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DESIGNING A NEIGHBORING GUIDE FOR THE HICKORY
GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH SMALL GROUP LEADERS
IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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APPROVAL SHEET

DESIGNING A NEIGHBORING GUIDE FOR THE HICKORY
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This project, and its completion, are dedicated to my wife, Erin. Flip over the dictionary, shake out every word, and you will still lack the words to adequately describe her. Her capacity to love and serve others is beyond measure. She is God's gift to me.

I dedicate this project to our three children, Will, Aubrey Jane, and Jace. All three of them have encouraged me in their own unique ways throughout this process. May God awake the three of you in the glorious grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I further dedicate this project to my parents, Mike and Pam Paslay. From the moment I existed, they began to heap inflammable gospel truths onto my cold, unbelieving heart, praying that if and when the Holy Spirit fell, there would be plenty of kindling for the spark to catch my heart on fire for Jesus.

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PREFACE

It is difficult to fathom that my redeemed, yet finite thoughts, decisions, and affections involved in the completion of this project were influenced by an infinite God who is perfect in all his ways. Only through Christ is there any hope that the way of this project might reflect the Father's ways.

This project is a snapshot of the life-giving support of my wife, Erin, whose wellspring of life is sourced by the Lord and experienced by countless others. Her desire for the Lord to use this project to send more gospel workers into the harvest is shown by the innumerable sacrifices she has made to help me see it to completion.

Dr. Adam Greenway, my project supervisor, as a professor and friend, has consistently guided me from my first days of seminary to the completion of this project. I am forever grateful for his impact on my spiritual formation.

Rev. Dan Dumas, my cohort leader and instructor, is proven in his ability to shape culture and develop high-capacity leaders.

Rev. Clint Pressley, my pastor, preacher, and friend, is gifted to lead out, minister the Word, and bring calm to frenzied flocks is uncanny.

Dr. Mike Daniels, my mentor and friend in the thick and thin of life and ministry, has always been there to encourage, counsel, and challenge me in the ways of Jesus.

I once heard it said, "Any congregation God calls you to serve is better than you deserve." If that is the case, and I am certain it is, then serving Hickory Grove Baptist

Church is proof that I experience the abounding grace of the Lord. It is the joy of my life to undershepherd the flock of God.

Justin Paslay

Charlotte, North Carolina

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The church is Jesus' idea. When looking in the Bible, one finds that Jesus, when his disciples first confessed him as the Messiah, said he would found his church. His people, his assembly, would be built from this confession. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts, Jesus explains this more. At the end of Matthew, Jesus commands his disciples to go and tell the Good News across the world and to teach others to obey everything he had commanded.

Essentially, Christ-followers must go to neighboring homes, cities, countries, and continents. Obedience to Christ's command demands followers of Jesus to love their neighbors and display such sacrificial love by engaging them with cultural sensitivity. Introductions, first impressions, thoughtful listening, non-verbal communication, doing kind deeds, and even the careful exchanging of words play a key role in allowing only the gospel itself to be a barrier to faith in Jesus. Under the command of Jesus, Christians are implored to consider and value every interaction, even those that are uncontrollably awkward or life-threatening, as opportunities to present people with the Good News of Jesus.

In obedience to Christ's command to make disciples and in light of the cultural sensitivity shown by the earliest followers of Jesus, the small group leaders of Hickory Grove Baptist Church (HGBC) in Charlotte, North Carolina, desire to avoid the addition of barriers as they engage their neighbors with the gospel.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of HGBC in Charlotte, North Carolina. At the time of its inception in November 1955, the first members met in a dairy

barn. The next fifty years yielded a numeric increase in membership, conversions, baptisms, land acquisitions, pastoral staff, ministry programs, operating budget, missions offerings, worship services, Sunday School classes, debt, and campuses. Archived spreadsheets and several thousand square feet of building space provide quantitative evidence of HGBC's growth in human bodies, buildings, and budget. With a heart to see more Charlotte residents take part in what was happening in the life of the church, HGBC began to discuss the various ways to increase its reach into the city. In 1995, shortly after discussion began, HGBC's North Campus was established. Like the Main Campus, this newly established campus experienced the same upward trend in bodies, buildings, and budget.

In January 2010, HGBC experienced a change that, even though inevitable, created congregational consternation about the future: a transition in senior pastor leadership. Joe Brown pastored HGBC for twenty-six years, and in January 2011, the church voted Clint Pressley to take the helm as the new senior pastor. The transition proved not merely a passing of the baton, but a tectonic shift in HGBC's theology, church culture, and understanding of the church's role in God's global mission of making his name known in all nations. The Lord used a renewed emphasis on expositional preaching to be the catalyst for change. More than a change in the color of the carpet or the usability of the website, the sufficiency of God's Word and faithfulness of the Holy Spirit brought about renewed minds, Christ-centered affections, and a fresh yearning for God to mobilize, send, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus to a lost and dying world.

Several other emphasis were renewed in an effort to increase the health and strength of the HGBC membership. First, the importance of church membership was addressed. Discover HG, an eight-week new members' class, was created to clarify the beliefs, vision, mission, and strategy of the church. Second, in the process of creating Discover HG, the church covenant was revised and utilized in the membership process. Third, the pastors began to meet with each baptism candidate to interview and eventually

determine the candidate's readiness to be baptized. Fourth, the increase in the importance of church membership helped the pastoral staff engage church members in conversations that either equipped, edified, or even rebuked them in their walk with Jesus. These efforts led the congregations' focus to shift further in the direction of fulfilling the commands of Jesus.

The Lord has stirred the congregation's heart to not only cherish the gospel, but to faithfully present it to those outside of Jesus. The Lord has led certain individuals, families, and groups of people to pray for an unshakeable burden for the lost, while intently focused on determining the best means by which people may be presented the gospel and respond to the call to come to saving faith and trust in Jesus. It was of first-level priority for HGBC to design a guide (GO:Guide) to help its members engage the lost, more specifically, their neighbors so that the gospel may be presented with cultural sensitivity.

Rationale

Based on the contextual factors, numerous reasons motivated the need to create and design a neighboring guide for HGBC members.

First, the 650,000 square feet of building space sitting on 200 acres of land is evidence of a ministry philosophy that at one point in time existed at HGBC. Every building on the property was built from 1960 to the mid-1990s. The pace of construction and design layout stemmed from a philosophy that is now referred to as "the church growth movement."¹ This movement caught on as churches, particularly Southern Baptist mega churches like HGBC, believed the prioritization of reaching the lost justified the means of constructing buildings that attracted people to the church campus. The thought was once newcomers stepped onto the church property and into the buildings, the odds of them eventually hearing about Jesus would increase. Family Life Centers with multiple

¹ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 21

basketball courts, weight rooms, exercise rooms, racquetball courts, indoor playgrounds, and even bowling alleys were common components of buildings built during this church growth movement. Consequently, the majority of ministry planning and efforts were spent getting people to the building. For three decades, HGBC propagated this ministry philosophy and mindset, naturally leading to a pattern of planning for the next crowd to come to one of the church campuses. The side effect that lingers still today is a building-centric, attractational approach to ministry. For this reason, a neighboring guide that instructs the current HGBC members to shift the focus from the church campus to the gospel needs of their neighbors was beneficial.

Second, the process of gathering crowds led to the development of consumeristic congregants. Because the focus was constantly about the church meeting the needs of the congregation, a neighboring guide directing and teaching such congregants to turn outward and engage their lost neighbors with the truth of the gospel while considering the cultural hang-ups that kept them from confessing Jesus as Lord proved necessary. The designing of a GO:Guide led church members to consider the importance of engaging their neighbors with cultural sensitivity.

Third, covenant members of HGBC are scattered amongst the citizens of Charlotte, a city that statistically communicates its desperate need for the Good News of Jesus Christ. Every day, 109 people move into the Charlotte metro area, adding to its population of 2.4 million people.² One in 7 of the residents of Charlotte are foreign born.³ The GO:Guide directed church members to consider the cultural differences that naturally occurred based on the background of new neighbors who recently moved into the city of Charlotte.

² Rob Kelly, "State of the City Report 2018," 8, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://forcharlotte.org/state-of-the-city/>.

³ Ibid., 9.

The potential for significant kingdom expansion to happen as a result of God’s people learning to be loving students of their neighbors and the cultural influences that shaped them is worth the effort required so as to prevent the adding of unnecessary barriers to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Such potential called for the creation and design of a guide that is kingdom-building, mission-minded, neighbor-focused, and missiologically sound. Hence, the reason for this project and the creation and design of the GO:Guide.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to design a neighboring guide for the HGBC small group leaders of HGBC in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Goals

Three goals directed the design of the GO:Guide. The New Testament commands of Jesus to “love your neighbor” and “make disciples” informed the necessary components of the guide.

1. The first goal was to assess the current mindset and approach taken by HGBC small group leaders to engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity.
2. The second goal was to design, with the help of missiological experts, a neighboring guide (GO:Guide) that would instruct the HGBC small group leaders in how to engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity.
3. The third goal was to increase the amount of effort made by the HGBC small group leaders to ascertain key insights into the cultural complexities of nearby neighbors.

Each of the goals was completed according to defined measurements and established metrics of success. The next section details the research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of all three goals.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current mindset and approach taken by HGBC small group leaders to engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity. This goal was measured by administering a Great Commission Inventory (GCI) to the North Campus

small group leaders of HGBC.⁴ The inventory assessed the type of thinking and the degree to which effort was made to further know the cultural complexities of neighbors living nearby. The small group leaders were questioned in order to better understand their motives, practices, and aspirations regarding the Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and engaging neighbors with cultural sensitivity. The goal was met when 80 percent of the surveys were completed and compiled for analysis. The completion of this goal helpfully informed the creation and design of the GO:Guide.

The second goal was to create, with the help of missiological experts, a neighboring guide (GO:Guide) that would instruct the HGBC small group leaders in how to engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity. This goal was measured by a panel of four people consisting of two North American church planters and two international church planters. These experts utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical fidelity, organization, scope, applicability, and clarity of the GO:Guide. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the initial feedback had yielded less than 90 percent, the guide was to be revised until it met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase the amount of effort made by the HGBC small group leaders to ascertain key insights into the cultural complexities of nearby neighbors. The goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey, which was used to evaluate the change in the small group leaders' level of effort and insight in getting to know their neighbors living nearby. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

⁴ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following key terms were used throughout this project:

Missio Dei. This project defines *missio Dei* as the mission of God. Until the sixteenth century, the concept *missio Dei* referred to the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically, the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.⁵ Then, in the twentieth century, the phrase was more widely used to refer to the missionary enterprise of spreading Christianity among non-Christians. By the mid-twentieth century, the term *missio Dei* grew in popularity and was being widely used by both ecumenicals and evangelicals.⁶ Despite a lack of consensus and differences in usage, the concept remains useful. In using this concept of *missio Dei*, this project did not associate itself with the non-evangelical uses that determine mission.

Missional. This project utilizes the definition provided by Nathan Finn and Keith Whitfield in *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church*. They provide a full-shaped definition of the adjective *missional* as they propose these three helpful statements and explanations:

1. Being *missional* means living directed by the mission of God. God's purpose is to be known as the Lord over his creation. His people are called to join him by making him known as Lord over all things.
2. Being *missional* means living a life shaped by the mission of God. God's mission establishes a kingdom where he is known as Lord and is praised. The people of God are a kingdom people, who dwell with God through his Spirit, enjoy his blessings, and are known by faith, hope, and love.
3. Being *missional* means living sent on the mission of God. The church is sent into the world by their Savior with an evangelistic calling: to proclaim that the God of all creation has mercifully made himself known through Jesus Christ and that there is forgiveness of sins and transforming grace available to all who enter his kingdom through repentance and faith.⁷

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 1.

⁶ Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 18.

⁷ Nathan A. Finn and Keith Whitfield, eds., *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 27.

The term *missional* is a contested term that can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the group and the context. Evangelicals, ecumenicals, and even the emergent camp have utilized the term. All three camps understand and use the term differently. Even within the evangelical camp, the term has been understood and used differently. Despite the various uses, *missional* remains a helpful term. Not only should it be used, but evangelicals would be well served to gain greater consensus.

This project had delimitations in a few areas to provide precision and clarity. First, each of the project's participants was an active adult member of HGBC. Second, only small group leaders from HGBC's North Campus participated in the project. Third, the project was completed at a megachurch with numerous small group leaders involved in ministries outside of the adult ministry. However, this project only included the small group leaders in the adult ministry. Fourth, the project focused on the small group leaders' outreach efforts. The small group leaders at HGBC have many other responsibilities. Teaching the Bible on a consistent basis is an example of another responsibility that requires a substantial time commitment. Finally, this project was limited to a period of sixteen weeks.

Conclusion

God expands his kingdom through the gospel witness of Christ-followers loving their neighbors as they love themselves. Such love declares and demonstrates the gospel with cultural sensitivity, eliminating obstacles unnecessarily added to the gospel presented. The gospel proclaimed is the power unto salvation, and the broken systems of this world ceaselessly press against both the people of God and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus. The GO:Guide was designed to instruct, direct, and educate HGBC small group leaders in how to engage their neighbors while striving to ever-increase in cultural sensitivity and eliminate cultural illiteracy.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE REDEEMED PEOPLE OF GOD ENGAGING THE LOST FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

Even before the canon of Scripture was recognized, the church viewed its mission as the global evangelization of all peoples not yet found in Christ. The list of biblical passages that can be adduced to provide the full picture of the mission is exhaustive. The story of the Bible tells of the one true God redeeming for himself a people from among every tribe, tongue, and nation. It is God's mission. Therefore, despite the self-worship and disobedience of his people, the accomplishment of the mission is certain, and the glory given to God is guaranteed. Luke understands this truth when he writes, "Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). Though God does not need help in carrying out his plan or displaying his power, he entrusts Christ-followers, empowered by the Spirit, to love their neighbors in declaring and demonstrating the gospel.

Biblical Perspective

God so loved his children that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem them from their sins. Paul writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). The mission is God's work toward the redemption of humanity. Christ-followers, purchased by the blood of Christ and purposed by his life, do just as God did for them, positioning their lives toward lost humanity, making every effort to present Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

This chapter examines key texts that provide a biblical understanding of what takes place when the people of God engage their lost neighbors for the sake of the gospel.

Understanding these biblical truths justifies the use of profitable, God-ordained methods as gospel messengers strive to engage the lost with cultural sensitivity.

Increase Worship: Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah 6:1-8 presents many gospel truths. Isaiah is called to the throne room of God (6:1) where he sees the glory of God (6:1, 5). Upon seeing the glory of God, he makes a confession (6:5). He is lost. He is a man of unclean lips (he is a sinner) and he lives amid a people of unclean lips, and upon his confession, he is cleansed (6:6-7). After experiencing cleansing, God asks Isaiah a question: who will go for us? Isaiah responds: “Here I am! Send me!” (6:8).

Isaiah could eventually respond as a willing messenger to go at God’s command; however, upon entering the presence of the Heavenly Council, the holiness of God and the presence of the Seraphim are too much for the prophet. He is overwhelmed with a feeling of unworthiness. John Watts writes, “The prophet is constrained to join the praise, but dares not. His own nature (“unclean lips”) as well as that of his people does not allow him to speak in the assembly.”¹ Isaiah is deathly aware of the uncleanness of he and the people. In God’s presence, everything is pure and right in worship. John Oswalt offers this perspective when he writes, “It is not merely purification of the lips or ritual purification that is needed. In some way, sin and iniquity must be removed if Isaiah (and his people) are ever to serve God with clean lips.”²

In essence, Isaiah must experience the progression of the gospel at work. Those lost in sin see God’s glory in the person and work of Christ. They understand that they are sinners, unworthy of grace and in need of mercy. Upon making this confession and placing their trust in Christ, they are cleansed of their sins. After experiencing the

¹ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 75.

