamation to the nations was expanded on in the conversation Jesus had just had with Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus.¹⁷ Johnson calls it Luke's "decisive turn toward his second volume [Acts]"¹⁸ They were to know the Scriptures well, then faithfully proclaim to their hearers Jesus' fulfillment of

¹⁶Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 388.

¹⁷Garland, *Luke*, 697.

¹⁸Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1991), 402.

every facet of God’s Word. They were to tell these things even at the risk of their own lives. It was that important to Jesus that his church announce his fulfillment of the Scriptures. Interestingly, Jerusalem would be their launching point. As Carroll suggests: “Jerusalem is no longer the center and goal of the nations’ movement but the point of departure for a centrifugal mission to the whole world.”¹⁹ It is from the capital of Judaism that the gospel of the Lord Jesus is to begin to spread to the nations. Later in his Acts account, Luke will detail Jesus’ specific plan of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Bock summarizes the commission in Luke’s Gospel to include five elements: first, the disciples will be called to preach; second, their message is a call to repentance; third, they offer a forgiveness of sins; fourth, the authority for this forgiveness resides in Jesus’ name; and fifth, the message is for all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem.²⁰ Luke’s account is linked closely to his Book of Acts allowing his privileged reader, Theophilus, an up-close view of the fulfillment of these things. The Holy Spirit came in Acts 2. The preaching of the gospel did begin in Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea. It soon spread to Samaria through the ministry of Philip (Acts 8). Then, through the ministry of Peter, following his vision on the rooftop of Simon the Tanner’s house, the gospel made its way to the gentiles, beginning in Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:23-48). The second part of Luke’s account in Acts deals with the great missionary, Paul, demonstrating the advance of the gospel to the nations—in fulfillment of Jesus’ commission in Luke 24:44-49.

Jesus did not leave them alone in this great work of evangelization. He promised the Helper yet again. In that Upper Room just a few days earlier he had taught of one who would come to them to fulfill his three-fold ministry: the Spirit would

¹⁹Carroll, *Luke*, 493.

²⁰Bock, *Luke*, 388–89.

convict the world of its sin of its unbelief; he would convict the world of its lack of righteousness before the holiness of God; and, he would convict the world of its coming judgment due to unbelief (John 16:7-10). Carson sees the threefold conviction of the Spirit as a continuation of Jesus' gracious ministry on the earth. First, despite the world's unbelief, he will continue to convict it of sin. Second, he will convict the world of its "hopelessly inadequate" righteousness before God. Third, the Spirit will convict the world of its "false" and "profoundly wrong and morally perverse" judgment of Christ. To Carson, the Spirit will continue this conviction knowing the world's "desperate need to learn of its plight" before God.²¹

In addition the Spirit would guide the apostles and the church into all the truth. The church would not be left to discern the truth of God's Word on its own. The Helper would ensure proper understanding of God's will and way. Neither would God abandon them in the task of the evangelization of the world. Johnson notes the Spirit will be *sent* (*apostello*, "I am sending") by the Father, in the same manner that the Son was *being sent* (Luke 4:18, 43), and that the disciples would be *sent* (Luke 9:2; 10:1; 11: 49).²²

Jesus meant for them to stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit was sent from heaven. This would be a dangerous thing for the disciples. They would be in the center of gospel opposition, but as they would learn, God meant for the resurrection to be first announced there. It would be in the very place of Jesus' execution that God's enemies would hear of his rising from the dead. To be "clothed with power from on high" (24:49) must have challenged the disciples. What would it entail? How would it feel? What would be its effect? At least one thing was certain: his command to witness the resurrection would be met with the power to do it. Morris notes, "The risen Jesus has the power to *send* the

²¹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 533-39.

²²Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 403.

Spirit. His authority is not limited as it was during the days of his earthly ministry.”²³ With regard to *send*, Stein adds that the “verb is a futuristic present (literally ‘I am sending’) that emphasizes the certainty of what God was about to do.”²⁴ The Father sent the Son. The Son will send the Spirit. Finally, the Son will send the church with the presence and power of the Spirit. This must have been a significant comfort to them as they contemplated the scope of His commission. Theophilus now has a complete understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus through Luke’s gospel. Later he would receive the Book of Acts with its thorough history of the church’s first efforts of proclamation of the gospel.

John 20:19-23

Word of Jesus’ resurrection had already begun to circulate on that first day of the week marking Jesus’ rising from the dead. First, Mary Magdalene entered the Upper Room to announce “I have seen the Lord” (20:19). Later we learn that Peter had an encounter with Jesus at some point during that day (Luke 24:34). Also, the two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus enjoyed the honor of conversing with the risen Lord. They learned first-hand from the Lord the connection of his life to the Old Testament Scriptures. Sitting at a meal with Jesus, these two men were made aware of his true identity. Lastly, on that same day, there was a memorable encounter between Jesus and the entire group of disciples in the Upper Room (minus Thomas). God saw fit to give multiple, convincing, appearances of the resurrected Lord to his followers.

In this passage John is writing as an elderly saint, some fifty or sixty years after the resurrection. He recalls the setting in vivid detail. Burge considers Luke’s account to be an “important parallel passage” with John, but then notes, “John builds the

²³Leon Morris, *Luke, an Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 374.

²⁴Robert H Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 621.

same scene but with important differences. It is the evening of Easter Sunday (20:19) and the doors are shut (“locked”, NIV). Fear gripped their hearts and they concluded that the tragic fate of Jesus may soon be theirs.”²⁵ It is likely that John knew Mark and his gospel account. So, he fills in gaps and writes as an evangelist. The purpose of his own gospel account is made plain in 20:31: “But these [signs] have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” It is clear that John’s purpose was evangelistic. He leads his readers to believe Jesus is the Christ. He introduces seven miracles as evidence of his claim (2:1-12; 4:46-54; 5:1-15; 6:1-14; 6:15-21; 9:1-41; 11:1-44). In addition, seven “I Am” statements are also given to make John’s point against the Gnostics who promoted the idea that Jesus did not actually have a physical body. On the contrary, John’s message is that Jesus was, in fact, God in the flesh (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Daring to lay out Jesus’ claim to the highest, most revered name for God, the *tetragrammaton*, the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14, was a bold statement meant to silence John’s gnostic critics.

Of course these signs and statements were not the only ones of Jesus’ ministry. It is clear that he did more and said more, but John’s intent was to convince and remind his readers that Jesus was in fact the Christ—that he was fully God at the same time being completely human. His gospel would have been disseminated and read in house churches throughout the Roman Empire. As a result, his readers were strengthened in their faith, producing even greater fervency of evangelism.

So, the Fourth Gospel has an evangelistic bent, especially to strengthen the faith of the fledgling church for this great work. But in telling of the story John is careful to relate the church’s power in her witness. There in the Upper Room on the evening of the resurrection Jesus appeared to them. Suddenly, he was in their presence, whereupon

²⁵Gary M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 557–58.

their doubts were perfectly put to rest. Fear had caused them to lock the doors, thinking they would likely be the next targets of the chief priests. As John recalls, Jesus' first word to the fearful disciples was *peace*. Jesus intends for his followers to have peace in the most difficult situations. Because of his presence we can experience this peace.

Concerning this important gift Beasley-Murray adds,

Never had that 'common word' [shalom] been so filled with meaning as when Jesus uttered it on Easter evening. All that the prophets had poured in *shalom* as the epitome of the blessings of the kingdom of God had essentially been realized in the redemptive deeds of the incarnate Son of God, 'lifted up' for the salvation of the world. His 'Shalom!' on Easter evening is the complement of 'It is finished' on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted.²⁶

Despite Jesus' command to the contrary, the disciples were understandably quite fearful. It is one thing to talk of a resurrected Christ—it is another thing to actually come face-to-face with him. Sensing their disturbance, John recalls Jesus' offer to show them the wounds on his body. Upon examining his hands and side, the disciples allowed themselves to rejoice. Joy prevailed in that room that night.

The disciples would learn another important lesson. Not only would peace and joy take root in their hearts, but they would also understand his mission for them.

Beasley-Murray observes, "The time has now come for the disciples to go forth into the world as the representatives of the Lord; thereby the declaration of 13:20 will become operative as men and women receive the Christ in the mission of the disciples and the God and Father who sent him."²⁷ In the Upper Room, prior to His arrest in the Garden, Jesus declared "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (John 13:20). Immediately this frightened little group receives a blessing of peace with the news that *they* would be similarly sent—just as Jesus was sent by the Father. So Jesus reemphasizes the gift of

²⁶George R. Beasley-Murray, *John: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 378–79.

²⁷Beasley-Murray, *John*, 379.

peace afforded to the people of God. From this vantage point of rest through salvation, Jesus sends out His followers to do his bidding. As Jesus was sent by the Father, his disciples would be sent by Him.

Luke highlights the purpose of Jesus' coming through his telling of the story of Zaccheus. Following the tax collector's salvation Jesus declared, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Now the elder John affirms Jesus' purpose in his words to the disciples ". . . as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (22:21). Being sent by Jesus is an important facet of the church's life. Paul pressed upon the Corinthian church their role of *ambassador*, or "one sent with a message" (2 Cor 6:20). That ambassadorship is to be met with passion, an urgency of mission to fulfill the master's command. Paul also related to the Ephesian church the reason for his present imprisonment was due to a careful fulfillment of this role of ambassador. He went to the nations with Jesus' message, faithfully speaking the gospel, resulting in his chains (Eph 6:20).

It must have been an overwhelming assignment to be sent by Jesus. Surely it meant they would suffer—as he suffered. It would demand a sacrificial leaving of comfortable and familiar things. To be sent meant Jesus expected them to carry out His mission of seeking and saving the lost in this world. They would do this work on his behalf. They would preach the gospel in his name. They would never relent from finding the lost one, while at the same time strategizing to reach the lost masses of humanity. They must have been overwhelmed with such a task? Surely they quaked at the thought of it. Then Jesus ministered to their hearts.

John records that Jesus *breathed* on them, imparting the Holy Spirit. How so did he breathe upon them? John does not say, but perhaps it is akin to Paul's description of the inspiration of Holy Scripture: "All Scripture is inspired [*theopneustos*, God-breathed] by God . . ." (2 Tim 3:16). It is also described by Peter as God's "moving

upon” (*fermenoi*) holy men who then spoke/wrote His Word (2 Pet 1:21). So, Jesus saw fit to strengthen the disciples, at outset, by giving a temporary infusion of the Spirit. They would need it to grasp his assignment to seek out and win the lost.

Does this giving of the Spirit conflict with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, some fifty days later? Did the Holy Spirit come twice? Perhaps it is appropriate to understand this initial coming of the Spirit in Old Testament terms. The Holy Spirit came upon God’s prophets in times of crisis or great events. Joshua was filled with the Spirit of wisdom upon the laying of hands from Moses just prior to his new role of leader of the people (Deut 34:9). David pleaded with God not to remove the Spirit as part of God’s discipline over his sin with Bathsheba. So, it is apparent the Holy Spirit would come for a time—for a specific reason—upon certain people prior to the cross. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit came by fire to demonstrate His permanent indwelling of the church. Burge states, “I believe the disciples experienced numerous moments of overwhelming glory as the Spirit touched and transformed them—and it all began the moment Jesus returned on Easter. That they would be empowered again, in a different way, on Pentecost does not eliminate the possibility that they were filled earlier.”²⁸ Köstenberger is in agreement in saying, “The present reference represents a symbolic promise of the soon-to-be-given gift of the Spirit, not the actual giving of it fifty days later at Pentecost.”²⁹ Carson affirms this view: “Jesus’ ‘exhalation’ and command *Receive the Holy Spirit* are best understood as a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full enduement still to come (though in the past for John’s readers) [author’s emphasis].”³⁰ On the one hand, this Upper Room receipt of the Spirit hearkens back to the Old Testament coming of the Spirit upon certain individuals, while on the other hand

²⁸Burge, *John*, 561.

