

Copyright © 2021 David Lee Watts

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

EQUIPPING THE CONGREGATION OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP
ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS,
TO PRACTICE EXPOSITORY LISTENING

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

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

by
David Lee Watts
May 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

EQUIPPING THE CONGREGATION OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP
ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS,
TO PRACTICE EXPOSITORY LISTENING

David Lee Watts

Read and Approved by:

Terry J. Betts (Faculty Supervisor)

William F. Cook

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	5
Goals	5
Research Methodology	5
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	7
Conclusion	8
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR TRAINING YOUR CONGREGATION TO BE EXPOSITORY LISTENERS	9
An Exegesis of Nehemiah 8–9	9
An Exegesis of James 2:22, Titus 2:11-14, and Romans 10:9-10	22
An Exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:2	24
Conclusion	26
3. HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO EXPOSITORY LISTENING	33
An Analysis of Emotions Over Textual Exposition in Pentecostal Preaching	33
Expository Preaching Enables the Listener to Learn the Bible More Clearly than Other Methods	36
Expository Preaching Enables the Listener to Hear More Scripture	41
Christians Must Become Active Listeners of Sermons	44

Chapter	Page
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	50
Description of the Preparation Period (Weeks 1-8)	50
Description of Implementation Period (Weeks 9-14)	52
Description of Follow-Up Period (Weeks 15-18)	54
Summary	62
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	63
Evaluation of the Project's Purpose	63
Evaluation of the Project's Goals	64
Strengths of the Project	66
Weaknesses of the Project	68
What I Would Do Differently	68
Theological Reflections	69
Personal Reflections	72
Conclusion	73
 Appendix	
1. PRE-PROJECT SURVEY	75
2. EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR PANEL	79
3. SIX-WEEK NEHEMIAH 8 AND 9 SERMON SERIES	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

PREFACE

This project would not be possible without the love and support of my wife, Angela Morris Watts. You are a reflection of God's goodness to me, thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to settle for nothing but my best. I also want to thank my mother and father, Rodney and Delaine Watts, and my brothers and sister, Joe, Mike, and Sandy.

I would also like to thank the faculties and staffs of Southwestern Assemblies of God University and Bridges Christian College. In particular, Dr. Kermit Bridges, Dr. Bruce Rosdahl, Dr. Dan Langston, Dr. Jeff Magruder, Rev. Lance Meche, Rev. Terry Phipps, Dr. Robert Harden, Dr. Gene Brown, Dr. Larry Hester, Dr. John Wyckoff, Dr. Justus Freeman, and Dr. Richard Miller.

This project would also not be possible without the love and support of the Board of Deacons and Members of Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in Farmersville, Texas. This church graciously took a chance on me in July 2018, when they voted me in to be their Senior Pastor. To Annie Molck, Troy Gosnell, Thomas Cooper, Ramon Rodriguez, and Laura Rodriguez, I believe the best is yet to come!

I am thankful for my cohort brothers, Stephen Conley, Shaun Lewis, Josh Sammons, Steve Stutzman, and Jake Roudebush, and my faculty advisor, Dr. Terry Betts, during this academic adventure. What an amazing group of men of God, thank you for your kindness and friendship to this proud, Texas, Pentecostal. To my editor, Betsy Fredrick, thank you, I never would have graduated without you. To Mike, Lori, Micaiah, and Kayelah Skelton, thank you for allowing me to stay with you and feeding me during my cohort meetings. You are a huge blessing.

Finally, I would like to thank the administration of Jimmy Swaggart Bible College, particularly, President Gabriel Swaggart, Vice President Dr. Stephanie Beauregard, and Dr. Don Paul Gray. Thank you for believing in me enough to bring me on the team at JSBC.

David Watts

Rockwall, Texas

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How vital is preaching in the life of the church? What if the listeners do not understand? What if they do, but they just do not value what is being said? Preaching is not just about the man in the pulpit, but also the parishioner in the pew. Nehemiah 8 shows the characteristics of authentic Bible exposition. After generations in exile, Israel had a renewed affection for God's Word: "Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (Neh 8:5-6).¹ They respected the Book of the Law of Moses. The people rose in respectful silence when Ezra opened the scroll. The people listened attentively to the Scriptures. They responded in an expression of praise and worship to God saying, "Amen! Amen!" In my own ministry assignment at Grace Fellowship Assembly of God the adult parishioners are not used to expository messages and in turn have not developed a sincere hunger for the Word of God. It was my desire that this ministry project would develop an argument on the value of expository preaching and listening that fosters the application of that preaching in changing people's lives.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in Farmersville, Texas, which is a rural suburb of the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metro area. Grace Fellowship was organized in 1921 with thirty charter members. Grace

¹ All Bible quotations are from New King James Version, unless noted otherwise.

Fellowship is a Pentecostal church affiliated with the Assemblies of God and is located in Farmersville, a growing agricultural community. There are approximately forty-five members, most of whom are older and have been with the church for a long amount of time.

The mission of Grace Fellowship is to be a body of multi-generational, and multi-ethnic believers assembled regularly to encounter God, serve one another and be equipped to serve, and to reach out to the surrounding communities with intentional acts of kindness. Grace Fellowship also strives to make opportunities for friendship to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and embrace new believers into the church body. There are approximately forty nationalities within a fifteen-mile drive to McKinney, Texas. Collin College is opening an extension site in Farmersville in the fall of 2020, and has a student body of over 52,000. The vision of Grace Fellowship is to see all cultures of the surrounding communities represented in our church and assembled together to encounter God and Christian fellowship through corporate worship, prayer, and declaration of the Scriptures.

The Core Values of Grace Fellowship

The core values of Grace Fellowship are to be biblically based. The Bible is the final rule of faith and practice. To be evangelistically centered, the church is focused on Christ's mission of bringing in and leading those not yet in fellowship with God. To be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our strength and guide in life and ministry. That we would be authentic in relationships. We are committed to our mission and purpose in the Farmersville community. We strive to prepare believers for ministry and open doors for action. And finally, to be service oriented, to serve the community through compassion and social responsibility.

The primary goals for Grace Fellowship are to be a New Testament community of believers and followers of Jesus Christ. We strive to serve others and each other with the mercy and compassion demonstrated by Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. We

strive to speak about anything God's Word speaks about with love and grace, and not to sacrifice truth. Our greatest goal is to create disciples of the truth of the message of Jesus Christ within our community. We endeavor to use creative means to connect to the lost, allowing the Holy Spirit to draw them to Christ. We support missions' endeavors throughout the world, our nation, and in our own community. We make it a priority to support financially and prayerfully missionaries around the world. We also want to be a community that is active in the participation of mission's trips.

The education structure of Grace Fellowship is program and curriculum based. The programs the church has are Sunday school classes, Sunday morning worship services, Wednesday night adult Bible Study, and Wednesday night Girls Ministries and Royal Rangers for Boys. These opportunities are great times for small group teaching, but other than in Sunday morning worship service the material is basic and in some cases shallow.

The current direction of Grace Fellowship is on an upswing in attendance and the people are encouraged. Grace Fellowship scores high in outreach and programs but there is a need for a strategic emphasis on expository preaching of the Word of God and the application of that preaching in the lives of the members. This project was needful to cultivate a Bible-honoring culture that allows Grace Fellowship to be effective for the kingdom and impact the community for Christ.

When a congregation only hears topical sermons that may or may not call for a response, they will not have a hunger for God's Word. The parishioners will only rely on the pastor for "feeding them" and not seek out the sermon texts themselves. Grace Fellowship has a heart for outreach but lacks depth spiritually. Pentecostal pastors as a whole have emphasized an emotional, public "move of the Spirit" as a response to preaching in line with Pentecostal beliefs but have not emphasized the Scripture in an expository manner. This project, although applied in one church, also serves as a model for other Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.

Rationale

An expository preaching emphasis and application of preaching would greatly benefit the existing members of Grace Fellowship. Because Grace Fellowship is a church revitalization, the emphasis for the past few years (like many churches) has been on evangelism and engaging the lost, and sometimes the mature church member has felt neglected. It can be challenging for any Christian to live for God in the world today and those who will remain faithful are the ones that are deeply rooted in Scripture. Expository listening would greatly change Grace Fellowship because fathers and mothers would implement the Word of God in their lives, homes, and marriages. Expository preaching allows a pastor to address issues that he may not be comfortable addressing in a topical sermon. When the topic lies in the exposition of Scripture and the pastor brings it out in the sermon it has greater impact because it is irrefutable.

Since expository preaching begins with the text of Scripture, it is in itself an act of worship. Expository preaching forces the pastor to study God's Word more thoroughly and thoughtfully than when applying other preaching styles. Through study, God changes the preacher's heart through this deep engagement with Scripture and then the congregation's heart also. Expository preaching enables the congregation to learn the Bible, but only if they learn to hear it. Emphasizing and preaching expository messages exposes the congregation to more of Scripture than a pastor self-selecting topical sermon that may neglect difficult or seemingly obscure texts. Exposition affirms the priority and sufficiency of a passage. Grace Fellowship would be served best when it makes clear that it is committed to teaching the Bible by teaching the Bible. Since expository preaching keeps the pastor from last minute preparation, it does not leave the congregation wondering what the preacher will talk about on Sunday. Expository preaching can help spur the parishioner on to personal study of a book ahead of time.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the congregation to become expository listeners and apply God's Word to their daily life at Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in Farmersville, Texas.

Goals

In light of the aforementioned context, rationale, and purpose, this project had three goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the current preaching response practices among adult members of Grace Fellowship.
2. The second goal was to increase knowledge of expository preaching and listening among adult members of Grace Fellowship through a six-week expositional series from Nehemiah 8.
3. The third goal was to modify attitudes toward the response and application of preaching.

Research Methodology

The focus of this project was the discipline of becoming an expository listener, or in a broader sense the discipline of application. The first goal was to assess the current preaching response practices among adult members of Grace Fellowship. To accomplish this goal, I utilized a survey at the beginning of the project to gauge the adult members' typical patterns of response to a sermon.² During week 1 of the project this survey was distributed to all adult members of the congregation as they entered the worship center. Members received instructions to complete the paper survey at home and return it to the church office by the following Sunday. A minimum of fifty completed surveys provided adequate information on sermon response practices. I compiled the results of these surveys and utilized the responses in shaping the sermon series described below. The pre- and post-class surveys included questions pertaining to attitudes toward preaching. Changes in attitudes were measured by analyzing the responses provided in these

² See appendix 1.

questions through a *t*-test for dependent samples. This goal was considered successfully met when the analysis demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The second goal was to increase knowledge of expository preaching and listening among adult members of Grace Fellowship through a six-week expositional series from Nehemiah 8. This goal included training Grace Fellowship to understand better the concept of expository preaching, training Grace Fellowship to understand the difference between exegesis and eisegesis, strengthening my own use of the discipline of expository listening, and training adult church members to listen to and apply biblical texts. To accomplish this goal, I selected an expert panel composed of three local pastors and two professors from Southwestern Assemblies of God University that vary in age, experience, as well as education level, and I explained my passion and intentions for this project in the development of expository listeners. The panel reviewed each sermon manuscript using a rubric to assess specific aspects of listening and application.³ This goal was considered successful when the panel's consensus was that each sermon reached the "satisfactory" level. If any sermon failed to reach this benchmark, then I revised the manuscript and resubmitted it for assessment.

The third goal was to modify attitudes toward the response and application of preaching. This goal was measured by the adult members of Grace Fellowship retaking the survey identified in goal 1 at the conclusion of the preaching series. Participants had to have attended at least four sermons for their survey results to be included. I compared the pre- and post-preaching survey responses using a *t*-test for independent samples, and this goal was considered successful when this *t*-test showed a positive statistical change in responses for at least thirty participants.

³ See appendix 2.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

For the purposes of this project, the following definitions and delimitations will be in use.

Expository listening. *Expository listening* is cultivated skills that allow Christians to better hear and apply the preached Word.⁴

Expository preaching. *Expository preaching* is defined by Stephen Olford as “the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God’s Word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of the given passage, with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response.”⁵

Expository sermon. *Expository sermon* is defined by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix as “a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners.”⁶

Bible study. *Bible study*, as expressed by Shaddix and Vines, has the goal of not merely reading the Bible, but “to first find out what the text originally meant and then apply the same meaning in a variety of new or different contexts of our own day.”⁷

Exegesis. *Exegesis*, as defined by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, is “the careful, systematic study of the Scriptures to discover the original, intended meaning.”⁸

⁴ Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010), 8.

⁵ Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 69.

⁶ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 27.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1993), 11.

⁸ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 19.

Purpose-regarding sermon. As defined by Haddon W. Robinson regarding a delivered message is “what one expects to happen in the hearer as a result of hearing this sermon.”⁹

Homiletical idea. Haddon Robinson characterizes the *homiletical idea* as “the statement of a biblical concept in such a way that it accurately reflects the Bible and meaningfully relates to the congregation.”¹⁰

This project had two primary delimitations. The first was that it was limited to a six-week sermon series addressing expository preaching and expository listening with a survey before and after. The second limitation was that those who were taught how to be expository listeners only included adult members of Grace Fellowship over the age of 18. The age of 18 was used as the study was directed toward men and women, not boys and girls or teenagers. One could state justifiable arguments for the age to be older or younger, but 18 is the age that a person is eligible to be a full member of Grace Fellowship. I also wanted to target key individuals in families that when they hear expository preaching it would enact change and growth in their families.

Conclusion

The chapters of this project comprise a summary of the use of expository preaching in the practice of creating expository listeners. The chapters are laid out to direct the reader through a logical process. The process is from assessing the current preaching response practices, increasing the knowledge of expository preaching, and modifying attitudes toward the response and application of expository preaching among the adult members of Grace Fellowship.

⁹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 113.

¹⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 113.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
TRAINING YOUR CONGREGATION TO
BE EXPOSITORY LISTENERS

The Bible demonstrates that the people of God need to be expository listeners. A thorough exegesis of Nehemiah 8–9 will show that congregations who learn to hear Scripture explained are moved to worship. An exegesis of James 2:22, Titus 2:11-14, and Romans 10:9-10 demonstrate that genuine Spirit-enabled obedience comes from faith that is fostered from hearing God’s Word. Additionally, an exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:2 will demonstrate that expository preaching and listening will help the church be committed to investing in people who will be faithful to teach others.

An Exegesis of Nehemiah 8–9

Biblical preaching is intended to change both the heart and the mind, thus learning to listen to sermons is vital for a church’s long-term health. In Nehemiah 8, Nehemiah called all the people to come together before the Lord for a time of celebration and dedication.¹ This was also a time of worship, as the people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God and read it in their midst. Their worship was centered in the Word. This was a special time for the people of God. The Babylonian captivity was over, and the Jews had returned to Jerusalem.² God had blessed them abundantly as they rebuilt the city.

To celebrate all that God had done, Nehemiah called the people together for a celebration and dedication service at the public square near the water gate. This was also a sacred time for the Jews—several feasts were held during the seventh month. In the

¹ J. G. McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 114.

² McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 115.

seventh month, The Feast of Trumpets was held on the first day; the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement were offered on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated on the fifteenth day.³ This was a time of celebration and dedication, but more importantly it was a time for worship. In Nehemiah 8:1-6, the reader sees an example of genuine worship.

When considering the elements of worship found in Nehemiah 8 that include the “assembly of worship” (vv. 1-6) and “the congregation” (vv. 1-6), one sees that this was not just a select group of the religious elite. The worship experience was not reserved for the priests and the tribe of Levi. This worship experience involved everyone. The text in verses 1-3 and 5-6 show that all of the people were involved in worship unto the Lord—men, and women, and even the children, none were left out or excused; all were present and in their places. In verse 1, all of the people were gathered as “one man” in the street before the water gate. Each was in their place and they were united in their purpose. The people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God. They were hungry for the Word and desired to hear it. There was no division or discord among them on this occasion.

The focal point of the worship service in chapter 8 was the Word of God. The people of God were hungry for His Word. They had been in captivity and did not enjoy the privileges of worship and biblical instruction they had at Jerusalem. Ezra read the Word of God from morning until midday. They were not concerned with time; they did not want to simply get finished and go home. Ezra the priest stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for that purpose, and expounded the Word of God.⁴ They had made preparations for preaching. Worship must include the man of God preaching the Word; preaching is essential to worship. God chose that method of delivery to share His message.

³ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 62.

⁴ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra/Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 143.