² John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 183.

movement from an unclean sinner to a cleansed saint, the only proper response is to go to others with the intention of pointing them to the glory of God as seen in the gospel.

Gary Smith writes, “The central feature of this revelation was the appearance of God sitting as a king on a highly elevated ‘royal throne’ (*kisseh* 6:1).”³ In this vision, Isaiah sees God more fully than before, and his noticeable response is to worship. Simply seeing God provoked Isaiah to worship. Other texts in Scripture demand from Christ-followers what can be observed in Isaiah’s calling to go and increase worship.

God’s people, redeemed and reconciled through faith in Christ, are commanded to worship (Matt 4:10). God seeks people to worship him (John 4:23-24) because God is worthy of praise (Ps 96:1-9). Indeed, man is not only purposed to worship (Isa 43:7), but is chosen before the foundation of the world. Man is called, regenerated, justified, and commanded to follow Jesus, living a life that personally increases worship of God and leads others to do the same (Eph 4:1, 17-24).

Isaiah’s vision calling provides the motivation to make the name of Jesus known and increase the worship he is worthy of receiving. In light of Isaiah’s response, Oswalt writes, “Having believed with certainty that he was about to be crushed into non-existence by the very holiness of God and having received an unsought for and unmerited, complete cleansing, what else would he rather do than hurl himself into God’s service?”⁴ Worshipping God must be an activity of the heart (Isa 29:13) and a personal treasuring of God’s value and worth. As seen in the account of Isaiah’s vision calling, worship is characterized by obedience to God’s commands (1 John 2:3-6). Worship aims toward godliness or personal holiness (1 Tim 4:6-8), which is then modeled and taught through

³ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, The New American Commentary, vol. 15A (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 187.

⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 186.

the witness of God's people to a lost world. Isaiah finds that being joined to God means joining a missionary society: he has been brought in to be sent out.⁵

Love Like Jesus: John 13:1-11

In John 13, Jesus turns his attention from his public ministry of preaching and teaching and begins to tend to his disciples and preparing for his death. John writes, "He knew that his hour had come to depart from the world" (v. 1) The urgency of the task for which he was sent to earth has now come to bear, and Jesus has gathered his closest followers for a meal taking place within the Passover week.

The shadow of the cross is looming over these thirteen men, and the time has come for Jesus to concretize the disciples' faith by teaching and modeling eternally important points. Jesus does this primarily by rolling up his sleeves and kneeling down at the dirty feet of his followers. Washing another's feet was a task normally reserved for the lowliest of servants; a job reserved for Gentile slaves.⁶ This is a rare act of special love. Jesus had loved his own all along; he now showed them the full extent of his love.⁷

Loved from the Beginning

John 13:1 is a picture of the fullness of Christ's love for his disciples then and now. John writes, "Having loved . . ." In English verb tenses, this is a perfect progressive form. Jesus did not decide to start loving his disciples at this meal. The loving action of washing their feet flowed from the past. Everything Jesus had done in the past has been done out love. This is an act of love that flowed from the past. In fact, Jesus loved his disciples before time began. He loved them before they knew of Jesus, before they followed, and even before they lacked faith in Jesus. "Having loved" is the commitment

⁵ J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 83.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 462.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 461.

Christ makes from the beginning that he will never leave, nor forsake his followers. There is nothing they can do to rid Jesus of his love for them. “Having loved” means the Lord is going to keep loving.

The kind of love Jesus has for his church is permanent in nature. It started from the beginning and will not disappear at life’s end. It is an eternal love.

Loved in the Present Moment

Jesus “loved his own who were in the world” (13:1). There is no hiding the sin that the redeemed children of God commit on a moment-by-moment basis in everyday living. Jesus knows all. The good news for sinners is that Jesus, even with the knowledge of such shortcomings, still loves them. Jesus is not waiting for a better version of a sinner to appear. Jesus not only knows the sinner and the specifics of the sins committed, but he loves the sinner. Jesus loves the sinner for who the sinner is and not who the sinner pretends to be. Whoever the person, whatever the activity, nothing can separate “his own” from the love of Jesus. This means that right in the thick of the disciples’ doubts and disbelief, Jesus was loving them.

The love of Christ is not an investigational love. He is not searching for certain conditions to be met by sinners in order to love sinners. Jesus gives himself fully to sinners. All efforts that sinners make to hide or protect sin from Jesus fall short. In fact, the sinner, or the real person, that nobody sees or knows is the sinner that God loves.

Jesus does not love the sin. He does not love the idolatry or false god worshipping, but he does love the sinner. This is the central point of the Christian message: God loves sinners. He sent Jesus, his one and only son, to die for sinners. Paul writes, “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one even dare to die—but God show his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6-8). Jesus comes to wash Peter’s feet, and John records the interaction:

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will

understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” (John 13:6-9)

The love of Jesus is something in which to be fully saturated. Christianity is not something in which one can just get one’s feet wet. The atoning work of Christ completely covers sin. John continues, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean” (John 13:11). John is referring to Judas. Judas is there at this table, at the scene of love. In the midst of washing feet, Jesus makes it clear that Judas is not washed, not in the way that counts. Judas has committed to his own way. He is interested in the benefits of being spiritually cleansed, but not the cost. John puts it in John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Judas sat at the table, heard Jesus’ words, watched him wash the feet of the disciples, yet remained far from salvation. The love of Jesus can be had, but in his love, he wants fully devoted disciples. Those who are willing to offer their broken selves to Jesus will find his love waiting for them in that moment.

Loved Forever

John writes, “He loved them to the end” (13:1). The immediate referent in this verse is to the cross. Jesus loved his own who were in the world so much that he was willing to go all the way to the end of the mission and die on the cross for their sins. It was on a bloody cross where Jesus was killed for sinners. At the cross one sees the wrath of God poured out for sins, but what is seen at the same time is the great, immeasurable, vast, eternal love of God poured out for sinners. The washing that Jesus is doing in this moment is a picture of this. Jesus loved sinners to the end of his life.

Jesus did not stay dead. He rose again. While the sin of sinners stayed in the grave, the love of Jesus did not. It remains forever. Because of Christ’s resurrection and

ascension to the right hand of the Father, his love is complete—from the beginning, now, and forever.

Rescue the Lost: John 20:21

Created in the image of God, Adam was designed to be in worshipful fellowship with God. Through Adam, God would reign over all the earth. This meant when Adam fell, God’s plan of salvation took aim at all the families of the earth.

In Genesis 12, soon after the nations scatter at the tower of Babel, God promises Abram that through him “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (v. 3). Then in Genesis 22:18, God reiterates to Abraham: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” God then keeps the promise with Isaac: “I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 26:4). To Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel, God again keeps his promise: “Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 28:14). The covenant made and the promises kept provide hope and expectation for the future Messiah.

Within the context of Israel, God promises to raise up a Davidic servant. This servant would not only lead the tribes of Jacob through a new exodus but also serve as a light to all nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. This coming Messiah—the second Adam, the seed of Abraham, the true Israel, the greater David, the Suffering Servant, the Son of God—would suffer God’s judgment as the propitiation for sins.

God’s wrath remained poised and ready to be justly poured out on sinful creatures. As death and destruction awaited his rightful bidding, God sent forth his Son. Initiated by God’s love and mindful of others, Jesus emptied himself, took on flesh and the Father’s mission, and gave his life for a lost and dying world. Jesus was sent to save sinners from the wrath of God. He was sent to this fallen world as light to the darkness of

humanity, as prevailing King and Conqueror over sin, as one in full submission to the will of the Father, even unto death on a cross. Paul writes,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

Jesus, the Son of God, in the greatest act of love the world has ever known, obtained eternal life for God's lost children at the expense of his own. Jesus was sent to seek and save the lost and succeeded to the degree that a perfect God was pleased in his Son. Christ-followers are called, redeemed, and purposed to join God's global mission. It is a mission that sends God's people to live mindful of the context, clearly targeting those who are lost and without hope in sin.

Go with the Peace of God

On the evening of the resurrection, Jesus finds his disciples behind a locked door seeking refuge from the Jews. Jesus makes his way into their presence and as he stands among them, assures them he is the Risen Lord, the overcomer of Satan and sin. With scars revealed, the Resurrected King grants them peace and assurance while bolstering their faith for the carrying on of Jesus' mission. The disciples, abounding in hope and certainty of their Savior, receive the directive as Jesus pronounces, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21).

It is a pronouncement that echoes throughout all of Christendom. The presence of Jesus and his mentioning of peace provides the disciples with assuredness of success. No longer do they have to second guess the ending. Keener writes, "Believers can do the

work because God has worked for them; the Father sent the Son and empowered believers by the Spirit imparted through the Son.”⁸

Go as a Reflection of Jesus

Jesus’ words in the fourth Gospel advance the plot of the redemption story. Now, after promising a second return, Jesus ascends, the Holy Spirit falls, the church is birthed, and Christians live sent, carrying on Jesus’ mission, declaring the message, “Jesus Saves.” After two millennia, this message remains the church’s mantra. This message brings spiritually dead beings into new life in Christ. This message has the potential to renew cities and reform societies. This message is reflected in the sent lives of Christ-followers. Matthew illustrates this fact:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:13-18)

The gospel message leads followers of Jesus to identify with Christ. As he was sent, Christ-followers are sent. The “sent-ness” of Jesus was not what he did, it is who he was. Therefore, his “sent-ness” is his followers’ “sent-ness.” Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Living sent is the Christian identity. It is who Christ-followers are. The Father’s mission was Jesus’ mission, and Christ-followers go to the lost just as Jesus came to them.

Followers of Jesus are purchased, entrusted, and sent to evangelistically interface with those who, though dead in their trespasses and sins, might be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 2:203.

Obey Jesus: Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission at the end of the book of Matthew. These are Jesus' words as Matthew records,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18-20)

This command find its roots in the authority of God. After accomplishing His redeeming work, Jesus in his coronation is given the name that is above every name in the heavens and the earth. The Great Commission embraces what has been promised in Christ from the beginning. It is the standard of obedience evidenced in the long-awaited King. It is how the kingdom of God expands and is done on earth as it is heaven. In short, the mission of the church is the Great Commission. Kevin DeYoung expounds on the mission of the church:

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.⁹

Jesus is crucified, laid in a grave, and three days later is raised from the dead, victorious over sin. At the cross, the mercy of God collided with the justice of God. Jesus, blameless and without speck or blemish, paid the price for sinners. What should have cost those separated from God through sin, cost Christ Jesus. John writes, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Jesus paid the price, appeased the wrath of God, and is granted all authority in heaven and on earth.

Jesus has the right to rule, command, and govern. The English word *authority* in Matthew 28:18 means "that which arises out of being." It is the right to rule based on the present state of being. Jesus currently rules victoriously over sin, death, and hell.

⁹ Kevin 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), 241.

Based on his right to do so, Jesus commissioned his disciples with full authority. While on earth, Jesus' authority was observed in his teaching (Matt 7:29), forgiving sins (Matt 9:6), calming the sea (Matt 8:26), healing sickness and disease (Matt 9:35), casting out demons (Matt 12:22), and gaining victory over death (John 11:43).

Go with Authority

All the exercises of authority were faint observations compared to the ultimate and universal authority restored to him by the Father in his exaltation. Now, Jesus claims “all authority in heaven and earth.” There is no place in this universe over which he has not been given authority. Christ's authority infiltrates every realm and sphere of influence. It is upon this foundation that Jesus commissioned his disciples and sends forth his followers as ambassadors of the king. Joey Shaw recognizes the significance of the authority given to Jesus: “Submission to the authority of Christ is at the core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In this respect, to ‘make disciples’ means influencing others to pledge their allegiance to Jesus as the Lord of their life.”¹⁰

Go Make More and More Disciples

The scope of the Great Commission is found in two words: all nations. When Jesus spoke of going to the nations, the hearers knew the immense size of this task. Though God had changed the way and the message of engagement, the people had a clue as to what “all nations” entailed.

Not only was the assignment substantial, but the direction was also adjusted. The mission of the nations had been to go out from Jerusalem. Now, everyone hearing the new direction took action to pursue “all nations.” The nations matter in the Great Commission. Disciple making now calls Christ-followers to live sent to all nations, not to be limited by state lines, oceans, national borders, or beyond.

¹⁰ Joey Shaw and Matt Carter, *All Authority: How the Authority of Christ Upholds the Great Commission* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 83.

The command is simple: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Though it is simple, the mission is too great, even impossible, for just eleven disciples to complete. Therefore, Jesus promised to be with them “to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). The story of the cross and the giving of the Spirit had spilled over into the life of the disciples, and now Jesus hints that this commission will extend beyond the apostles’ lifetime. In fact, the story would spill over into the life of the church. The church has inherited the commission from the apostles. Today, as the church’s chapter of the redemption story continues to be written, it must take seriously the command to make disciples. It is a command to the church, not just individual Christians. Every follower of Christ has a role to play and a plan to obey in the Great Commission until the Lord returns.

When Jesus said, “go,” he was not commanding all of his disciples to go abroad. In the first chapters of Acts, just before his ascension, Jesus was very specific about the geographic locations where he expected his disciples to go. Jesus states, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem when he said these words. Jesus desired for the disciples to teach where they were in Jerusalem, but to not stop there. The teaching of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection needed to be sent out. Some would live sent with the gospel message to other Jews. Others would be sent to cross boundaries of culture and religion, making disciples in Samaria. Others would be sent even beyond that, to places that were different than anything they knew.

Trust the Spirit’s Lead: Acts 6:1-7, 9:31, 13:1-4

The disciples of Jesus Christ were true disciples before and after Pentecost. In Scripture, the disciples were performing miracles even before Pentecost (Matt 10:8, Luke 10:17). So, if the disciples had been regenerated and given the power to perform miracles, what difference did the indwelling Spirit make, particularly in their ability to make disciples? By nature, everyone is a disciple. A disciple is a follower. Everyone follows. A disciple influences. Everyone influences. The difference, then, lies in what idea or

person(s) a disciple seeks to follow and influence. For a disciple of Jesus Christ, the difference is based on the indwelling Spirit's leading. A. W. Tozer writes,

You and I do not have hidden potentials, creative impulses, and all that kind of stuff in us. We walk around on the earth barely able to keep going. As we get older, the gravitational pull slowly drags us down and humps us over. Finally, we give up one day with a sigh and go back to Mother Earth. That is the kind of potential we have. We have the potential to be a corpse. God Almighty says, "I do not want to wake up the power that lies in you. Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you." That is a different thing altogether, my friend.¹¹

The indwelling Holy Spirit provides (1) an ongoing, increasing desire and ability to make disciples by spotlighting Jesus Christ, and (2) supernatural comfort that powerfully overcomes the harmful and deadly threats from the broken systems of the world.

In 2008, I was in the middle of eastern Turkey and witnessed a ministry partner engage and evangelize a group of people standing on the entry steps of a well-known mosque. We had just walked around the mosque when I began to watch him engage the abrasive crowd in conversation. As he stood on the front steps of this Islamic holy site, deep into the territory of the enemy, the crowd multiplied, the interest spiked, and I grew nervous. Two American brothers were with me along with a Turkish brother. We stood twenty-five feet away and began to pray for the Holy Spirit to work through the faithful witness of this ambassador for Christ.