²⁹Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 574.

³⁰D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 655.

it points to the soon-coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. So, this encounter could be considered a blessed, albeit temporary, empowerment meant to strengthen them in the brief days prior to the Spirit's final coming. At the same time, it could have been, as John remembers it, simply a result of the sudden presence of the risen Lord, and nothing more.

Lastly, John recalls Jesus giving the disciples the authority to *forgive* sins. During His ministry, Jesus was roundly criticized by the religious leaders for claiming the authority to forgive sins, for example, in the case of the crippled man lowered through the roof in Capernaum (Matt 2:1-12). Of course the man's healing proved Jesus' claim to be true. But the church must remember, he is not giving us the authority to proclaim forgiveness in our own strength. Rather, it is only in Jesus' name, and for his glory, that the church can proclaim forgiveness. It is only by repentance and faith in Christ that one can experience forgiveness of sins. Köstenberger points out in Matthew's account of how "this power is attributed to Peter in a universal, salvation-historical sense (16:19; cf. Acts 1-12) and to the disciples in an intrachurch context (18:18)."³¹ Carson observes, "In the parallel statements in Matthew, the context suggests church discipline; in this verse, where the context is the mission of Jesus' disciples (v. 21) and the Spirit who empowers them (v. 22), the focus is on evangelism."³² So what does it mean to us? Again, Köstenberger states simply, "John focuses on the pronouncement of the forgiveness (in case of repentance) or the retention of sins (in the case of a persons' refusal to believe)."³³ It is clear the disciples did not possess this power to forgive in themselves, but only by the name of Jesus, their resurrected Lord. According to Morris the simple meaning stands that the church "can pronounce with authority that the sins of such-and-such people have been forgiven or have been retained. If the church is really acting under the leadership of

³¹Köstenberger, *John*, 575.

³²Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 655.

³³Köstenberger, *John*, 575.

the Spirit it will be found that her pronouncements in this matter do but reveal what has already been determined in heaven.”³⁴ What is it that has been determined in heaven? Simply that those who repent can be declared as forgiven, and those who refuse repentance not only do not have their sins forgiven, but also stand under present condemnation of God. John affirms the commission of Jesus described in other accounts. This forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit to any person. It is a task the church must never overlook or forsake.

Acts 1:8

Jesus’ command to go with the gospel into all the world demands a strategy. In Acts 1:8 the strategy is revealed. Fittingly, it is as simple as it is profound. In the Book of Acts, Luke continues his explanation of Jesus’ story to his friend Theophilus. If his Gospel account could be described as the *beginning* of Jesus’ ministry, then Acts is the *continuing* of Jesus’ ministry. While the apostles Peter and Paul are featured in the story, it becomes apparent that Jesus is actually directing the affairs of his church. This is no more apparent than in the first chapter. Stott observes, “Christ’s followers were both to announce what he had achieved at his first coming and to summon people to repent and believe in preparation for his second coming.”³⁵ This announcing and summoning is to begin at home then radiate to the nations.

Luke gives details of the ascension of Jesus from the Mount of Olives. It is an inspiring account of the conclusion of Jesus’ ministry on the earth (1:9-11). Everything regarding the work of the church between his ascension and his return fits within the Acts 1:8 strategy. The Mount of Olives, situated just to the east of the walled city of Jerusalem, stands at about 2700 feet elevation. Because the city sits about two hundred feet lower in

³⁴Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 750.

³⁵John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 44.

elevation, one has an unobstructed view into the old city. This panorama must have been in sight as the disciples listened to Jesus' strategy of evangelization of the world. On this hill an unforgettable conversation took place between Jesus and his disciples. They asked a question pointing to their Jewish hopes of "restoring the kingdom to Israel" (1:6). Bock notes how the Lord "does not reject the premise of the question, that the kingdom will one day be restored to Israel."³⁶ On the other hand, Bock notes, Stott "sees the question as full of errors. In Stott's view, they should not have asked about restoration, since that implied a political kingdom; nor should they have asked about Israel, since that anticipated a national kingdom; nor should they have asked about 'at this time,' since that implied the kingdom's immediate establishment."³⁷ At any rate, Jesus uses the question as a launching pad to impress upon them his strategy for declaring the gospel in every generation. As Bock explains, "Instead of worrying about the end of the plan, they are to be equipped to carry the message to the end of the earth."³⁸ Peterson adds that "Christians have to live with the tension of knowing that the work of the gospel is central to God's eschatological plan, but never being able to calculate the exact date of the end."³⁹

Before the plan Jesus gives a promise of power. He instructs his disciples to "not leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised" (1:4). This point cannot be overstated. Too often preachers are guilty of telling congregations what to do, often resulting in much guilt, before reminding them how it can be done in the first place. Things like living the Christian life, overcoming sin, obeying the commands of the Lord, or gaining Christ-likeness can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit. Bruce compares their upcoming experience with the Holy Spirit to Jesus' own baptism: "As

³⁶Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 62.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Bock, *Acts*, 64.

³⁹David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 111.

Jesus had been anointed at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, so his followers were now to be similarly anointed and enabled to carry on his work.”⁴⁰ Just as one is saved by faith, one must live by faith. In keeping with this example, Jesus introduces his power before giving his plan.

The promise is a reminder of what had already been pledged in the Upper Room on the evening before his crucifixion. In John 16:17 Jesus astounded his men: “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes will convict the world.” Perhaps the men had forgotten this great promise, even as they had forgotten the resurrection. Now on the Mount of Olives, just before his departure, Jesus reminds them of the coming Helper.

First, as Peterson notes, the coming of the Spirit “is not continuous but definitive . . . though clearly the Spirit is available at any time after Pentecost for those who repent and are ‘baptized in the name of Jesus Christ’ (2:38).”⁴¹ As the story progresses, each stage of the Acts 1:8 plan is marked by a special coming of the Spirit (2:1-4; 8:14-17; 10:44-47; 19:6). In Acts, God inaugurates the apostles preaching with Spirit power. He also, gives a once-for all demonstration of the coming of the Spirit to mark each turn of His plan to get the gospel to the nations.

Second, they would have to wait for a while for the Spirit, but not for long, “not many days from now” (1:5). That brief time amounted to just ten days. It must have been intended as a reminder to the disciples of their own inadequate strength, creativity, and personality to accomplish the work. They could do nothing on their own—they needed to wait. Today, the church would do well to remember their example of waiting for the power of the Spirit to accomplish our mission.

⁴⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 36.

⁴¹Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 110.

Third, the Spirit was not for their personal enjoyment but for the work of the gospel. By his power they would become his witnesses. They were to tell everything they had seen and heard concerning Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection. It is clear the effect of empowering by the Spirit is a new courage and clarity in telling his story. It is noted by Peterson that Jesus' power, *dynamis*, was given to the apostles in a special way, allowing for miracles as well as for powerful speaking.⁴² Often, today's emphasis on a subjective, emotional, personal experience with the Spirit is just not in keeping with the apostle's example of Spirit-filled preaching in the first days of the church's ministry.

Now to the strategy. First, Jesus addresses the fears of his followers. With the city of Jerusalem as the backdrop, Jesus ordered his followers to begin at their current location. There was no allowance to return to comfortable Galilee for the telling of the redemption story. They were to start there in Jerusalem, and the surrounding region of Judea. They had vivid memories of his arrest, trial, beating, and crucifixion less than two months earlier. Who could blame their fear of similar treatment by the religious leaders? What must have been a shock to them at first-hearing, would come into focus as they realized the gospel was to go to the most difficult places on earth, starting first with those closest to us. It is often the case that the most intimidating prospects for evangelizing happen to be those we know the best—families, friends, and neighbors. Jesus does not let his followers escape the natural tendency to avoid those who know us best. Start where you are!

The second part of the strategy dealt with the prejudices of his followers. He pointedly declares the next step in His mission was Samaria. The Samaritans were a mixed-race. Dating back to the return of the exiles of Judah, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews had learned to despise the Samaritans. With the financial

⁴²Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 110.

backing of Cyrus, king of Persia, the Jewish remnant returned to rebuild the temple under the direction of the governor Zerubbabel.⁴³ During the construction those Jews who had been left behind, who had intermarried with the surrounding pagans, approached the builders with an offer to help. They were flatly refused due to the impurity of their marriages. This, of course, bred a deep resentment among all parties involved. In reaction to the rejection, and in contrast to the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans designated Mount Gerizim as the center of their worship. It would be several hundred years before the Jews were confronted with the sin of prejudice. In an open show of love for all races, Jesus made a point to travel into Samaria during his ministry. While most Jews would avoid travel, even to the point of crossing over the Jordan River to avoid walking through its territory, Jesus modeled his future strategy by going directly to Samaria. As John noted, “He had to pass through Samaria” (John 4:4). This breach in cultural protocol resulted in the encounter with the woman at the well, near Sychar, in Samaria.

With such deep-seated prejudice toward the Samaritans among his followers, Jesus knew his message would be hindered. So, he ordered them to go there. His church was not given the opportunity to build barriers to any people group or person. Everyone would be candidates for his love and forgiveness. As a result, no church or missionary has the freedom to determine certain individuals or races to be off-limits for the gospel. In sending them to Samaria, Jesus demanded death to the church’s prejudices.

The third phase of his plan would be overwhelming were it not for the promise of the Spirit. Stott says, “They were to be his witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’ (1:8) and ‘to the very end of the age’ (Matt 28:20).”⁴⁴ The church has an impossible mission if undertaken in human strength and wisdom, but it remains our purpose nonetheless. They

⁴³Ezra 1:1-4; 3:8; 6:1-5.

⁴⁴Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 44.

were told to witness to his death, burial, and resurrection “even to the remotest part of the earth”. Did he then pause to let the magnitude of scope sink in? How would they get there? How would they accomplish such a task? Perhaps it dawned on the disciples how much they would need power to accomplish Jesus’ plan. Soon they would experience that power first-hand.

Interestingly, Luke builds his account of the church’s first thirty years around the Acts 1:8 directive. Bruce states, “It has often been pointed out that the geographical terms of verse 8 provide a sort of ‘Index of Contents’ for Acts.”⁴⁵ First, the gospel was proclaimed in the city of Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost after receiving the Spirit. Under the preaching of the Apostle Peter some three thousand people were converted to faith in Christ that day. Second, the gospel made its way to Samaria through the preaching of Philip. Miracles attended both movements of the Spirit. Finally, Jesus set about getting His gospel to the “remotest part[s] of the earth” through the mission efforts of Saul (soon to be re-named Paul) and Barnabas. Bruce has “you will be my witnesses” as the overarching theme of the book, and “in Jerusalem” as the theme of the first seven chapters. He sees “in all Judaea and Samaria” as being detailed from 8:1 to 11:18, while the rest of Acts shows the march of the gospel to Rome, fulfilling Jesus’ plan for the nations.⁴⁶

God’s plan of advancing the gospel has never changed since that day on the Mount of Olives, forty days after Jesus’ resurrection. Success in gospel proclamation is only in the power, and the under the direction of, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s work is to convict this world of their sin, Jesus’ righteousness, and of his future judgment (John 16:8). As each church submits to his leadership, the Spirit directs a unique plan of

⁴⁵Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 36.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 36–37.

evangelization, beginning locally and reaching to the nations. It is a blueprint that brings him glory by its simplicity and scope.