First Corinthians 1:21 says, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, its pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

The Word presented and preached in worship services affects people’s lives. Notice the scripture brought respect. When Ezra opened the Word of God the people stood up; they stood in attention to the Word. They knew the Word of God was beneficial for their lives and there was a respect and eagerness for the Word. The Word was read and preached and brought rejoicing to the hearts of the people. They lifted their hands and rejoiced in the Lord. The Bible brought comfort to them and they had reason to rejoice. They had many emotions upon hearing the Word of God, they bowed their heads, and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The people did not feel worthy to lift their heads. They were in the presence of the Lord and they feared God and worshiped Him.⁵ The people showed commitment as they stood in their place for a large portion of the day reading the Word of God. For another part of the day they confessed and worshiped the Lord.

They read the Word for three hours and then confessed and worshiped God for another three hours. They were committed to the worship service. Hearing God’s Word sparks a revival. In Nehemiah 8:1-3 the people gather and ask Ezra to read God’s Word:

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”

Before Ezra preached, the people told him to bring the book of the Law. This demonstrates that the Spirit of God was at work even before the reading of God’s Word. The hearing of the Word of God must be a priority. Hearing the Word of God is evidence

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 103.

the Spirit of God is working within the body of believers.⁶ However, it is still important to cooperate with that work rather than resist it. The hearers need to cooperate with God's Spirit if the Word of God is going to do its full work in them.

In understanding the book of the Law from the previous section it is important to note that it is referencing the Law of Moses, which refers to the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This was Israel's instruction manual for how to walk before God. Everyone who could understand it needed to hear it. Then Ezra read from it in the open square; he read God's Word from daylight to mid-day.⁷ He read God's Word for six hours and the people listened.⁸

How God's Word Was Received (Neh 8:4-6)

Nehemiah 8:4-6 says,

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The people of Israel had taken the time to build a wooden platform so that the Word of God could be heard. They did practical things so God's Word would have the greatest effect. On the right hand and left hand of Ezra were men supporting him in his ministry of teaching God's Word. The ministry of God's Word has the greatest effect when people can see others who are in support of it and live in obedience to it. All the people answered, and this work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results in verse 6: (1) the people thanked God (by saying Amen when Ezra

⁶ Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, 103.

⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 72.

⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 72.

blessed the Lord); (2) they prayed (by lifting up their hands), and (3) they worshiped (by bowing down before Him).

God's Word Was Presented so the People May Understand (Neh 8:7-8)

Nehemiah 8:7-8 reads,

Also, Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So, they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading.

Special men were appointed to help the people understand God's Word. After the reading they needed to understand it because if they did not understand it, then it would do little good. Making sure his audience understands should be the first goal of any preacher or teacher, and Ezra helped the people to understand the Law.⁹ God's people need special help in understanding God's Word because, first, the things of God are spiritually discerned and not intellectually discerned. The Holy Spirit uses gifted teachers to bring spiritual discernment to the readers of Scripture, helping them understand what God's Word says. Second, because it was originally written in a different language, in a different culture, in a different place, and at a far distant time, teachers helped the people understand in their current context. Third, because minds are often slow to understand things that will convict the hearts, listeners often need the biblical truth spelled right out to them.

A preacher must speak in a clear, easy-to-understand way. The preacher's main goal should be to make the people understand, not to impress or entertain them. The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

⁹ Frank E. Gaebelin, *Ezra*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Dick Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 22.

The People Respond with Weeping (Neh 8:9-11)

Nehemiah 8:9-11 reads,

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” So, the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.

The Word of God was doing its intended work. Second Timothy 3:16 indicates two of the things for which the Word of God is profitable: reproof and correction.

Sometimes it hurts to be reproved and corrected, and these tears in these verses are evidence of some of that pain. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites did not want the people to mourn, even though it is a good thing to be sad under the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The sense of conviction does not need to be greater than the sense that God is doing a good and holy work. Knowledge of sin should never be bigger than the knowledge of Jesus as savior. Mankind is composed of great sinners, but He is a greater savior. The people felt sad because they were aware of their own sin. However, they could walk in joy because God was doing a great work.¹⁰

The People Choose to Rejoice (Neh 8:12)

Nehemiah 8:12 says, “And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.”

They went away praising God because understanding God’s Word brings such a sweet sense of joy. Then, the leaders gathered for more study of God’s Word in Nehemiah 8:13: “Now on the second day the heads of the fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.”

¹⁰ Williamson, *Ezra/Nehemiah*, 143.

The People Keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8:14-18).

Nehemiah 8:14-18 reads,

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So, the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also, day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

The attitude of the Israelites was that God said it, so it will be done. Even though tradition did not tell them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, it had not been done since the days of Joshua. The Feast of Tabernacles was all about remembering how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. Israel in the wilderness could see God's blessing and provision for them right then. Because of their great obedience to God's Word, there was very great gladness.

The people Gathered in an Assembly of Humble Repentance (Neh 9:1)

Nehemiah 9:1 reads, "Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads."

After the Holy Spirit had done a significant work in the lives of the people, there was a scene of dramatic, humble repentance.¹¹ Fasting showed their lowly, humble state. Fasting and wearing a burlap sack was to show their complete poverty of spirit before God. Then they took handfuls of dirt and cast it on their heads to show their lowly state before God, and to say, that they were so troubled by their sin, the normal comforts

¹¹ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Holman, 1993), 23.

of life were unimportant.¹² These actions reflected a humble attitude of heart, humility not only toward God, but also toward man. They did this publicly and others saw them in this public state. The people came to God with truly humble, repentant hearts.

An Assembly to Separate Themselves (Neh 9:2).

Nehemiah 9:2 says, “Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.”

The people of Israel confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. They had to realize and admit their missing of God’s mark. They had to admit that not only they were sinners, but they came from sinful ancestors. This confession was especially important in Israel where there was a tradition of glorifying forefathers. After such great victories, both with building and spiritually, there was humble repentance.¹³ This great, humble gathering of God’s people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. They had drawn close to God, and now He was drawing them even closer.

An Assembly to Hear God’s Word and to Worship Him (Neh 9:3)

Nehemiah 9:3 reads, “And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.”

The humble repentance and confession of sin would have been an incomplete work if it were not for hearing the Word and worshiping. God does not show people their sin just so that they will humbly confess it but so that they can walk on in what is right before Him. They confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. This brokenness of

¹² Greg Goswell, *A Study Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah* (Wyoming, MI: Evangelical Press, 2013), 23.

¹³ Williamson, *Ezra/Nehemiah*, 143.

heart led them to humbly come before God and hear His Word. A sure first step of revival is this brokenness of heart.

A Prayer of Repentance (Neh 9:4-5a)

Nehemiah 9:4-5a says, “Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah.”

All eight of these men did not pray the following prayer at the same time. Perhaps it was written out and they took turns, perhaps it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or perhaps (and according to tradition) Ezra prayed this prayer.¹⁴

Praise to the God of All Creation (Neh 9:5b-6)

Nehemiah 9:5b-6 reads,

Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

After the encouragement to praise, Ezra gave a reason to praise: because this is the great God who made it all. Looking at the glory of God’s creation gives man a reason to praise Him, to humble himself before Him, and to trust Him. God wants man to praise Him, humble himself before Him, and trust Him, and He gives man good reason to.

Praise to the God who chose Abraham (Neh 9:7-8)

Nehemiah 9:7-8 says,

You are the LORD God, who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites; to give it to his descendants. You have performed Your words, for You are righteous.

¹⁴ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 23.

The people of Israel are giving praise to the God who chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. They are acknowledging that God has performed His word. The people of Israel are saying to God, "Lord, You promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and now here we are! Your promise is indeed true."

**Praise to the God Who Delivered
Israel (Neh 9:9-15)**

Nehemiah 9:9-15 reads,

You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So, you made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. And You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors You threw into the deep, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover, you led them by day with a cloudy pillar, and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light on the road which they should travel. You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses Your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, and brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, and told them to go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them.

A second sure sign of revival (following brokenness of heart) is reflection on the goodness of God. When pride is cast down, and hearts humble before God, the hearer of the Word of God can begin to see Him for who He is, and see how good God is.¹⁵

Nehemiah 9:16-17 reads, "But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion, they appointed a leader to return to their bondage."

The people of Israel had a terrible response to the great and good works of God on behalf of Israel. God had been so good to Israel, but they acted proudly. The Israelites' sin is bad enough, but to consider that they sinned against a God who has only treated them well is far, far, worse. When humans humbly seek God and see His goodness they

¹⁵ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 23.

cannot help but notice their own sinfulness—the blackness of mankind’s sin stands out against the brightness of God’s purity and goodness.¹⁶

God’s Gracious Reply to Rebellious Israel (Neh 9:17b-21)

Nehemiah 9:17b-21 says,

But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them. Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, and said, “This is your god that brought you up out of Egypt,” and worked great provocations, yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them on the road; nor the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

God’s gracious answer to the rebellion of Israel was glorious. The phrase “ready to pardon” is especially wonderful, indicating that nothing is keeping God from pardoning man except his refusal to come to Him through Jesus. He is ready to pardon if mankind is ready to receive it.

God’s gracious response to Israel was that even after they made the golden calf and worshiped it, He did not forsake them.¹⁷ He still provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He still guided them by His spirit, and He still fed them and gave them water. Together it shows not how special Israel was but how special God is.

Readers of Scripture are often impressed at how patient God is with the sinner, how He somehow holds back His terrible judgment against those people who deserve it so badly. Yet it seems that His patience toward humans is even greater—those who have received so much more from Him but still act like Israel did.

¹⁶ Knute Larson, Kathy Dahlen, and Max E. Anders, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 54.

¹⁷Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 34.

The Cycle of Israel's Relationship with God (Neh 9:22-31)

Nehemiah 9:22-31 reads,

Moreover, you gave them kingdoms and nations, and divided them into districts. So, they took possession of the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven and brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to go in and possess. So the people went in and possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they wished. And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So, they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, "Which if a man does, he shall live by them." And they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear. Yet for many years You had patience with them and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore, you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful.

The cycle began with God showing His goodness to His people (He gave them kingdoms and nations) and with God's people being blessed.¹⁸ Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, God's people turn from Him. Then, God brings correction or a "wake-up call" to His people. As a result, God's people turn back to Him. Then, blessed and satisfied, God's people again turn from Him. As the cycle continues, the motions of each cycle get deeper and deeper, but God does not change.

¹⁸ Matthew Levering, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2007), 77.

A Plea to God for Intervention (Neh 9:32-37)

Nehemiah 9:32-37 says,

Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us, our kings and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. However, you are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly. Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works. Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also, they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; and we are in great distress.

These wicked people knew they needed God to save them. Israel at this time was not an independent nation, they were a province of the Empire of Persia and under heavy Persian taxes and obligations.¹⁹ They ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression, which gives a good description of what real confession is all about. It recognizes that God is right, and mankind is wrong. Confession is agreeing with God about both things.

Conclusion: A Point of Decision (Neh 9:38)

Nehemiah 9:38 reads, “And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.”

Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, making a covenant, and writing it down to commit themselves to His ways. The fourth sure sign of revival after brokenness of heart, reflection on God’s goodness, and recognition of sinfulness, is a renewal of obedience. The people of Israel come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience but something that shapes their future.

¹⁹ Larson, Dahlen, and Anders, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 54.

An Exegesis of James 2:22, Titus 2:11-14, and Romans 10:9-10

An exegesis of Romans 2:22, Titus 2:11-14, and Romans 10:9-10 will demonstrate that genuine Spirit-enabled obedience comes from faith that is fostered from hearing God's Word.

James 2:22 says, "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" Faith and works cooperated perfectly together in Abraham. If he had never believed God, then he could have never done the good work of obedience when asked to offer Isaac. Additionally, his faith was made perfect by his obedient works.²⁰

Titus 2:11-14 reads,

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Grace brings salvation. A person does not go out and "get" salvation; it comes to him and he has the opportunity to receive it. There is one gospel of grace for all men. God does not have a gospel of grace for some and a gospel of law or self-justification for others. All men find salvation by the grace of God.²¹ The ancient Greek word for *teaching* has in mind what a parent does for a child. It speaks of the entire training process: teaching, encouragement, correction, and discipline. Grace is a teacher in this sense.²²

Grace puts ungodliness and worldly lusts in the past. While we may struggle with sin in this present world, now our desires are in Christ. Grace teaches Christians to renounce those things, not only to avoid them. Grace teaches how to live in the present age. Believers must live soberly (self-controlled) in regard to themselves, and must live

²⁰ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 126.

²¹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 126.

²² Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48. (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 89.

righteously in regard to the people around them, and they must live godly (to take God seriously). Grace teaches Christians to expect and prepare for their blessed hope.²³ That hope is not heaven or glory, but Jesus Himself, face to face. “Looking for” indicates that Christians should live in active expectation of the return of Jesus. It should be precious for Christians to consider the heart of the God of grace.²⁴ “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

Every word of this description of Jesus’ work is important. Jesus gave, which means it was voluntary. He gave Himself, which means Jesus gave all He could give.²⁵ Also, He gave Himself for all mankind, which means Jesus was given as a substitute for sinful man. “Redemption” means “to be bought out of slavery by the paying of a ransom.” Humans are bought out of their slavery to sin and purchased for His service. Christians are redeemed; purchased to live with zeal.

Romans 10:9-10 shows how faith is fostered from hearing God’s Word. They do not gain God’s righteousness by works. Instead, Christians gain it by confessing and believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ.²⁶ Romans 10:9-10 says, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

At the heart of the message of the gospel, sinful man confesses the Lord Jesus, he agrees with what God said about Jesus, and with what Jesus said about Himself. It

²³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 247.

²⁴ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 118.

²⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 248.

²⁶ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 96.

means children of God recognize that Jesus is God, He is the Messiah, and His work on the cross is the only way of salvation for mankind. Christians can never forget all that it meant to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. Some wonder why Paul did not mention the crucifixion in this passage. However, when Paul emphasizes the need to believe that God has raised him from the dead, it is not that he believes the resurrection as opposed to the cross, but encompassing the work of Jesus on the cross.²⁷ Mere intellectual agreement with the facts of the cross and the resurrection is not enough. Salvation requires faith in the person and work of Christ for salvation, which is demonstrated in a life that has such faith.²⁸

These passages demonstrate the completed work on the cross that Jesus accomplished for all believers. This completed work calls for a spirit-enabled obedience from all Christians—an obedience in response to faith that is grown from hearing God’s word. This obedience and faith calls people to not just be hearers of the Word, but doers also. The Christian does not merit the favor of God by doing good works. God’s favor cannot be merited. The Christian works for the Lord out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to have a deeper relationship with him.

An Exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:2

In Second Timothy 2:2, Paul is addressing the issue of commitment in the church. This passage demonstrates that expository preaching and listening help the church be committed to investing in people who will be faithful to teach others. Second Timothy 2:2 states, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Paul reminded Timothy of the body of truth that he had heard from the apostle in the presence of many others. Certainly, Timothy heard many Bible studies from Paul, and shared much time with the

²⁷ Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 96.

²⁸ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 121.

apostle in personal discipleship. It may be that Paul reminded Timothy of the word he presented among many witnesses.²⁹

God gave this ministry to Timothy, not for him to keep, but for him to pass on to others. An essential part of his work as a pastor was to pour into others what God had committed to him. One may say that everything a pastor does in his ministry he should train others to do. There are no duties of a pastor so holy or so secret that he should keep them all to himself. He should always seek to spread ministry to others, and to train others to do the work of the ministry. Timothy was not to teach others his own particular ideas or theories, but he was to teach simple apostolic doctrine and example (“the things that you have heard from me”). Timothy was responsible to pour into others what Paul had poured into him.³⁰ Training leaders is part of a pastor’s job description. The pastor should not only train leaders when the need for a leader is obvious, nor should he only train leaders for the needs of his congregation alone. He should train leaders for the kingdom of God in general, whether the leaders are used in ministry at the particular pastor’s congregation or not.³¹

When Timothy looked for those whom he could pour apostolic doctrine and practice into, he was to look for the quality of faithfulness. He did not need to find smart men, popular men, strong men, easy men, perfect men, or good-looking men; Paul told him to look for faithful men. This verse reveals the real apostolic succession—the succession of faithful men who take the teachings of the apostles and pass them on. Without faithfulness to the teaching and example of the apostles, the idea of apostolic succession is nothing more than the laying of empty hands upon empty heads. This job of

²⁹ R. T. France, *1 Timothy*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

³⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1958), 200.