As we prayed, I began to notice how quickly things escalated. Proselytizing, attempting to convert a person to another religion, is illegal in this country. The conversation that started with a small group now grew to sixty people, and the aggression of the crowd intensified as well. My mind raced. Would I see my wife and newborn son again? Would anyone know we had been taken by the authorities? What are they yelling back at my ministry partner? Who are they texting and calling? Who is the guy who just walked out of the mosque?

¹¹ A. W. Tozer and James L. Snyder, *Tozer: The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 32.

In the midst of the questions, the Turkish brother placed his hand on my shoulder and spoke words to me I will never forget: “Justin, the Lord is with us. He will not forsake us.” He paused for a second and said, “Welcome to real Christianity.” In that moment, a sense of God’s presence overwhelmed me. I was conscious of God’s drawing near. Whether the Spirit leads a believer to be a witness to the neighbor a couple of doors down or to a people group on a different continent, he can be trusted.

Go with the Spirit’s Comforting Presence

A follower of Jesus makes disciples based on the leadership of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Reeves contends, “The Spirit gives us his very self, that we might know and enjoy him and so enjoy his fellowship with the Father and the Son.”¹² Even amid persecution and uncertainty, the Holy Spirit’s presence supplies comfort to followers of Jesus Christ. Acts 9:31 reads, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” The peace the church experiences is part of the support the Spirit gives to the community even during persecution. This support is called “comfort” or “encouragement.”¹³ Christ-followers are awakened to sense the powerful presence of the Spirit who faithfully comforts those who are sent into the world with the life-giving news of Jesus Christ.

Go in Unity, Prayer, and Fasting

Followers of Jesus, seeking to make disciples, are sent by the Spirit to declare and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost world. Disciple makers in these communities exercise maximum spiritual discipline while fully trusting in the Holy Spirit to lead and guide in accordance with the Father’s will. When this tension becomes

¹² Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 87.

¹³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 372.

imbalanced (though never escaping God's sovereignty), the communities feel the effect in different ways.

When followers of Jesus weigh too heavily on the side of strategy and less on the Holy Spirit, the result is imbalanced in the flesh. The community is more similar than diverse, more leader-dependent than empowered, more isolated than engaging, more incompetent than trained, more growth by addition than reproduction by multiplication. A swing of the pendulum can produce other undesired consequences. In this case, healthy missiological practices are abandoned under the guise of the Spirit's leading. Perceived fruit and advancement begin to justify unhealthy practices. Success is misinterpreted as undeniable movement or empowerment of the Spirit.

When communities of believers hold the tension of strategy and Spirit's leading in a God-honoring way, the result is kingdom-building to the core. The community multiplies into communities of missionaries trained, equipped, empowered, and sent to multiply again and again. This can happen. A couple of instances in the book of Acts provide clear examples of communities committed to follow the Spirit's leading, united in purpose and mission strategy.

The first instance occurs in Acts 6:1-7. In this passage, the Jerusalem church, meeting as groups in different houses, made an adjustment based on the feedback regarding the Greek-speaking widows. Amid growth, the need was for maintained unity and consistent compassion toward the needy. Dennis Johnson writes,

The growth of the church not only provoked external opposition but also produced internal strains. Increasing numbers led to a disparity in the distribution of material support to the poor, with widows in the Greek-speaking portion of the church suffering neglect. Diversity of cultures and needs overburdened the apostles, who consequently recognized the need for a diversity of ministries and ministers.¹⁴

A solution was proposed and accepted, and they chose seven Spirit-filled men. The apostles laid their hands on them, praying for the ministry of the tables and the ministry of the Word. The apostles were now able to teach the Word and the widows

¹⁴ Dennis E. Johnson, *Let's Study Acts* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 65.

were cared for. The power of the Spirit working through the Word about Jesus led the church to grow.¹⁵

The second instance occurs in Acts 13. While the church is gathered in Antioch, worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit speaks to the church. Luke provides little detail about how the revelation was given, nor does Luke provide much detail about the type of work the Holy Spirit was calling Barnabas and Saul to fulfill. However, from what follows it is obvious believers are meant to understand it is to be a mission for the Gentiles.¹⁶ So, after praying, the church sends the two off on mission. In Acts 13:4, it is also the Holy Spirit who sends them out.

These two instances provide clear examples of Christian communities evangelistically engaging with the broken systems of the world according to both the trusting of the Spirit's leading and the collaborative plans of the Christian community to guide those sent out on mission.

Declare the Gospel: Acts 2:34-36, Acts 17:24-31

Followers of Jesus communicate the whole truth of the gospel, believing it is the seed of truth to be sown in the soil of the hearer's heart. They also communicate the gospel frequently and faithfully, even when on the surface it cannot be observed that the Spirit is softening the hearer's soul.

The story recorded in Acts stands in continuity with the mighty acts of God recorded in the Old Testament and with the ministry of Jesus.¹⁷ Believers of Jesus Christ converting from death in sin to new life in Christ is a mighty and prevalent occurrence in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, Peter preaches after Pentecost bearing witness of Jesus to this

¹⁵ Johnson, *Let's Study Acts*, 66.

¹⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 418.

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 23.

group of sermon hearers. The audience listens as Peter draws from Old Testament prophecy, points out prophecy fulfilled, and provides the utmost clarity of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done.

Go to Preach the Good News of Jesus

In Acts 2:36, Peter proclaims, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” In verse 38, Peter stresses that every one of his hearers needs to repent and be baptized.¹⁸ Peter knows they must change. The Jews must recognize Jesus as the Messiah and confess him as Lord. They reject Jesus with their lives. Peter preaches, believing that if these Jewish hearers do not change, they will face God’s judgment for their sins.¹⁹ The sermon reassures them there is hope, even now. Bruce articulates, “Repent of their sins and turn to God, confessing him as Messiah, and their sins will be forgiven, and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit—the gift bestowed on the apostles themselves only a few hours before.”²⁰

Peter calls for repentance. Before Peter, in the years before the crucifixion, Jesus calls for repentance. John the Baptist makes repentance the theme of his preaching. John Calvin teaches, “That repentance stems from serious fear of God and consists in the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the Spirit.”²¹

In bearing witness of Christ and the cross, every Christ-follower must obediently call for repentance. When the lost encounter sent disciple makers of Christ

¹⁸ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 155.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 69.

²¹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1012.

Jesus, at some point they must hear that a holy God gifts salvation, leading to repentance of their sins and placing their faith and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ-followers bear gospel witness so that people may follow Christ over anyone else.²² Christ-followers are sent to bear witness and inspire responsiveness on the part of followers.²³ Christ-followers bear witness so that other Christ-followers cooperate in seeking to honor the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴

In Acts 17, Paul provides another clear example of a disciple maker bearing witness of Jesus. However, when one compares the sermon Peter preaches in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost with the sermon Paul preaches in Acts 17 before the Athenian intellectuals, there is a contrast in response, proving Christ-followers are to obediently bear witness of Christ Jesus and trust the supernatural, powerful work of the Spirit to convert the lost to life in Christ. Paul's success is found in the faithfulness of his preaching, not in the number of conversions counted. This metric of success is true for every generation of Christian preachers.

In Acts 2, Luke tells that Peter preached and 3,000 people followed Christ. Only a handful of people followed Christ in Acts 17. In Acts 2 and 3, the sermons are for a Jewish group of hearers. These Jews believe in one creating God, possess an idea about sin, and are narrowly focused about God's chosen people.

For the first time, in Acts 17, a sermon is preached and Paul bears witness of Jesus to cultured pagans. The Greeks in Athens have no knowledge of the Bible. No eye or ear witness of Jesus had bore witness to Athenian people before now. Therefore, Paul does not quote from the Old Testament. In fact, Paul quotes from the Greek poets. Paul

²² Martin Hanna, "What Is 'Christian' about Christian Leadership?" *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2006): 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

finds himself talking to people with no idea of God, in a city full of idols, and he preaches, faithfully bearing witness of Jesus.

Go Knowing the Audience

In Acts 2, 3, and 13, the focus is on Jesus and belief in him. In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas run into pagans. Paul heals a crippled man and the pagans think the two men are gods. Now in Acts 17, based on a secular audience, Paul does not focus on the promise of God. After establishing point of contact and a point of conflict, Paul communicates the gospel. Paul speaks as long and pointedly as needed to persuade the hearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 17:24, Paul introduces the Athenian intellectuals to God. Luke writes, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.” Precisely because this God made everything and rules over all, it should be obvious that such a God cannot be confined to shrines made by human hands.²⁵ Moreover, Luke writes,

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being,” as even as some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” (Acts 17:26-28)

God arranged things so that as those who go led by the Spirit bear witness, people would reach out to find him, realizing something is wrong with the universe. Having not explained yet the specific problem, Paul hints here of an alienation between mankind and God, quoting minor Greek poets and using their words and insights from their own literature.

Then, in verse 29, for the first time, Paul introduces what is wrong with the universe. Paul clearly states that the problem is idolatry. Idolatry is a critical concept for this group of hearers to comprehend. Paul warns them that whatever they pursue,

²⁵ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 525.

becomes god. In the Old Testament, God is not angry because of injustice, although injustice happens. It is not war that makes God angry, though he is a God of peace. It is idolatry. Sinful idolatry most offends God. This is true always. In a perfect world, followers of Jesus love God fully and perfectly, and obey and love others out of their love for him.

By verse 31, Paul understands that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is bound up in the unchanging gospel, and he will not trim the message. Even knowing some will be upset, Paul obediently teaches the gospel message, insisting that Jesus not only died for sins, but was vindicated by God in His resurrection from the dead.

Go Preaching the Whole Gospel

Like Paul, followers of Jesus do not compromise the gospel. The death and resurrection hang together. The Good News is that this God who does not owe sinners anything, who cannot be bought by religion, graciously comes to his rebel brood in the person of his own dear Son. Jesus, the Redeemer, buys back his own people by burying their death in his death. In bearing the sins of others, the death of Christ is vindicated publicly by the resurrection from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is God's setting the seal of his approval and acceptance of Christ's work. It is God's endorsement of Christ's claim to being his begotten Son; it is God's affirmation of Christ's righteousness. This glorious news leads Christ-followers to engage a lost world and bear witness of his wondrous deeds.

Jesus declares that he always pleases the Father; Jesus claims to be the pure and perfect ideal of manhood; Jesus presents himself as a legitimate object of devotion and trust, love, and obedience, and the only way to God. Belief in this truth demands disciples of Jesus Christ communicate the whole truth of the gospel, even when the message is upsetting or rejected. Christ-followers prepare themselves to interact with lost neighbors in obedience to King Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, and for the glory of God the Father.

CHAPTER 3
PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR WITH
THE HEART OF JESUS

The kingdom of God expands as God's people evangelize a world that is in a perpetual state of "self" worship. Satan's strategy to combat this expansion is to manufacture idol upon idol according to mankind's liking. He is a ceaseless peddler of lies and false ideology. The prince of the power of the air persuades all people groups outside of Christ to follow their passions and flesh rather than Jesus (Eph 2:2-3). Idol worship is the focus of the broken systems of the world that the church, though promised to overcome, wars against from generation to generation. Until the consummate return of Jesus when everything is made new, these world systems seduce fallen creatures to worship the god of "self."

The biggest solution to today's societal issues and the problem of "self" worship is found in a practical plan that Jesus stated in one command: love God fully and love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 23:37-40 records such teaching:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

Love your neighbor as yourself. It is a simple plan, yet an important plan. It is so important that Paul, in his letter to the Galatian believers, reminds them of the commandment: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14). The plan is complete, concrete, and can change the world. Christians do not need to underestimate, overcomplicate, or ignore it. They do not need to be intimidated, overwhelmed, or feel useless. Whether next door or in a nearby neighborhood, problems exist and broken homes abound. Dysfunctional families, drug

addicts, and dilapidated houses can be just a few doors down. Can such significant problems be solved? According to Jesus, yes. Two thousand years ago he provided a plan that secures success.

The purpose of this chapter is to answer foundational questions regarding the plan Jesus put in motion for the Spirit-indwelt church. It closely examines the characteristics of the love that motivates Christians to carry out Jesus' command to love their neighbors. After clearly depicting the corrupt nature of neighbors lost in sin, the chapter spells out specific ways for the church to gather, mobilize, and be sent out to love their neighbors.

“Self” versus “Others”

Human nature, created in sin, looks inward for self-worth. Christians engaging their lost neighbors with the gospel will inevitably impede on humanity's worship of “self.” Impeding on the lives of neighbors lost in sin can be difficult for many reasons. The difficulty lies in the challenge of loving neighbors who live according to a secular worldview or possess a framework for making life decisions that are contrary to the Christian worldview. For instance, pretend Tom lives next to a professing believer in Christ. Tom is a middle-aged man who is different from his Christian neighbor by way of his skin's melanin, ethnicity, and socioeconomic makeup. Life has not turned out like he thought it would. After two broken marriages, estranged kids, and constant bouts with loneliness, Tom has decided to abandon what he once believed to be true about life. His weekends are spent getting to know people he meets online. Whether in chat rooms or different cities, Tom makes a living to support the time and travel necessary to find the type of community for which he longs. Tom wants nothing to do with religion or any notion of Jesus. In fact, he is adamantly opposed to anything associated with Christianity. His mom taught him to treat people kindly, so he is not outwardly hostile toward his Christian neighbors, but he is by no means eager to get to know them or spend time with them. Aside from mowing his yard or setting out and pulling in his trash can from the

curb, he barely steps outside his house. His garage door might as well be permanently closed. It is opened only for the seconds needed to park or pull out his car. Neighbors like Tom are scattered throughout the world, and for every situation like Tom's, thousands more are in one way or another opposed to Jesus and the kingdom of God. Neighborhoods and cities around the world are populated with people like Tom, who may not know it or even deny it, but truly need the saving love of Jesus. So, how do Christians effectively love Tom in a way that reflects Christ?

For Christians, knowing the true nature and level of corruption within the heart of a lost neighbor impacts the way they love them. Without this understanding, Satan deploys his worldly system of self-worship and, as a result, natural man is self-perceived as inherently good. This misperception is the root of the issue: the more Satan can convince natural man of the sufficiency of self-worship, the less necessary the Good News of Jesus becomes. To combat this type of misperception, Christians must address the broken systems of the world with a biblical understanding of human nature, especially those who assemble in prosperous countries like America. In addressing such a broken system, Christians, whose corrupted nature has been solved by Jesus' saving work on the cross, must love "others." The implications of how Christians are to love their neighbors are built on a foundational understanding of the supernatural love of Christ.

This chapter spotlights a significant system of the world that, at its root, seeks to exhaust God of his authority over mankind and convince humanity that the state of this world is problem-free. The effects of this system of the world exist in Western context, particularly in the recent history of the church in America. This chapter digs to the root of this world system by examining the philosophical premises found at its core.

Following a brief survey of alternative views, this chapter first seeks to affirm the historical Augustinian view of the four-fold state of human nature in its original, fallen, redeemed, and glorified conditions. Once affirmed, the remainder of the chapter examines the biblical nature of the love that Christians should evidence in the way they live for

“others.” The examination of this type of love will include suggestions of practical ways to overcome and further prevent the church’s drifting away from its true, biblical mandate to “love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

The Human Nature of Neighbors

The world is populated with people in great need. The vastness of suffering is a symptom of a root issue: human sinfulness. People are in great need and the needs are great, but the greatest need of every human being is salvation from sin and reconciliation to a holy God. Scripture paints a sobering picture of human sinfulness. Every person who has ever lived, excluding Jesus, has been born into sin (Rom 3:23, 5:12-19). The purpose of this section is to articulate an understanding of human sinfulness. Coming to a high-level understanding involves a survey of the various views of human nature that have existed in the church. Three views have predominated: the Pelagian view, the Semi-Pelagian view, and the Augustinian (Calvinist) view. A fourth, but far less common view, Hyper-Calvinism, is also briefly surveyed.