Revelation 5:8-14

God intends to build His kingdom. Nothing will thwart His purpose to establish it. It was the focus of the prophets: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom” (Ps 45:6; Heb1:8). It was the hope of the apostles: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim 4:18). Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), but it will eventually be situated in this world. It is a heavenly kingdom that will eventually occupy this earth. Peter describes the “day of the Lord” that suddenly comes upon this earth. It will be a complete destruction of all things as, “The elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Pet 3:10). And yet this ruin is not the end of the earth for Peter goes on to add: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). Jesus’ kingdom is not one made with hands, but of souls, or “living stones” which are “being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood” for the purpose of “offer[ing] up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4-5).

Jesus is accomplishing this great task even now by his Spirit through his people. He will continue to do so until his Father’s purposes are completed: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). God has chosen to use his *called out ones*, the church, in the last days (beginning with Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and ascension) to accomplish this great kingdom. So, the result of the church’s labors in evangelism, in every generation, among all peoples, will result in a future celebration in heaven. John was given a vision of this occasion. The reader is

overwhelmed with the scope of the celebration. The staggering number of participants is alluded to by John's phrase "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (5:11).

The occasion for the celebration is the opening of a great book by the Lamb of God. The reader is introduced to this Lamb after a careful setting of the stage in chapter four. John's senses are strained as he takes it all in: a voice, a throne, one on the throne, twenty-four elders, lightning and thunder, burning lamps, a sea of glass, and four strange creatures. Reminiscent of Isaiah, John hears these creatures constantly crying out: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come" (4:8). At this endless praise, the elders are observed to fall prostrate in worship while "casting their crowns before the throne" (4:10).

Chapter 5 opens with tension. There is a dilemma. In the Father's right hand is a book but it is perfectly closed with seven seals. Mounce describes the scroll as having "unparalleled significance . . . [containing] the full account of what God in his sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world."⁴⁷ Keener notes, "Seals reserved the contents of a document for its rightful recipient and authenticated the document with witnesses who attested it."⁴⁸ There is none in creation who answers an angel's invitation to open the scroll. John is overcome with grief at the prospect of God's will going unfinished. At this point John is introduced to the one who *will* assume the impossible task: "The Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals" (5:5). John describes this lamb in detail as having seven horns and seven eyes, representing his perfect power and wisdom.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 129.

⁴⁸Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 185.

⁴⁹Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 133.

John watches in amazement as the Lamb takes the book from the right hand of “Him who sat on the throne” (5:7). Only God could do such a thing. It is a reference to the deity of Jesus, the Lamb of God. At the taking of the book things begin to happen in heaven. Praise to the Lamb becomes the focus of all heavenly creatures. Three songs of praise are listed in the remainder of chapter 5. First, there is the song sung by a small choir of four creatures and twenty-four elders. Their posture is humble as “they fell down before the Lamb” (5:8). In their hands are harps and bowls. The harps will add to their worship. Mounce considers, “Since the function of the living creatures is not priestly, it may be best to take the harps and bowls as applying only to the elders.”⁵⁰ The bowls are filled with the “prayers of the saints,” collected throughout time. Their song is new—it had never been sung before this significant moment.

This first song of the creatures and elders (5:9-10) is marked first by adoration. The Lamb is worthy to take the book. Next the song celebrates the scope of the Lamb’s ministry. His death purchased salvation for sinners from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. To Mounce, “The worthiness of the Lamb does not at this point stem from his essential being, but from his great act of redemption. He is worthy precisely because he was slain.”⁵¹ Finally, they rejoice in God’s plan to build a kingdom of faithful servants who will forever bring Him glory as priests. These new heavenly priests were once sinners doomed to hell, but now have been reconciled to God because of the Lamb.

A second songs follows with a choir of angels joining the four living creatures and elders. John exhausts all language to describe the scene. He uses “myriads and myriads, and thousands and thousands” to give the reader an idea of the vastness of this second choir. According to Beale, and others, this description is generally take to be a reference to Daniel 7:10.⁵² Keener adds, “That God has so many myriads (Rev 5:11) to

⁵⁰Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 134.

⁵¹Ibid., 135.

⁵²G.K Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co.,

worship him reinforces the text's example for us that he is worthy of worship. 'Ten thousand' was simply the largest number for which the Greek language afforded a ready term, so the plural (in the Greek) of 'ten thousand times ten thousand' is a handy way of saying that they were innumerable."⁵³ Osborne concurs saying, "A 'myriad' is the highest number known to the Greco-Roman world (about ten thousand)."⁵⁴ Mounce says to not take the number "arithmetically but as an apocalyptic symbol for a countless multitude."⁵⁵ Whatever the case, their singing can only be described as *loud* (5:12). It too begins with ascribing worth to the Lamb. In this the reader is reminded of the importance of praise in the life of the Christian. What is most assuredly the focus of the gathering of heaven's creatures—namely the worship of the once-slain-but-now-alive Lamb of God—should be the same today for the people of God. We are to regularly assemble ourselves for worship today, similarly offering praise to the Lamb. In this second song, the amassed choir of angels, creatures, and elders pronounces a faultless, seven-fold blessing, upon the Lamb. Mounce is reminded of David's final prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19: "Yours, O LORD is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all."⁵⁶ It is perfect praise. The Lamb alone is rightfully the recipient of *all* power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. Smalley suggests that Israel's kings might have enjoyed five of the seven characteristics of praise, including power, riches, wisdom, might and honor; but the final two, glory and blessing, are reserved for the godhead alone.⁵⁷ John's readers, the persecuted saints living

2013), 364.

⁵³Keener, *Revelation*, 189.

⁵⁴Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 262.

⁵⁵Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 135.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁷Steven S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the*

at the end of the first century, must have marveled at the sight he described. Surely they were strengthened by this picture.

John describes a third song of praise. After the four-living creatures and twenty-four elders were joined by myriads of angels, this choir is suddenly enlarged by *all* of creation: “Every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them” (5:13). To Mounce, “The universality of Christ’s great redemptive work calls for a universal response.”⁵⁸ The spectacle is overwhelming in its magnitude. It is a scene that expects awe and wonder from the reader. Imbedded in this third song is an assertion of Jesus’ deity that surely hushed John’s gnostic critics. The one on the throne *and* the Lamb receive the *same* praise from this all-creature choir. Blessing, honor, glory, and dominion belong to the Father and the Son forever. Only deity could deserve such praise. It is clear John considered Jesus to be divine. Mounce concurs saying, “Chapter 5 has revealed a central truth that governs the entire book of Revelation. By his sacrificial death the Lamb has taken control of the course of history and guaranteed its future. He alone was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll of destiny.”⁵⁹

John concludes this chapter with an unforgettable sight. The choirs cease their singing. An echo of praise rings throughout the universe. Then, with impeccable timing comes a simple affirmation from the four creatures with a one word exclamation point: “Amen!” (5:14). Smalley notes “four different but complementary” uses of this word in the Revelation: a confirmation to another speaker (here and 22:20); an affirmation of an

Apocalypse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 139.

⁵⁸Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 138.

⁵⁹Ibid.

act of worship (1:6-7; 7:12; 19:4); to conclude a prayer (22:21); and as a title of Jesus (3:14).⁶⁰ Finally, John observes the elders being reduced to utter humility and adoration. Revelation 5 remains a stirring reminder to the church of its vital mission to preach the gospel to people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (5:10). Whatever the risk, whatever the cost, we must keep on—to His glory.

⁶⁰Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 141.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED
TO THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE NATIONS

Overview

The command is clear. The urgency is ever-present. Now the church must determine in real time, in every generation, to take up Jesus' command to preach the gospel to the nations. What will be the church's motivation to risk all? As the gospel is understood fully, it will be proclaimed with conviction and passion. When hell becomes a very real place to dread and fear, the church will awaken from slumber to warn the lost. When a strategy is in place, in keeping with the Master's plan, the church will move forward in confidence. Finally, when the church depends upon the power of the Holy Spirit rather than its own creativity or clever plans, victory is assured. In this chapter a foundation is laid for the practical carrying out of the Great Commission of Jesus so clearly stated and re-stated in the New Testament.

Understand the Gospel

From the church's beginning, the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth has been its *only* message. It is an announcement that brings both conviction of sin to those would repent and believe; as well as certain opposition, sometimes even fierce, by those who reject the claims of the gospel, namely the lordship of Christ Jesus. The first proclaimers of the gospel made it their practice to include the resurrection as proof of their message. They also pointed back to the Old Testament prophets, framing their message by the fulfilled word of God. So, it is a strengthening thing for the church today to have a clear understanding of the gospel. Let the church

wonder at her message of salvation, dating back to the Garden of Eden—and yes, even to eternity past. To Greear, who confesses to once suffering under a ministry enslavement to something other than the simple, powerful story of Christ, defines the gospel as “the announcement that God has reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son Jesus to die as a substitute for our sins, and that all who repent and believe have eternal life in Him.”¹ After a rediscovery of the power of the gospel, Greear celebrates a new heart for ministry, leaving behind a drudgery-based, acceptance-oriented motivation of seeking God’s approval in the work. He states, “The gospel produces not just obedience, you, see, but a new kind of obedience—an obedience that is powered by desire. An obedience that is both pleasing to God *and* [author’s emphasis] delightful to you.”²

There are at least five components of the gospel to be understood, believed, and proclaimed. First, the gospel is considered a mystery, once hidden in the heart of God in eternity past, but now revealed for all to know (Col 1:25-27). His plan of redemption did not suddenly occur to him as a *good idea* as he was busy creating the universe. God existed in perfect unity and harmony with himself in eternity past, needing nothing for his completion, and yet, God determined, in his perfect wisdom, to create the universe with the expressed purpose of putting his attributes on display. The only reason for his creative urge was for his glory, to express his love to his creation. The highest demonstration of this love was determined to be found in the creation of mankind. In man (and of course woman) God placed part of himself. Created in the image of God, man would become an immortal creature able to love, hate, create, and appreciate the wonder of God’s attributes. With perfect power, God also determined to give to men a wonderful gift—a free will. It would be this free moral agent who would become God’s primary channel of glory. In his infinite wisdom God knew what would become of mankind. He saw the

¹J. D. Greear, *Gospel* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 5.

²*Ibid.*, 18.

future sin and rebellion. He knew the loss of fellowship, even death, which would come upon mankind as a result, but there in eternity past, deep in the heart of God, was a plan. His plan of redemption, hidden from all creatures until perfectly and finally demonstrated in the cross of Jesus Christ, resulted in a restoration of fellowship between God and sinners who believe on Christ.