³¹ William R. Baker and Thomas D. Ellsworth, *Preaching James*, Preaching Classic Texts (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 19.

training leaders was so important that it could not be restricted to Timothy alone. Those whom he had trained must also be given the job to teach others.³²

Biblical Preaching Is Vital

If Christians believe the Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God, then they should believe that biblical preaching is vital for the church's long-term health. Christians need to truly be shaped and formed by the Word of God rather than by the culture in which they live. What, therefore, can be done to increase the level of biblical literacy and theological understanding among God's people? What can the church do to begin to instill in the hearts and minds of those who profess to be Christians a deep love for Scripture that leads to significantly increased biblical literacy? The exposition of the previous passages shows the biblical understanding and importance of expository preaching and developing expository listeners.³³

The basic assumption of most people in the Pentecostal tradition is that the Bible is the basis and foundation for all Christian understanding and teaching. Knowledge and understanding of God's Word are central to an effective understanding and practice of the Christian faith, both in terms of historical content and character formation. Even if one denies these assumptions, however, no reasonable person can deny that the Bible holds a central place within the Christian faith. Since the beginning of Christianity, the Bible and its contents have served as the primary source for Christian theology and doctrine. As such, it would benefit every person who professes to be a Christian to know and understand the basic contents of the book that defines their faith specifically as "Christian."

Evidence suggests that many pastors in Pentecostal circles fail to invest in or adequately pursue an aggressive agenda for biblical literacy in the local church.³⁴ This

³² France, *1 Timothy*, 5.

³³ Baker and Ellsworth, *Preaching James*, 19.

³⁴ Jeff C. Magruder, *Spirit and Truth: A Handbook on Expository Preaching for Pentecostal Students* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 6.

may in part be because pastors do not know how to go about it, are uncertain of its importance, or both. Given the amount of information contained in the Scriptures and the fact that spiritual formation includes more than just knowledge of the Scriptures, it is reasonable to conclude that many pastors are unsure where to start and have thus chosen to focus their time and energy primarily in areas of biblical character formation to the neglect of historical content and biblical information. It is even possible that some pastors do not often themselves engage with the Bible, either for learning content or for developing character. Pastors and churches would surely benefit from a commitment to expository preaching in the pulpit to orient the people of God in the Word of God and not just base discipleship from an emotional response.³⁵

Many preachers have been introduced to expository preaching as one approach among many, rather than seeing it as guiding principle, i.e., the main idea of the text is the basis for the main idea of the sermon. Once that guiding principle is in place, the form the sermon takes (inductive, deductive, narrative, illustrated) varies depending upon what will best communicate the text's meaning to the audience. The form a sermon may take may vary; what does not change is that the text governs the sermon. Expository preaching is a philosophy not a method.³⁶

Expository preaching has suffered in the hands of its friends. Well-meaning preachers have thought that to be expository meant to offer their listeners nothing more than a running commentary on a text or heavy exposition and little application. Nothing will dissuade Pentecostal preachers more than an approach to preaching that appears dry or unrelated to the needs of people. Fortunately, a commitment to expository preaching does not require choosing between relevant application and biblical content. Application justifies and focuses the exposition. On the surface, this concern seems genuinely valid.

³⁵ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 6.

³⁶ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 7.

However, probing a little deeper will show that clear exposition of the Bible will make one address several contemporary issues, some which many would prefer to avoid.

Preaching involves the proclaiming of the gospel and sees the preacher as a messenger, or herald of that gospel. Technically, it is not a sermon unless the Bible is being explained and applied. This does not mean there should not be a prominent place for speeches, reflections, testimonies, etc., given from behind the pulpit, nor does it follow that there is no place for other mediums of communication or an expansive use of the arts. However, it is helpful to understand the difference for a clear understanding of the function and importance of each.³⁷

Expository preaching is not the only thing done behind the pulpit, but preachers should seriously consider making it the main thing. One could argue that Pentecostals have been so committed to being led by the Spirit that they have neglected other essential practices needed for good preaching, such as preparation, organization of the message, planning a preaching calendar, staying with the sermon notes while delivering the sermon, and allowing the main idea of the text to be the main idea of the sermon. Preachers tend to underestimate the Holy Spirit's ability to lead preachers in planning.³⁸ If the Spirit can guide ministers at the altar, during their prayer time, or in day-to-day living, then He can certainly give them wisdom to plan. The preaching plan, like all plans, are projections based on the best information they have at the time; if it needs to be revised, then they should do so. The Holy Spirit will guide them. There is nothing inherently contradictory about being led by the Spirit and preaching expository sermons. Both commitments require effort, patience, and a willingness to let God have His way.³⁹

³⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 43.

³⁸ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 25.

³⁹ Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 27.

Expository preaching is a logical commitment for Pentecostals who have such a high view of Scripture. It is a matter of record that their doctrine is by and large a statement of conservative evangelical theology. If they were to review any doctrinal statement of the major Pentecostal denominations (Church of God in Christ, Four-Square, Assemblies of God, Church of God Cleveland, Tennessee) the reader would find that phraseology such as “infallible,” “immutable,” “verbally inspired,” and “authoritative” are prominent in describing the nature of the Bible. Thus, one leading Pentecostal scholar, Gordon Fee, observes, “The mainstream of traditional American Pentecostalism has treated Scripture in very much the same way as have other forms of American fundamentalism or evangelicalism.”⁴⁰ Expository preaching assumes the power and authority of Scripture. Expository preaching presents the power of the Word as it is explained and applied to the lives of people. Pentecostal’s strong commitment to the authority of the Bible should lead Pentecostals to utilize expository preaching more intentionally.⁴¹

Pentecostal preachers tend to define Pentecostal preaching in terms of style instead of substance. When people think of Pentecostal preaching they commonly think of a delivery style that is characteristic of Pentecostal worship: exuberant, spontaneous, simple speech, etc.⁴² Without wanting to dismiss the distinctions found in much Pentecostal sermon delivery, it would be a mistake to think that Pentecostal preaching is primarily understood in terms of style. Indeed, one cannot fully appreciate what motivates this zeal unless he defines Pentecostal preaching in terms of theology.⁴³

A most helpful definition of Pentecostal preaching is offered by R. H. Hughes. He wisely refuses to distance Pentecostal preaching too much from preaching done by

⁴⁰ Gordon Fee, quoted in Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 7.

⁴¹ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 7.

⁴² Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 7.

⁴³ Scott M. Gibson, ed., *Making a Difference in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 15.

other evangelical ministers. Hughes focuses not on differences in delivery, instead he addresses the unique theological emphasis that Pentecostals have, most notably Acts as a pattern for the life of the church along with speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, and spiritual warfare.⁴⁴ Assuming his definition is correct, Pentecostal preaching should be defined in terms of doctrine instead of delivery. Does it stress the need of the church to be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Does it teach that the works of the Holy Spirit through the disciples in the book of Acts is more than just a record but instead a pattern for Christian service and spirituality? Does it create expectation in the lives of the audience regarding God's ability and willingness to work through spiritual gifts, yesterday, today and as long as the church is doing her work? If the answer is yes, then that is Pentecostal preaching; and it is my conviction that expository preaching will help to firm up, clarify, and better explain the exegetical base from which those doctrines emerge.

Expository preaching is a philosophy that when done intentionally and thoughtfully provides Pentecostal preachers with the ability to deal with relevant issues with confidence that their proclamations are firmly based on the rightly divided Word of God. Expository preaching does not limit creativity or minimize the value of other forms of communication but rather helps to clarify what preaching really involves, and grounds the speaker and the audience in Scripture. Also, expository preaching does not require that one deny his culture, personality, or delivery style; rather, the Pentecostal preacher takes those vital ingredients and weds them to the proclamation of the authoritative, transforming message of the gospel. Ultimately, the greatest value of expository preaching for the Pentecostal preacher is the opportunity to partner with the Holy Spirit from the determination of the biblical concept to the final delivery of the message.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 15.

⁴⁵ Sydney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 188.

Christians the world over have historically viewed the Bible as God's self-revelation to humankind. Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions have all agreed on the central premise that Scripture is the primary source and guideline for Christian teaching. The Bible is composed of two sets of testimonies or covenants (Old and New) and is the deposit of the sufficient and adequate witness to God's self-disclosure. Most evangelical scholars would surely agree on this point though there is not a consensus on the nature of God's self-disclosure. It is fair to assume, however, that most scholars would acknowledge at least three interrelated categories of God's revelation: the spoken word, the Incarnate Word, and the written Word.

God's initial self-revelation was through the spoken word. Most evangelical scholars would generally agree that (1) God spoke the world and humankind into existence (Gen 1) and evidence of God's existence can be seen throughout creation, in what many refer to as general revelation; and (2) God revealed himself by speaking to specific people at various times throughout history in what many refer to as special revelation. He spoke to Noah and provided for Noah's salvation; he called Abraham and through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob set apart a people for himself; he called to Moses in the burning bush, revealing his name to him and sending him to be the deliverer of God's people from slavery in Egypt. He spoke to Moses on Sinai and gave him the Law for God's people—the first written text considered to be Scripture, which was expanded over time to include the history of Israel, the writings of the prophets, and the wisdom literature, all of which became the Scriptures for God's people. Thus, between the witness of the Scriptures and God's spoken word through the prophets, Israel was without excuse when failing to listen to the self-revealing God who called them into covenant relationship with himself. The reader of Scripture should give significant attention to the interplay between God's spoken word and the written texts of Scripture that developed over time in Israel's covenant history with God.

The ultimate authority of the sermon does not reside in the preacher's call or the preacher's position, but in the Scripture being preached. Authority can only come when one can say, "Thus says the Lord"; and this cannot be said until what is being preached actually comes from the Bible properly interpreted and applied.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 110.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO EXPOSITORY LISTENING

Historically, the Pentecostal Church has neglected expository preaching and thus hindered church members from becoming expository listeners. Pentecostal preachers have historically emphasized an emotional response to a sermon but have neglected textual exposition.¹ This chapter will explore historical issues related to expository listening and to teaching a congregation the importance of becoming expository listeners.

An Analysis of Emotions Over Textual Exposition in Pentecostal Preaching

From its earliest days, preaching had an important function within the Pentecostal movement as an explanation at the hand of the Bible of what God still wants to do for people: to touch them with his Spirit of power. Pentecostals inherited the Reformation form of preaching generally used in evangelical circles consisting of the exposition of biblical passages. However, they changed it from an orderly and reasoned discourse into a sometimes chaotic phenomenon with a style that has little substance and was not merely to impart information or explain what a biblical passage meant for the first listeners or even for today's readers, but primarily to build faith in the listeners' hearts to receive what God wants to give them.²

In this sense, Pentecostal preaching describes itself as prophetic, where “prophecy” is defined as the revelation of words that come from God. This is a

¹ Jeff C. Magruder, *Spirit and Truth: A Handbook on Expository Preaching for Pentecostal Students* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 2.

² James W. Cox, *Biblical Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 4.

Pentecostal definition of biblical prophecy as imagined in both the Old and New Testament, applied to today's circumstances and related to God's overarching promises and purpose. In the words of John G. Lake, "*prophecy* is the result of conceiving and understanding the real vision of Christ whereby through union with him he takes possession of a person, reveals the power of God in and through that person, and in the process transforms other people and applies the power to their needs." These are the real truths of the gospel. The Spirit witnesses to them when they are preached. The signs of the miraculous and spiritual gifts follow when this gospel is preached. The Spirit is the force and means by which Jesus remains present in history and continues his work of inaugurating the kingdom. The question asked here is, what are the main characteristics of Pentecostal preaching that define it as distinctive from other traditions? Is it personality, style, preparation, results replete with signs, contents of the message, a combination of all or the above the diverse preaching styles among Pentecostal individuals and groups make it difficult to describe what is characteristic? When these distinctives are distilled from Pentecostal preaching practice it should be emphasized that it is not necessarily these characteristics that are exclusive to Pentecostal preaching. Then it becomes possible to critically evaluate the practice for its effectiveness.³

In Pentecostal literature we find out about preaching an emphasis on two elements—the value of the written word for the preached word is underscored while at the same time attention is given to the Spirit's work in the preacher and among the congregation. In Pentecostal literature one discovers that preaching should ideally take place in the interplay and balance between these two elements. Finding the balance between word and the revelation of the Word through the Spirit is the intricate task of the preacher. The preacher utilizes language that focuses on the Spirit's work because in the

³ Howard G. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 26-30.

preacher's analysis of preaching this language forms an integral and important element for Pentecostals.⁴

I endorse the idea that God is (or can be) actively involved in the process of preaching and his involvement distinguishes preaching from mere speech. An important indicator of the success of the preaching event is the results in terms of people getting saved, the sick being healed, and believers being encouraged and edified, as described of apostolic preaching in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 3:2-8; 4:30; 8:6-7).⁵ The pragmatic factor serves as a tool to evaluate Pentecostal preaching—if listeners did not experience what the message explained, then the sermon was not successful.

It is impossible to describe a Pentecostal sermon while utilizing Enlightenment criteria (such as the elevation of reason, drive for clarity, the human as exclusive subject, and belief in sameness) because Pentecostal worship with its highly dynamic and experiential liturgy has been found metaphysically incorrect. The result is a lack of adequate language with which to convey the dynamics of preaching within a Pentecostal worship service. A new homiletical paradigm that allows for greater emphasis on the inductive (rather than deductive) and mysterious nature of preaching and its effects that can correctly describe “anointed preaching” is needed. This paradigm is a view accommodated by postmodernism's return to supernaturalism toward the ancient worldview expressed in the New Testament in reaction to modernity's claim that everything in the world is capable of being known by anyone who is reasonable with nothing miraculous, gifted, or unavailable to be added to the natural world from outside the known order.

⁴ Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 26.

⁵ Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 27.

Expository Preaching Enables the Listener to Learn the Bible More Clearly than Other Methods

To describe the distinctive characteristics of Pentecostal preaching in a concise manner is vital in describing Pentecostal homiletics. While the concepts, structures, and methodologies of other confessions that are not Pentecostal provide a great deal of material utilized in Pentecostal homiletics, it is possible to identify a few factors that do not play a part in non-Pentecostal circles and that form the unique element in Pentecostal preaching. For Pentecostals, the sermon (or rather, message) invites the listener to experience the power and truth of the Word proclaimed.

The implication of the preaching of God's Word is that there is a certain immediacy to the Word proclaimed. A message about healing in a Pentecostal church invites listener to experience the healing power of Christ who still heals today, illustrating the Pentecostals' approach to revelation, hermeneutics, and proclamation. The unique Pentecostal emphasis in the preaching event can be described in terms of the three different elements of the preaching endeavor, God's work in preaching, the preparation for preaching the message, and the preaching event itself.⁶

Pentecostals agree that all believers receive an endowment of the Spirit, allowing non-Pentecostal preachers to be enabled by the Spirit to preach the gospel effectively, although they will not be as bold and spiritually "connected" as Pentecostals. However, Pentecostals believe that Spirit baptism brings a special endowment of power that can be traced back to the events of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which provides power to witness in preaching, leading to supernatural results.⁷ Pentecostals believe that their preaching is more powerful and effective because they have experienced Spirit baptism and the initial sign of speaking in tongues. This belief might be the result of arrogance, haughtiness, or and even pride when Pentecostals place their preaching in a

⁶ Scott M. Gibson, ed., *Making a Difference in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 10.

⁷ Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 11.

category of its own, caricaturing evangelicals as a group focused on an intellectual faith merely based upon propositions. Those who have not experienced Spirit baptism (in terms of how Pentecostals define it) should not be understood as lacking the potential for supernatural results in their preaching (as Billy Graham and others have demonstrated).⁸

Second, the authority of the Bible is presupposed by Pentecostals. Some Pentecostals describe the Bible as inspired by the Spirit, inerrant, and infallible, proceeding from God and therefore invested with divinity that makes it authoritative and efficient. However, most Pentecostals hold that there is still more to Scripture, building their theology primarily on the Bible, and finding in the Bible a precedent to be repeated and re-enacted in the lives of contemporary believers.⁹ The text of Scripture is not one dimensional. The Protestant adage *sola Scriptura* is revised to *Spiritus-Word*, and Scripture is understood within the context of the ongoing revelation of God by his Spirit. The Spirit is not made a prisoner to the Word, limited to speaking scripturally, but the Spirit is liberated to speak to the church in many ways.¹⁰

Pentecostals do not define doctrine from the narratives about the early church, but they use these narratives as a model for what they expect to experience themselves, in their meeting with God through his Spirit. Purity of doctrine is then preserved by checking to see that the witness of what the contemporary disciple has experienced conforms to the primary “witness” of Scripture.¹¹ The problem posed by this viewpoint is that strange doctrines can easily be (and are) imported, and Pentecostals do not necessarily utilize Scripture to test it, as one finds the Jesus Only heresy, that embraces

⁸ Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 10.