Philosophical Premises

Before examining each view, it is important to understand their philosophical basis.¹ Interestingly, the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Hyper-Calvinist views all share the same philosophical premise: “Where there is no power or ability, there is no duty.”² Here, the distinction between natural and moral ability becomes important. The Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian conclude, “Man has the duty, therefore he has the power.”³ The

¹ The important points in this portion of the discussion come from Tom Nettles (notes from *Jonathan Edwards*, course 26410—The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2005). Nettles is a gifted historian and theologian with a knack to read between cultural lines.

² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Patrick Alexander. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 212.

³ *Ibid.*

Hyper-Calvinist, however, while basing his view on the same philosophical premise, comes to a different conclusion: “Man has no power, therefore he has no duty.”⁴

In contrast, those holding the Augustinian view work from the philosophical premise that “man has the duty, but he has no power or ability.”⁵ While man may have the *natural* power, he does not have the *moral nature*, and man’s nature is everything when it comes to rendering spiritual activities that are pleasing to God. Thus, it is impossible for man to do something if man has no moral nature or disposition to do it. A complete deficit in moral nature depletes man of power. Man’s moral condition is sinful and establishes the very basis for all sin.⁶ With these underlying philosophical premises in mind, each of the four views are examined regarding the issues that are, at the point of engagement, occurring when Christ-followers show the love of Jesus to their neighbors.

Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian Anthropology

Pelagianism. Pelagianism takes its starting point in the natural ability of man. Because God has commanded man to do that which is good, the Pelagian assumes man must have the ability to do what is commanded. Therefore, man must have free will in the absolute (libertarian)⁷ sense so that he can choose between good and evil. Pelagius believed that

⁴ Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 212.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bruce Ware writes that the “libertarian” conception of human freedom “proposes that at the very moment of choice, we are free in making that choice if (and only if) in choosing what we do, we could have chosen otherwise.” Bruce Ware, *God’s Greater Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 63-64. Ware explains further:

So we are free when choosing A if, at the moment of this choice we could have instead chosen not-A, or B. And if this is not the case, then we are not genuinely free. Therefore, they assert, we must begin with the non-negotiable ‘truth’ about human life that asserts 1) that we are free, and 2) that our freedom is libertarian—lest we have no freedom at all. (Ibid., 66)

[Adam] had a free and entirely undetermined will, which enabled him to choose with equal facility either of these alternatives. He could either sin or refrain from sinning, as he saw fit. In Pelagius' own words, "Whether we will, or whether we will not, we have the capacity of not sinning. I say that man is able to be without sin, and that he is able to keep the commandments of God."⁸

According to Warfield, "This sufficiently direct statement of human ability is in reality the hinge of [Pelagius'] whole system."⁹

The church condemned Pelagianism as a heresy at the Council of Orange in the year 529, and it was condemned again at the Council of Florence, the Council of Carthage, and, ironically, at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century in the first three anathemas of the Canons of the Sixth Session. Consistently throughout church history, the church has roundly and soundly condemned Pelagianism—because Pelagianism denies the fallenness of nature; it denies the doctrine of original sin.¹⁰

Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism is a softer form of Pelagianism, which teaches man has the capacity to seek God in and of himself apart from any movement of God's Word or the Holy Spirit. According to Semi-Pelagianism, man does not have a complete capacity, but man and God could cooperate to a certain degree in the salvation effort. According to the *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*,

This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and the 'first slight transient conviction' of having sinned against God. God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith.¹¹

Even if one agrees to this point, the jury is still out as to who moves toward the other to a greater degree and who is ultimately responsible for the cause of the new birth

⁸ Pelagius, *On Nature in Grace*, quoted in Benjamin B. Warfield, *Two Studies in the History of Doctrine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Captivity of the Church," *Modern Reformation* 10, no. 3 (May/June 2001): 23.

¹¹ United Methodist Church (US), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 52.

in Christ. Nevertheless, this philosophy and anthropology directly impact the overall approach of the church to evangelize lost neighbors and interact with their broken lives as Jesus would.

Hyper-Calvinist Anthropology

Hyper-Calvinists hold a libertarian understanding of human freedom, yet they also believe all actions are pre-determined by God. They conclude that humans have no freedom and deny that any free determinations are made by man. In other words, because human freedom is libertarian, God's determination of all rules out man's being able to act freely. Thus, there is no compatibility between divine sovereignty and human freedom. This view is held by those who yelled out to the great missionary William Carey, "Sit down young man. When God determines to save the heathen, He'll do it without your help or mine!"¹² Only a small minority of Calvinists hold this biblically untenable view.

Augustinian Anthropology

Augustinians believe all men together sinned in the sin of Adam and through his sin all other punishments for sin came into the world, thereby human nature has been both physically and morally corrupted. Every man brings with him into the world a nature already so corrupt, that it can do nothing but sin. Charles Hodge sums up as follows:

All men showed themselves to be sinners. They all gave evidence of sinfulness as soon as they gave evidence of reason. They all appeared not only as transgressors of the law of God, but as spiritually dead, devoid of all evidence of spiritual life. They were willing slaves of sin, entirely unable to deliver themselves from their bondage to corruption. No man had ever given proof of possessing the power of self-regeneration. All who gave evidence of being regenerated, with one voice ascribed the work not to themselves, but to the grace of God.¹³

¹² Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 6.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Ingersoll, Ontario: Devoted Publishing, 2016), 2:79.

Augustinians believe that, by Adam's transgression, the freedom of the human will to please God has been entirely lost. In his present corrupt state, man can and will do only evil.

The Pelagian/Semi-Pelagian and Augustinian views are probably the most commonly held views in the church today. Hodge summarizes the comparison between these views:

It thus appears that as all the distinguishing doctrines of the Pelagians are the logical consequences of their principle of plenary ability as the ground and limit of obligation, so the distinguishing doctrines of Augustine are the logical consequences of his principle of the entire inability of fallen man to do anything spiritually good.¹⁴

Utilizing the *1689 London Baptist Confession (LBC)* as a platform, the next section defends the four-fold Augustinian view of human nature as the only model that is faithful to the testimony of God's Word.¹⁵ This view holds that, in its fallen state, the human will is chained—that is, bound by sin and disinclined toward God and the things of God to such a degree that apart from a work of divine grace in the human heart, man will not (indeed, cannot) come to Christ.¹⁶

The Four-Fold Augustinian Understanding of Human Nature

Augustine understood the states of human nature in a four-fold sense. This same view is presented in the *LBC*.

Man's original state. The *LBC* states that God originally

has endowed human will with natural liberty and power to act on choices so that it is neither forced nor inherently bound by nature to do good or evil. Humanity in the state of innocence had freedom and power to will and to do what was good and

¹⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:79.

¹⁵ Stan Reeves, *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017).

¹⁶ A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Human Depravity* (Pensacola, FL: Mt. Zion, 1952), 87.

well-pleasing to God. Yet this condition was unstable, so that humanity could fall from it. (Matt 17:12; Jas 1:14; Deut 30:19; Eccl 7:29; Gen 3:6)¹⁷

Man's fallen state: Bound in sin. Humanity did not remain in its original state, but

by falling into a state of sin, has completely lost all ability to choose any spiritual good that accompanies salvation. Thus, people in their natural state are absolutely opposed to spiritual good and dead in sin, so that they cannot convert themselves by their own strength or prepare themselves for conversion. (Rom 5:6; Rom 8:7; Eph 2:1, 5; Titus 3:3-5; John 6:44).¹⁸

This statement concerning man's fallen state is critical to what a church believes about its neighbors and what it will take to love them according to the gospel and not based on a belief that good morals will override doomed human sinfulness. Of the four states of human nature, man's fallen state has been misunderstood or treated as an overstatement of natural man's inability to move toward God.

In his fallen condition, man can do nothing to keep from sinning. In other words, he cannot keep from sinning because his nature is fallen and depraved (John 3:5, 6:44; 1 Cor 2:14). The biblical evidence of man's total inability to not sin is robust and decisive. Sin has affected all of man's being: mind, affections, will, and even his body. The faculties of the human person function as a unified whole. They are not organized in water-tight compartments, one of which might be ruined while the others remain intact. Indeed, the entire being of man's nature has been affected by sin.

While the salvific work of Christ is the "good news" of the gospel, the inherent evil and moral corruption of human nature is most certainly the "bad news." In fact, as Peter Kreeft has pointed out, this "bad news" is the only part of Christianity that is empirically verifiable just by reading the newspapers.¹⁹ There, one finds daily proof of the worldwide "ugliness" of unrestrained human depravity. Indeed, nothing seems to be

¹⁷ Reeves, *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 27.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 27.

plainer or more evident than the fact all are afflicted with a fallen nature. This fallen nature makes it difficult for Christians to love their neighbors. The sinfulness of human nature proposes a challenge to Christ-followers commanded to love sinners no matter what.

The redeemed state. God has not left man without hope, however. The Christian worldview, as revealed in the scriptures, offers a coherent explanation of the nature and extent of this perplexing problem. The *LBC* states,

When God converts sinners and transforms them into the state of grace, He frees them from their natural bondage to sin and by His grace alone enables them to will and to do freely what is spiritually good. Yet because of their remaining corruption, they do not perfectly nor exclusively will what is good but also will what is evil. (Col 1:13; John 8:36; Phil 2:13; Rom 7:15, 18, 19, 21, 23).²⁰

Redeemed man still has the ability to sin, but is now given the ability to not sin.²¹

The glorified state. The four-fold state of human nature includes the description of human nature in glory. The *LBC* reads that “the state of glory is the will made perfectly and unchangeably free toward good alone” (Eph 4:13).²² It is only in the glorified state that man will be “able to not sin” and “unable to sin.”

It is at this point that those of the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and other views holding a libertarian view of free will run into difficulty, for it would seem the possibility of sinning would remain, even in the glorified state, if the libertarian view is maintained, which runs counter to the testimony of Scripture.

Consequently, the Augustinian view remains viable, more closely reflecting the biblical testimony.

Christians should understand (in contrast to other commonly held views) human nature in a four-fold way: original state, fallen state, redeemed state, and glorified

²⁰ Reeves, *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 27.

²¹ Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 212.

²² Reeves, *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 27.

state, according to the historical Augustinian view. Moreover, in accordance with the Augustinian view, human beings in their fallen state are deeply flawed to the core and in bondage to sin; indeed, the corruption of original sin extends to every aspect of human nature. May God help human beings see themselves as they really are so they can more thoroughly appreciate who Jesus is and the grace the Father has bestowed upon mankind through the gift of his Son. In understanding man's inability to find Christ on their own, may Christians live sent as ambassadors of King Jesus, pursuing those perishing in sin and boldly offering the Good News of life that can be found only in Christ Jesus.

Love One's Neighbor as Jesus Loved Them

How sinful is the sinner? Scarlet stained beyond anything but the blood of Christ removing it. How deep is sin? Inescapably deep. Is creation basically pure with a positive inclination toward the good, or totally and absolutely corrupt? Totally and absolutely corrupt.

Since the fall of man, every generation of God's people has had to figure out how to love their neighbors. Driven by the same motivation and faced with similar challenges and opportunities, this project and plan will be rewritten, revised, and customized by future generations of Christ-followers. Therefore, hope for success in expanding God's kingdom is and forever will be in Christ Jesus, whose ability to make all things new does not need even the most published and utilized project ever produced. The church prevailing to the end of time and for all eternity is Jesus' project, and until that time comes, the command is to engage the lost and love neighbors, teaching what Jesus taught, doing as Jesus did, and making his name known throughout the world for the glory of God.

Forgive One's Neighbor

What does it mean to have the grace of God so invade, persuade, and pervade a person, that his or her words and behavior are directed by that grace? The gospel shapes

how followers of Jesus do family, church, relationships in general, but believers must see first how it shapes their own lives in order to do those things. What does it mean to experience the heart of Jesus? It primarily means having the love of Jesus shape the love of his followers.

In John 13:35, Jesus says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” How do people know if one is a disciple of Jesus? They love. John takes it further in 1 John 4:7-8 when he says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” This passage is important in what it claims about love. John make the point that if those who claim to know Jesus do not love, then they do not know God. When Christians love, they help others experience the heart of Jesus. To this point, someone might say, “Well, lots of people love. It is not difficult to find lots of unbelievers who love each other and do acts of love.” The Bible is clear about a particular kind of love. The kind of love that John commends is only something that can be born from hearts transformed by Jesus.

Paul describes this kind of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

This is a famous passage. It has been preached by preachers and heard at numerous weddings in front of couples who have no idea what this passage is legitimately talking about. Not understood correctly, the love described can seem gushy and mushy and light

and fluffy. Such a misunderstanding can lead to misplaced expectations in marital relationships, but even in relationships within a faith community. It is vital for Christians to know what will be required in loving people according to the type of love Paul provides in this passage. Having the right idea about this type of love sets the right standard and communicates what will be required.

A life lived according to gospel love includes much more than a couple loving one another in Christian marriage. The gospel of Jesus Christ affects every relationship of the believer. When believers are in relationships with anyone for any length of time, they see that they cannot not be in a relationship with a sinner.

However, when the grace of God changes sinners and they experience the sacrificial love that Jesus displayed on the cross, it should be felt and shown by others around them. Redeemed love is love that extends to every relationship. For the believer, the foundation of every relationship is the love of God. And when the starting point for every relationship is the love of God, Christians learn over and over again that love has a lot less to do with feelings and a lot more to do with forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a critical component of love that must be understood by a Christian who finds himself living in a neighborhood with Muslims. This aspect of love must be lived out by a Christian who keeps having their trash can accidentally taken by their next-door neighbor. Whether it is a clear difference in religion or a temporary mix-up in property on trash day, a Christian is going to have problems come up in their neighborhoods. C. S. Lewis provides helpful direction for Christians who run into such a problem and need guidance in how to handle the problem:

I find that when I think I am asking God to forgive me I am often . . . asking him to do something quite different. I am asking him not to forgive me but to excuse me. But there is all the difference in the world between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness says, "Yes, you have done this thing, but I accept your apology; I will never hold it against you and everything between us will be exactly as it was before." But excusing says, "I see that you couldn't help it or didn't mean it; you weren't really to blame." If one was not really to blame then there is nothing to forgive...What we call "asking God's forgiveness" very often really consists in asking God to accept our excuses. To excuse what can really produce good excuses

is not Christian charity; it is only fairness. To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.²³

The earlier section of this chapter proved that neighbors in their fallen state will sin, and there will be times when that sin needs to be addressed or overlooked. Whatever the case, Christians should strive to love their neighbors by forgiving them.

Be Patient with One's Neighbor

Being a Christian neighbor calls for patience and kindness. Jesus changed the idea of having enemies. Now, in loving enemies, Christ-followers are to not only be patient with them, but pray for them. Believers can expect neighbors to hurt, offend, or even hate them, and when they do, the response is to bless them. Christians pray for their neighbors, even the ones they do not get along with. Whether wronged or annoyed, it is the job of believers to be patient with their neighbors.

If a Christian's love cannot stand up against the need for patience and kindness, it is not love. The option to love neighbors when it is only convenient does not exist. If loving neighbors does not cost something, it is not really loving. If Christian neighbors only love when it is easy, they really are not loving somebody, but only loving themselves.