Second, the gospel was progressively revealed by God in the Old Testament. He marked out the coming of the messiah by his covenants. The sacrificial system of the Jews was set in place to point to the coming one who would perfectly and finally fulfill the temporary sacrifices of lambs, goats, and bulls. The church must understand this overview of the Old Testament to appreciate the full impact of the gospel. For example, the story of the Garden of Eden sets the stage for the need of redemption. Sin separated God from mankind. The result of Adam's sin was devastating. There was not just an *interruption* in fellowship because of sin, there ensued a perfect and *forever separation* from God in death. Williams concurs, "Adam sinned; his sin introduced sin and death into the creation; death reigns over the entire universe, and everyone after Adam personally sins and transgress, so that everyone is responsible for his individual sins (Rom 3:23; 4:25)."³ It was the perfect problem for mankind: weak, frail, and miserable as a result of sin. Man found himself in a desperate situation before God. In his sinfulness he could not hope to ever fellowship with God ever again, and yet, God did not leave Adam hopeless. He pointed to a coming one who would crush the enemy's head, even if by his own suffering, i.e., his own "bruised heel" (Gen 3:15). So, hope was born in the heart of mankind. Through suffering, even sacrifice, there was to be a restoration one day with God. Bridges and Bevington note, "It is doubtful that the act of sacrificing was an invention of Adam, Cain, or Abel. The first garments of Adam and Eve were almost

³Jarvis J. Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul's Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012), 43.

certainly the skins of animals offered in sacrifice by a method devised and instituted by God himself (Gen 3:21). In the first mention of sacrifice, the Bible gives the impression that the offerers were given specific instruction by God to govern the form and method of making an acceptable offering.”⁴ So, it is certain that Adam and Eve believed God’s promise, resulting in their salvation. In the lives of Noah, Abraham, and David the church learns the covenant nature of God. In the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc., the church learns how God keeps his word. To Moses God instituted the priestly sacrificial system for his children. The detail and scope of this system of animal sacrifices is staggering. But there was a great purpose—pointing to the gospel. As Bridges and Bevington observe, “Atonement by animal sacrifice was the method by which sinning Jewish believers, estranged from God and excluded from covenant standing, were forgiven and restored to relationship with the inflexibly holy and yet merciful God.”⁵ So, in every passage of the Old Testament the reader drops into the story to learn yet another facet of the plan of redemption. For example the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in chapter 53 is significant to the gospel. Philip interprets this chapter for the seeking eunuch in Acts 8:25-40. Bock and Glaser summarize Philip’s exposition as follows: “Unjustly humiliated, [Jesus] took our place so we can experience cleansing and new life with God, something that God showed that Jesus had been done by raising Jesus from the dead and taking Jesus to his side in heaven. The eunuch had come to see that it was true. There is much to learn from the eunuch’s response—and much to gain.”⁶

Third, the gospel was unveiled in the life of Jesus—for all to see. That life was miraculous at its outset. It was a promised birth. Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz of a sign to

⁴Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 48–49.

⁵Ibid., 49.

⁶Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *The Gospel according to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2012), 144.

prove God’s power: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). Following this miraculous conception then birth; after a hidden childhood and young adulthood; Jesus began his public ministry. His many miracles were given as undeniable proofs of his claims of deity. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter pointed Jesus’ the miracles as having been used by God to *attest*, or put on display for all to see, to Jesus’ person (Acts 2:22). Finally, Jesus death was unique in so many ways, resulting in only one assessment—he gave his life as a ransom. Dever and Lawrence express the passion associated with a clear understanding of this payment: “The idea of ransom was used of buying back a prisoner of war, or a slave, or a debtor from debtors’ prison. Brothers and sisters, through Jesus Christ *we* [authors’ emphasis] are those prisoners and slaves that have been redeemed. We are those who have been brought out by what Jesus has done.”⁷

Jesus was not merely killed by the execution of the Romans. This was clear to all present. He actually surrendered his life that day prompting the centurion in charge of the crucifixion to begin “praising God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’” (Luke 23:47). And there was no mistake that Jesus actually died that day. Romans were not in the habit of removing living criminals from their crosses. Interestingly, he died after just six hours on the cross. Paul declared the significance of that death: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19). Here we are introduced to the doctrine of imputation. Morris sees a two-sided approach to this transference of our sins to Jesus’ account, and at the same time Jesus’ righteousness to our account: “Imputation is a way of saying that God accords believers that standing that they could never reach of themselves. Paul can put the same truth negatively and speak of God as ‘not reckoning unto them their trespasses’.”⁸ Peter adds

⁷Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence, *It Is Well: Expositions on Substitutionary Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 73.

⁸Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing

that he “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18). Morris celebrates this truth saying: “The sins that kept us away from God no longer do so, that’s to that death.”⁹

Fourth, the resurrection proved the gospel to be true. So, his death was in fact the satisfaction of God’s wrath toward sin (1 John 2:2). It proved all of Jesus’ words to be trustworthy. No wonder the first preachers included the announcement of the resurrection in virtually every proclamation of the gospel (Acts 2:24; 3:15; 13:32-34; 17:31). Paul pointed to the hope of our own resurrection because of Christ’s: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor 15:20-24). By his resurrection, Jesus claimed for God what was lost in the fall of man. Death was conquered. The sentence of separation from the creator was lifted allowing all who would believe access to God. By his resurrection, the Son proved himself to be the only way to God.

Fifth, the gospel includes the literal ascension of Christ back to heaven as well as the promise of his return. This very visible demonstration of God’s power completes his plan of redemption on earth. Jesus returns to heaven with a glorified body, the very type of body to be inherited by each believer in due time (1 John 3:2). And he leaves the proclamation of the gospel to his church, albeit not in their own strength, as they were to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit, but the responsibility was their own. As that small group of Christ-followers strained their eyes to catch the last glimpse of

Co., 1965), 246–47.

⁹Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 326.

their Lord rising into the cloud, an angel appeared to them. His words have affected the church for two millennia: “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

This is the gospel the church must know. God set into motion a plan hidden in his heart from eternity past. This plan for man’s redemption is the good news that whoever believes on Jesus, turning to him in faith while confessing him as Lord, will in fact be forgiven, adopted, and given an inheritance in heaven forever. The apostle John stated so clearly: “but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12). The gospel is for God’s glory. It is for the church to declare.

The Situation of the Human Soul

Sadly, the church is prone to forget the reality of hell. Hell is unpleasant. It is not a topic for polite conversation. To the contrary, DeYoung and Gilbert note, “The doctrine of hell, however unpopular it may be and however much we may wish to soften its hard edges, is essential for faithful Christian witness.”¹⁰ Our culture of positive thinking is strained at the thought of a human soul suffering in torment throughout eternity. In our age of enlightenment we have moved on from such things. It is not politically correct to speak of a person’s soul perishing forever in a literal place called hell. So, today’s church is tempted to settle for caring only for the immediate physical needs of our surrounding population while never sounding a warning of impending judgment. This cannot be. The true situation of the human soul before God demands the church overcome its complacency and fear to give an impassioned appeal for belief and repentance. Hell must be understood.

¹⁰Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 244.

Jesus warned about a place of torment. One cannot read the life of Jesus without appreciating his sober movement through the three years of public ministry. Each step is measured. There is a sense of purpose about every movement, about every situation. At times, what seems to be a nuisance to the disciples becomes the most significant teaching opportunity for Jesus (e.g. in Matt 14:15, after a long day of ministry, the disciples asked him to “send the crowds away” leading to the feeding of the 5000). He is on a mission during his brief time with his people Israel. He has come to speak of eternal things, to explain God (John 1:18). He has come to warn about the coming judgment of the human soul by His Father (Matt 10:28). A striking example of his purpose came following the arrest of John the Baptist, as Jesus began his public ministry. Matthew relates, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17). With that, Jesus’ teaching fell upon the collective conscience of his countrymen. They would have to repent of their sin and unbelief to have any hope of life with God after death. Why such an opening message from the one who is only love? Because there are times when the most loving thing a person can do is warn of danger. At the risk of being misunderstood, even rejected, the warning must be delivered. This is what Jesus did for the human race. If hell is not a real place, if not a place to be avoided at all costs, then why Jesus’ message of repentance? What is the purpose of his coming if not to warn mankind of hell? And to offer an escape?

Jesus warned of a terrible place of suffering that must be avoided at all costs. According to Chan and Sprinkle “Jesus uses the word *gehenna* (translated as ‘hell’) twelve times in the Gospels. He also uses images of fire and darkness in context where punishment after judgement is in view. A quick look at these statements shows that Jesus believed, like His Jewish contemporaries, that a horrific place of punishment awaits the

wicked on judgement day [authors' emphasis].”¹¹ Jesus spoke of hell as being a place of fire (Matt 5:22; 18:9), even with unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43). It is a place of destruction of the body (Matt 10:28). He warns his friends not to be afraid of those who can only kill the body, but rather to fear “the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:5). He graphically emphasized the awfulness of hell using comparison: “If your right eye makes you stumble [because of lust], tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt 5:29). In answer to those who promote annihilation as an alternative to the literal suffering in hell, Edwards writes: “Eternal punishment is not eternal annihilation. Surely they will not be raised to life at the last day only to be annihilated.”¹² As a result of these warnings, an ever-present sense of the gravity of Jesus’ ministry forces its way into our ministries as well. The church today simply cannot ignore the perilous state of the human soul before holy God. As DeYoung and Gilbert point out, “Since hell is real, evangelism and discipleship are not simply good options or commendable ministries, but are literally a matter of life and death.”¹³

The apostles preached with urgency and passion, pleading with their listeners to repent. Why? On the Day of Pentecost, Peter assumed the responsibility of being the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. Following the message his hearers were overcome with their guilt and culpability in the death of their Messiah. What were they to do? Peter’s answer was consistent to that of John the Baptist and even Jesus Himself: “Repent!” (Acts 2:38). Luke then records, “With many other words [Peter] solemnly

¹¹Francis Chan and Preston M. Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity and the Things We Made up* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2011), 74.

¹²Jonathan Edwards, *The Wrath of Almighty God: Jonathan Edwards on God’s Judgment against Sinners* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 291.

¹³DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 245.

testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” (Acts 2:40). Why the urgency in Peter’s message? Simply, the perilous state of the human soul before holy God. God’s wrath can be avoided he proclaimed. How? By the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Packer’s definition of the gospel there is found an urgency connected to preaching: “The gospel tells us that our Creator has become our Redeemer. It announces that the Son of God has become man ‘for us men and for our salvation’ and has died on the cross to save us from eternal judgment.”¹⁴ Passionate proclamation of the gospel is warranted today as much as any time of the church’s history.

The apostle John offers a glimpse into both the current and future situation of the soul. In his account of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, we learn the truth: the unbelieving sinner has already been judged by God (John 3:18). It is not that he will be judged one day in the future, he *already* stands in the judgment of God. It is a frightening prospect to be sure. So, if that sinner should die in that lost condition, what is his eternal future? Again, John gives insight. At the conclusion of his revelation, the reader is confronted with the final judgment, called the Great White Throne judgment of Jesus. Every person who has ever lived will be made to live again, to face the wrath of God for the rejection of Jesus as the savior of the world. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s *book of life* are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). It appears Jesus referred to this judgment during his earthly ministry when he described those who would one day be on his right hand (the righteous, the sheep) and those who would be on his left (the unrighteous, the goats) (Matt 25:31-46). To the goats, or the unsaved, Jesus declares a most terrifying prospect awaiting them in eternity. Because their lifestyles gave no indication of ever having submitted to the lordship of Christ, evidenced by their refusal to serve their fellow man, Jesus announces: “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). So, what

¹⁴J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 189.

is the fate of the unbeliever? “These will go into eternal punishment”, Jesus declares (Matt 25:46). According to Edwards, “Christ has this honor of being the Judge of the world given Him as a suitable reward for His sufferings. This is part of Christ’s exaltation. The exaltation of Christ is given Him in reward for His humiliation and sufferings.”¹⁵ To Edwards “God is infinitely just and thus it is fitting that he should punish sin with an infinite punishment.”¹⁶ Bridges adds, “The absolute holiness of God should be of great comfort and assurance to us. If God is perfectly holy, then we can be confident that His actions toward us are always perfect and just.”¹⁷ No one will ever lay any blame against Jesus as he executes perfect justice against humanity. In fact, according to Schreiner, commenting on Revelation 19, the judgment of God will be celebrated in the earth, as when “the Nazi regime in Germany fell in 1945 and when several Communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed decades later. So too, when Babylon falls, those in heaven will exclaim, ‘Hallelujah!’ (19:1, 3). They will confess that God’s judgments are ‘true and just’ (19:2).”¹⁸

From Jesus, to John the Baptist, to the apostles, to the church’s witness in the first century, to the clear New Testament warning of future damnation for unbelieving sinners—the church has been afforded clear insight into the future of the human soul. As a result, this world deserves a clear warning from the church. While wrestling with the vital question of the “relation of divine providence to practical expression of the Christian faith, such as prayer, evangelism, and Christian service,” Bruce Ware affirms, “We are commanded to pray, to witness to the gospel of Christ, to use our gifts to build up the

¹⁵Edwards, *The Wrath of Almighty God*, 152.