⁹ Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 11.

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1993), 22.

¹¹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 22.

cultic influences through the teaching of E. W. Kenyon, prosperity theology, and the overemphasis on angels that functions in parts of the Pentecostal movement.¹²

Some Pentecostals tend to place experience and extra-biblical revelation above the Bible, exposing themselves to such heretical teachings as well as abuse by emotionally unstable persons. Pentecostals' anti-intellectualism, fundamentalism, pietism, and disdain for formal theological training are a backlash against the traditional Western (and Protestant) modernist obsession with logic, academics, and science while Pentecostals value God's direct revelation, in many instances apart from the corrective of biblical exegesis and exposition.¹³ While modernism's excesses should be avoided, it is important that faithfulness to Scripture is emphasized in preaching. Pentecostals who place the Spirit above the Word and thus elevate experience to become the norm are damaging to truth. However, Pentecostals argue that the Spirit is prior to the Word and inspires and illumines that Word within the communion while leading and guiding persons in the community. Because of the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit, the text of scripture, as written word, is alive and powerful, leading to signs and powers of the Spirit that may not be regarded as an optional addition to the church.

Third, Pentecostals emphasize that the message in preaching originates in God, not in the prophet. Pentecostal preachers prefer to refer to their preaching as "messages" rather than "sermons" to illustrate their reliance upon the Spirit to supply them with an inspired message suitable for each unique occasion. In addition, they regularly use prophetic terminology in their ministry, for example, "I have a message that the Lord has laid on my heart, that God deposits in my spirit," and they pray and allow that the Spirit will move powerfully to make their preaching effective, with the resultant signs and wonders. Sometimes they refer to their messages also as a "burden" that the preacher

¹² Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 2.

¹³ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 3.

received, normally during times of prayer (and fasting). The Pentecostal preacher would agree that study is necessary to build an effective sermon and that knowledge of the socio-historical context of the Scripture passage is essential. Pentecostals believe that neither study nor insight can give birth to a prophetic message. They argue that study of the Scripture and dependence upon the Spirit for explaining the passage are not mutually exclusive but rather complement each other in preparation of the message, resulting in preaching “prophetic Scripture.”¹⁴

To interpret texts as literally as possible, many Pentecostals ignore the temporal, cultural, and historical gap that exists between the biblical text and the contemporary reader. When the text is read and interpreted without utilizing available knowledge about the author and his/her relation to the readers, the first readers and their situation, and the culture and history behind the text, then misunderstanding may (and does) occur. Some Pentecostals in their disdain of formal theological education deny themselves knowledge of hermeneutical and exegetical tools and resources, but this knowledge is necessary in combination with the anointing of the Spirit in interpreting the Word of God.¹⁵

Pentecostal preaching is and should be rooted soundly in Scripture, beginning from and focusing on the biblical text. This rooting in Scripture should be regarded as non-negotiable. God’s role in preaching is that he has spoken through Scripture. For the preacher to uphold what God has communicated, he or she must preach the Scriptures or at least stay within its boundaries. In preparation for preaching, most Pentecostal denominations have as a precondition for entrance into the ministry that preachers be able to witness a call. As a result, many Pentecostal preachers’ call narrative deliberately bears

¹⁴ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 3.

¹⁵ Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 27.

similarities to the call narratives of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, calling preachers with a compelling urge to proclaim the divine Word.¹⁶

The divine call serves for the preacher as the beginning of a new life dedicated to the preaching ministry because it is interpreted as divine authorization and ordination for ministry by the church and the individual. It can be argued that a person's call experience is subjective and one's ministry cannot be built upon an emotionally loaded experience.¹⁷ However, many seemingly successful ministries were and are built upon such testimonies. The call narrative for Pentecostals must always necessarily include the experience of Spirit baptism, which serves as the quintessential encounter that transforms the believer, as well as the initial sign of being filled with the Spirit, resulting in a reordering of life in terms of a new spirituality filled with apocalyptic expectation and urgency. The experience of Spirit baptism is perceived as the motivation for bold witness in Pentecostal preaching.

According to Pentecostals, Spirit baptism reveals the revelation and truth of Christ, accompanied by the supernatural demonstration of his power, implying that Spirit baptism is an absolute necessity for the preacher. The filling with the Spirit enables the preacher to proclaim a Spirit-inspired and Spirit-anointed message with boldness and effectiveness, amounting to the preacher being endowed with authority to preach. Men and women alike experience the call. Authority to preach is derived on the one hand from the call, resulting in a personal relationship with Christ, and on the other hand from Scripture, although Pentecostals argue that more emphasis should be on the internal work of God in the life of the preacher, allowing him or her to speak with power rather than to the external authority of Scripture as the source of authority in preaching. This belief underlines the necessity that prayer should ground preaching; however, the amount of

¹⁶ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 2.

¹⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 18.

time the preacher spends in prayer does not necessarily determine the level of anointing in their preaching.¹⁸

The implication of Pentecostal preachers is that the proclamation of the Bible should be accompanied by an anointing of the Spirit that serves as a precondition for the proclamation to be effective and successful, a viewpoint that most Protestants would not hold because in their opinion the authority behind preaching resides in the biblical text and not the preacher. The church expects the preacher to maintain a healthy spiritual life, in Pentecostal terms to be continually filled with the Spirit. This belief is imperative for a Pentecostal preacher because it leads to a Spirit-filled character and mind, displaying the fruit of the Spirit and being in continual communication with God.¹⁹ Pentecostal preachers experience what they call “the anointing,” where they act beyond themselves in following the guidance of the Spirit that serves as vehicle of a revelation coming to the preacher, sometimes without any preparation, as a word of wisdom or knowledge. Pentecostals emphasize that the goal of Pentecostal preaching is not to stimulate listeners intellectually or entertain them, but to transform their actions, leading to a new lifestyle.²⁰

Expository Preaching Enables the Listener to Hear More Scripture

Pentecostal preachers enact the Word of God for their listeners to experience an encounter with God that will lead to life transformation, in the same order as that experienced by the preacher and based on what the biblical characters experienced. Enacting the Word of God means to act out the biblical message. This enactment does not mean that the message will not include information and argument. The difference in the belief of the Pentecostal preacher versus the non-Pentecostal is that the purpose of the

¹⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 18.

¹⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 19.

²⁰ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 43.

message is not to inform but to transform, including actions and will. This belief does not necessarily mean that Pentecostals equate emotions with spirituality, although it may be true in many instances; however, Pentecostals agree that emotions should be the natural byproducts of any genuine experience with God in a healthy spirituality, producing spiritual depth and a concomitant change of life and attitudes. The test for true spirituality is a changed lifestyle in agreement with New Testament requirements.²¹

Many contemporary Pentecostals would agree that exegesis of a passage of Scripture, including a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context is necessary, with the help of resources such as lexicons, concordances, commentaries, and etc. They fear, however, that academic work in exegeting the text may minimize the influence of the Spirit. The end goal of preaching is not simply good exegesis; it is a word from God that produces the divine desired effects of transformation in the human situation.²² Pentecostal hermeneutics therefore tends not to spend much time in exegeting a text in a historical-critical manner but rather focuses on the immediate meaning of a text. What the text meant in its original cultural context is less important for Pentecostals looking for the link with a contemporary situation and its application in daily life.²³

This hermeneutic constantly reinforces the conviction that the spiritual and extraordinary supernatural experiences of biblical characters need to be reenacted in the lives of contemporary believers. Pentecostal preaching requires a theory and a method of hermeneutics that facilitates a “re-experiencing” of the biblical text while maintaining respect for the text within its historical context. This shortcoming weakens Pentecostal

²¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 19.

²² Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17.

²³ Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 23.

preaching's faithfulness to the biblical text. By expecting historical biblical events to be reenacted in the contemporary church, leading to biblical signs and wonders repeated in modern times, Pentecostals' worldview allowing for supernatural intervention and miracles stands in stark contrast to a scientific worldview that does not allow for any supernatural phenomena to occur outside the accepted system of inductible cause and effect.²⁴ Pentecostal epistemology is sometimes criticized as naïve because it uncritically adopts the first-century worldview with all its corollaries, allowing for God's control over believers' daily lives and his involvement in their affairs. Pentecostal epistemology and hermeneutics require a positive view and a rationalist-modernist philosophical paradigm to interpret the Bible.²⁵

Pentecostal preaching is unique and needs a distinctive and specific paradigm to describe its essence. Postmodernism's seeming return to supernaturalism, which is the ancient worldview, accommodates this paradigm. In Pentecostals' God-centered worldview, all things relate to God and God relates to all things, and the natural world is always potentially a vehicle for the visitation of the supernatural.²⁶

While the Protestant Reformation's paradigm centers on the recognition that humans are sinners who stand guilty and condemned before a just God but that the death and resurrection of Jesus offers forgiveness as a free gift, a gift of forgiveness that justifies and sustains believers. The Pentecostals' message has a further and different focus. It also centers on the meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but then leads to and culminates in the manifestation of the Spirit, leading to believers' living in Jesus' daily presence. In Pentecostal preaching it is therefore critical that a correct biblical theology of pneumatology and bibliology must drive and undergird the

²⁴ Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 17.

²⁵ Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 18.

²⁶ Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 11.

methodology of homiletics to ensure that the Spirit's work in all aspects of preaching is recognized.²⁷

In terms utilized by 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, preaching should not depend on lowly speech or wisdom; Jesus Christ as crucified should be the sole focus. To be effective, preaching should be in demonstration of the Spirit and power so that listeners' faith will not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, Paul's "wisdom of men" cannot be equated in an unqualified manner with academic scholarship, as Pentecostals did in the past. Higher education should not come into conflict with the leading of the Spirit, although the potential for such a possibility would always exist and a written manuscript to guide the preacher in the pulpit should not necessarily squelch the leading of the Spirit. It should be non-negotiable that Pentecostals' sometimes excessive emphasis on the present work of the Spirit and the supernatural should be counterbalanced by serious exegetical labor unlocking the text in its sociohistorical context.²⁸

Christians Must Become Active Listeners of Sermons

Scripture should provide the borders within which Pentecostal preaching limits itself. A more balanced Pentecostal approach to preaching is needed today, one that incorporates the Spirit's inspiration of the Bible and his present work in preaching. Supernatural signs serve as a kind of hermeneutical criteria for Pentecostals' preaching and teaching. The phenomenon of supernatural results forms the defining element that sets Pentecostal preaching apart from other evangelical entities, requiring sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit and an expectation of his direct involvement in the preaching event. Pentecostals do not always acknowledge that all "supernatural" occurrences come from the Spirit.

²⁷ Lawson, *Famine in the Land*, 11.

²⁸ Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 18.

In Pentecostal preaching, the preaching of the Word should bring about the reality described in the text. The pressure on Pentecostal preachers to produce supernatural results in line with the passage from which they preach leads, in some instances, to the manipulation of the context of preaching to gain the desired results from the preached Word. Thus, the preacher may use “hype” and emotionalism to get people to respond to the altar call, mass suggestion for people to be “slain in the Spirit” or experience Spirit baptism, excessive noise, activity, motion, disorder, or showmanship.²⁹

The temptation for Pentecostals may be to focus exclusively on the supernatural and ignore other challenges, such as the inequality underlying the local community, poverty, the needs of the physically or mentally challenged, or orphans. They may also lose the perspective that preaching does not always lead to immediate gratification. In some instances, a sermon may only bear fruit in the future, when the church reaches its ultimate goal of perfection. The guidance of the Spirit being followed leads to spontaneity where the preacher may stop the message to pray for healing or give an invitation for members to bring testimonies. From the beginning, Pentecostals allowed room in worship services for people to testify about their encounters with God, and testimonies play an important role in illustrating the truths distilled from Scripture.

Testimonies reflect the fact that theological teaching in sermons initiates experience, including Spirit baptism, and argues that Pentecostalism serves as a protest against the use of religious words without religious experiences to back them up, a protest against perceived theological shallowness. The Pentecostal tradition conceives the church as a community of prophets. The preacher is one prophet among many. The roots of Pentecostal prophetic preaching are found in the inclusivity of the community of believers in Joel 2:28-30.

²⁹ Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 18.

For most Pentecostals, as is the case among Protestants, the congregation's role in the development of the sermon is primarily passive. The message may appeal to their actions and require them to respond to an invitation, and they may respond and interact to the message with "hallelujah!" and "amen," but Pentecostals should purposefully acknowledge that the congregation has been endowed with gifts of the Spirit as priests and prophets, leading to their free participation in all structures and a resultant democratization of liturgy, worship, and preaching with a transparent, non-hierarchical corporate structure. To incorporate the giftedness of Spirit-filled members, preachers may form a team that prepares for the preaching event and consists of a cross-section of the congregation to help in the development of the message. The various gifts of the Spirit encompassed in the team will contribute in ways that will complement the preacher's guiding and provide insight into blind spots that characterize the preacher's limited perspective.³⁰

The congregation can also be involved in the delivery by the established custom of "call and response," a pattern of verbal interplay between the preacher and congregation that helps shape the message's delivery. Dialogue may also be utilized, involving the intentional interplay of multiple viewpoints that may lead to unforeseen and unexpected ideas, a practice going back to William Seymour's ministry at Azusa Street when he invited others to respond and participate in his sermons. Preachers are not infallible and when a person claims to speak on behalf of God, the claim must be subject to a process of discernment. Preaching invites prayerful scrutiny by the community of believers. Preaching should be done to please and honor God; the temptation should be avoided to pander to every opinion in the congregation. Discernment is not always an easy task because of the difficulty one might experience to discern truth from error. It calls for a body of people who are formed in the Spirit where each one is bearer and hearer of the Spirit. In

³⁰ Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010), 32.

addition, the true prophet's message will seldom be popular, as demonstrated by biblical prophets' rejection by their peers and Jesus' crucifixion. The prophetic preacher may experience negative responses and criticisms of the message (Matt 5:11–12).³¹

A last element to be discussed is the delivery style in Pentecostal preaching. A sermon's effectiveness depends partly on the preacher's style, consisting of the arrangement of thoughts, use of voice and gesture, and means to involve listeners, such as a "call and response." Pentecostal preaching has been defined as the dissemination of truth through personality, and this aspect should be kept in mind. Pentecostal preaching is normally delivered with passion and an abundance of active language.³² The use of passionate language and unconventional methods led to Pentecostal preachers being characterized as fanatics, although more recently some have adopted a more refined style of delivery to reach new niche markets. It is important that Pentecostal preaching not adopt preaching models that are not compatible with their paradigm and hermeneutical orientation that the message should happen in the lives of listeners before it is effective.³³

Pentecostal preachers see as the purpose of their message an explanation and illustration at the hand of the Bible of what God still wants to do for people today: to touch them with his Spirit of power to save, free, heal, and deliver them. For this reason, preaching is not primarily concerned with what a biblical passage means but wants instead to facilitate an experience that concurs with the experience of the biblical accounts. Pentecostal preaching is described in terms of God's work in preaching, preparation for preaching, and the preaching event. God's work first consists of baptizing the preacher with the Spirit enduing him or her with power to witness in preaching and resulting in supernatural consequences. Second, the Spirit should be allowed to work

³¹ Dan Dumas, *A Guide to Expository Ministry* (Louisville: SBTS Press, 2012), 87.

³² Joel Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011), 9.

³³ Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 9.

freely. The Spirit is not made a prisoner to the Word and limited to speaking scripturally, but the Spirit is liberated to speak to the church in many different ways. However, this causes some Pentecostals to place experience and extra-biblical revelation above the Bible, which exposes them to heretical teachings.³⁴

Third, the message in preaching should originate in God and his Word, not in the prophet. While the Pentecostal preacher would agree that study is necessary to build an effective sermon, neither study nor insight can give birth to a prophetic message. However, Pentecostal preaching as non-negotiable should always be rooted soundly in Scripture, beginning from and focusing on the biblical text. Pentecostals believe that preachers should have a divine call before they are allowed to preach, and the call narrative must always necessarily include the experience of Spirit baptism. Authority to preach is derived from the call that should result in a personal relationship with Christ as well as Scripture as the source of authority in preaching.³⁵

The anointing of the Spirit serves as a precondition for the proclamation to be effective and successful because the goal of Pentecostal preaching is to transform people. Pentecostals accept that exegesis is necessary but share the fear that academic exegetical work may minimize the influence of the Spirit. The end of preaching is not simply good exegesis but rather to present a message that leads to the transformation of the human situation.