Do Not Envy One's Neighbor

Christians not loving their neighbors may result in envy and boasting. Jerry Bridges writes, "Envy is the painful and oftentimes resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by someone else."²⁴ In James 3:14, James says that envy is "bitter." Bitterness is when someone has a bad taste in their mouth about someone else. This bad taste could be due to who they are or what they have. Envy is a sentiment of self-sovereignty and self-entitlement. And that is how it is similar to boasting: "Why should that guy have gotten the promotion? He did not deserve it. Other employees get to the office just as early.

²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 178-79.

²⁴ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 149.

Other employees stay at the office later. There are certainly other employees in the office who work harder.” Envy and Boasting. Boasting is a failure to love that comes from a sense of entitlement. “I,” “I,” “I.” It is self-infatuation rather than love for others.

It is not possible to love someone as Christ loves if all attempts to love are squelched by a constant effort to size them up, justifying the reasons why someone else is not as deserving as one might think.

Do Not Be Accusatory to One’s Neighbor

It is not right for Christian neighbors to constantly survey the neighborhood to get mad about what another neighbor possesses or how they spend their time. For instance, if looking out one’s window, someone might think, “Look at that. Look at this guy. Can you believe this guy? What a jerk. What a” Within such a stream of thought is a general disdain that comes to the mind’s surface and is not proactively being shut down.

That does not sound like gospel-shaped talk or thinking. A Christian may have valid reasons not to like their neighbor or may have been hurt by a neighbor, but when such irritable, resentful thinking starts and continues to come to mind, it comes from a heart that is not full of Christ’s love. Instead, it is coming from a heart of self-love, and self-love stifles the witness of a Christian neighbor.

Do Not Keep Score with One’s Neighbor

Paul writes regarding love: “It does not rejoice at wrongdoing” (1 Cor 13:6). The love Paul describes does not store up grievances. It does not keep score. This type of love does not allow Christians to store up complaints and criticisms.

Christian neighbors keep score when they make statements such as “you never” or “you always.” Love means not turning a momentary irritation into a catalog of sins recorded and saved up. Love does not keep a record of wrongs and love certainly does not bring the record out to win arguments or make the case. Christian neighbors who are serious about Christ being magnified in their life and are serious about real, gospel love

must be more interested in loving their neighbor and not winning against their neighbor. Christian neighbors who keep a record of wrong are prone to see their own sin as lesser than their neighbors' sin. Christians should not make their neighbor feel like a bad person; instead, Christians ought to do what Paul mentions in the second part of 1 Corinthians 13:6: "Rejoice in the truth." Instead of looking into the lives of neighbors for behaviors and actions to critique, Christian neighbors are encouraged to look for things to praise. Praising instead of condemning can be difficult for believers who expect others around them to shape up and get their act together. Often, Christians are their own worst enemy. Not only do believers constantly need the gospel to combat self-improvement, but they certainly need it when seeking to love, help, and support struggling neighbors. According to this passage, Paul does not teach the best motivation to change is conviction. Rather, it is encouragement. This understanding is similar to the way the gospel has power that the law does not have.

Therefore, Paul says next, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). In relationships, believers have the moment-by-moment choice to either advocate or accuse. The decision to do one over the other starts in the mind. It begins in how one thinks about the person. It depends on whether one rehearses all of their faults or sins in his imagination. Or, believers can rehearse another person's good qualities, which would be rejoicing with the truth rather than rejoicing in wrongs. It does not mean that none of the negatives are not true about the individual, but it points to what believers "celebrate" in their mind. It spotlights that which is the focus of the believer. The posture of a Christian toward his neighbor should be one of advocacy, giving the benefit of the doubt, considering good motives, and lowering expectations. It is not a loving decision to assume the worst, impugn motives, or unfairly raise the bar higher and higher.

A heart shaped by Christ's love is honest about another's failings and sins; it is a heart that advocates for them. Maybe the neighbor who fell short had a bad day, received

some bad news, or was severely wounded from something in their past. It could be they simply never learned how to act or be a good neighbor.

It is easier to advocate for people who are liked. Christian neighbors are called to carry God's love in the way of grace and extend this kind of thinking to the people that are more difficult to like. This is what it means to believe all things and hope all things. It is being someone's advocate rather than accuser. This is a major difference between gospel love and legalistic love. It is the major difference between someone who has experienced God's grace and someone who has not.

Christ has every reason to accuse, convict, and condemn sinners. No one can stand in his holy presence based on his own goodness. The discussion of human sinfulness has proven this to be true. Sinners can offer nothing to Christ Jesus to please him. Yet, in the gospel, Christ stands not as the accuser of sinners, but as their eternal advocate. To adopt the posture of an accuser is to adopt the posture of the devil himself, the accuser of the brethren.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, Paul offers a complete argument:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul provides a picture of maturity. He presents a picture of maturity shaped by eternity. Paul is saying, "Given that the gospel is scaled to eternity, while all this other stuff, even good stuff, is only temporary, Christ followers ought to live according to the gospel. That is true love." The reason Paul contrasts true love with acting like children is that children are more enslaved to their impulses and emotions—they fly off the handle, pitch fits, pout, whine, complain, and lose their temper. Paul is saying, "I once acted like a hyperemotional child. But, I'm a grown-up now." He is suggesting, "If the believer's heart is tuned to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they will not be enslaved to impulsive responses of the flesh to conflict, difficulty, stress, and injustice."

A Christian may be legitimately wronged or sinned against. However, it is not a mature, Christ-like response to throw a tantrum or succumb to the immediate feelings of the flesh. It takes real maturity, real hope in Christ, to respond to sins and wrongs and irritations with patience and kindness. It takes trusting that there is a greater vindication. It means trusting that God will compensate for anything lost. Ultimately, it means believing that God has done all these things for sinners.

When Christians refuse to love their neighbors, they are acting like love is only given to the deserving, which means they are acting like they deserve God's love. It is a downplay of grace to deny love to someone else. Believers are unable to extend forgiveness until they are honest about the extent to which they are forgiven. When they realize how much they have been forgiven, the beginning of verse 8 makes much more sense.

Jesus knows that the capacity for his followers to love and forgive their neighbors is finite. The ability, then, rests in God's love toward his children saved by grace through faith in Jesus. God's love toward those redeemed in Christ is relentlessly patient in its eternal perseverance. Christians have no right to say to someone who has wronged them, even if they continue to wrong us, that "you have reached your limit with me. My love for you stops now." Such action on the part Christians fails to truly see the depths of their sin in the light of God's holiness. If God, who is perfect and holy, will forgive and love those who are most certainly not, on what basis do Christians have to be unforgiving and unloving to others?

Christ followers can have trouble loving neighbors who are hard to love. It is difficult to keep forgiving neighbors when they continue to behave inexcusably. Christians can become weary. At times, they may even question how much more of such behavior they can take and keep forgiving. They may want to know if they can give up, but fear what that might mean. With all their effort to continually love their neighbor, there is simply no bearing of fruit. The results cannot be seen. They have changed, but their neighbor has not. The love that Jesus demands his followers to show their neighbors does

not have a contingency plan. It does not come with a limited warranty. It is not a love based on results. To think about Christian love in this way is to think of love in a way that is not biblical. Paul has Jesus in mind as the model of love when he tells believers, “Love is about sacrifice and service. And it keeps going. It never ends” (1 Cor 13:8). Whether neighbors being loved embrace forgiveness or not, the call is to keep forgiving. Whether the neighbor being loved is changed by gospel love or not, the call is to keep on loving.

In this sense, “love never fails” does not mean that “love always gets the result the one loving wants.” It means simply that love is not a failure. Love is not a failure regardless of the results. The reason why is because God is not a failure, and God is love.

When Christians love their neighbors with a persevering, sacrificial love, they are reflecting the eternal goodness and grace of God himself. They are glorifying God, and there is no higher calling. Christians love their neighbors because God first loved them. Love always perseveres. Love never fails.

Always Love One’s Neighbor

Christ-followers will love forever. Love will never end. In 1 Corinthians 13:13, love is the greatest because God is love. God expressed his love most deeply by sending his Son: Real love magnifies Christ. In 1 John 4:9-11, John says,

In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

True love really looks like death on a cross. On the cross, believers see the depths of God’s love for sinners. It is through the cross that one can see how Jesus perfectly manifests 1 Corinthians 13 love to undeserving sinners.

Jesus is patient and kind; he is not envious or boastful; he is not arrogant or rude. He did not insist on his own way but, following his Father’s will, left the glory of heaven to empty himself and serve sinners and sacrifice himself for them. Jesus is not irritable or resentful and Jesus keeps no record of wrongs that he might rejoice over those

in their sins and failings. He has forgiven sinners of all their trespasses, throwing their sins into the depths of the sea to remember them no more and has justified them. Jesus rejoices with the truth of his grace that declares sinners righteous. In Jesus, his followers can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. Jesus never ends.

Conclusion

The challenge for Christians to love their neighbors has existed since Jesus gave the command. It will remain a challenge until the consummate return of Jesus. This chapter's examination of the sinfulness of human nature helps to explain why Christians find it a challenge to love their neighbors. As long as neighborhoods and communities are populated with humans, they will be populated with sinners who are corrupt to the core. Such corruption brings problems to the streets and dysfunction to homes. The task for Christians to love their neighbors is especially critical as the current landscape is challenged by secularism and the standards of morality are modified by those who desire to live out their sin nature and justify what they feel is right in their minds and hearts. This cultural pressure has minimized the sinfulness of human nature and made it even more difficult for the church to call sin what is sin. Despite such difficulty, Christians are commanded to love their neighbors through such corruption. This project is intended to help the church love their neighbors in faithful obedience to Jesus' command in Matthew 22:39. The next chapter outlines the details of the project and how it helped the small group leaders of HGBC love their neighbors.

CHAPTER 4

CREATING THE GO:GUIDE

Technology companies invest an exhaustive amount of resources creating tools that benefit their current and potential customers. A company organizes and compensates teams of employees to research, develop, manufacture, market, and manage products and customers. Hours upon hours, perhaps years upon years, are spent ensuring a purpose is established, a customer type is targeted, and a product is created. The worth of it all is determined by the customers' response to the proposed value of the product. Even in an instant, the customer weighs the value of the product by determining the level of benefit the product will bring to their lives minus what it will cost them (value = benefit – cost).

Illustrating the church's mission with a business model can be a fine-line to walk. However, the following illustration explains the thinking behind the creation of the GO:Guide without compromising the true nature of the work to which Christ calls his followers.

Living in a time of unprecedented technological innovation demands precision in product design. At the introduction of the product, the consumer is presented with a value proposition. To buy or not to buy? The value is measured by subtracting the cost from the benefit. Once in the hands of consumers, the product is perceived as more beneficial than the cost paid to acquire and use it.

In this ten-week project, I studied the missiological literacy of HGBC small group leaders, created the GO:Guide, and increased the level of participation of HGBC small group leaders researching the neighbors living near them.

Research Topic

Hickory Grove Baptist Church is located in Charlotte, North Carolina; a city 2.4 million people call home. Currently, 109 people move to Charlotte daily. Of those 109 new residents, 1 out of 7 are born outside of the United States.¹ This gives the churches in Charlotte a remarkable opportunity to both declare and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ to its new neighbors who have potentially never heard the name of Jesus, or even laid eyes on a church building.

Over the past few years, members of HGBC have experienced not only changes in the city of Charlotte, but also in the ministry philosophy of their church. Both the pastoral and small group leadership have diligently worked to increase the theological, ecclesiological, and missiological knowledge of the congregation, especially for those who are a part of a small group. The process of biblically indoctrinating church members has reaped tremendous fruit and expanded the opportunities for ministry to occur both inside and outside of the church building. Such ministry expansion has truly been a gracious provision from the Lord, especially when considering the amount of change taking place in almost every facet of church members' lives. The thought driving the HGBC faith family to take more seriously loving their neighbor comes in the form of the question, "Lord, to whom are we called?" This question is at the heart of this research, project, and the creation of the GO:Guide.

Research Purpose

With such great potential for kingdom expansion to happen through the various neighborhoods within Charlotte, research was needed to know the missiological literacy of HGBC church members. HGBC small group leaders were chosen as the specific group to research for a couple of reasons: (1) every small group leader works for secular organizations/companies surrounded by co-workers who are the face of the context and

¹ Rob Kelly, "State of the City Report 2018," 9, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://forcharlotte.org/state-of-the-city/>.

shapers of the culture; (2) in the ministry structure of HGBC, small group leaders are the most significant influencers of those who make up the membership core. Obtaining the various ways in which HGBC small group leaders love and engage their neighbors in Charlotte was simple and linear in nature. The project officially started with the HGBC small group leaders receiving the GCI on September 3, 2017. The project concluded with the HGBC small group leaders' completion of the Live Sent Survey for the post-survey results needed to measure the effectiveness of the GO:Guide. The results were collected on November 5, 2017.

Great Commission Inventory

On September 3, 2017, the GCI was sent in an email survey to HGBC small group leaders who taught in the adult department. They were asked to complete the survey by September 17, 2017. This duration of time allowed the small group leaders time to ask questions and complete the survey. Sixty-two small group leaders received the email invitation to participate in the survey, 59 completed the survey.

Two different sources were referred to in the development of the questions posed in the GCI. In 2006, I participated in the GC2 conference hosted by the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). GC2 was an "invitation only" conference for pastors of churches who have proven to be significant supporters of the IMB in the past and were forecasted to increase in that support. While at the conference, I formulated specific questions designed to be an initial screening. In other words, if congregants were to approach an HGBC pastor or member of the Missions Committee with a desire to pursue international missions opportunities, they would walk through these questions as a first-level screening. Multiple IMB strategists at the conference affirmed the questions as an adequate first-level screening capable of being asked to every HGBC member. The second resource utilized in the formation of the GCI was David Frazier's *Mission Smart: 15 Critical Questions to Ask Before Launching*

Overseas.² This book was suggested by IMB strategists and served to influence the formulation of questions in the GCI. The results of the survey can be found in appendix 2.

The survey was well received by the small group leaders and affected them in a few ways. First, they appreciated how the survey challenged the way they presently felt about loving lost people, especially neighbors living next to them. One couple let me know that they expected to complete the survey quickly and without much thought, but as they progressed through the questions they grappled extensively with the realities of the Lord's command to love their neighbors and whether they were truly obeying what Jesus expected of his disciples. Second, those who provided feedback appreciated the heart behind the questions and valued the accountability. Third, it created an increased desire to do more in the neighborhoods, ultimately becoming more involved in the lives of their neighbors. This increased desired was evidenced in follow-up conversations from the survey. Individuals approached me with ideas about how they improvingly love their neighbors. Finally, the survey provoked discussion addressing some of the root issues leading to the inadequacies some of the small group leaders knew about and felt in their own lives. The effects of the survey were an added benefit to my personal pastoral ministry and to the creation of the GO:Guide. Conversations around the survey verified the fact that this research and the creation of a practical tool like the GO:Guide would be welcomed and utilized by both small group leaders and eventually small group members. Consequently, the survey provided needed information to be utilized in creating the GO:Guide of the church. The results of the survey can be found in appendix 2.