¹⁶Jonathan Edwards et al., *Jonathan Edwards’s Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Casebook* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 27.

¹⁷Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), 27.

¹⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 623.

body of Christ.”¹⁹ Ware goes on to add, “The commandments contained in the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament epistles are numerous, and it is clear that God’s people are to take them seriously.”²⁰ As a result, we must resist the temptation in our gospel saturated culture to *compete* with other churches in our communities to build our private social clubs to entertain and bless the saved. We must risk the disapproval of our culture by telling of Jesus’ death on the cross to rescue sinners from hell. His suffering, including his agony at being separated from the Father (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), and death is the means by which God has provided salvation to us. To Stott, the death of Christ resulted in the most amazing encounter with hell: “We may even dare to say that our sins sent Christ to hell—not to the ‘hell’ (*hades*, the abode of the dead) to which the Creed says he ‘descended’ after death, but to the ‘hell’ (*gehenna*, the place of punishment) to which our sins condemned him before his body died [author’s emphasis].”²¹ As a result, we cannot retreat into our safe zones of *good* ministry. On the contrary, we must hazard *everything* to get the gospel to the millions of sinners who stand in judgment today, and in the very near future. This urgency has prompted great missionary movements in past generations. We can settle for no less today. In short, love propels the church to tell the gospel. Bonhoeffer declares, “It was not human beings who accomplished anything here; no, God alone did it. He came to human beings in infinite love. He judged what is human. And he granted grace beyond any merit.”²² Since we now have this same love, as his children, let the church tell the story—souls are at stake.

¹⁹Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 22.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 81.

²²Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Manfred Weber, *Meditations on the Cross* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 20.

The Church's Strategy for Reaching the Nations

A practical strategy must be in place to accomplish the church's mission. Each church must be willing to affect its *own* community for Jesus' sake. From there, the gospel must be sent to the nations. It is clear Jesus meant for each local New Testament church to be its own headquarters of the gospel. DeYoung and Gilbert define this task as follows: "The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus Christ now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father."²³ So, when the millions of churches around the globe understand this strategy, allowing their concentric circles of influence to intersect with each other, it becomes obvious that God's plan for the advance of the gospel is unstoppable.

At the same time, there are obstacles to be overcome. Carson acknowledges the opposition in some circles on the necessity for a church's world-wide mission strategy: "First, in the contemporary climate the notions of evangelism and mission are deeply offensive to some. Many Western theologians consider the idea of winning people to Christ a parochial vestige of past imperialism; and not a few 'third world' theologians agree."²⁴ While prevalent, this notion must be refuted. It must be opposed at every turn. Why? God is at work today building his kingdom by His church. It is his prescribed method and he will have nothing less. At the same time, Wright warns about emphasizing evangelism at the expense of discipleship, saying both are necessary: "The bad result of separating evangelism from discipleship and prioritizing the first is shallowness, immaturity and vulnerability of false teaching, church growth with depth and rapid withering away (as Jesus warned in the parable of the sower; Matt 13:20-22)."²⁵

²³DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 241.

²⁴D. A. Carson, *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 213.

²⁵Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's*

DeYoung and Gilbert warn against removing gospel proclamation from our necessary mercy ministries, i.e., caring for the “widows and orphans” (James 1:27), saying: “It is not the church’s responsibility to right every wrong or to meet every need, though we have biblical motivation to do some of both. It is our responsibility, however—our unique mission and plain priority—that this unpopular, impractical gospel message gets told, that neighbors and nations may know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, they may have life in his name.”²⁶ Stott is careful to note the ongoing international emphasis of Jesus’ kingdom, saying: “For Christ’s kingdom, while not incompatible with patriotism, tolerates no narrow nationalism. He rules over an international community in which race, nation, rank and sex are no barriers to fellowship.”²⁷ As a result, each church must put aside its prejudices as well as its comfortable self-serving ministries to win the lost—locally, nationally, and internationally. These barriers to the gospel must be overcome by Jesus’ church.

So, how can the gospel be proclaimed to neighbors, friends, and co-workers? First, it is the wise pastor who leads his church to witness the gospel on a day-to-day, *as-you-go*, basis in the local community. No program is necessarily needed, other than trained believers, growing in their faith, opening their mouths to tell the gospel. It is a simple, reproducible approach to evangelism. Of course on-going training for gospel conversations is critical. Modeling this process from the pulpit or in small groups is helpful. Mark Dever models his own method of evangelism by highlighting three gospel essentials he wants to convey to people: “First, the decision is costly (and therefore must be carefully considered; see Luke 9:62); second, the decision is urgent (and therefore must be made; See John 3:18, 36); and third, the decision is worth it (and therefore

Mission (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 285.

²⁶DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 249.

²⁷Ibid.

should be made; see John 10:10).²⁸ Witnesses will attain mastery in evangelism through demonstration, not just information. As Jesus witnessed to the woman at the well, the disciples would learn to share the gospel as they went about their routine lives. So, each church must have an on-going emphasis on life-style evangelism to ward off an inevitable coldness of concern for lost souls. Dever reminds the church-growth-consumed American church that “the only true growth is the growth that comes from God.”²⁹

Second, missions must be put before the church on a consistent basis. Each church must seek God’s will for national and international involvement in advancing the gospel. The value of the pastor’s personal involvement in these things is obvious. He must be willing to *speak* of the lostness of the world, and to personally *go* on mission. The church will draw strength from such a pastor. His example will permeate the entire body, creating a new awareness of lostness. As he returns from each trip, the church will note a growing passion for the nations in the heart of their pastor. Others will take up his challenge to go. Over time, a new *culture of missions* begins to take root in a previously self-centered body of Christ. It is an intentional, pastoral-led process to bring a church to an awareness of its God-given responsibility to evangelize the nations. Through this part of the strategy, previous hindrances to church health, such as selfish attachment to personal agendas, will become insignificant—to the joy of the body!

Third, the church must prioritize its budget for evangelism. Of course the largest line item in most church budgets will be personnel, but let each staff member be a catalyst for gospel advance. Each year the church must be willing to re-evaluate its budget to determine whether or not evangelism is priority. Again, the pastor’s role cannot be overstated. He must be willing to call the church to sacrificial giving to missions. He must be willing to challenge status quo giving, stretching the church to give at levels

²⁸Mark E. Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 1998), 17.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

never before considered. Annual budgets must reflect a church's passion for souls. Separate giving campaigns throughout the year are necessary to create a culture of giving so others may go with the good news.

The church's strategy is simple. God intended it to be so. First, tell the gospel as we go. Next, provide opportunities for personal mission involvement. Finally, give sacrificially that others may go. James Ware sees in Paul's relationship to the church in Philippi an example of any local church's mission: "Paul understood the Philippians' partnership for the gospel to involve not only their financial support, but also their own missionizing activity for the extension of the gospel, and that Paul reflects throughout Philippians 1:12-2:18 upon the spread of the gospel through the Christian community. Paul in Philippians is specifically concerned, not only with his own apostolic mission, but with the participation of the Philippians and others in the work of spreading the gospel."³⁰ When the New Testament church realizes its purpose for existence, the glory of God by the telling of the gospel, it will find new life. As John Piper puts it, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions."³¹ Lesser pursuits, though often having quality and benefit, will be surrendered for the primary task of participating in God's plan of redemption in the earth. He has come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He has commissioned his church to do the same.

³⁰James P. Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 170.

³¹John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

The Source of the Church's Power

We have the plan. The church is to begin at home, at its present location, to preach the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Then we are to expand our vision to our surrounding region and nation. At the same time, each church must eventually take the gospel to the nations. Every people group in the world deserves to hear the gospel in their own language. The local church is God's plan for this work. But how can we do it? We must have help. We cannot hope to accomplish spiritual things by our own human wisdom or creativity. To Stott, "The Holy Spirit would not only apply to them the salvation which Jesus had achieved by his death and resurrection but would impel them to proclaim throughout the world the good news of this salvation" saying, "Salvation is given to be shared."³² The church of Jesus must have Jesus' power for the work. And we have it in the presence of God's Spirit.

Carson speaks of three horizons when it comes to the evangelization of the nations. The first horizon has to do with "the biblical documents or, as some would have it, of the first generation of Christian believers as that perspective is preserved in the New Testament." The second horizon is "ours—i.e. that of established Christians who seek to understand the Scriptures," but crossing from our own understanding of Scripture to the third horizon happens when "we try to evangelize and teach the content of Scripture to another group or people. Indeed, the greater the cultural gap between the evangelizing church and the target people (or, otherwise put, between the second and the third horizon), the greater the potential for massive distortion of the message."³³ As a result, Carson relates the "Bible's teaching on the depravity of fallen human nature, a depravity extending even to the natural mind that cannot understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14), in one sense makes the communication process, the transfer of meaning from the second horizon to the third, far harder than those who focus on the new hermeneutic can

³²Stott, *The Spirit the Church and the World*, 39.

³³Carson, *The Church in the Bible and the World*, 218.

imagine. But conversely, the Bible's own solution to this dilemma—the enabling *work of the Spirit of God*, is not afraid to bring God into the picture; and is therefore a highly creative and powerful ‘solution’ [emphasis added].³⁴ So, it is only through the help of the Spirit of God that any church has any hope of reaching those whose minds are darkened to the things of God. It is clear though, that God has purposed to use the local church, despite its many shortcomings to accomplish his eternal plan of redemption. Of course, when a church realizes this holy partnership, there is an awakening to the possibilities of seeing what God can do in any situation.

Throughout the book of Acts we see the influence of the Spirit as the gospel advances. Köstenberger and Swain note how Luke “is careful to show, [that the gospel of Luke] is only the beginning. In his second volume, Luke consequently narrates the coming of the Spirit (in fulfilment of Jesus’ promise; cf. Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5) and the church’s Spirit-empowered witness ‘to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).”³⁵ Schreiner adds, “Luke could be described as a theologian of the Holy Spirit because he frequently refers to the Spirit in his two-volume work.”³⁶ In Acts, Schreiner sees several descriptors used by Luke to describe the influence of the Spirit including, “Those who spoke in tongues in Acts 2:4 are said to have been ‘filled’ . . . with the Spirit. Various other verbs are used to denote the dispensing of the Spirit, including ‘receive’ . . . ‘pour out’ . . . ‘give’ . . . ‘come upon’ . . . ‘fall upon’ . . . and ‘baptize.’”³⁷

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit fell upon the disciples just as Jesus had promised ten days earlier at His ascension: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all

³⁴Carson, *The Church in the Bible and the World*, 256.

³⁵Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Nottingham, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 156.

³⁶Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 440.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 450–51.

Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As noted above this supernatural power can be traced throughout Acts as the disciples faithfully fulfill the commission of their Lord. Green observes: “Luke does not teach us that the apostles initiated mission. They sat quietly in Jerusalem until the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost; then they could not keep quiet about the mighty deeds of God.”³⁸ Green goes on to suggest that it was the Spirit who sent “an ex-Pharisee opponent of the gospel, converted through the direct leading of the Lord the Spirit” as well as sending Philip to reach the Ethiopian eunuch returning to his homeland; not to mention the Spirit’s scattering of the saints at the outbreak of Jerusalem persecution.³⁹ One cannot read Luke’s account of the first thirty years of the church’s advance without being impressed with the partnership between God’s Spirit and his church. As the church steps out in faith, God provides power. For example, consider Paul in Athens. It was the cultural and learning center of the ancient world. For centuries the Athenians had cultivated their humanist philosophies through Zeno, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others. What hope would an itinerant preacher of the gospel have against such long-standing human thought amidst pagan excess? To this intimidating setting Paul brought the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, so well-armed, the missionary faced the influential Areopagus council on Mars Hill. To Schreiner, “[Paul] did not view the idols in Athens dispassionately, remarking on the beautiful artistry evident in the numerous idols. Instead, he was provoked and irritated by their idolatry (Acts 17:16).”⁴⁰ Schreiner reflects upon Paul’s conviction, “The Athenians were not saved through their gods and were challenged to repent (Acts 17:30).”⁴¹ Paul opened his mouth with confidence. He spoke

³⁸Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 79.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁴⁰Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 521.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 522.

with power, wisely connecting the gospel to a common human longing and searching for truth: “Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children’” (Acts 16:23b-28).

In this Athenian witness, Tyra sees Paul’s wisdom of contextualization. He compares the differences in Paul’s preaching in Jewish synagogue in Antioch Pisidia with this encounter with the Greek philosophers in Athens suggesting, “It made a difference whether the apostle was in Asia or Athens, not in terms of his ultimate message but with regard to his method. Though both of Paul’s sermons culminated with a bold announcement of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 13:37; 17:31), the rhetorical route to that sermonic denouement differed dramatically.”⁴² Tyra goes on to remind, “We should be careful to note as well that the texts under consideration seem to imply that Christian disciples were made as a result of both preaching events (Acts 13:43; 17:34).”⁴³ Finally, Tyra notes, “Because of the faithfulness of the Spirit of mission, disciples can be made in any sociocultural context, even Athens!”⁴⁴ The church must decide to depend upon this “Spirit of mission” to have any hope of success in the conversion of sinners.

It was at the conclusion of Paul’s witness on Mars Hill that we see the outward

⁴²Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 136.

⁴³Ibid., 135.

⁴⁴Ibid., 136.

evidence of the inner working of the Holy Spirit. While the majority of the resident philosophers and lawmakers in the Areopagus *sneered* at Paul's assertion of Jesus' resurrection, and while others begged for *another* time to hear more from the apostle, there was a certain number of hearers who *believed* the gospel that day. Tucked into Luke's account of this incident is the following note: "But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and other with them" (Acts 16:34). There, even in the midst of a general rejection of the gospel, souls were saved by the inner working of the Spirit.

Later on that same second mission trip, Paul traveled alone to Corinth. Corinth was a port city, renowned for its wickedness. Paul went there with the gospel and the Spirit. That was all! Several years later, in a letter of correction to the church that was eventually planted in Corinth, Paul wrote of the influence of the Spirit during those start-up days: "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:1-5). If Paul is to serve as our example of faithfulness and courage in preaching, let him also be our example of Spirit-dependence in ministry. The church cannot hope for spiritual success without the Spirit's power. The church dare not attempt to reconcile men to God without the help of the Spirit of God. Surely we will fail. But, with his help? Surely we must succeed.

Also, it is evident the early church depended on prayer as the gospel advanced to the nations. Wright notes, "When we turn to the New Testament, we find prayer as the saturating medium of the mission of Jesus, of the church in Acts, and of Paul's

instructions to the churches in relation to his own missionary work.”⁴⁵ When Peter was under arrest, awaiting the same execution afforded James, the church gathered to pray. It was a humble gathering to be sure. The Jerusalem church had no influence in the court of Herod. They had no money to bribe officials. They had no means of overpowering a stockade protected by many guards. All they had at their disposal was prayer. It is clear they wielded this weapon with effectiveness that night. Luke records a significant note: “So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God” (Acts 12:5). Of course what follows can only be described as *God-sized*. An “angel of the Lord suddenly appeared” (Acts 12:7) and the situation tilted in favor of the believers. Peter’s subsequent release from prison is a reminder for our churches that heaven is interested in our efforts to proclaim the gospel. God is still tuned to the church’s *fervent* praying. As we seek his help, we will have it. By prayer, the church involves the presence of the Holy Spirit in unusual ways. Why? Because God’s interest is his kingdom. So, when the building of his kingdom becomes a church’s primary objective, evidenced by its pleading in prayer, that church will know God’s power in unforgettable ways—to God’s glory.

In Duesing’s account of Adoniram and Ann Judson’s departure from America to Burma in February 19, 1812, becoming the first Baptist missionaries from America, the following letter is found. Judson wrote on March 4, 1831 to his fellow missionary, Cephas Bennett “requesting 15,000 to 20,000 tracks [sic]. Attending the great annual Buddhist festival at the Shew Dagon in Rangoon, they experienced a might movement of God’s Spirit and an increased interest in the gospel.”⁴⁶ Judson’s letter stirs the church’s heart today as we consider the infinite power of the Spirit of God who presses the church to keep on with the gospel to the ends of the earth. Judson continues to his friend:

⁴⁵Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 257.

⁴⁶Jason G. Duesing, *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 177.

[We have distributed] nearly ten thousand tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been six thousand applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China—'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.' Others come from the frontiers of Kathay, a hundred miles north of Ava—'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.' Others come from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known—'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells about Jesus Christ.'⁴⁷

The Spirit of God finds a ready tool for kingdom building in any church willing to submit to his leadership. He stands ready to add power to preaching; fire to evangelism; and wisdom to strategy. Similarly to Judson, any such church will find the same Spirit to be an awe-inspiring ally in that work of the gospel.

⁴⁷Duesing, *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary*, 177–78.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROJECT

Overview

This chapter describes the project of reaching and assimilating internationals carried out at First Baptist Church Centerton from April 3, 2016, until June 18, 2016. In essence, the project was meant to awaken First Baptist Church Centerton to the growing lostness of the NWA population, particularly among the international community. First a general description of the project will be given. Second, the results of the project will be provided. Third, the five evaluators and their reviews of the five messages preached to First Baptist Church Centerton during the project will be listed.

The Project

In an effort to challenge First Baptist Centerton with the growing lostness of our community, especially among those moving to our area from other nations, this project was put before our people on April 3, 2016, through the preaching of a sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. The theme of the text relates to Paul's praise toward the young Thessalonian church for its boldness in sharing the gospel, despite great opposition. The sermon's proposition was found in verse eight: "The gospel must sound forth from First Baptist Church." Consistent forth-telling of the gospel will be a mark of distinction for any New Testament church, particularly for First Baptist Centerton. Five observations were made through the exposition of the text leading FBC to evaluate its own ministry. First, the church at Thessalonica would not allow any barrier to hinder their proclamation of the gospel. Second, this church knew what it meant to be saved from sin and idolatry. Third, the church at Thessalonica took full advantage of its position on the Egnatian Way,

an important ancient thoroughfare.¹ Fourth, this church was bold in its witness, seizing the opportunities given by God to saturate that part of the Roman Empire with the gospel. Fifth, as a result of these four truths, this church enjoyed a far-reaching impact.

Following the exposition of the text, for application, the international project was introduced to the people including a description of the pre-sermons survey. The pre-sermon surveys were then made available to the people following the service. Participants could choose to fill out the survey in paper format or online using a provided QR code card. Instruction was given to return the completed surveys by the next Sunday, April 10, 2016. A stated goal was to have at least one hundred surveys from qualified participants (i.e., members of FBC Centerton who were at least eighteen years of age) returned the following week.

On May 8, 2016, after the fifth of five consecutive project sermons, the identical survey was re-distributed to the qualifying participants. The participants in the post-survey were expected to have filled out the initial pre-survey, and to have listened to each of the five sermons, whether in person or online. They were instructed to return the post-sermons surveys by the next Sunday, May 15, 2016. A stated goal was to have at least 60 percent of the post-surveys (or 47 surveys) returned by May 15, 2016.

Also, at the conclusion of the fifth sermon, following the distribution of the post-surveys, a challenge was given to the church. How many connections/friendships with our international neighbors or co-workers could be initiated in a specific six-week period? The people were called to prayer for the project which was set to conclude on June 18, 2016. A goal of 50 such testimonies was put before the people.

The Project Results

Seventy-nine qualifying pre-sermon surveys were received by the deadline of

¹Constructed in the second century BC, this ancient Roman highway stretched some 700 miles from the east coast of the Adriatic Sea to the city of Byzantium (modern Istanbul).

April 10, 2016. This number eclipsed the goal of 60 pre-sermon surveys stated in the project. Following the five sermons from April 10-May 8, 2016, 17 post-surveys were received by the deadline of May 15, 2016. This number failed to meet the goal of 60 percent of the pre-sermon surveys, or 47 such surveys. Nine testimonies were received by the conclusion of the project, including the following four testimonies:

One Sunday morning I happened to sit by a young man, around my age, from India, sitting alone on the back row. We exchanged names and shook hands during greeting time and after the service I asked him if he knew anyone in the church. When he told me that he did not, I asked him if he wanted to meet my husband and his friends and then introduced him to them. He told us that he had come to our church because he lives nearby and was just curious about what happened there. He played basketball with a group of young men from the church that night, and through those relationships has heard the gospel, begun to attend the Exodus Tree of Life class and the Chastain's Connect Group. He continues to regularly attend Sunday service and play basketball on Sunday nights. All of these circumstances, from me sitting next to him completely by chance, to him coming to our church, and being so open to learning about Christianity, is very clearly a work of God and he should be glorified for it.

On recent travels to Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, I had the opportunity to share conversations, friendship and then the gospel to a Dublin, Ireland-born Canadian from Calgary. I was also able to share with a Quebec-born French/Canadian and finally with another Canadian from Alberta. God has truly blessed with the opportunities to share His truth both in Word and in deed. I am grateful for the boldness and the desire He has given me to share with those I meet as He leads!

There is a Family Dollar Store in our neighborhood. As I was checking out, I recognized the accent of the east-African clerk. I asked her where she was from, and she replied that she was from Kenya. I asked her where. She told me Kenya again. I apologized and ask her what town and tribe. She told me, and I told her some of the towns that my wife and I had been to, working with churches. There was a line of people waiting to check out. I told her we would be back to visit with her when she didn't have so many customers. We will let our friends, who are returned missionaries, know that she works there too. They live less than a mile from that store. The clue that she is open to further conversations was her big smile and the Kiswahili greeting she gave me as I left.

I was doing a home inspection for two men who are opening a business in the Fayetteville Mall. Nir was from Israel and Hosea is from Nicaragua. They had bought this five-bedroom house for their employees to live rent-free. Both men were very friendly and easy to talk to. I mentioned to Nir that I had been to Israel, so we talked about that, and before I left, he invited me to go with him to Israel sometime. Our time was limited because the realtor was there, but in that short time we made a connection.

The 9 testimonies failed to meet the goal of 50 such testimonies given during the six-

week period from May 8, 2016 to June 18, 2016.

By comparing the 17 completed post-surveys to their pre-sermon counterparts it is clear, at least for these learners, that there was an increase in their understanding of lostness and evangelism. For example, participant 128 is between the ages of 36-49 and has been a member of FBC Centerton for less than a year. On the question of the concentration of lostness in the NWA area (question 5), this learner moved dramatically from “disagree somewhat” to “strongly agree” indicating an increased awareness of lostness in our area. Also, on the question of having entertained an international friend in one’s home in the last five years (question 20), this person moved from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Participant 1640 is between the ages of 23-35 and has been a member of our church for less than one year. This learner moved significantly in his or her knowledge of the percentage of the world’s population that is designated as “Christian” (question 16) from “disagree somewhat” to “agree somewhat”. There was also a shift in his or her urgency to share the gospel (question 21), moving from “disagree” to “agree somewhat.”