Pentecostal epistemology adopts the first-century God-centered worldview that the natural world is always potentially a vehicle for the visitation of the supernatural. Last, the preaching event is described in terms of its results, including conversions, signs, and wonders that serve as hermeneutical criteria for Pentecostal preaching. However, not all “supernatural” occurrences necessarily come from the Spirit, and the pressure on

³⁴ Magruder, *Spirit and Truth*, 54.

³⁵ John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 12.

Pentecostal preachers to produce supernatural results may lead to manipulation to gain the desired results from the preached Word while also focusing exclusively on the supernatural and ignoring other existential challenges faced by the surrounding community. The congregation as a community of prophets should be involved in the delivery while applying discernment about the truth of the message.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes of the scheduling of the project, the preparation period (weeks 1-8), the implementation period (weeks 9-14), and the follow-up period (weeks 15-18). This ministry project was designed to develop practical ways to gauge the effectiveness of preaching, encourage Pentecostal preachers to preach expository sermons, and help the members of Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in Farmersville, Texas, to become expository listeners. The first element of the project was to develop a six-week sermon series from Nehemiah 8 and 9, and for the expert panel to evaluate it. Panel members utilized an evaluation rubric and was interviewed.¹ The rubric critiques from the panel were reviewed and changes were made to the sermon series. The project's second element involved preaching the six-week sermon series. A pre-series survey was administered at the beginning of the first service. At the end of week 6, a post-series survey was administered. Throughout the series, all sermon notes and PowerPoints were available for the members.

Description of the Preparation Period (Weeks 1-8)

During week 1, the week of July 1, 2019, I developed the first sermon of the series from Nehemiah 8 and 9. This was the first outline of the six weeks of sermons, each being five to six pages in length.² All six sermons included PowerPoints for participants to follow along during each sermon. On the first Sunday of week 1, July 7, 2019, church members completed the pre-project survey, which assessed their

¹ See appendix 2 for rubric, see appendix 1 for pre-project survey.

² See appendix 3.

understanding of expository preaching.³ Two adults distributed the pre-project surveys during my introduction. After a brief period, the surveys were collected and placed face down in a box. Participants who informed me in advance that they would be absent received a copy of the survey prior to the first sermon. Absentees returned their survey to me in a sealed envelope, and these were mixed with the other surveys to ensure anonymity. A total of 51 pre-project surveys were completed.

During week 2, the week of July 8, 2019, I wrote the second sermon of the series from Nehemiah 8 and 9. In addition, the results of the pre-project survey were analyzed, and the data was recorded. The pre-project survey focused on three areas: spiritual maturity, personal preferences, and application. Participants were scored in each of these areas based upon their answers. I created a spiritual maturity score using questions 3, 4, and 6. These questions indicated the participants' length of time as a church member, length of time as a Christian, and what influenced their spiritual growth the most. A personal preferences score was created from questions 1, 2, 5, and 7. These questions indicated the participants' age, gender, impression of the church, and what style of preaching they enjoyed the most. I created an application score using questions 8, 9, and 10 in the survey. This score measured the amount of time and frequency a participant spends listening to preaching and what they do while listening, i.e., if they take notes.

During week 3, the week of July 15, 2019, I wrote sermon 3 of the sermon series from Nehemiah 8 and 9. I then sent sermons 1–3 to the expert panel.

During week 4, the week of July 21, 2019, I wrote sermon 4 of the Nehemiah 8 and 9 sermon series. During week 5, the week of July 28, 2019, I wrote sermon 5 of the Nehemiah 8 and 9 series. During week 6, the week of August 4, 2019, I wrote sermon 6 of the series and sent sermons 4–6 for the panel to review.

³ See appendix 1.

The Expert Panel

The expert panel was comprised of six mature Christians who brought unique perspectives to the evaluation process. Evaluator 1 was a Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Assemblies of God University and had a Doctor of Ministry in Expository Preaching recipient from Gordon Conwell University. Evaluator 2 was a pastor and retired Missionary in Brazil knowledgeable in the area of preaching and had served at various Bible Colleges and Seminaries. Evaluator 3 was a University Professor and a Department Head in Biblical Studies, former Pastor, and College Administrator. Evaluator 4 had been a deacon at Grace Fellowship Assembly of God for many years as well as a member of the church for more than fifty years. His feedback helped tailor the sermon series to the audience of the church. Evaluator 5 was a pastor of a nearby large church in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex with over forty years of ministry experience. Evaluator 6 was a vocational chaplain and a noted expository preacher in the African American community.

Each member of the expert panel received the first three sermon outlines and evaluation rubric by July 15.⁴ Due to scheduling conflicts, the panel was not able to meet through conference call. Thus, I spoke with panel members individually to discuss each week of the series and each section of the evaluation rubric.

The panel received final three sermon series outlines by August 5, 2019. By week 7, the week of August 11, 2019, I reviewed the critiques from the expert panel and made changes and in week 8, the week of August 18, 2019, I resubmitted the edited sermons to the panel for review.

Description of Implementation Period (Weeks 9-14)

During week 9, the week of August 25, 2019, I preached sermon 1 of the sermon series. Sermon 1 covered Nehemiah 8:1-6. The summary of sermon 1 is that Nehemiah

⁴ See appendix 2.

called the people to come together before the Lord for a time of celebration and dedication. This was also a time of worship, as the people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God and read it in their midst. Their worship was centered in the Word.

The main points of sermon 1 were (1) the assembly of worship, (2) the agenda for worship, and (3) the attitude of worship. The church body could achieve worship more frequently if it would follow the example set forth in Nehemiah. Where is the congregation's heart today? Are the church people ready to get out the door and go home or are they concerned with worship? Are some things in the congregation's heart not right? If so, why not come and confess it? If all is well with the parishioner's soul, then why not praise the Lord for His goodness? The corporate church body can achieve worship together, but it is up to the individuals.

During week 10, the week of September 1, 2019, I preached sermon 2 of the sermon series from Nehemiah 8 and 9. Nehemiah Sermon Chapter 8:7-12 was titled "How God's Word was received." The main points of sermon 2 were (1) God's Word is presented so the people may understand, (2) response to God's Word makes revival flow, and (3) the people choose to rejoice. The listeners understood the words declared to them: They went away praising God because understanding God's Word brings a sweet sense of joy.

During week 11, the week of September 8, 2019, I preached sermon 3. This sermon covered Nehemiah 8:13-18: spiritual headship. The main points of the sermon were insight into the pattern of spiritual leadership. A leader (1) strives for theological maturity (v. 13), (2) organizes his family life biblically (v. 14), (3) participates in faith-building events (v. 16), and (4) heaps the blessing of God upon family (v. 17).

During week 12, the week of September 15, 2019, I preached sermon 4, titled "Convenience vs. Inconvenience," covering Nehemiah 9:1-6. The main points were (1) the heart of the matter is the heart, (2) actions matter, and (3) follow the instructions of God.

During week 13, the week of September 22, 2019, I preached sermon 5. The sermon was titled “Never Abandoned” from Nehemiah 9:19-31. The main points were (1) God did not abandon unfaithful Israel, (2) Jesus as sin was abandoned, (3) why we will never be abandoned, and (4) God is faithful. God has not only made great and precious promises, He has the ability to follow through on every one of them.

Finally, during week 14, the week of September 29, 2019, I preached sermon 6 from the Nehemiah 8 and 9 sermon series. The main points of this message, titled “The Cycle of Israel's relationship with God,” from Nehemiah 9:22-31, were (1) Israel’s relationship with God, (2) a plea to God for intervention, and (3) conclusion: a point of decision.

Description of Follow-Up Period (Weeks 15-18)

During week 15 of the project, the week of October 6, 2019, I sent an email to all members encouraging them to review all sermons and get further clarification on any content they did not grasp. I did not receive back many replies. Most participants indicated they saw the connection to the people hearing Ezra read the scroll and responding to the call to worship, and how preaching expository messages will move people to worship and cause a hunger for revival.

During week 16 of the project, the week of October 13, 2019, I met with the members of the panel and the church and summarized the six messages of the sermon series. The members and the panel recorded their scores from the evaluation rubric.⁵ All panel members said the sermon series was practical and that it encouraged the church people to be attentive to the Word of God and have a deep hunger for the exposition of scripture. The church members had a consensus that the series challenged their thinking and alerted them to the need of expository messages over topical messages.

⁵ See appendix 2.

Panel member 1, a professor, said the sermons could use more examples; namely, examples that are current. He mentioned the current political attitudes of America with the divided nature of our country. He also mentioned encouraging the members to watch preachers from other denominations that excel at the art of expository preaching—preachers whose doctrine the members may not agree with but that they might notice the skill of the preacher breaking down the passage verse-by-verse.

Panel member 1 was grateful to observe a Pentecostal church that had a pastor transitioning the church into hearing expository preaching. Expository preaching was his passion and his area of academic study. Panel member 1 felt that expository preaching best fulfills the biblical commands regarding preaching. The Bible he felt has a lot to say about what preaching is to be. Prescriptively, passages like 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and 1 Timothy 4:13-16 call for a Word-centered ministry. The commitment of any church, Pentecostal or another stream, should strive to be a Word-centered ministry.

Descriptively, throughout the Bible, and especially in the book of Acts, the reader repeatedly sees a model set forth for preaching. In Acts, for example, Peter and Paul explain the Old Testament and bring it to bear, which is no coincidence. Implicit within the call to preach is the call to preach the Scripture, and expositional preaching best fulfills this biblical command.

Expository preaching also affirms a high view of Scripture. When it comes to preaching and one's stated beliefs about Holy Scripture, actions speak louder than words. How the preacher handles and preaches the Bible reveals what he truly believes about it.

Expository preaching honors the function of preaching. This was Panel member 1's biggest point. Biblical preaching gives people a clear and certain Word. Preaching, if anything, is to be authoritative, and expository preaching gives the sermon a "thus sayeth the Lord" influence.

Panel member 1 and panel member 4 (who serves as a deacon at Grace Fellowship) both attested to the fact that emphasizing expository preaching was bringing

a weight to the act of preaching to the church people. That preaching was serious and not just based in emotionalism. Biblical preaching puts the text of Scripture front and center in the sermon, thus bringing a level of seriousness to the pulpit. Panel member 1 reminded me that the great preachers of church history, men like Bunyan, Whitefield, Edwards, and Spurgeon, were all expository preachers.

Panel member 1 also stated that expository preaching brings spiritual maturity. In the church there will be a trickle-down effect from the pulpit to the pew. Over time, for better or worse, a church tends to reflect the personalities and passions of their pastor. The church that receives a steady diet of biblical exposition will grow in their knowledge of the Bible and in their confidence to study, practice, and teach it. Moreover, strong pulpits draw mature believers who desire to be fed and to be part of a maturing congregation. Over time expository preaching leads to a healthier church. A weekly diet of theme verses or only teaching on topical subjects leads to a weak church.

Panel member 6, who serves as a vocational chaplain, echoed the statements in regard to the importance of expository preaching. Expository preaching, he felt, teaches the congregation how to study the Bible. It is no compliment when a church member asks, “Wow, where did you get that revelation?” Church members should be able to see the root of the application and how it is derived from the preached text. Panel member 6 emphasized that part of preaching the Scriptures is to demystify the preaching and sermon preparation, thus educating the people on how to study the Bible. Expository preaching should do more than explain the text; it shows people how to interpret and explain the text as well.

Panel member 5 had the view that expository preaching would always make sure that the sermon is relevant. There is often an inverse correlation between biblical relevance and attempted cultural connection. Nothing dates a sermon like filling it with pop culture references. He said to stick to the series, and it was amazing how things would line up with what was currently going on with people. He cited the example of

preaching through a series in Daniel in 2016, and the chapters lining up with exactly what was going on in the world with the Presidential election. Sermons that are text-oriented speak to the perennial needs of the human heart, and when they are amplified by cross-references, historical illustrations, and pointed application, they have no expiration date.

Panel member 3, who serves as a University Department Head in Biblical Studies stated his belief that expository preaching is the most evangelistic and Christ-centered way to preach because it keeps Christ at the center of the text. He echoed Paul's admonition to preach Christ and Him crucified and that should be every preacher's mission as well, and preachers best accomplish this mission to preach Christ and Him crucified by not just preaching "gospel" messages or by tacking on the gospel at the end of a sermon. To rightly interpret any text is to draw lines from that text to the broader, biblical meta-narrative of Christ and Him crucified. Therefore, to preach an Old Testament narrative or a New Testament epistle should not be a detour from the gospel. Rather, every sermon based on Scripture is a sermon where Christ can be prominently featured.

Panel member 3 also emphasized that expository preaching helps mature the preacher as a man of God. Biblical exposition is not easy. It takes time to interpret the passage in its context, build an exegetical outline, and fashion it all together in homiletical form. Year after year, this rigorous work will deepen the preacher's scriptural knowledge. The thousands of hours wrestling with texts are incredibly beneficial. Moreover, preaching verse-by-verse through books in the Bible forces the preacher to confront difficult doctrines, wrestle with difficult texts, and apply the full weight of Scripture to the preacher's own life. All of this, and more, facilitate spiritual growth and maturation.

According to panel member 3, expository preaching gives the preacher confidence when he is in the pulpit that his sermon is from God and that he did not have to fashion something from a perceived "divine revelation." The confidence preachers

have in their sermons is derived from the confidence they have in the truthfulness, authority, and power of Scripture.

The full effectiveness of a sermon can vary for a host of reasons but grounding the sermon firmly in the text ensures a certain scriptural validity that will bear fruit. The text itself serves as a safety net, guaranteeing at least a minimal return on the sermon and that no sermon will ultimately fail. Anytime the text is read and the gospel is preached there will be at least a minimal impact.

Panel member 1 emphasized that as a bi-vocational minister, expository preaching is the best tool for time management. In my early ministry, determining which text to preach was often nerve-racking. After much prayer and Bible page turning, I would often still be unsettled. Sometimes on Saturdays I would be furiously looking for something to preach on. With expository preaching, pastors typically preach the next verses in the chapter or book of the Bible. This saves time in the passage-selection process. It also saves time in the sermon preparation process as the pastor can carry forward his week-to-week study.

Expository preaching is important in the Pentecostal world to ensure balance in the pulpit. As God's Word, the Bible is perfectly balanced. God's chosen emphases are superintended and impossible to improve upon. Expository preaching naturally lets God speak what He has spoken and emphasize what He desires to emphasize. It prevents hobbyhorse preaching, dodging difficult passages, or going on rabbit trails. Biblical exposition lets the text speak, which lets God Himself speak.

Panel member 4 also provided insight on how some of the content went over his head and he was not able to grasp some of it. He stated that he had been a member of the church for over fifty years and had never heard a sermon series from Nehemiah. He noted that the emphasis on unity was important for Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in particular and that being unified as a church body was an issue that the church has had. Chapter 8 emphasized how all the people were gathered the street before the water gate.

Each person was in their place and they were united in their purpose. The people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God. They were all hungry for the Word and desired to hear it. There was no division or discord among them on this occasion. Panel member 4 believed this was of great significance for our church. He felt Grace Fellowship Assembly of God needed that same cooperation in the worship services. Grace Fellowship needed to be united in purpose, desiring to hear from God and worship Him. If the church is not united in purpose, then Grace Fellowship will never achieve worship together.

Most panel members and church members felt that week 4, “Convenience vs. Inconvenience,” from Nehemiah 9:1-6, did not flow as well as the rest of the sermons and needed to be fleshed out differently. The consensus was that this was the weakest of the series.

Panel member 2, a retired missionary and pastor, strongly agreed with the premise of sermon 1 in the thought that it seems that modern society would have the average person believe that worship is for the faint or the feeble. It is viewed as something for former generations. Many youth and young adults see no reason for worship. Biblical worship is essential for all the people. Bring children to the house of God; they need to hear and be exposed to the Word, the Spirit, and the atmosphere of worship. He felt it was necessary to keep children in the worship service for this purpose. He explained that children would experience “culture shock” if they played games every Sunday, sang active songs, and had every message or Bible story illustrated with a skit, object lesson or interactive device, but had never been in the main service. His fear was suddenly the child would turn 10 or 12 and then “graduate” to big church: the music is strange; there are no games, skits or illustrations, only some guy preaching for a half hour or longer; they do not know any of the people; and there is no candy. That is what he felt happens to children who are never in the main service. Within a few months, maybe even a few weeks, they might decide that they do not want to be there. If parents make the

child stay, then he will leave as soon as he turns 18. If not, he will leave sooner. Panel member 2 felt that this was a big reason why so many young people are no longer attending church—because they were never a part of the church at large.