Missiological Findings

On Friday, September 2, 2017, I conducted a conference call with Caleb Crider and Brian Harrell. Crider is a missiologist, teacher, and writer. He and his family spent seven years in Spain as a missionary. He also founded The Upstream Collective, a network

² David L. Frazier, *Mission Smart: 15 Critical Questions to Ask Before Launching Overseas* (Memphis, TN: Equipping Servants International, 2014).

of churches committed to thinking and acting like missionaries at home and abroad. He currently works with a major denomination's international mission agency teaching people to live and work cross-culturally. Brian Harrell is an IMB worker currently serving unreached people groups in the Southeast region of Africa. He and his family are doing remarkable gospel work in that area of the world. Buildings used by influential witchcraft doctors have been demolished at the command of the leading witchcraft doctor who gave her life to Christ. Once a student who ran track and played baseball at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, Harrell is now proficient at fishing while sea-walking in the Mediterranean Ocean. The guidance both men provided was invaluable. Both understand Charlotte's context, while also possessing experience with other profitable, God-ordained missiological methods used in other cultures to bring people to Jesus.

The conference call proved to be a healthy and challenging discussion. The conference call consisted of the (1) biblical basis for the project; (2) project overview; (3) discussion of the data collected from the GCI; (4) discussion determining the key components of the GO:Guide; and (5) discussion suggesting the design and format of the GO:Guide.

The call began with a brief overview of the biblical basis for the project, stepping Crider and Harrell through the outline of chapter 2 of this project. Going through the biblical perspective of the project provided the need for a guide to help the HGBC small group leaders engage their neighbors with the gospel. It also emphasized the importance of neighbors being engaged with cultural sensitivity. The desire to see the small group leaders of HGBC engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity was the catalyst for this project. I made the both men aware of a few of the challenges that prevented HGBC small group leaders from accomplishing this task. First, the individualistic culture of Charlotte makes it difficult for any neighbor to engage the other neighbors within their neighborhood. The amount of time neighbors spend outside of their homes daily is minimal. The weather, social media, work schedule, traffic, and

demanding schedules are all key factors that make it difficult for neighbors to engage other neighbors. Second, despite neighbors living in neighborhoods designed to reside in close proximity, there still exists a challenge of neighbors living closed-off from one another. Keeping neighbors a safe distance from the details and problems of day-to-day living is typical. This prevents people from having to worry about their neighbor's problems and needs. There is a desire to minimize interaction to lessen the maintenance of being a neighbor. Third, church programming and ministry efforts have not historically challenged the HGBC small group leaders to love their neighbors as commanded by Jesus. Learning to love their neighbors in a way that is biblical may be a significant challenge.

After discussing the biblical basis for the project, time was spent explaining the goals of the project. Crider and Harrell needed to understand each of the three goals of the project for them to know the role they played in the project. The three goals were explained, and the discussion successfully clarified the GCI and the development of the neighboring guide. Once the goals were discussed, the results of the GCI were presented. The GCI provided several key insights and provided the opportunity for necessary discussion. The GCI allowed for the discussion about what needed to be addressed to remain objective. Also, the results of the GCI informed the decisions about the function and design of the GO:Guide. Finally, the GCI pinpointed the key issues that the GO:Guide should strive to resolve.

Analyzing the Data

Interpretations

Harrell, Crider, and I agreed that a shift in schedule and reprioritization of engagement with neighbors needed to take place. Regarding co-workers, this group needed to increase the degree of intentionality in their gospel witness. With such little interaction with neighbors, guidance in this area became the consistent concern as we talked through the survey results. What did these men lack in order to increase the degree to which they interacted with their neighbors? The problem was unanimously determined

to be a strategy and competency issue more than a character issue. Perhaps life was to blame, but the goal now was to provide a tool to both reinvigorate and clearly direct this group to evangelistically engage with people in their neighborhood.

Observations

All participants of the survey were men, the majority being 30-59 years of age. They are family men who work in secular organizations and interact regularly with lost people in the workplace. As expected in their roles as small group leaders, these men highly value God's Word. As men of the Word, it also comes as no surprise that they believe the Great Commission is a significant command to obey with their lives. The main point of concern is in spotlighting the amount of confidence in, interaction with, and actual sharing of the gospel. Based on the group's valuing of the Word and its need to be read and studied daily, the overflow of action was expected to be higher. That expectation increases when one also observes the elevated number of those who pray daily and consider evangelizing with co-workers and neighbors a priority.

The need for the small group leaders to increase the level of engagement with their neighbors was apparent from the GCI responses. Only 18 out of the 59 surveyed communicated that they spent time in their neighborhood regularly. In any relationship, the quality of interaction is greatly determined by the quantity of interaction. This number proved the need to increase the amount of time the small group leaders spent with their neighbors.

Spiritual topics can be difficult to broach even with people one is most comfortable engaging in conversation. Out of 59 small group leader responses, 55 indicated this was true for the surveyed.

In a conference call that lasted an hour and a half, these missiological experts and myself analyzed the survey results and determined the area where these small group leaders needed the greatest amount of guidance. The last portion of the conference call was spent discussing what this practical tool needed to be and to accomplish to see these

small group leaders evangelistically interact more with their neighbors and in ways that are contextually sensitive to how the neighbors daily live their lives.

Expert Missiological Input

At this point in the conference call, we began to discuss the clear need to increase the missiological literacy of the small group leaders who had communicated in the survey that they did not know much about their neighbors. As discussed in chapter 3, this indicates that they rarely interact with their lost neighbors or even fellow believers who can be partnered with in the mission. Though they are aware of the need to evangelize and make disciples, and believe the Spirit within them is powerful enough to use them and speak through them, reasons exist as to why they are not currently engaging with their neighbors.

Knowing the abilities and skills that these small group leaders possess, there is tremendous potential for them to interact with their neighbors in a transforming way. This group of small group leaders was chosen because of the faithfulness and fruitfulness of their ministry work, which was an important aspect in the development of the GO:Guide. This guide was designed to address the missiological competencies of this group more than the heart issues producing missional stall out. While there will always be heart issues in not fully obeying the mission of Jesus, the three of us on the conference call agreed to create a tool to guide this group to prepare to engage their neighbors for the sake of the gospel.

GO:Guide Essentials

Keep It Simple

Harrell and Crider stressed the importance of making sure the tool was clean and simple. The simplicity of the tool would prevent unnecessary obstacles. Both men spoke of the amount of knowledge that can be gained about neighbors simply by making natural observations throughout the day. The cleaner the tool's design, the better chance

it would be utilized consistently over a long period of time. An overcomplicated tool, they felt, would not be utilized and would therefore perpetuate mission stall out. The goal was to keep everything about the tool simple. It needed to be simple in design, language, flow, and usability. We thought the tool would be most effective if any user could memorize the steps of the guide. To accomplish this goal, we felt the tool needed to be no more than eight steps.

Create It to Be Multi-Generational

The tool's simple design would allow for children to participate in getting to know their neighbors as well. A simple tool could help train children to channel their natural curiosity and get to know neighbors with gospel purpose. Crider, Harrell, and I envisioned this tool being placed on the family's refrigerator or being a conversation piece at the dinner table. For this kind of training and use to occur, the design had to keep the younger generations in mind.

Make It Self-Explanatory

If the tool's design was well-thought out, it would require little instruction or training to start using and completing. The tool needed to be clear in explaining and coaching the tool's user. Even though the tool and the reason for it are of the utmost importance for the sake of the kingdom, the tendency to overcomplicate it needed to be resisted.

Work the Language

Word choice would make or break the tool. Every word needed to be carefully selected and the language used needed to communicate a lot with a little. Also, the language needed to inform and direct different types of users. From the novice to the expert, the tool should be able to be utilized by a broad spectrum of users. Word selection would play a key role in the scalability of the tool.

The language of the tool also needed to be active sounding. Each step should avoid a passive tense. For the highest level of usability and clarity, the tool needed to describe each step or task in an active tense. Also, the sentences and statements needed to remain short in length and not too wordy.

Language in the analytics game is crucial. Big businesses pay a lot of money for analytics regarding what people think, feel, and do. If businesses see this as an important way to persuade people to value what is offered for the exchange of money, certainly the church could do the same for the great exchange of a heart of stone for a heart of flesh.

Design It to Be Visually Helpful

From the direction of steps to take, instructions to read, and information to glean, the tool needed to clearly map the information. The user should effortlessly know through the visual layout of the tool where to start, what to do, and where to end. Therefore, the thickness of arrows and the type and color of the font needed to help the user navigate the tool.

Distribute Widely

The tool needed to be designed to handout or send electronically. The reproducibility and scalability of the tool meant that the design was created for easy printing or download. A tool that is several pages would make it more cumbersome to distribute to the masses. This tool was designed with a scale greater than only a small group of leaders.

GO:Guide Evaluation

To reach the objectives and goals of the GO:Guide, four church planters were asked to evaluate its design. The church planters were chosen based on their expertise and experience in loving neighbors in various contexts throughout the world. The discussion

and evaluation of the GO:Guide was pivotal in designing a tool that the HGBC small group leaders could employ in their own lives and neighborhoods.

On Thursday, September 21, 2017, I conducted a conference call with Drew Griffin. Griffin is the Lead Pastor of Cross Church NYC in New York City. Along with a core launch team, Griffin planted Cross Church NYC in 2014. He is an exceptional thinker. His experience planting a church in a context different from the one in which he grew up and received ministry experience proved to be vital in his evaluation of the GO:Guide. Griffin was quickly able to point out the elements of the GO:Guide that either needed to be added, revised, or deleted.

Griffin emphasized one key element of the GO:Guide that he felt must be included in the design. He mentioned the importance of cultural sensitivity time and time again over the course of our conversation. In his experience as a church planter, he and members of the church planting launch team found that people responded positively to conversations, invitations, and even prayers when team members interacted with a sensitivity to who the person is and what they believe. Griffin was adamant about this type of interaction, pointing out how this approach affected the culture of their church and the mindset of its members. Based on Griffin's insight regarding the cultural sensitivity of the tool's users, the word "culture" was placed in the GO:Guide and made to be an early instructional step in the tool.

Griffin also provided feedback concerning the design and format of the guide. He agreed with the number of instructional steps and suggested there be blanks below each step. Griffin felt that blanks would encourage the user to interact with the guide. He also pointed out that certain personality types do whatever it takes to fill in blanks. Based on this suggestion, blanks for the user to make notes were included in the design of the GO:Guide.

On September 21, 2017, I also conducted a conference call with Daniel Yang. Yang is the Lead Pastor of Trinity Life in Toronto, Canada. Just as Griffin did in New

York City, Yang planted Trinity Life with a church planting launch team. They began to hold worship services in 2013.

After stepping through the details of the project and overviewing the results of the GCI, I presented the GO:Guide to Yang. He offered a favorable evaluation and affirmed the direction and execution of the GO:Guide. I mentioned to Yang some of the comments and suggestions made earlier in the day by Griffin. Yang agreed with Griffin's emphasis on cultural sensitivity, and he made some other suggestions to consider in the GO:Guide's design. Yang provided some staggering statistics describing the ethnic make-up of Toronto. Based on the needs of Toronto, he emphasized the need to train members to love their neighbors by not demanding them to assimilate into a particular culture. Instead, Yang suggested the guide lead its users to adjust to the cultural preferences and behaviors of their neighbors to make it easier for their neighbors to integrate into the life of the church. He believed that if church members began to do this in their neighborhoods, it would eventually lead them to do the same when the church gathers. Based on Yang's feedback, the word "indigeneity" was included in the GO:Guide.

Yang has a background in web design. He has an eye for the usability of tools like the GO:Guide. Yang felt that the GO:Guide would bog down and become clunky if graphic icons were included in the design. Based on this feedback, the only graphic icon was the word "Go" placed in the background of the guide.

On Friday, September 22, 2017, I conducted a conference call with Jacob Pursley. Pursley is in an international church planter in the Middle East. He is a gifted evangelist with a tremendous ability to remove complex cultural barriers when engaging all types of people in conversation. Pursley's experience in ministering to Muslims for the past twelve years allowed him to add helpful insight to the design and overall use of the GO:Guide.

After providing Pursley with the details of the project, a great deal of time was spent discussing the small group leaders' responses obtained from the GCI. Pursley was

concerned with the lack of interaction the small group leaders had with their neighbors. While he appreciated the guide's emphasis on cultural sensitivity, Pursley pointed out the need for the presentation of the gospel to happen sooner than later. He recognized his personality's role in the opinion he expressed, but still felt the guide's users not be overly delayed or too passive in presenting the gospel. It was based on his feedback that the word "presentation" was included on the GO:Guide.

Lastly, on Friday, September 22, 2017, I conducted a conference call with Aaron Peters. Peters, along with a church planting launch team, was sent by HGBC to partner with City on a Hill, a local church in the Boston area, in efforts to plant another local church in a different part of Boston. Having lived in Charlotte and spending a few years on the pastoral staff team of HGBC, Peters was able to offer feedback specific to what he knew about the church and context. Specifically, he was concerned about the lack of sequence in the GO:Guide's instructional steps. Based on this feedback, the instructional steps were graphically placed on the letter in the word "GO." Peters also stressed the need for the guide to remain simple. Having spent much of his focus as a pastor leading the students of HGBC, he felt the simplicity of the tool was pivotal for the guide's use by all generations.

All four conference calls served to improve key aspects of the GO:Guide. Each church planter offered significant feedback and their contributions to the overall design of the GO:Guide were innumerable. They deserve ample credit for the success of its production and continued use.

Small Group Leader Training

On Sunday, October 22, 2017, I conducted a training session with the small group leaders involved in the project. The training consisted of the (1) biblical basis for the project; (2) project overview, (3) discussion of the data collected from the GCI; (4) discussion determining the key components of the GO:Guide; and (5) discussion suggesting the design and format of the GO:Guide

The goal of the training was to educate the small group leaders on the use of the GO:Guide. The guide was well received. After presenting the elements of the GO:Guide, a brief time was spent answering questions and providing further clarity.

Conclusion

This project was successful in meeting the three goals outlined in chapter 1. The GCI and the information it provided were crucial for myself and two missiological experts to analyze and determine exactly what needed to be included in the creation of the GO:Guide. The expert panel of church planters were the right people to assemble and provide feedback on the GO:Guide. Proof of the achievement of the GO:Guide was seen in the significant measure of success brought about in the increased participation of the HGBC small group leaders.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

The purpose of this project was to design a neighboring guide that instructed HGBC small group leaders in how to engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity. This purpose was established based on the life and health of HGBC. The Lord has brought about a change in HGBC's missional attitude and posture. Put simply, HGBC began to look more outward than inward regarding the engagement of their neighbors.

The challenge presented to the leadership was to come alongside the changing mindset of the congregants and guide them in the way they live out and engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity, and ultimately, for the sake of the gospel. A sense of reinvigoration ignited a passion to pursue the lost, especially neighbors. Digging to the root, the biblical understanding, of human depravity in sermons preached and lessons taught called the hearers to re-examine their theological understanding of such significant doctrinal truth and search their hearts for what the Lord might be calling them to do in order to pursue sinners. The true description of man's descent into sin and sprint toward hell convicted and called afresh the sovereign power of a sending God. HGBC members living sent to their neighbors for the sake of Christ gained traction and implanted healthy seeds of gospel growth felt even now during the evaluation of this project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

This project's purpose was identified and stated based on conversations between HGBC church members and pastors, and to meet the need that surfaced time and time again amidst the dialogue. That need was to instruct, direct, and to a certain degree educate HGBC members in how to love and engage their neighbors most effectively for the sake of the gospel. With these requests in mind, the project set out to create a neighboring guide

to give HGBC small group leaders needed direction and education in how to engage their neighbors in word and deed for the gospel, minus cultural barriers. A neighboring guide was designed to meet such needs.