Participant 5795 increased in his or her understanding of the lostness of our area, moving from “strongly disagree” to “agree somewhat” on question 5; moving from “strongly disagree” to “agree somewhat” on question 16; and moving from “strongly disagree” to “agree somewhat” on question 25. Each of these questions deal with a knowledge of the number of internationals living in NWA, as well as the percentage of the world’s population designated Christian and how many internationals live within a twenty-five mile radius of our church.

If these completed surveys are indicative of the church’s understanding, it is clear that the project did in fact raise awareness of the lostness of our community, particularly with regard to internationals. However, with so few responses, compared to the initial number of completed pre-sermon surveys, this is difficult to ascertain.

The Sermon Evaluations

Five messages on the commissions of Jesus to his church were preached on consecutive Sunday's, from April 10 to May 8, 2016. The first message from Matthew 28:18-20 was entitled "Only One Mission." The proposition was clear: "We have one mission—to make disciples." The church was reminded of the one imperative from the Great Commission, that of making disciples, and is accomplished by going, baptizing, and teaching. In this most familiar commission of our Lord, we learned five necessary factors that will ensure we actually are making disciples: that we know and believe Jesus' supreme authority; that we obey his command to go to the nations; that we baptize those who believe on his name; when we teach his followers his word; and when we depend on his presence.

The second message, from Luke 24:36-49, was entitled "You, Yes YOU, are Witnesses." The proposition of the message was given: "You are witnesses of these things." Every believer is to be a witness of the good news of Jesus. For this to happen several things must be true. First, we must be grounded in the word. Second, we must be willing to tell the whole gospel to the whole world. Third, we must simply speak about what we know of the gospel. And fourthly, we must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit as we go about it.

The third message, from Acts 1:1-11, was entitled "Do These Things till I Return." The proposition was stated at the beginning and throughout the message: "Jesus has given us everything necessary that he may build his kingdom." We observed, for example, that he gave us his power; his plan; and his promise. These gifts afford great confidence as the church overcomes fears (Jerusalem); prejudices (Samaria); and complacency (to the remotest parts of the earth).

The fourth message, taken from John's account of the Jesus' resurrection and commission found in John 20:19-23, was entitled "Sent by the Sent One." The premise of the text was stated clearly: "Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, so too we are sent by

him.” This message offered a summary of the first four messages reminding our church of our responsibility to tell the gospel. Also, the desperate situation of the lost soul was emphasized to our people. And finally, the power of the gospel was highlighted.

The fifth message, taken from Revelation 5:1-14, was entitled “The King at Work.” The proposition was emphasized regularly through the message: “As we serve the king, we join in the building of his kingdom.” In this text John gives the church a glimpse into its future by highlighting three different choirs, each building to a crescendo of praise directed toward the Lamb that Was Slain. The final, greatest, choir eventually encompasses *all* of creation. At the conclusion of this final song of praise, the four creatures give continual affirmation of Jesus’ praise with a resounding “Amen!” Their response is seemingly meant to echo throughout the universe preceding the breaking of the first seal on the scroll which introduces the judgment of God on this earth for rejecting the Lamb of God. In the three choral arrangements the church takes note of those from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The church is invited to join the king in bringing those from every nation into his kingdom.

Five pastors reviewed and offered critiques of the five messages. Each pastor was given a rubric to evaluate the biblical and theological fidelity of each sermon. The rubric included eight different areas to evaluate including: the relevancy of the sermon to the topic of Jesus’ commission to his church; the trueness of the message to the text; the theological accuracy of the sermon; whether the central proposition was stated and clearly articulated during the message; whether the points of the sermons were aligned to the proposition; the practical application of the sermons; whether the sermons sufficiently dealt with the texts; and finally, to what degree the sermons were effective. Using the rubric, the five pastors graded the five sermons at rates of .969 percent, .981 percent, .988 percent, .993 percent, and .975 percent respectively. The original percentage goal for the sermon rubrics was set at 90 percent to accomplish the goal of spiritual growth in the

hearers.

Each of the five pastors holds at least a master's degree in theological education, as well as at least five years of experience in the pastorate. The evaluators included the following men: Dr. John Brock, senior pastor, Highview Baptist Church, Florence, Alabama (D.Min., Reformed Theological Seminary, 2002; M.Div., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987); Scott Hill, pastor, Lakeside Baptist Church, Rogers, Arkansas (M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005); David Murphy, pastor, Northpark Baptist Church, Sherman, Texas (M.Div., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008); Nathan Rose, pastor, Liberty Baptist Church, Liberty, Missouri (M.Div., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009); J.D. Arnold, recent pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Jane, Missouri (M.A., Liberty University, 2012.)

CHAPTER 5
PROJECT EVALUATION AND
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter will evaluate the project as well as offer some insights gained through its implementation. First Baptist Church, Centerton, AR is strategically located in the heart of Benton County, which joined to Washington County, makes up what is commonly referred to as Northwest Arkansas (NWA). This region of Arkansas is regularly touted as having one of the fastest-growing regional economies in America. With large national (i.e., Tyson Foods and J.B. Hunt Transport) and international companies (i.e., Walmart) located in NWA, the population growth, particularly among internationals, has been significant in the past twenty-plus years. While some churches are having significant stand-alone ministries for specific segments of the population, FBC determined to attempt to reach and integrate other cultures *into* our ministry. This project was meant to foster that heart of reaching and assimilation of the growing international community into our ministry.

Summary of the Project

The project had a simple aim: to heighten the church's awareness of the growing concentration of lostness, especially among internationals living in the NWA region. A simple thirty-question survey was given to the church prior to, and following, the preaching of five sermons based on the commissions of Jesus to his church to reach the nations. Following the sermons and the post-survey, the church was then challenged to engage with internationals for a specific six-week period. During this practical stage of the project, participants were encouraged to submit brief testimonies of their involvement

in the lives of internationals during the six-week period.

The five sermons were evaluated by five fellow pastors using a rubric of eight categories to judge the biblical and theological trustworthiness of each of the five messages. The input from these pastors was important to affirm the accurate exposition of the texts as well as effective application. Each of the first four sermons dealt with one of the commissions of Jesus to his church to evangelize the nations, including Matthew 28, Luke 24, Acts 1, and John 20. The fifth message examined the culmination of the historic evangelization of the church over the centuries, found in John's vision in Revelation 5.

Evaluation of the Goals

Only two of the four goals listed at the outset of the project were actually met during the project. The first goal, meant to ascertain the level of the church's understanding of the need to evangelize the nations, involved a pre-sermons survey was given to the church on April 3. The goal was to receive at least sixty completed surveys by the next Sunday, April 10. Seventy-nine surveys were actually collected.

Generally speaking, the surveys revealed a healthy understanding in our church related to evangelism. With regard to soteriology, 94 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that only followers of Jesus Christ will go to heaven (question 9). Ninety-five respondents strongly agreed that anyone who rejects Jesus Christ as Lord will spend eternity in hell (question 10). Ninety-six percent strongly disagreed with the statement "Eventually, God will allow everyone into heaven" (question 11). Interestingly, a large majority of the participants affirmed the need for the Holy Spirit to draw sinners to faith in Christ in question 14 (78 percent strongly agreed, 15 percent agreed). Prejudice in the church, with regard to the integration of internationals, appears to be negligible (question 23). Eighty-seven percent of the surveys indicated a strong disagreement in being troubled with an international member assuming a key position of leadership, i.e., pastoral level, deacon, teacher, etc. A combined 90 percent of the surveys reacted in

disagreement about having a struggle with prejudice (question 24). Ninety percent of the respondents affirmed to some degree that they actually know the name of an international living in our community.

The pre-surveys did reveal some areas of improvement for the church to consider. With regard to praying daily for the lost (question 18), only 10 percent strongly agreed, with another 18 percent agreeing, and 31 percent agreeing somewhat. A combined 38 percent of the respondents disagreed with question 19 about actually knowing the names of their neighbors and actively pursuing friendships with them. Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated they have not been trained in evangelism (question 29).

The second goal to be met was the development and delivery of a five-sermon series based on the commissions of Jesus. While familiar to many church members, the commissions of Jesus must be reviewed and re-examined on a regular basis. Five fellow pastors examined the five messages using an eight-question rubric. The goal of receiving at least a 90 percent rating on each of the sermons was met. This goal was helpful in preparation for preaching the five messages, especially in the areas of the sermons propositions and applications. The five pastors did not hesitate to challenge or fail to encourage.

The third goal was to preach the approved messages to the church body at First Baptist Centerton, Arkansas over a five-week period from April 10 until May 8. The sermons were preached with dependence upon the Holy Spirit for conviction and clarity in the delivery. Included in this third goal was a re-evaluation of the church family by re-issuing the thirty questions given at the outset of the project. The goal was to receive at least forty-seven completed post-surveys. However, only 17 completed surveys were received by the deadline of May 15, falling short of the goal. Of those surveys received, there were some helpful insights. On question 21, there appeared to be an increase in the

urgency to share the gospel, moving from 17 percent in the pre-surveys to 35 percent in the post-surveys. Thirty-four percent of the respondents on the post-surveys strongly agreed with the question of having an ongoing friendship with an international in NWA (question 6) as opposed to only 15 percent of the pre-survey respondents strongly agreeing with the question. On question 27, “I can finish the pastor’s statement, ‘We exist to . . .’” there was an increase from 45 percent to 53 percent of respondents who strongly agreed.

The fourth goal was to see at least fifty connections with internationals by our church members over a six-week period extending from May 8 until June 18. This goal was not met, as only nine testimonies were submitted by the deadline. Several attempts were made over the six-week period to encourage the people to seek opportunities to engage internationals, and to relay the results of those encounters.

Strengths

The project had several strengths. The first relates to the challenge of having five pastors evaluating each of the five project sermons prior to delivery of the messages. These fellow pastors used a rubric of eight categories for each message. For the first time in a twenty-year preaching ministry, my sermons were submitted for review and evaluation. This accountability was not only a new experience, but a refreshing one as well. The comments given by friends, each accomplished in the field of preaching, were challenging at times, but largely filled with encouragement. To be strengthened in the area of application, learning better how to bring listeners to both conviction and action, was significant.

A second strength of the project was the clear reminder to First Baptist Church Centerton of our responsibility to reach our community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any church, including ours, is prone to rest on a “come to the church” mentality of

evangelism, rather than a “go to them” with the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection. God has commanded his church to make disciples by *going* to the lost, *baptizing* those who repent, and *teaching* the way of Christ to those new believers. In this project, FBC was reminded to not depend on the lost, particularly those internationals moving to our community, somehow finding their way to FBC Centerton—we must go to them. Our members were challenged to engage the lost through friendship evangelism. This method of reaching the lost has been referred to as “as you go” evangelism, albeit in this case, with a sharp lookout for internationals.

A third strength surely relates to the head-on emphasis of assimilating internationals into our church’s ministry. Any vestige of prejudice toward those coming into our fellowship was challenged as the project boldly and simply called the church to reach internationals with the intent of seeing them become part of the life and ministry of our church. While in the past it has been an accepted ministry model to segregate those from other countries into their own cultural groups, this project openly led the church to reconsider its ministry to assimilate into its life those from other countries and cultures.