Panel member 5, a pastor, questioned the length of the six-week series. He encouraged me to expand content, especially on the two weeks devoted to the first part of Nehemiah 8 that includes verses 1-12. He believed a great deal of this material would be so important to every church. Sermon 1 laid out the agenda for worship, and that the focal point of the worship service was the Word of God. The reader of the text may notice the priority of the Word in verse 2-3, the people of God were hungry for His Word. They were interested in what the Bible had to say. The people of God had been in captivity and did not enjoy the privileges of worship and biblical instruction they had at Jerusalem. Ezra read the Word of God from morning until midday. Panel member 5 loved the emphasis that the people were not concerned with time, wanting to get finished and go home. There was emphasis placed on the Word. A lot is labeled “worship” in our day, but much of it is not biblical worship; a great emphasis is placed on emotion and entertainment in today. Biblical worship is centered on the Word of God. The Word of God was the focus here and if the modern church is going experience real worship, it must be centered on the Word.

In the preaching of the Word, Ezra the priest stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for that purpose, and expounded the Word of God. They had made preparations for preaching. Worship must include the man of God preaching the Word. Modern society has gotten away from Bible preaching, but nothing can replace preaching in the worship service. Panel member 5 loved the emphasis that preaching is essential to worship. God has chosen that method of delivery to share His message and deal with people’s lives. Ezra had a desire to share the Word of God. Ezra 7:10 says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

The panel members brought valuable insight from their collective experiences. All agreed, whether they were in a ministry as a pastor, layperson, in education, or in a parachurch ministry, that they had a renewed love and focus on expository preaching from interacting with the sermon series and evaluating it. Assessing the sermons using the sermon series rubric helped them to assess their own preaching or view of preaching and the application of that preaching in their own lives and ministries. Although they did not all agree on every point that I made in the sermons series, they could see that I was at least attempting to stay true to the text and be faithful in only pulling out of the text and not interjecting into it.

By week 6, I had interviewed all members of the expert panel and received their scores for the evaluation rubric scores. The six-member expert panel determined that 99 percent of the series met or exceeded the sufficient level.⁶ The six-week curriculum was updated and ready for use in preaching the six-week series.

I preached the six-week series in the months of August and September during Grace Fellowship Assembly's Sunday morning worship service. An average of 51 adults attended. At the start of each week, they received a note page to fill in the blanks of the points of the sermon. All six weeks utilized PowerPoint. The PowerPoint slides were saved on a flash drive and audio recordings were burned onto CD in the event of participant absence. In addition, participants received a survey before the first sermon started and after the sixth service concluded.

On October 20, 2019, during week 17 of the project, the post-project survey was distributed. This survey was identical to the pre-project survey in order to make pre- and post-series comparisons. Participants were asked to place their survey face down in a box as they left the room. Those who notified me in advance that they would be absent still received the survey—they were instructed to listen to the recorded audio of sermon

⁶ See appendix 3.

6, complete the survey, and then return it to me in an envelope the following week. A total of 51 post-class surveys were completed, 40 of which were completed by adult members of Grace Fellowship who attended all six services.

A survey for dependent samples was used to analyze the pre- and post-service surveys in three areas. The frequency for which adults of Grace Fellowship took notes during preaching increased greatly. The frequency that participants listened to preaching also increased. Participant attitude toward expository preaching improved throughout the six-week series.

Summary

This ministry project involved two elements. The project's first element was to develop a six-week sermon series from Nehemiah 8 and 9 for evaluation from an expert panel. Each member of the panel utilized an evaluation rubric and was interviewed. The critiques from the panel were reviewed and changes were made according to the panel's recommendations. The project's second element involved preaching the six-week sermon series. A pre-series survey was administered at the beginning of the first service. By the end of week 6, a post-series survey was administered. Throughout the duration of the series, all sermon notes and power points were available for the members.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the project's purpose, goals, and methodology. Project strengths and weaknesses are addressed, followed by personal and theological reflections.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to define and create a hunger for expository preaching for the members at Grace Fellowship Assembly of God in Farmersville, Texas. Expository preaching has not traditionally been utilized or emphasized among Pentecostals and it is my belief that this is a detriment to the Pentecostal church. While being thoroughly Pentecostal, members of Pentecostal churches do not have to sacrifice an emphasis on God's Word for allowing a "move of God" expressed in emotional responses, but emphasizing God's Word will produce lasting fruit and real heart change.

While I have served as an Assemblies of God minister for the past twenty-one years, I have found that disparaging comments toward Christian higher education are common. I have long desired to help believers grasp why expository preaching is important, what it exists to do, and how Christians should utilize and apply it in their lives. Moreover, I have wanted to develop a practical study of expository preaching and preach it at my church.

Throughout the course of this project, I outlined and began to develop a six-week series to preach at Grace Fellowship. The series was supplemented with PowerPoint slides and detailed notes. As a result of this project, participants took notes more frequently, their listening of preaching outside of the church increased, and their attitudes toward expository preaching improved. Thus, the purpose of this project was fulfilled.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

This project had four goals: (1) develop a six-week sermon series from Nehemiah 8 and 9; (2) increase the knowledge and awareness of biblical exposition; (3) improve attitudes toward preaching; and (4) encourage application of preaching in the lives of believers.

Goal 1

The first goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series to preach on Sunday morning. I designed the series to include fill-in-the-blanks to be completed during each sermon with several questions to encourage post-service thought. Takeaways included a main thought to research and think on throughout the week.

An expert panel comprised of six people of diverse backgrounds evaluated the series according to a rubric.¹ They also provided suggestions via emails to edit the sermons. When the evaluation scores were compiled, 99 percent of the criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.² Thus, goal 1 was achieved.

Goal 2

The project's second goal was to increase knowledge of biblical exposition among the members of Grace Fellowship. Of the 10 survey questions, 3 were used to gauge spiritual maturity (3, 4, 6), 4 questions focused on personal preferences (1, 2, 5, 7), and 2 questions focused on application (9, 10). I wanted to see a positive change between pre and post-class surveys for questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. A survey was administered to determine if the pre- and post-project change in application responses was statistically significant.

The survey results suggest that the six-week series made a discernable impact on participant understanding of expository preaching. Feedback from the members aligns

¹ See appendix 2.

² See appendix 3.

with this result. A recurring comment was, “I love how biblical your sermons are.” Some church members had not considered that their desire for emotional response was not the sign of real fruit but living out the Christian faith every day was what was important. Others thought that expository preaching sounded boring and was only something that Baptists did. There has always been a suspicion toward academia in Pentecostal circles. This stems from the early Pentecostals who believed that Jesus was coming back soon and that they did not have time to attend seminary, and that by attending seminary they would “lose the fire of the Holy Spirit.” Participant understanding of preaching grew more biblical as the six-week series progressed. Given the project feedback, the second goal of this project was accomplished.

Goal 3

The project’s third goal was to improve attitudes of Grace Fellowship members toward preaching. Of the 10 questions on the survey, 4 were used to gauge personal preferences. Questions 1, 2, 5, 7 were used to create this personal preferences score.

A survey was administered to determine if the pre- and post-project change in attitude scores was statistically significant. The survey determined that a score increase was statistically significant in the rise of participants actively engaging in the preaching process and application of said preaching. The result from the survey suggests that participant attitude toward preaching improved as a result of the six-week class. While few participants expressed a desire to preach themselves, many shared that the way they viewed preaching had changed.

Participant attitudes toward expository preaching improved due to the six-week series. Given the survey analysis and congregation’s feedback, the third goal of this project was accomplished.

Goal 4

The final goal of this project was to encourage the application of preaching in

the lives of Pentecostal believers. Question 8 of the pre- and post-class survey asked participants to state how many times they listen to preaching each week. The average pre-survey response was two times a week, and the post-survey response increased on average to three times a week. So, participants were searching out preaching from other sources aside from just listening to me.

A post-project survey was administered to determine if the pre- and post-series change in response of the sermon they heard that week at Grace Fellowship was significant. The post-project survey suggested that participants increased in actively reflecting on the sermon for that week. Participants commented on application in a general or theological sense, and in a personal sense. Many shared that this series changed their view of expository preaching.

I would have liked feedback confirming that participants really applied at their home from the sermon for the week in a more detailed way than prior to the six-week series. However, minimal feedback on application does not invalidate the survey result. Therefore, the project's fourth goal was achieved.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of this project was the use of a sermon series. I carefully selected six people of diverse backgrounds who read the series to ensure it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practical.³ Their feedback improved the series and helped me see how Grace Fellowship members would receive my preaching. In addition, writing this sermon series better prepared me for preaching the six-week class. Had I written six sermons based upon this project, I would have focused on summarizing chapters 8 and 9, but not as many verses in depth. The resulting sermons may have been too shallow. In contrast, expository sermon writing forced me to develop the sermons with my audience in mind.

³ See appendix 2 for rubric.

The six-week series was not overtly academic, but feedback suggested I had pretty much connected with my audience. At least five participants said, “You helped me think very differently about expository preaching.” Improvement of participant attitudes toward expository preaching and an increase in listening to preaching affirmed I had connected. Much of the effectiveness of the six-week class was due to developing sermon series in conjunction with the panel.

The second strength of this project was that participants were challenged to think in a more biblical way about preaching and worship. Few participants remembered a pastor preaching from Nehemiah. Nehemiah offered pertinent insights to our church and where it was in 2019. For instance, What does it mean to be a disciple? What is a disciple? Is a disciple a pupil? Is a disciple a student? Is he or she someone who learns all about the Bible so they will know a lot? Can give a deep discussion on the differences between premillennialism, post millennialism and Amillennialism? Despite their deep theological knowledge, do they not live a life pleasing to God? Theology is important, but not for its own sake. Theology and knowledge of the Bible is important so that believers know how to follow Christ. It is important to know how to live in a way that pleases Him.

The project’s third strength was its focus on engaging preaching and not just leaving the service wondering what the preacher just talked about. In week 4 I talked about following the instructions of God and supplemented the passage from the next chapter in Nehemiah, Nehemiah 10:28-29: “The rest of the people . . . join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.” As the pastor, I admonished the members to care for the church’s children from Nehemiah 10:30. To keep Sabbath (rest and worship) according to Nehemiah 10:31. To give of resources as well as of themselves according to Nehemiah 10:39. In the church’s mission, the church goes against and

changes the culture. The modern culture of society is apathetic unless the focus is about “me.” The Kingdom Principles taught in this sermon series were: Self-Denial (Luke 9:23-24); Service (Matt 23:11); Count Costs (Luke 14:28); Be Salt; Light; (Matt 5:13-16).

Weaknesses of the Project

The lack of in-service discussion may have been the most significant weakness to this project. Because it was a sermon series and not a formal class, there was limited discussion after the preaching. Each service involved limited discussion of two pre-class survey questions followed by the main message. Some participants stayed afterwards to ask a question or to share thoughts; however, most did not. Lack of in-service interaction hindered my ability to gauge how the material was being received and prevented me from being aware of any issues.

What I Would Have Done Differently

To better deal with time constraints, the number of sermons should have been increased. Teaching eight sessions, as opposed to six, would have allowed ten to fifteen minutes for weekly after church discussion. Few questions could have been fully answered during this time, but it would have helped.

I regularly reminded participants to listen to the CD audio when absent. PowerPoint slides displayed the notes for each class, and I used a laser pointer to draw further attention to the PowerPoint. Yet, out of 51 post-class surveys collected, only 40 met the necessary criteria for this project (an adult member of Grace Fellowship who attended all six sermons). I expected participants to miss some weeks, but it was disappointing in how apathetic some were to the project.

The survey was effective, and a different instrument would not have provided more data. Data gathering, in general, was foreign to members of Grace Fellowship. A few participants seemed to not understand the significance of the surveys. If I were to preach the six-week sermon again, I would better prepare participants by using a sign-up

sheet in advance, which would allow me to speak with each person that wanted to participate before week 1 of the series.

The lack of in-class discussion and decreased number of participants who completed all six weeks were two project weaknesses. Nonetheless, the survey analyses aligned with class feedback. This alignment suggests that the project achieved its goals.

Theological Reflections

The sermon introduction is such an important aspect of expository preaching. The preacher wants three things to happen in the first few minutes. The preacher wants to get the congregation's attention, direct their attention to the subject matter, and create a positive expectation about what is the preacher going to say? Part of healthy exposition is capturing the pathos and ethos of the text.

I had to deliver a general aim for the introduction so that participants would not think "Oh no, not this again." I worked hard to establish contact with the audience and attract their attention as to why what I was talking about was important. The preacher has to let the hearers know the heart of the text as close to the beginning of the message and also give them the passage's main overarching thought.

Working through Nehemiah and summarizing its main point was especially enriching. I applied the lesson I was taught in my doctoral program that if it is a narrative it is a pericope, and if its epillistillary it is chapters. The summary of passages in the development of an exegetical book outline bring the joy of discovery. The outline became the foundation of the sermon series. Praying and meditating over the outline and consulting commentaries helped me subdivide the outline in the major sections. I learned that in working through the book for outline purposes it was important to note the verses and passages that are unusually difficult. Developing a title for the series that reflects the major theme of the book was a point at which I did not excel.

I endeavored to implement a simple exegetical process. The expositor should begin by reading the passage several times in different translations, take note of the

nuances, be alert for special literary forms and interpret them appropriately, ground the sermon in its literary context, and root or ground the sermon in the historical/cultural context. If the preacher can, he should translate the passage from the original language. If the preacher cannot, then he should use the ESV or NASB.

I pondered the question “are there any words or particular terms that need to be studied?” Preaching is a hammer; the preacher only gets one good shot at the brick wall a week. Preaching is the one opportunity to disciple the pastor’s entire congregation each week. The pastor is trying to help people by speaking to their head, heart, and will; all three have to work together. As a pastor, I have to ponder the question “What are pastors teaching them in the mind?” Pastors want church people to change what they think when what they think does not align with the Word of God. What about their will? Are pastors paying attention to what their congregation is feeling?

At the heart of exposition is explanation. Pastors should ask themselves “Do I explain the biblical text?” There is power in the exposition of Scripture. Illustrations in sermons are useful but explanation of the text is the goal. Preaching is knowing the preacher’s gifts and seeking to improve them while remaining who God made the preacher to be. Preaching is not only an individual knowing himself but knowing his congregation, where they are, where they have been and how to best lead them.

Jesus did not preach the same in Jerusalem that he did in the hillsides of Galilee; Paul’s sermons began right where the audience was. Preaching is discipleship; the congregation may not be where the pastor wants them to be, but the pastor is leading them there. Serving as pastor is more than preaching, it is loving and guiding people and presenting to them a compelling vision for a congregational future.

In this project I was introduced to a new concept for biblical interpretation in one of the books used in this project, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the*

Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology.⁴ The authors, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson introduced to me the concept of the hermeneutical triad. The hermeneutical triad consists of history, literature, and theology. History and literature are at the two bottom points of the triangle, and they build up to theology. This book looks at each point of the triad in turn, but spends the most time exploring three subsets of literature: canon, genre, and language. Köstenberger and Patterson propose that in interpreting the Bible one follows this triad, which consists of history, literature, and theology. They acknowledge that while the name for this approach might be new, the practice of studying Scripture in this way certainly is not. What makes this approach different from other geometrically named interpretative models (i.e., the hermeneutical circle and spiral), is that instead of moving from general to special hermeneutics, the hermeneutical triad moves from special to general. The authors explain that in doing so, we are building on the enormous amount of recent scholarship on the importance of the canon, theology, metanarrative, and Scripture as ‘Theo drama.’ Thus, we don’t start with words; we start with canon. Instead of starting close and then backing up to see the larger picture, this book proposes starting with the big picture and then move closer.

This Hermeneutical Triad a simple method for interpreting the Bible. It involves preparation, interpretation, and application. The method for interpretation is built around the hermeneutical triad, which consists of history, literature, and theology. In the modern period of church history, one of these elements of the hermeneutical triad has been emphasized to the exclusion of the others: The historical-critical method elevated historical considerations above literary genre or theology. The literary/postmodern approach can elevate literature above concern for historical rootedness or eventual theological concerns. The theological interpretation of Scripture can tend to misuse

⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 201.

theology into texts and fail to pay closer attention to historical context and literary genre. The Hermeneutical Triangle helps the reader's interpretive journey, and particularly my interest in theological interpretation of Scripture. When done well, theological interpretation rests on historical investigation and literary sensitivity. When done poorly, it is simply a reaction to historical-critical methods and jumps into the last step of the triad prematurely. It would have been helpful to have more historical background and more about biblical theology, as well as perhaps a little more attention to developments like speech-act theory.