One of the primary aims of this project was to increase the missiological literacy of HGBC small group leaders. This specific aim stemmed from the model of the apostles, specifically Peter and Paul, exegetically shown from the Bible in chapter 2 of this project. Peter and Paul were precise in engaging people who had never met a follower of Jesus and the message they communicated. The apostles' precision was evidenced in their sensitivity to the cultural and spiritual elements that differed in each gospel engagement. The initial point of contact, which was at the time unprecedented gospel interaction, was a collision between light and darkness, holiness and evil, life and death, and truth and deceit. The apostles' obedience unavoidably created an initial obstacle, only to be overcome supernaturally. What Peter and Paul modeled next, however, is what every Christ-follower sent on mission should replicate. The apostles knew the creation of such an impenetrable obstacle would require the power of the Holy Spirit alone to overwhelm any resistance to the life-giving truth of the gospel presented. Even still, these apostles had prepared so that no additional obstacles would impede the presentation of the gospel. These apostles taught with their lives what now can be read in missiological textbooks. The apostles believed in the power of the gospel and loved those who would hear the message enough to deny themselves of personal rights and privileges. Valuing the gospel and genuinely loving people focuses the heart to forsake all for Christ Jesus and making his name known.

The design of the GO:Guide sought to expand the timeline in which it would be utilized by the HGBC small group leaders. The precision of the guide's design was critical in shaping the user's experience. The guide was created to be simple. Simplicity was key to increasing the guide's shelf-life. Overcomplicating the guide would lead to a decrease in use. It could also lead the guide's users to perceive it as just another trendy

church gimmick. A clean, simple, clear design also required the right use of words. Therefore, words were selected that would both teach the user the basics of engaging neighbors with cultural sensitivity while also guiding the user through an investigative process that can be as surface or in-depth as desired. The guide's design needed to provide the ability for multi-generational use, perhaps capable of becoming a staple piece talked and prayed through in Bible studies, accountability groups, or by families in times of worship and devotion. Christian maturity was also considered in the design of the GO:Guide. The guide's design needed to consider the most novice user while simultaneously adding value to the experienced missionary residing in unreached areas of the world. The overall use of the GO:Guide depended on whether it could be inserted and add value in multiple formats, processes, and relationships within the life of the church. The purpose of the project's neighboring guide would diminish if the design was misunderstood, confusing, or unhelpful.

The design of the GO:Guide would need to allow the HGBC small group leaders to gain helpful data about their neighbors. While the weightiness of God's call to follow Jesus and lead others to do the same should naturally motivate Christians to pay close attention to those who live near them on a day-to-day basis, missional apathy remains a force to be reckoned with, and has been since Genesis 3. HGBC small group leaders are empowered to teach with authority and model to other HGBC members what it looks like to live a life on mission for Jesus. The starting point of the GO:Guide's design was based on the information obtained from the GCI. Though the HGBC small group leaders desired to proactively prepare for engaging their neighbors, they felt unprepared and lacked key information to engage with cultural sensitivity. Therefore, the design of the GO:Guide would instruct the HGBC small group leaders in how to investigate, gather information, and engage their neighbors with cultural sensitivity. Prayerfully, stepping through the guide and obtaining key information would lead to increased cultural sensitivity and

favorably accompany the growing desire of the HGBC small group leaders to engage their neighbors for the sake of the gospel and in obedience to Christ's commands.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The goals for this project were intentionally sequential. With each goal met, the following goal might be better fulfilled. Based on the goals' measurements determined at the outset of the project, all the goals were met.

The first goal was to assess the current mindset and approach taken by HGBC small group leaders to engage their neighbors in Charlotte. This goal was measured by administering a Great Commission Inventory (GCI) to the North Campus small group leaders of HGBC. The inventory assessed the degree to which the small group leaders engaged their neighbors with cultural sensitivity. The small group leaders were questioned in order to better know and understand their motives, practices, and aspirations in loving their neighbors as Christ commanded. First, the questions required small group leaders to self-evaluate a range of discipleship topics. The discipleship topics were basic, common, and effectively revealed key insights regarding the spirituality of the small group leaders. Second, the GCI struck a right balance by including questions that pushed the small group leaders to answer introspectively, yet not feel the questions were uncomfortably intrusive or judgmental. Third, the GCI revealed specific areas to be developed in the life of the small group leaders. For example, the small group leaders' lack of engagement with their neighbors helpfully informed the GO:Guide's design. The GO:Guide was tailored for a basic level of engagement and not deep relationships. The goal was met when 80 percent of the surveys were completed and compiled for analysis. The completion of this goal helpfully informed the creation of the GO:Guide.

The second goal was to design, with the help of two missiological strategists, a neighboring guide (GO:Guide) to instruct HGBC small group leaders in how to engage neighbors with cultural sensitivity. This goal was measured by a panel of four people consisting of three North American church planters and one international church planter.

These experts utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical fidelity, organization, scope, applicability, and clarity of the GO:Guide. The success of meeting this goal was due to the high level of expertise contributing to the design of the GO:Guide.

First, the two missiological strategists exceeded every expectation. They were intellectually curious about each response of the GCI. Their genuine concern for the development of the small group leaders was evidenced in both the amount and quality of conversation they provided in the initial design stage of the GO:Guide. The conversations regarding the GO:Guide's design were high level, contributive, and secured success for the design of the GO:Guide. Every detail of the design of the GO:Guide was discussed in detail and evaluated with a critical eye.

Second, the four church planting pastors who evaluated the design of the GO:Guide provided qualitative feedback. The conversations with each of these experts helped to revise the GO:Guide and ensure the success of its completion. Every aspect of the guide was questioned, refined, and signed off on by these experts. The endorsement of the expert panel guaranteed the final version of the GO:Guide would effectively help the small group leaders' engage their neighbors.

This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the initial feedback had yielded less than 90 percent, the guide was to be revised until it met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase the HGBC small group leaders' effort to engage their neighbors and obtain key information based on their interaction and observations. The goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey which was used to evaluate the change of effort made by the small group leaders. The GO:Guide was tested to determine whether it actually led the small group leaders to increase the amount of effort they made to engage their neighbors. The Live Sent Survey (LSS) stepped the small group leaders through questions that made it possible to measure whether the introduction of the

GO:Guide influenced the amount of effort they made to engage their neighbors. Every question of the survey asked about different aspects of the small group leaders' neighbors or neighborhood. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths of this project contributed to its success. The first strength of this project was the GO:Guide's scope of influence. The GO:Guide prompted many conversations in small group gatherings and has become a consistent conversational piece in both the conclusion of small group lessons and accountability groups. Shortly after the post-survey results were received, the pastoral staff received positive responses and engaged in helpful dialogue with both small group leaders and church members. The GO:Guide created an interest in gaining more knowledge about the neighbors living around the small group leaders. In fact, many of the small group leaders expressed gratitude for what the GO:Guide emphasized. They also detailed the unexpected and needed effect the GO:Guide brought about in their day-to-day living and engagement with their neighbors. Now more than ever they paid attention, praying that what they had noticed and observed about their neighbors would affect the impending point of contacts made. Overall, the subsequent conversations brought about by the GO:Guide were remarkable. The project impacted the pastoral staff as well. They used it in their personal lives and challenged themselves to pay closer attention to their neighbors. Also, many of them used it for planning ministry events. Whether it was an event like Vacation Bible School or a short-term mission trip the student ministry took over Spring Break, the GO:Guide was utilized to prepare participants to engage the lost with greater cultural sensitivity. This project influenced both the small group leaders and pastors of HGBC and had a comprehensive impact on the church.

The second strength of this project was how it provoked HGBC small group leaders to pay closer attention to their neighbors. Simply walking through the GO:Guide

led to an increased desire to engage their neighbors and put their investigative knowledge of each neighbor to the test. One small group leader reported new levels of intentionality when they played with their kids outside on the weekend. They testified of the GO:Guide's ability as they detailed keen, never before made observations regarding their neighbors, even neighbors they lived next to for several years. In another conversation with a small group leader, he quickly listed off several new observations about his neighbors that he had never made or considered as unnecessary obstacles to the gospel. This type of feedback spoke to the Lord's gracious use of the GO:Guide.

A third strength was the GO:Guide's use of categories. Because the project began by assessing the mindset and methods of HGBC small group leaders, the GO:Guide incorporated a wide-range of users. The differences include demographics, socioeconomics, life seasons, family size, marital status, type of residence, and surrounding culture. The GO:Guide's design reflects a thoughtful, thorough examination of such variables by highlighting the over-arching categories gleaned from the GCI. Virtually every single variable could come up under one of the GO:Guide's categories. The goal was to ensure the GO:Guide considered all the key categories needed to instruct, direct, and educate the small group leaders effectively. The GO:Guide's categories reflect the expertise provided by the missiological experts chosen for the project.

A fourth strength was the GO:Guide's intuitive design. The flow of the guide makes sense. Based on the feedback of the expert panel, the guide has a clear starting point and smoothly flows to the concluding category. The guide's design also reflects what the Bible prioritizes in the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and Great Commission. The aesthetics, language, and flow of the guide encapsulate the character and mission of God. Any user of the GO:Guide, whether young or old, immature or mature in the faith, with no to little experience can make sense of the ordering of the steps and easily get a feel for what God desires from their engagement with neighbors.

A fifth strength of the project was the way it raised the level of accountability. The GO:Guide, though simple in design, eliminated any excuse for lack of neighbor engagement or cultural insensitivity. For the small group leaders, the GO:Guide became a regular agenda item for quarterly trainings. At each training they were asked about the progress made from consistently stepping through the GO:Guide. The accountability was greater felt when asked to provide new information they had obtained from either observing or engaging their neighbors. The GO:Guide was able to provide accountability even the most experienced small group leaders had never encountered.

A sixth strength of the project was the reproducibility of the GO:Guide. The expert panel communicated the distributable ease of the guide should the request of the use by other churches arise. Simply put, the GO:Guide would transfer. Any church member at any church in any context could utilize the GO:Guide. Even though the demand for direction and need for such a guide stemmed from HGBC, the GO:Guide transcends the very cultural barriers it requests the user to overcome.

A seventh and final strength of the project was the high caliber of missiological input given by such talented experts. This final strength is the reason for any other strengths mentioned. The intellect and level of thinking these two men brought to the project are immeasurably valuable. Their consulting ability attributed to the success of the creation and design of the GO:Guide. The impact of their investment will be felt in the life of HGBC and Charlotte neighborhoods for years to come.

Weaknesses of the Project

Even though the project accomplished all of its goals and went according to plan, there were some weak areas of the project and opportunities in which to improve. The first weakness was the project's narrowed concern about neighbor engagement. Though the need for neighbor engagement was expressed by HGBC small group leaders, neighbor engagement is not the only way by which the Great Commission is fulfilled and the Great Commandment obeyed. Key relationships are made and conversations had where

HGBC members work and play. The necessary narrow focus of this project was expected to be a weakness.

A second weakness was the heavy emphasis on cultural sensitivity without making more of an emphasis on what must increase in the heart of those seeking to engage their neighbors for the sake of the gospel. A messenger of the gospel misses the point and may remain insensitive to a neighbor's cultural background should their heart not increase in self-denial and desire to obey that which the Lord has commanded. The guide's primary goal was to correct cultural insensitivity and left less room for addressing the heart issues that could impede a willingness to sacrifice personal preference and cultural ideals.

A third weakness of the project was the guide's lack of communicating what duration of time should be expected to achieve successful levels of neighbor engagement with cultural sensitivity. This was partly due to the vast number of possible variables that could be considered as time determiners in each engagement. Depending on the Spirit's leading, any timeline is subject to change and any expected outcome could suddenly happen or demand further investment. For certain personalities stepping through the GO:Guide, a lack of time expected may lead to frustration.

A fourth weakness is similar to the third weakness. A weakness of the project is the guide's loosely defining of success. The reason for such a weakness to exist is due to similar reasons why a timeline was not specified in the guide. The outcome of engaging neighbors with cultural sensitivity is as chapter 3 explains—completely based on the work of the Holy Spirit. The GO:Guide would seem self-refuting should success be defined more than it was in the final category of the GO:Guide.

A fifth weakness of the project lies in the simplistic nature of the GO:Guide's design. If perceived by some to be too simple, it could also be perceived as unimportant. The goal of a guide is to strike the right balance for as many user's as possible. Every guide or manual will in one way or another fail to meet every user's expectations. Some GO:Guide users may expect a guide created and designed for something as important as

getting the gospel to their neighbors to be more complex and thorough. If they feel this is the case, then they will sense the GO:Guide fell short of what was expected.

A sixth weakness of the project is the potential short life-span of the GO:Guide. The implementation and continual use of the neighboring guide depends on key factors such as buy-in from the leadership, communication of its importance, celebration of stories in which the guide was positively utilized, and consistent promotion of the guide's benefits. The length of time in which the GO:Guide maintains usefulness depends on much more than what this project purposed to accomplish.

A seventh weakness of the project is the amount of caring support for those who respond to the challenging questions negatively. For certain individuals, a lack of engaging neighbors may stem from an underlying anxiety triggered by any type of social interaction. While the goal of the project is biblical and the motivation of its success is pure and right, it is not fail-proof. The aim of the GO:Guide is to help small group leaders engage their neighbors. It is possible that while small group leaders positively increase the level of effort they make to engage their neighbors, they simultaneously must deal with an increase in fear, doubt, or anxiety that newly develops simply by participating in this project. As the GO:Guide is utilized more and more by the small group leaders and throughout HGBC, this will be a variable to monitor.

Project Changes

The project's evaluation identified modifications that would enhance the project. While key objectives and goals were met and the project went according to plan, certain changes might better serve the future of the project and use of the GO:Guide. Next are a few changes that would benefit the future use of the project.

First, the small group leaders were the only participants asked to complete the GCI. The development of the GO:Guide would benefit from responses obtained from a more sizeable and diverse group of participants. The participants of the GCI should expand

to include small group leaders involved in all the ministries of HGBC and not just adult small groups.

Second, the opinion of the experts who provided feedback was instrumental to the success of the project. The only change that would be made to the feedback they gave and consultation they provided would be to add a different perspective both in the ideas given and the feedback obtained. In regard to the creation of the GO:Guide, the rubric would include four laypersons in addition to the four church planting pastors who provided feedback in filling out the rubric. These four laypersons (two men and two women) included in the evaluation of the GO:Guide would be selected from each of the church planting pastors' congregation. This feedback would provide a needed perspective on the neighboring guide's usability. It is possible, even likely, that pastors, though constantly around their congregants, might still default to the use of language that is clear and makes sense to other pastors, but is not clear to the majority of the congregants for whom the guide targets. Including laypersons in the guide's evaluation could better alleviate confusion.

Third, the project could benefit from a more formalized training supplementing the GO:Guide. The GO:Guide was designed to stand on its own as a tool to increase the effort made by HGBC small group leaders to engage their neighbors. This was a known factor in introducing the GO:Guide to the small group leaders. The design of the GO:Guide implied that effort would naturally lead to an increased amount of knowledge the small group leaders would come to realize about their neighbors. A formalized training would provide key tips in how to process and further respond to the additional information they found out about their neighbors.

Fourth, the GO:Guide may have benefited from a different format. While the guide is aesthetically pleasing to some, its atypical format may be too much for some users to bear. To optimize the format of the guide and maximize its use, the rubric used to evaluate the guide would include more questions regarding the format of the guide. While

the specifics of what formatting changes need to be made may not be exactly spelled out, the evaluation would more than signal the need for a change in formatting be made.