Weaknesses

Several inherent weaknesses arose in the project. First, there was a significant gap between the initial surveys, with seventy-nine received in the first week of the project, and the post-sermon surveys distributed five weeks later. With such a distance from the original emphasis on the project, there was a significant drop off in the number of post-surveys received at the end of the project. The second weakness was the generality of the application of the project. The people were given six weeks to initiate connections and friendships with internationals after hearing the five messages on the commissions of Jesus to his church. However, there was no training or connection with other members for encouragement. There was an assumption that each member would

simply follow through with the challenge to connect with an international during the six-week period, with little accountability in the process. As a result very few testimonies of connections with internationals were actually received. It appears that the anonymity of the surveys actually allowed the participants to be excused from the more difficult one-to-one actual conversations with lost friends and co-workers. Third, the reporting system was lacking. It appears that asking for participants to write out brief descriptions of their witnessing encounters may have been intimidating to some. Rather than having a simple process of acknowledging a discussion, conversation, or encounter with an international, they were asked to write about the encounter. While these descriptions were helpful to share with the church at large, even inspirational for some, it appears that others found the exercise to be taxing.

What I Would Have Done Differently

I would make several changes to make the project stronger and more effective for the church. While the emphasis on the lostness of our community was important, especially the highlighting of the growing numbers of internationals living near us, the application of the project could have been improved. First, the survey process could have been highlighted in a more effective way. Perhaps a lunch could have been provided for participants prior to the filling out of the first survey. At this gathering a very clear explanation of the responsibilities of the participants could have been emphasized. Then, at the end of the five sermons, a second lunch could have been used to bring the group back together for more guidance and inspiration. Having such an anonymous group of participants did not afford an opportunity for inspiring them to finish well on the project. Also, the lunches would have been good times for talking through questions on the project and even discussing the five sermons highlighting the need of evangelization.

Second, it is clear the six-weeks of application would have been strengthened by regular contact with those participating in the project. A daily text or email to

participants would have encouraged their connection with internationals, as well as their reporting of those encounters. The emphasis on anonymity for the surveys, which in turn meant there was no contact information gathered for the participants, resulted in a loss of personal contact during the process of application. In effect, the only means of encouragement to the participants was from the pulpit each Sunday, as well as occasional emails to the entire church. The project would have been strengthened with a regular, personal contact to heighten awareness and promote accountability in the connection with internationals.

Third, providing a means of talk-back and discussion of the five messages would have proved valuable to the project. Perhaps incorporating these talk-back times in our regular Sunday evening prayer times would have been used to strengthen the entire project. Others would have been inspired to accept the challenge of connecting with internationals for the sake of the gospel. It is certain that such weekly discussion would have promoted the need of focused prayer for the souls of the lost in our community. There is a sense that the project may not have maximized its impact on the church for the sake of evangelism.

Conclusion

The First Baptist Church of Centerton, Arkansas is strategically located in the heart of Benton County in Northwest Arkansas. The church has demonstrated a burden for the nations. Consider their adoption of the Bedia, an unreached people group in South Asia, since 2007. Also, their ongoing support of an Iranian pastor planting the first Farsi-speaking church among refugees in Athens, Greece, indicates a kingdom mindset. At the same time, the church has realized its obligation to reach the lost, particularly internationals, living in their own neighborhoods as well. There has been little hesitation in assimilating internationals into ministry. This project was meant to remind this dear church of their responsibility of friendship, *as you go*, evangelism. All glory to Jesus!

APPENDIX 1
EVANGELISM SURVEY

Personal Identification Code (please choose and remember a four digit code): _ _ _ _

Agreement to Participate (part one)

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your level of understanding of evangelism in our church. This research is being conducted by Stuart Bell for purposes of project research required for the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, you will be asked to fill out this survey, both prior to, and following the five DMin project sermons preached by Stuart Bell. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Agreement to Participate (part two)

To be included in the project, please place a check beside each statement:

- I agree to submit a pre-survey using an anonymous four-digit code
- I agree to listen to five sermons, either in person or online
- I agree to submit a post-survey using the same anonymous four-digit code
- I agree to participate in a six-week practical application period

I. PERSONAL BACKGROUND (Please place a check beside each answer)

1. What is your age?

18-22

23-35

36-49

50-65

66-above

2. How long have you been a follower of Christ?

Less than a year-5 years

6-15 years

16-25 years

26 years or longer

3. Are you a member of First Baptist Church Centeron?

Yes

No

4. How many years have you been a member of First Baptist Church Centeron?

Less than 1-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16 years or more

II. PERSONAL OPINION (Please indicate your opinion using the following scale)

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

1. I have shared my faith with another person since becoming a Christian.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. I have personally led another person to Christ since becoming a Christian.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. I am able to clearly explain the gospel using Biblical references.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. I am confident in sharing my faith.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. I am aware of the approximate number of internationals living in the Northwest Arkansas.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. I have an ongoing friendship with an international person living in Northwest Arkansas.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. I feel confident in discussing my faith with a person of another religion.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. I am confident in initiating a spiritual conversation with a person of another religion.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. I believe that only followers of Jesus Christ will go to heaven.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. Anyone who rejects Christ as Lord will spend eternity in hell.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. Eventually, God will allow everyone into heaven.

SD D DS AS A SA

12. Hindus and Muslims will go to heaven.

SD D DS AS A SA

13. Christians should seek to convert people of other religions.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. The Holy Spirit must draw a person to faith in Christ.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. Prayers of believers actually make a difference in the conversion of the lost.

SD D DS AS A SA

16. I know the approximate percentage of the world population designated as *Christian*.

SD D DS AS A SA

17. Allah and Jehovah are different names for the same God.

SD D DS AS A SA

18. I pray for opportunities every day to share my faith with others.

SD D DS AS A SA

19. I know the names of my neighbors and am actively pursuing friendships with them.

SD D DS AS A SA

20. I have entertained an international friend in my home here in Northwest Arkansas within the last five years.

SD D DS AS A SA

21. I have an urgency to share my faith with the lost.

SD D DS AS A SA

22. I believe Christian internationals should be welcomed into our church's membership.

SD D DS AS A SA

23. It troubles me to think about an international person serving in a key leadership position in our church, i.e. pastor, deacon, or Sunday school teacher.

SD D DS AS A SA

24. I struggle with personal prejudice with people of other races.

SD D DS AS A SA

25. I know the approximate number of people living within a twenty-five mile radius of our church.

SD D DS AS A SA

26. The church's first responsibility is the welfare of its members.

SD D DS AS A SA

27. I can finish our pastor's statement: "We exist to . . ."

SD D DS AS A SA

28. I know the name of an international person living in Northwest Arkansas.

SD D DS AS A SA

29. I have been trained in personal evangelism.

SD D DS AS A SA

30. A person can be saved by observing my good life.

SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Biblical and Theological Fidelity Tool					
Sermon Evaluation					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon is clearly relevant to the topic of the church's responsibility to reach the nations with the gospel.					
The sermon is true to the biblical text.					
The sermon is theologically accurate.					
The proposition of the sermon is clearly stated and affirmed throughout the sermon.					
The points of the sermon clearly support the proposition.					
The sermon contains points of practical application.					
The sermon is sufficiently thorough in dealing with the text.					
Overall, the sermon is effective.					

APPENDIX 3

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS DEMOGRAPHICS

Benton County Demographics

Source: quickfacts.census.gov (based on 2010 census)

Bentonville

American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	1.2%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	8.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.2%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.5%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	8.7%
White alone, percent, 2010	81.4%

Centerton

American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	1.2%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	2.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.6%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	12.2%
White alone, percent, 2010	84.0%

Pea Ridge

White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	93.6%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.9%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	Z
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.0%

Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	5.8%
---------------------------------------	------

Rogers

American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	1.0%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	2.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.3%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	3.0%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	31.5%
White alone, percent, 2010	73.7%

Siloam Springs

White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	74.2%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	4.6%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	1.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	Z
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	5.0%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	20.8%

Washington County Demographics

Source: quickfacts.census.gov (based on 2010 census)

Fayetteville

White alone, percent, 2010 (a)93.6%	77.0%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.9%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	Z
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.0%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	5.8%

Springdale

White alone, percent, 2010 (a)	64.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent, 2010 (a)	1.0%
Asian alone, percent, 2010 (a)	2.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent, 2010 (a)	5.7%
Two or More Races, percent, 2010	2.9%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2010 (b)	35.4%

NWA Demographics (2013)

Source: <http://www.nwacouncil.org/pages/demographics>

2013 White Population (Esri) (%)	79.9
2013 Black/African American Population (Esri) (%)	2.8
2013 American Indian/Alaska Native Population (Esri) (%)	1.4
2013 Asian Population (Esri) (%)	2.5
2013 Other Race Population (Esri) (%)	9.5
2013 Population of Two or More Races (Esri) (%)	2.8
2013 Hispanic Population (Esri) (%)	16.8

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013.
- Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*: Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36. 2nd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- _____. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996.
- Bock, Darrell L., and Mitch Glaser. *The Gospel according to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2012.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, and Manfred Weber. *Meditations on the Cross*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- Bridges, Jerry. *The Pursuit of Holiness*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978.
- Bridges, Jerry, and Bob Bevington. *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of the Acts*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.
- Burge, Gary M. *John*: The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Carson, D. A. *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*. Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987.
- _____. *The Gospel according to John*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990.
- Carson, D. A., Walter W. Wessel, and Mark L. Strauss. "Matthew." In *Matthew and Mark*, edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, 23-670. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

- Chan, Francis, and Preston M. Sprinkle. *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity and the Things We Made up*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011.
- Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, and William Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Dever, Mark, and Michael Lawrence. *It Is Well: Expositions on Substitutionary Atonement*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Dever, Mark E. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 1998.
- DeYoung, Kevin, and Greg Gilbert. *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Duesing, Jason G. *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel according to Mark*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Casebook*. Edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, Caleb J.D. Maskell, and Kenneth P. Minkema. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.
- _____. *The Wrath of Almighty God: Jonathan Edwards on God's Judgment against Sinners*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014.
- _____. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.
- Garland, David E. *Luke*. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- _____. *Mark*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Greear, J. D. *Gospel*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Green, Michael. *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina. Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2006.

- _____. *The Gospel of Luke*. Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1991.
- Keener, Craig S. *Matthew*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- _____. *Revelation*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Scott R. Swain. *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*. Nottingham, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Lane, William. *The Gospel of Mark*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.
- Morris, Leon. *The Cross in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965.
- _____. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.
- _____. *Luke, an Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.
- Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.
- _____. *Matthew*. New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.
- Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Packer, J. I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009.
- Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

- _____. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Smalley, Stephen S. *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- _____. *Mark*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Stott, John. *The Spirit the Church and the World: The Message of Acts*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- _____. *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Tyra, Gary. *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Ware, Bruce A. *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Ware, James P. *The Mission of the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism*. Boston: Brill, 2005.
- Wilkins, Michael J. *Matthew: From Biblical Text—to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Williams, Jarvis J. *For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul's Theology*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH CENTERTON, ARKANSAS TO EVANGELIZE AND ASSIMILATE INTERNATIONALS

Stuart Allen Bell, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William F. Cook, III

This project seeks to lead First Baptist Church, Centerton, Arkansas, to understand, accept, and act upon their responsibility of reaching the growing international community living in the Northwest Arkansas region. Chapter 1 introduces the need to reach and assimilate internationals into the life and ministry of First Baptist Centerton. Chapter 2 gives a biblical and theological basis for evangelism by examining the commissions of Jesus found in the gospels, as well as a culmination text in Revelation. Chapter 3 deals with theoretical and practical issues associated with evangelism. Chapter 4 describes the details of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the results of the project, including personal reflections on the project.

VITA

Stuart Allen Bell

EDUCATION

B.A., John Brown University, 1983

M.A., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987

MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE

Children/Recreation/Youth Minister, Field Street Baptist Church, Cleburne, Texas, 1983-1989

Youth Minister, First Baptist Church, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1990-1993

Pastor, Forrest Park Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, 1993-1996

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Searcy, Arkansas, 1996-1998

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Centerton, Arkansas, 1998-2016

Church Planter, North American Mission Board, Seattle, Washington, 2016