Expositors of the Word of God that are pastors, usually have limited time in sermon preparation because of their duties in their churches, expository preaching can aid pastors with limited time. Often, pastors wrestle with the outline of a sermon. The task of the expositor in preaching is to discover the sermon's outline, not to come up with one. That is, if preachers or teachers have done their job in exegesis, then the preacher or teacher will have an outline it is the literary shape of the text. Since the literary shape is determined by the genre, the interpreter must examine the process genre by genre beginning with the narratives.

Since Christianity is a historical religion, and all texts are historically and culturally embedded, it is important to ground interpretation of Scripture in a careful study of the relevant historical setting. Since Scripture is a text of literature, the bulk of interpretive work entails coming to grips with the various literary and linguistic aspects of the biblical material. Since Scripture is not merely a work of literature but inspired and authoritative revelation from God, the goal and end of interpretation is theology. Theological interpretation, when done well, rests on historical investigation and literary sensitivity. When done poorly, it is simply a reaction to historical-critical methods and jumps into the last step of the triad prematurely.

Personal Reflections

The process of completing this doctoral project produced much fruit in my life

and ministry. Attending The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary made me so grateful for the church at large and my Southern Baptist brothers. My professors were some of the most brilliant and Godly men I have ever sat under.

This project also helped me pursue balance. As a bi-vocational minister trying to revitalize a church, expository preaching is a pastor's best method for time management. Pastors who preach expository messages do not have to scramble to try to figure out what they are going to preach on Sunday.

Finally, this project opened my eyes to the use of surveys. I attempted to write an honest pre- and post-class survey and provide an honest interpretation of survey results. Analysis of survey results suggested I had achieved statistical significance in three areas, but assessing participant feedback was the most fruitful part of this process.

I hope that my research and survey data will serve Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal Denominations and inform them of the importance of implementing expository preaching in their churches. One great take away from this project is that I believe the most biblical form of preaching is expository preaching. The people heard Ezra preach from the scroll and fell down and worshipped God. That model of preaching the Word and the people responding is still the blueprint for the modern church to follow.

Conclusion

This project achieved all four of its stated goals. I worked with an expert panel to develop a six-week sermon series that was sufficient for goal 1. Feedback from participants combined with survey analyses indicated that participants grew in their knowledge of expository preaching, developed more biblical attitudes toward preaching in general, and spent more time listening to preachers. Analyses also indicated that the project made a statistically significant change in each of these areas. Thus, goals 2-4 were achieved.

The project could have been improved by allowing more time for after service discussion. Increasing the number of classes from 6 to 8 would also have helped. A

second weakness was low class completion. Out of 51 pre-class surveys collected, only 40 post-class surveys could be used for this project. A sign-up sheet administered prior to the first class would have allowed me to speak with each participant and answer questions about the importance of the pre- and post-class surveys.

The expert panel and the use of sermon series made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the six-week sermon series. Participants were encouraged to think biblically each week, and were given principles to help them engage their world from a biblical perspective.

This research project encouraged me to think in greater depth about the mission of the church. I was also challenged to humbly understand opposing views and to exercise balance in my research. This project has been a valuable experience.

APPENDIX 1
PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

This survey was prepared for the project titled, “EQUIPPING THE CONGREGATION OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS TO PRACTICE EXPOSITORY LISTENING” and is not purposed for the collection of any other information. The content of this questionnaire will not be used for any other purpose. Please read following questions and please make sure to mark only one of the relevant examples.

1. What is your age range?
 - ① 20s- 6
 - ② 30s- 5
 - ③ 40s- 6
 - ④ 50s- 4
 - ⑤ 60s or older-30

2. What is your gender?
 - ① female- 41
 - ② male- 10

3. How many years have you been (attending the Church)?
 - ① less than 1 year- 3
 - ② 1 -3 years- 0
 - ③ 4 -10 years- 3
 - ④ 11-20 years- 10
 - ⑤ 21 years or longer-35

4. How many years has it been that you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and the Lord?
 - ① less than 1 year- 2
 - ② 1-3 years- 0
 - ③ 4 -10 years- 4
 - ④ 11 -20 years- 10
 - ⑤ 21 years or longer-35

5. What do you think is the most important thing when you introduce church to others?
- ① The preaching of the Senior Pastor. -40
 - ② Bible study(discipleship training).-7
 - ③ Small group meetings.-0
 - ④ Church size-4
6. What influences your maturing of faith (growth) the most?
- ① The preaching of the Senior Pastor.-50
 - ② Bible study(discipleship training)-0
 - ③ Small group meetings.-0
 - ④ church size-1
7. Which style of preaching do you like?
- ① Preaching that elucidates the text of the Bible to be easily understandable.-21
 - ② Preaching that utilizes diverse materials and data.-2
 - ③ Preaching filled with the preacher's humor.-10
 - ④ Preaching that provides applications to personal life and challenges.-8
 - ⑤ Preaching that provides biblical viewpoints (solutions) on common interests such as social issues.-10
8. How many times do you listen to preaching a week?
- In Church: _____ times (The average answer was two times)
- Tape or CD _____ times (The average answer was one time)
- On TV: _____ times (The average answer was five times)
- On the Internet: _____ times (This answer was exclusively answered by those in their 20's and 30's with the average answer being 3 times)
9. When listening to preaching I like to:
- ① Take notes that I format my own way.-8
 - ② Fill in blanks of main points on a pre-provided piece of paper.- 6
 - ③ Fill in blanks copied from PowerPoint slides on the projector screen.-35
 - ④ Just listen and remember points.-2
10. After I've listened to preaching, I like to:
- ① Take my notes home re-read them once.-40
 - ② Reflect on the sermon at least three times during the week.-0
 - ③ Talk about the sermon application with friends or family members.-10
 - ④ I don't think about the sermon at all.-1

POST-PROJECT SURVEY

This Survey was prepared for the project titled, “EQUIPPING THE CONGREGATION OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS TO PRACTICE EXPOSITORY LISTENING” and is not purposed for the collection of any other information. The content of this questionnaire will not be used for any other purpose. Please read following questions and please make sure to mark on only one of the relevant examples.

Out of 51 distributed pre-project surveys, 40 came back from those who met the project criteria of attending all six sermons in the sermon series.

1. What is your age range?
 - ① 20s- 6
 - ② 30s- 3
 - ③ 40s- 5
 - ④ 50s- 4
 - ⑤ 60s or older-22

2. What is your gender?
 - ① female- 32
 - ② male- 8

3. How many years have you been (attending the Church)?
 - ① less than 1 year- 2
 - ② 1 -3 years- 0
 - ③ 4 -10 years- 3
 - ④ 11-20 years- 8
 - ⑤ 21 years or longer-27

4. How many years has it been that you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and the Lord?
 - ① less than 1 year- 2
 - ② 1-3 years- 0
 - ③ 4 -10 years- 3
 - ④ 11 -20 years- 8
 - ⑤ 21 years or longer-27

5. What do you think is the most important thing when you introduce church to others?
- ① The preaching of the Senior Pastor. -31
 - ② Bible study(discipleship training).-5
 - ③ Small group meetings.-2
 - ④ Church size-2
6. What influences your maturing of faith (growth) the most?
- ① The preaching of the Senior Pastor.-31
 - ② Bible study(discipleship training)-5
 - ③ Small group meetings.-3
 - ④ church size-1
7. Which style of preaching do you like?
- ① Preaching that elucidates the text of the Bible to be easily understandable.-26
 - ② Preaching that utilizes diverse materials and data.-0
 - ③ Preaching filled with the preacher's humor.-6
 - ④ Preaching that provides applications to personal life and challenges.-4
 - ⑤ Preaching that provides biblical viewpoints (solutions) on common interests such as social issues.-4
8. How many times do you listen to preaching a week?
- In Church: _____ times (The average answer was two times.)
- Tape or CD _____ times (The average answer was four times.)
- On TV: _____ times (The average answer was six times.)
- On the Internet: _____ times (This answer on the pre-project survey was exclusively answered by those in their 20's and 30's with the average answer being 3 times, on the post project survey it increased to all age groups to 4 times a week.)
9. When listening to preaching I like to:
- ① Take notes that I format my own way.-3
 - ② Fill in blanks of main points on a pre-provided piece of paper.- 7
 - ③ Fill in blanks copied from PowerPoint slides on the projector screen.-28
 - ④ Just listen and remember points.-2
10. After I've listened to preaching, I like to:
- ① Take my notes home re-read them once.-28
 - ② Reflect on the sermon at least three times during the week.-6
 - ③ Talk about the sermon application with friends or family members.-6
 - ④ I don't think about the sermon at all.-0

APPENDIX 2

EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR PANEL

Expository Preaching Evaluation Tool					
Nehemiah Sermon Series					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Sermon introduction arises from text and emphasizes listening and applying the Word.					
Sermon’s homiletical idea arises from the text and contains both a statement of truth as well as application.					
Each of the sermon’s points emphasizes specific ways Christians should listen and apply the truth of the passage.					
Sermon applications are specific and geared toward listening and applying.					

Evaluation Responses

Panel member 1 said the sermons could use more examples; namely, examples that are current. He specifically mentioned the current political attitudes of America with the divided nature of our country. He also mentioned encouraging members to watch preachers from other denominations that excel at the art of expository preaching—preachers whose doctrine the members may not agree with but that they might notice the skill of the preacher breaking down the passage verse-by-verse.

Panel member 2, strongly agreed with the premise of sermon 1 in the thought that it seems modern society would have the average person believe that worship is for the faint or the feeble; it is viewed as something for former generations. Many youth and

young adults see no reason for worship. He reiterated the sermon point that biblical worship is essential for all people.

Panel member 3 stated his belief that expository preaching is the most evangelistic and Christ-centered way to preach because it keeps Christ at the center of the text.

Panel member 4 agreed that preaching was serious and not just based in emotionalism.

Panel member 5 had the view that expository preaching would always make sure that the sermon is relevant. There is often an inverse correlation between biblical relevance and attempted cultural connection.

Panel member 6 echoed the statements in regard to the importance of expository preaching. Expository preaching, he felt, teaches the congregation how to study the Bible.

APPENDIX 3

SIX-WEEK NEHEMIAH 8 AND 9 SERMON SERIES

WEEK ONE:

Summary: Nehemiah called all the people to come together before the Lord for a time of celebration and dedication. This was also a time of worship, as the people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God and read it in their midst. Their worship was centered in the Word.

The People Worship

Nehemiah 8: 1-6

This was a very special time for the people of God. The Babylonian captivity was over, and the Jews had returned to Jerusalem. God had blessed them abundantly as they rebuilt the city. To celebrate all that God had done, Nehemiah called all the people together for a celebration and dedication service at the public square near the Water Gate.

This was also a sacred time for the Jews. It was during the 7th month, the month when several feasts were held. The Feast of Trumpets was held on the 1st day on the month; the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement were offered on the 10th day, and the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated on the 15th day of the 7th month.

This was a time of celebration and dedication, but more importantly it was a time for worship. In these verses we see an example of genuine worship. There is a lot that is labeled “worship” in our day, but much of it doesn’t resemble what we find in this passage. I am convinced if we are to worship in a way that pleases and honors God, we must learn to worship biblically. If our worship doesn’t resemble worship in the Bible,

then I fear we are not achieving worship. Our society has embraced the idea of “to each his own,” but that simply will not work for worship. I want to examine the elements of worship found in the text as we consider: An Illustration of Worship. As we do, consider the elements of our worship.

I. The Assembly of Worship (1-6)

A. The Congregation (1-6) – This was not just a select group of the religious elite. It was not reserved for the priests and the tribe of Levi. This was a worship experience that all were called to be a part of. Notice the words in the text – Vvs.1, 2, 3, 5, 6. All the people were involved in worship unto the Lord – men, women, and even the children. There were none left out or excused. All were present and in their places.

Modern society would have us believe that worship is for the faint or the feeble. It is viewed as something for former generations. Many youth and young adults see no reason for worship. Biblical worship is essential for all the people. Bring your children to the house of God. They need to hear and be exposed to the Word, the Spirit, and the atmosphere of worship!

B. The Cooperation (1) – All the people were gathered as one man in the street before the water gate. Each was in their place and they were united in their purpose. The people called for Ezra to bring the Word of God. They were all hungry for the Word and desired to hear it. There was no division or discord among them on this occasion.

We need that same cooperation in our worship services. We need to be united in our purpose, desiring to hear from God and worship Him. I trust you have come today with a desire for worship. If we are not united in our purpose, we will never achieve worship together.

II. The Agenda for Worship – The focal point of the worship service was the Word of God. Notice:

A. The Priority of the Word (2-3) – The people of God were hungry for His Word. They were interested in what the Bible had to say. Keep in mind, they had been in captivity and did not enjoy the privileges of worship and biblical instruction they had at Jerusalem. Ezra read the Word of God from morning until midday. They weren't concerned with time, wanting to get finished and go home. There was emphasis placed on the Word.

As I said, there is a lot that is labeled “worship” in our day, but much of it isn't biblical worship. There is a great emphasis placed on emotion and entertainment in our day. Biblical worship is centered around the Word of God. That was the focus here and if we are to experience real worship, it must be centered on the Word.

B. The Preaching of the Word (4) – Does that sound familiar? Ezra the priest stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for that purpose, and expounded the Word of God. They had made preparations for preaching. Worship must include the man of God preaching the Word.

I know modern society has gotten away from Bible preaching, but nothing can replace preaching in the worship service. Preaching is essential to worship! God has chosen that method of delivery to share His message and deal with people's lives. 1 Cor.1:21 – For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, its pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Ezra had a desire to share the Word of God. Ezra 7:10 – For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

C. The Persuasion of the Word (5-6) – When the Word is presented and preached in the worship service, it affects people’s lives. Notice:

1. It Brought Respect (5) – When Ezra opened the Word of God, all the people stood up. They stood in attention to the Word. They knew the Word of God was beneficial for their lives. There was a respect and eagerness for the Word.

Oh, how we need that respect for the Word of God in our day. In the Bible we have the heart of God. He has given us His Word to live by. It is the Word that brought conviction to me, resulting in my salvation. It is in His Word that I find encouragement and direction for my life. The Word is not to be ignored or dreaded, but cherished and respected!

2. It Brought Rejoicing (6a) – As the Word was read and preached, it brought rejoicing to the hearts of the people. They lifted their hands and rejoiced in the Lord. The Bible had brought comfort to them and they rejoiced in the Lord. They had reason to rejoice.

We too have reason to rejoice. There is nothing wrong with rejoicing in the Lord. God deserves and desires the praise of His people. If God’s people can’t rejoice, who can? If they can’t rejoice in the worship service, where can they? We need to get beyond our pride and rejoice in the Lord. I am blessed beyond measure and have reason to rejoice!

3. It Brought Reverence (6b) – Upon hearing the Word of God, they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The people didn’t

feel worthy to lift their heads. They had been in the presence of the Lord. They feared God and worshiped Him.

We need that godly reverence in our worship services today. We have not met for a social gathering. We have not come to waste an hour or so. We have come to meet with a holy God and worship Him. We ought to come before the Lord with fear and trembling. God deserves our best – He gave His best for us. May God help us to come before Him with a humble heart in holy reverence. If we could grasp His holiness and all He has done for us, it would transform our lives.

III. The Attitude of Worship (9:3) – They developed an attitude that we need if we are to experience real worship. Consider:

A. Their Commitment (3) – The people stood in their place for a fourth part of the day reading the Word of God. For another fourth part of the day they confessed and worshiped the Lord. A fourth part of the day consisted of three hours. They read the Word for three hours and then confessed and worshiped God for another three hours. They were committed to the worship service.

Now, I am not implying that we start holding our worship services for six hours a day, but we need commitment to God. Many get irritated if the service lasts beyond 12:00. There is little commitment in our day. Many have a hard time giving the Lord an hour on Sunday morning. Oh, that we would get to the place that we have come to worship and hear from the Lord and stay until we do.

B. Their Confession (9:3) – For three hours the people confessed before the Lord. These people were having revival. They were getting their hearts right with God. Ezra wasn't pleading and prodding folks. They came willingly and confessed before God.

Can you imagine a response like that in our day? If we sing over two verses, some think the preacher is trying to manipulate the invitation. These were serious about the Lord. They didn't want anything to stand between them and God. We cannot afford to allow anything to stand between us and Him. I believe that some are afraid of the altar. This is a special place that needs to be used. We must keep short accounts of our sin. Confess it, forsake it, and live for God!