Fifth, the GO:Guide would benefit from a clear emphasis on the necessity of prayer. Prayer is central to any strategy or tool used by the church to love their neighbors. Jesus commanded his followers to pray. They were to pray for laborers for the harvest (Matt 9:37-38). They were to pray for the Lord to strengthen them and not give up (Luke 8:18). From its inception, the church prayed for the boldness to love and evangelize even those who persecuted them (Acts 4:29). Paul instructed followers of Jesus to pray ceaselessly (1 Thess 5:17). This project should be modified to clearly communicate that any effort made to engage neighbors is nothing, apart from Jesus (John 15:5). Therefore, prayer must be central to the GO:Guide and changed to make this essential truth more apparent to its user. The appropriate modification should be made to provoke the user to pray for themselves and their neighbors. The changes should lead them to trust in the supernatural work of God as they diligently work to love their neighbors and point them to Jesus. The project should prioritize prayer as not just something to do before engaging their neighbors, but as something that must permeate all of life.

Theological and Personal Reflections

This project revealed the missiological illiteracy of the modern-day church, specifically in the means and methods used by the church to engage the lost world. For various reasons, the Western church has become focused on getting the attention of the lost world. Chapter 2 provided the theological and philosophical reasons for why this type of focus is faulty and harmful to the church. Time, money, and effort were overspent attempting to attract a morally camouflaged culture to come to church and be convinced for themselves that the cost of following Jesus and participating in church activities was not going to cost them much more than what they were already paying for cheap depravity. Grimacing now from reading such a harsh description pales in comparison to the pain of the convictional conflict felt by those, like myself, who pastored through the church growth

movement, and now not only live to tell of its shortcomings, but attempt to utilize any means available, even doctoral projects like this one, to see it corrected, perhaps even redeemed.

As I reflect over this project, I feel the urgency for which the gospel is needed amongst my lost neighbors. I also feel the desire to see churches multiply and countless disciples made. At the same time, I recognize that the Lord gives me no promise that my faithful obedience to his commands will be rewarded with the rate of reproduction I desire. Even if it were biblically possible for this project to bring about rapid multiplication, it is not biblically promised. While I pray and long for the gospel to spread rapidly throughout my neighborhood and the nations, it is the Lord who determines the rate of the gospel spread throughout the world. Like Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, I am to pray, fast, and long for the gospel to spread rapidly and expect the church to multiply. Success is defined as faithfulness to Jesus and obedience to his commands. Faithfulness means working hard while investing energy, time, and resources into the task of loving neighbors and making disciples. I pray this project leads others to thoughtfully and biblically do that which best accomplishes what God has called his church to do. The humble work of pointing people to Jesus includes doing what it takes, even adjusting strategies, so that God might bear fruit through our lives. Faithfulness is dependence on the gracious power of God and full trust in him to bring about the results.

This project graciously brings to mind the most significant way in which the Lord has grown my faith. This project called for spending countless hours pouring over page after page of the Bible, exegeting passage after passage, searching God's mind on subject matter that is to be included in equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. While working on this project, anyone sitting near me, who listened closely, could likely hear my spiritual heart creak and crack as the Lord called me to trust him with aspects of my pastoral leadership yet unrestricted to his Christ-conforming presence. As he did with the disciples in Mark 10, the Lord called me, and even now calls me, to leave everything

for the sake of following him, for the sake of the gospel, and for the sake of his flock. To God alone be they glory.

Conclusion

With the conclusion of this project comes a sense of God's sovereign hand lengthening into the life of HGBC. Proof of such supernatural work is evidenced in the upward spiraling effect of God's Word preached and the Spirit's leading trusted. Increased knowledge of God has led to Christ-like conduct. Christ-like conduct has increased the desire to know him even more. This pattern of gospel growth calls for celebration overflowing into prayers of gratitude and intercession.

The GO:Guide was created and designed to better pastor the precious people of HGBC for whom Jesus purchased with his own shed blood. My prayer is that the initial evidence of the guide's impact would continue in conforming the church increasingly into the image of the Son, sent by a loving God to redeem sinners from the peril of their sin, and reconcile them to a right relationship with the Father. May the Spirit of God awaken the depraved souls of neighbors engaged for the gospel, even those engaged due to God's gracious use of the GO:Guide.

APPENDIX 1

GREAT COMMISSION INVENTORY (GCI)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the participant's current understanding, practice, character, and fulfillment of the Great Commission. Justin Paslay is conducting research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

This is part of a research project conducted by Justin Paslay. By completing the survey, you are consenting for this data to be used in the project.

It would be helpful to the pastoral staff if you add your name below, but it is optional. If your desire is to remain anonymous, please use the last four digits of your phone number to help with organization.

Name (4 digits) _____
Gender _____ Age _____

Mark the one you believe to be true (Please mark only one).

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | Scripture is authoritative, inspired, and inerrant. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | The Great Commission commands all Christians to make disciples of all nations. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I interact with lost people on a regular basis. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | I spend time in prayer daily. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I intake scripture daily. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. | I spend more time participating in entertainment than I spend time with God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | I spend time with family members regularly | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. | I spend time with people in my neighborhood regularly. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

9.	I spend time in discipleship and fellowship with other believers regularly.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	It is easier for me to discuss spiritual topics with other Christians than with the lost.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	I participate in mission trips (local or overseas) as often as I am able.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I work outside of the home in a secular organization.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I have the opportunity to spend time with lost people daily.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I enjoy meeting and getting to know new people.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	It is easy for me to open up my home to my lost neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I feel comfortable leading a Bible study with my lost neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I believe that I have been given authority through Jesus Christ to share the gospel with my lost neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I believe that I have nothing to fear in sharing the gospel with my lost neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	I believe that I am able to clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	I believe that when I share the gospel with someone, the Holy Spirit is working through me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	I feel that I do not have enough money to participate in missions.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	I feel that I have time to spend with lost people.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	I believe that I am qualified to share the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	I feel equipped to share the gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	I feel better equipped to engage the lost when I have spent time in scripture and in prayer first.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 2
GREAT COMMISSION INVENTORY RESULTS

Hickory Grove Baptist Church
September 2017

Criteria

HGBC Church Member
North Campus Adult Sunday School Teacher

62 Emails Sent
59 Total Responses
59 Complete Responses

Demographics

Gender

Male	100%	59
Female	0%	0

Age

18-29	8.47%	5
30-39	20.33%	12
40-49	27.11%	16
50-59	23.72%	14
60-69	11.86%	7
70+	8.47%	5

Marital Status

Married	93.22%	55
Single	6.77%	4

Table A1. Great Commission Inventory responses

	% Selected	# Selected
Scripture is authoritative, inspired, and inerrant.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	0	0
Agree Slightly	0	0
Agree	3.4	2
Strongly Agree	96.6	57
The Great Commission commands all Christians to make disciples of all nations.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	0	0
Agree Slightly	0	0
Agree	5.1	3
Strongly Agree	94.9	56
I interact with lost people on a regular basis.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	11.9	7
Agree Slightly	15.3	9
Agree	18.6	11
Strongly Agree	54.2	32
I spend time in prayer daily.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	6.8	4
Agree Slightly	8.5	5
Agree	20.3	12
Strongly Agree	64.4	38
I intake scripture daily.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	15.2	9
Agree Slightly	11.9	7
Agree	13.6	8
Strongly Agree	59.3	35
I spend more time participating in entertainment than I spend time with God.		
Strongly Disagree	13.6	8
Disagree	25.4	15
Disagree Slightly	30.5	18
Agree Slightly	18.6	11
Agree	8.5	5
Strongly Agree	3.4	2

Table A1 continued

I spend time with family members regularly.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	5.1	3
Agree Slightly	13.6	8
Agree	20.3	12
Strongly Agree	61.0	36
I spend time with people in my neighborhood regularly.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	5.1	3
Disagree Slightly	13.6	8
Agree Slightly	25.4	15
Agree	30.5	18
Strongly Agree	25.4	15
I spend time in discipleship and fellowship with other believers regularly.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	11.9	7
Agree Slightly	25.4	15
Agree	32.2	19
Strongly Agree	30.5	18
It is easier for me to discuss spiritual topics with other Christians than with the lost.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	0	0
Agree Slightly	6.8	4
Agree	33.9	20
Strongly Agree	59.3	35
I participate in mission trips (local or overseas) as often as I am able.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	3.4	2
Disagree Slightly	25.4	15
Agree Slightly	28.8	17
Agree	22.0	13
Strongly Agree	20.3	12
I work outside of the home in a secular organization.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	6.8	4
Agree Slightly	8.5	5
Agree	30.5	18
Strongly Agree	54.2	32

Table A1 continued

I have the opportunity to spend time with lost people daily.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	3.4	2
Agree Slightly	5.1	3
Agree	20.3	12
Strongly Agree	71.2	42
I enjoy meeting and getting to know new people.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	6.8	4
Agree Slightly	20.3	12
Agree	30.5	18
Strongly Agree	42.4	25
It is easy for me to open up my home to my lost neighbors.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	6.8	4
Disagree Slightly	22.0	13
Agree Slightly	22.0	13
Agree	28.8	17
Strongly Agree	20.3	12
I feel comfortable leading a Bible study with my lost neighbors.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	13.6	8
Disagree Slightly	16.9	10
Agree Slightly	39.0	23
Agree	16.9	10
Strongly Agree	13.6	8
I believe that I have been given authority through Jesus Christ to share the gospel with my lost neighbors.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	0	0
Agree Slightly	3.4	2
Agree	11.9	7
Strongly Agree	84.7	50
I believe that I have nothing to fear in sharing the gospel with my lost neighbors.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	3.4	2
Agree Slightly	16.9	10
Agree	50.9	30
Strongly Agree	28.8	17

Table A1 continued

I believe that I am able to clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	5.1	3
Agree Slightly	6.8	4
Agree	52.5	31
Strongly Agree	35.6	21
I believe that when I share the gospel with someone, the Holy Spirit is working through me.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	1.7	1
Agree Slightly	1.7	1
Agree	40.1	24
Strongly Agree	39.0	23
I feel that I do not have enough money to participate in missions.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	16.9	10
Agree Slightly	33.9	20
Agree	25.4	15
Strongly Agree	23.7	14
I feel that I have time to spend with lost people.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	8.5	5
Disagree Slightly	30.5	18
Agree Slightly	30.5	18
Agree	16.9	10
Strongly Agree	13.6	8
I believe that I am qualified to share the gospel.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	3.4	2
Agree Slightly	10.2	6
Agree	45.8	27
Strongly Agree	40.6	24
I feel equipped to share the gospel.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	1.7	1
Disagree Slightly	5.1	3
Agree Slightly	28.8	17
Agree	33.9	20
Strongly Agree	30.5	18

Table A1 continued

I feel better equipped to engage the lost when I have spent time in scripture and in prayer first.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Disagree Slightly	5.1	3
Agree Slightly	18.6	11
Agree	44.1	26
Strongly Agree	32.2	19

APPENDIX 3

GO:GUIDE

PARTNERS
Who is going to help us?

PRESENTATION
Good News, How?
Access, Proclamation

LOCATION
Address? House #? Apartment #?

PEOPLE
Name of Neighbors

CHURCH
Worship, Communities, Indigeneity, Reproducibility

CULTURE
Customs, Idols,
Needs, Bridges/
Barriers, Language

PLATFORM
Why are you here?
How will we engage them?

APPENDIX 4

GO:GUIDE EVALUATION RUBRIC

The markings below are the summary of the 4 church planting pastors' responses.

Live Sent Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The guide is pertinent to the direction of the church.				4	
The guide is engaging.				4	
The guide provokes genuine responses.				4	
The guide is clearly worded.				4	
The guide utilizes understandable language.			1	3	
The guide accurately measures the mindset of members.			1	3	
The guide could be distributed church wide.				4	
The guide works well with email distribution.				4	
The guide reveals needed action steps.			1	3	
The guide is capable of multi-generational evaluation.				4	
The guide will yield realistic feedback.				4	
The guide will evaluate all levels of church member faithfulness.			1	3	
The guide is thorough.			1	3	

APPENDIX 5
LIVE SENT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the participant’s current effort in researching the most profitable, God-ordained methods of engaging lost people. Justin Paslay is conducting research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

This is part of a research project conducted by Justin Paslay. By completing the survey, you are consenting for this data to be used in the project.

It would be helpful to the pastoral staff if you add your name below, but it is optional. If your desire is to remain anonymous, please use the last four digits of your phone number to help with organization.

Name (4 digits) _____
Gender _____ Age _____

Mark the one you believe to be true (Please mark only one)

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | I am aware of the various cultures of the people that live in my neighborhood. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | I can identify the various idols that my neighbors worship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I am comfortable initiating conversations with my neighbors. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | I consistently engage my neighbors in conversation. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I consistently invite my neighbors over for dinner. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. | My neighbors would consider me as a person to reach out to in a time of need. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

7.	I am genuinely concerned about the individuals and families that live right next to me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	I feel led to reach out to my neighbors and get to know them personally.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	I consistently pray for my neighbors by name.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	My neighbors are increasingly willing to engage in planned neighborhood activities.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11.	I am aware of the needs in my neighbors' lives and I seek to help them be met.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I am able to identify bridges to sharing the gospel with my neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I am comfortable articulating the gospel to my neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I am aware of the activities and interests that my neighbors are regularly involved in.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	I have identified other Christians in my neighborhood that can come alongside of me in the effort to reach our neighbors.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 6
LIVE SENT SURVEY RESULTS

Table A2. Live Sent Survey results

Participant	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score
1	59	68
2	69	74
3	69	74
4	67	73
5	66	77
6	69	77
7	74	76
8	71	76
9	70	76
10	70	76
11	64	71
12	63	74
13	62	73
14	67	71
15	66	71
16	68	72
17	67	69
18	65	73
19	69	72
20	71	73
21	71	72
22	67	69
23	64	75
24	72	75
25	73	75
26	72	75

Table A2 continued

27	69	75
28	69	75
29	69	75
30	72	74
31	69	69
32	66	69
33	70	73
34	68	72
35	68	78
36	67	77
37	67	72
38	66	66
39	59	64
40	65	66
41	63	66
42	64	65
43	63	64
44	63	64
45	60	64
46	61	63
47	58	66
48	62	65
49	62	65
50	61	63
51	60	67
52	64	66
53	60	67
54	63	66
55	63	66
56	60	67
57	61	66
58	66	66
59	59	64
	<i>Maximum amount of points possible: 90</i>	
	p=	
	0.0000000000000000081329075936	

APPENDIX 7

LIVE SENT SURVEY RESULTS

Table A3. T-test of survey results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre Test</i>	<i>Post Test</i>
Mean	65.79661017	70.372881
Variance	16.92343659	20.444769
Observations	59	59
Pearson Correlation	0.759577525	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	58	
t Stat	-11.64575273	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000000000000000040664537968	
t Critical one-tail	1.671552762	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000000000000000081329075936	
t Critical two-tail	2.001717484	
<p><i>Hypothesis: The administering of the GO:Guide to the select group of small group leaders made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their participation in engaging their neighbors (p< .001).</i></p>		

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ABSTRACT

DESIGNING A NEIGHBORING GUIDE FOR THE HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH SMALL GROUP LEADERS IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

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This project sought to provide a neighboring guide (GO:Guide) for the small group leaders of Hickory Grove Baptist Church. Chapter 1 gives the context of ministry at Hickory Grove and the rationale and goals for this project. Chapter 2 offers the biblical perspective on the redeemed people of God engaging the lost through the loving declaration and demonstration of the gospel. Chapter 3 examines the sinful nature of humanity and suggests ways in which believers can love their neighbors with cultural sensitivity and gospel clarity. Chapter 4 gives a detailed outline of the project, including an explanation of the critical components of the GO:Guide. Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project and its goals. This project provides the church with the means to effectively engage their neighbors with the love of Jesus Christ.

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