C. Their Completion – We find that they worshiped the LORD. They actually achieved worship that day. This was a service that God was pleased with. It was not an empty, vain service. It was a worship service.

We have set aside two services per week for worship, but how often do we see it through? How often do we carry worship to completion and actually achieve worship? Church we need to complete our worship. I know that each service is different, but we could worship more than we do. We could achieve worship more frequently if we would follow the example set forth in Nehemiah.

Conclusion: Where is your heart today? Are you ready to get out the door and go home or are you concerned with worship? Are there some things in your heart that are not right? If so, why not come and confess it? If all is well with your soul, why not praise the Lord for His goodness? You can achieve worship, but it is up to you.

WEEK TWO:

Nehemiah Sermon Chapter 8:7-12

How God's Word was received.

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

a. So Ezra ... stood on a platform: They had taken the time to build a wooden platform so the Word of God could be heard. They did practical things so God's Word would have the greatest effect.

i. There are practical things we can do also to help God's Word have the greatest effect; when a room is comfortable, low in distractions, and the preacher is clearly heard, it helps God's Word have the greatest effect.

ii. But by far, the greatest preparation must happen in the heart. We must come, willing to forget about ourselves and our own agenda, and submit ourselves to God's Word - not the preacher's word, but God's Word.

b. At his right hand ... and at his left hand: On the right hand and left hand of Ezra were men who were supporting him in his ministry of teaching God's Word. The

ministry of God's Word has the greatest effect when people can see men who are in support of it and obedience to it.

c. When he opened it, all the people stood up: They had a respect for God's Word. They recognized it for what it was - the Word of God, not the word of man. They honored it.

i. This is evidence of two things. First, that the Spirit of God is at work; second, that something good is going to happen.

d. Then all the people answered: This work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results.

- The people thanked God (by saying Amen when Ezra blessed the Lord)
- They prayed (by lifting up their hands)
- They worshipped (by bowing down before Him)

i. Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and Word of God are working in us.

(Neh 8:7-8) I. God's Word is presented so the people may understand.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

a. Helped the people to understand the Law: Special men were appointed to help the people understand God's Word. After the reading they needed to understand it because if they did not understand it, it would do little good.

i. Understanding needs to be the first goal of any preacher or teacher. When I stand to teach God's people, there are some things that I always need to remember:

- If you leave knowing five helpful hints to a better life, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave having been amused by humor, entertained by anecdotes, or captivated by dramatic stories, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave motivated to action, or praying a prayer, but it is not based on a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed.

- If you leave admiring me, but do not have a greater understanding of God's Word, I have failed - and will be accountable before God for my failure.

b. Helped the people to understand the Law: It is important to see why God's people need special help in understanding God's Word.

i. First, because the things of God are spiritually discerned and not intellectually discerned. The Holy Spirit uses gifted teachers to bring spiritual discernment to us, helping us to understand what God's Word says.

ii. Second, because it was first written in a different language, in a different culture, in a different place, and at a far distant time. Teachers help us understand it all in our own day.

iii. Third, because our minds are often slow to understand things that will convict our hearts. We often need it spelled right out to us.

iv. Understanding isn't only necessary for those who haven't become familiar with the Bible. Sometimes if we have heard it ten times before, we really don't understand it for right now. When an art restorer cleans a painting, he reveals things that were always there, but the colors weren't as bright and the details weren't as clear, because they were obscured - then the real impact of the painter's work can be seen.

c. They read distinctly: The preacher must speak in a clear, easy-to-understand way. His main goal is to make the people understand, not to impress or entertain them.

d. They gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading: The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture, and not his own agenda or favorite personal topics. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

II. Response to God's Word makes revival flow.

1. (Neh 8:9-11) The people respond with weeping.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your

God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So, the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

a. All the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law: The Word of God was doing its intended work. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us two things the Word of God is profitable for: reproof and correction. Sometimes it hurts to be reprovved and corrected, and these tears were evidence of some of that pain.

b. Do not mourn nor weep: Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites did not want the people to mourn, even though it is a good thing to be sad under the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Yet if the sense of conviction is greater than the sense that God is doing a good and holy work, then tears are not good.

i. Our knowledge of our sin should never be bigger than our knowledge of Jesus as our savior. We are great sinners, but He is a greater savior.

ii. Therefore, the joy of the Lord is your strength - even when you are being convicted of sin. When we are convicted of sin, we know that God is doing a work in us, so we can be glad and take joy.

c. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength: The people felt sad, because they were aware of their own sin. But they could walk in joy because God was doing a great work. Our emotions are not beyond our control; we can do God's will even when we don't feel like it.

III. (Neh 8:12) The people choose to rejoice.

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

- a. They understood the words that were declared to them: They went away praising God, because understanding God's Word brings such a sweet sense of joy.

WEEK THREE:

Text: Nehemiah 8:13-18, Title: Spiritual Headship

A. Abilene Christian University researchers, Dr. David Lewis and Dr. Carley Dodd have recently concluded a cross-generational study (six different tests) to measure fathers' positive and negative influences upon teens' spirituality. The found that "every time" dad's role "as teacher came out be the most important predictor." Among other top predictors of adolescent spiritual maturity, as related to dad, were his: commitment to Christ, spiritual well-being, prayer life, boldness in discussing issues of faith, genuineness and emotional closeness. Of those teens whose fathers expressed their love well, 84% had a high spiritual maturity, but among teens whose fathers had difficulty doing so, only 39% had a high spiritual maturity.

B. Background to passage: After the offering for worship in chapter seven, and the big worship service in chapter eight, most of the crowd disperses. On the second day, all the heads of the families come back together with the Levites and Priests and Ezra. What we see here is the spiritual leadership of the families of the nation coming back together for more instruction.

C. Main thought: This text gives us insight into the pattern of spiritual headship and leadership.

I. Strives for Theological Maturity (v. 13)

1. These men were the representative heads of all the families there in Jerusalem. They were returning to seek further instruction from Ezra about the law, because they were viewed as the instructors of their families. And instructors need to

be instructed on a continuing basis. As the heads of the homes, they were responsible for the lifestyle and the spirituality of their households. It was their responsibility to ensure that their children were taught and lived out the faith of their fathers. And therefore, their commitment to that task is demonstrated by their coming back for more depth in learning of the word.

2. 1 Cor 11:3, Deut 6:4-9,

3. Illustration: As a Youth Pastor I always strove to teach them what their parents did not know and had never learned, but that should be a challenge to parents, This man wanted to study the scriptures, but he could not read. He prayed for God to help him learn to read. In time a teacher came to his village, and he asked the teacher to help him. He learned the alphabet. He studied sounds and learned to put the letters together to make words. Soon he was reading simple words. The more he practiced, the more he learned. He thanked the Lord for sending the teacher and for helping him learn to read. This man has increased his faith, humility, and knowledge to such a degree that he has served as a counselor with his church. Now, remember these are Christians.

- 48% could not name the four Gospels.

- 52% cannot identify more than two or three of Jesus' disciples.
- 60% of American Christians can't name even five of the 10 Commandments.
- When asking graduating high school "born again Christians" over 50% of them thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.
- 61% of American Christians think the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.
- 71% of American Christians think "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse. No wonder George Barna said, "Americans revere the Bible but, by and large they don't know what it says. And because they don't know it, they have become a nation of Biblical illiterates."

4. Even the instructors of others need to be instructed. This goes not only for fathers, but for all those that are commissioned to teach biblical truth. Those commissioned to teach must be committed to going the extra mile in their study. Parents, fathers, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that your children embrace the faith of Christ. Therefore, you must deepen your commitment to learning the faith. We are much in need of godly men who will look past Lifeway, SS, and morning worship, and dig deeply into the faith. We need men who will seek out knowledge and those who will give them that knowledge. We need to buck the status quo when it comes to what we know about the bible.

II. Organizes Family Life Biblically (v. 14)

1. So what we see in this verse is during their study of the Word they found that God had told the children of Israel to dwell in booths as a remembrance of their time spent in the wilderness wandering around. And so, each of these men felt compelled to go back and lead their families in preparing booths. We will get to the ceremony in a minute, but the point is that these men were committed to the authority of scripture, not only in a theological, theoretical way, but in a practical, everyday way.

2. Deut 6:5-9

3. Illustration: Theology is important, and knowledge of the Bible is important, so that we know how to follow Christ. It is important so we can know how to live in a way that pleases Him. I read this story from a Christian Flight Instructor “I used to work as a flight instructor. Now, can you imagine what we might do with someone who wants to learn to fly airplanes. We take him and give him six months of full-time theoretical training. We teach him everything there is to know about flying.

We teach him the lift equation. We teach him what happens when one does certain things with the controls. We teach him all about flight planning. Then we give him a written test and he gets 100%. He has passed, so we give the keys to a plane and tell him to go and fly the plane by himself. What do you think will happen? I'm pretty sure there will be a hole in the end of the runway. What went wrong? Our student knew all about the theory of flight but had never put it into practice. You see, theory must be accompanied by practice. Practice without the right theoretical base is disastrous, but theory without practice is useless.”

4. As individuals or as couples, we tend to do family like we have seen it done in the past. We tend to parent like we were parented with some variation, but basically the same. And these men had not been brought up this way, but when they read it, they put it into practice. As biblical Christians we should not be afraid to question authority or tradition. If it is biblical, then Spirit-led godly people will discern that, and keep tradition, but if not, they are not afraid to discard it. Men, you must step up to the plate and begin to lead your family biblically. So how do we do it? Glad you asked...

III. Participates in Faith-Building Events (v. 16)

1. Nehemiah answers that question for us. Notice that the text says that each booth was built on top of “his” house. So, the fathers helped all the family build a booth for the celebration. This is the main way that fathers are instructed to lead in their homes. They are supposed to plan and lead the family in doing biblically based activities all designed to pass on spiritual truth.

2. Joshua 4:5-7, Ex 12:24-27,

3. Illustration: British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once had a discussion with a man who firmly believed that children should not be given formal religious instruction but should be free to choose their own religious faith when they reached maturity. Coleridge did not disagree, but later invited the man into his somewhat neglected garden. "Do you call this a garden?" the visitor exclaimed. "There is nothing but weeds here!" "Well, you see," Coleridge replied, "I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself. If both your parents worshipped with you regularly while you were growing up, there's an 80 percent likelihood that you'll worship God regularly as an adult. If only your mother worshipped regularly with you, there's only a 30 percent probability that you'll worship regularly as an adult. If only your father worshipped regularly with you, the likelihood that you'll worship regularly as an adult increases to 70 percent!

The first step, (not necessarily most important) is to get consistent about your attendance to church. But that is basic. And I shouldn't even have to mention that for it is a mark of being a genuine Christian. But that is how low the standard has been brought, remember that we don't even require that of our members. Next, fathers you must begin leading in family worship. And we are going to help you in that, I realize that most of you have never seen it, let alone done it. But I am assuming that you would like to do it. Also, you must seize opportunities to teach biblical truth—holidays, family traditions, etc. And we must do our duty to make these faith-building experiences routine, or maybe regular is a better word.

IV. Heaps the Blessing of God upon Family (v. 17)

1. There are other biblical records of this festival being celebrated. So evidently, the harvest emphasis had been focused on, but the booths and remembrance part were neglected. And when the true meaning of the celebration was restored, and the heads of the homes began to order their lives around scripture, God was glorified, and there was great gladness. The Hebrew word used meant exceeding joy, and Nehemiah added the superlative gadol, which means exceedingly great. So, literally it translates “exceedingly great exceeding joy.”

2. Ex 20:5-6, Deut 5:10, 7:9, Neh 1:5, Dan 9:4,

3. Illustration: the results of the Edwards household in succeeding generations, “Certainly,” the father replied with the confident air of an instructor. “And did he hear what you said about the bacon and the coffee?”

“Of course,” replied the father with a note of caution in his voice.” Then his daughter asked, “Dad, which did God believe?” tell about the letter that I started to write to our group of absentee fathers...

4. Men, there is an unfathomable reservoir of blessing that will be poured out upon your children, and your children’s children if you are faithful to walk in his ways and keep his commands and covenant. Our covenant is one sealed in Christ’s blood where He gave his life for us, and we surrender our lives to Him out of love and gratitude. And men, when you fail to lead your home, you not only sacrifice blessings, you sign the spiritual death certificate of your children and grandchildren barring the merciful intervention of God.

A. Closing illustration: maybe tell the story of that father of the bride with the sword at the wedding...

B. Plead for the lostness of families and the failure to pass on the faith to generations. Plead for the acknowledgment of failure, repentance, and transformation.

C. Invitation to commitment

WEEK FOUR:

Convenience vs. Inconvenience

Scripture: Nehemiah 9:1-6

Summary: The American church is in trouble! We have chosen consumerism and convenience over service. We must be challenged to follow Jesus at all costs.

1. Picture of New US Citizens

a. Becoming a Christian reminds me of the excitement with becoming a US Citizen

b. BUT, something happens along the way and the “new” wears off.

2. What do these slides have in common? Convenience Slides

a. 7-11

b. Garage Door Opener

c. TV Remote Control

d. Microwave

e. Roomba

f. DIY Checkout at Walmart

g. ATM

3. quote: “The difference between ‘interest’ and ‘commitment’ is: ‘Interest’ is when it is easy; ‘Commitment’ is all the time.”

4. The Challenge for the American Church – get past the convenience and being consumer-driven; stop with the “entitlement” mentality.

a. Convenient is when something is favorable to one’s comfort; easy to do, use, get to

b. Church stats are down [Apologetics Press Post 5.28.19

For several years, polls have shown that only 39% of Americans say they attend worship at least once a week (“How Religious...,” 2009; cf. Newport, 2010). However, more recent research suggests that the actual “head counts” of those who actually show up for weekly church services is half that figure, i.e., 17.7% (Barnes and Lowry, 2018). That means that the vast majority of Americans no longer attend church of any kind.

c. Small group participation is down

d. When was the last time you fasted for a spiritual purpose?

e. Contrast our treatment of Jesus with His treatment of us. Who is committed and who acts out of convenience?

5. Nehemiah 9:1-38

I. The Heart of the Matter is the Heart

A. The True Beginning – Self-Examination – Nehemiah 9:1-2

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

1. History: Personal and National

2. Moved to Repent – fasting, etc.

3. Confession and worship – Nehemiah 9:5-6a

Then the Levites, . . . said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 “You are the LORD, you alone. . .

B. The True Commitment

1. In writing – Nehemiah 9:38

38 “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

2. On hearts – 2 Corinthians 3:3

3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

II. Actions Matters!

A. Actions Reveal Hearts – Matthew 15:18

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

B. Commitment (All the Time) to: (Nehemiah 10:28-39)

III. Follow the Instructions of God – Nehemiah 10:28-29

28 “The rest of the people, . . . 29 join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.

2. Care for Our Children – Nehemiah 10:30

30 We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

3. Keep Sabbath (rest and worship) – Nehemiah 10:31

31 And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

4. Give of Resources as Well as Selves – Nehemiah 10:39

39 For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.”

1. In our mission we go against and change the culture.

a. Our culture – apathy unless about “ME”

b. Kingdom Principles:

- Self-Denial – Luke 9:23-24

- Service – Matthew 23:11

- Count Costs – Luke 14:28

- Be Salt; Light; (Matthew 5:13-16) Leaven (Matthew 13:33)

- WHAT IF we tithed just our waking hours to God? $168 - 56 = 112 \times 10\%$
= 11.2 hours/week

2. How to accomplish this mission? – Philippians 2.5-8

- a. Let Jesus into our lives – His commitment becomes OUR commitment
(not convenience)

Matthew 26:39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

- b. Presence of the Holy Spirit – Romans 14:17 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

3. Closing Prayer

WEEK FIVE:

NEVER ABANDONED

Neh. 9:19-31

INTRODUCTION

5. We all prize faithfulness and think badly of those who abandon their duties or those they're in charge of.

6 That's why it's especially difficult for us when we feel like God has let us down, has failed us in some way.

B. THESIS

1. Many people, within & without the church, have feelings of abandonment.

2. Perhaps this feeling comes from a childhood event or a traumatic event in our adult years.

3. Possibly it's derived from our modern isolationism – we don't even know our neighbors, usually.

4. Maybe it's from the hardships of life or modern overload. But the Bible reminds us that God will never abandon us, though everyone else might.

5. Tonight I want us to look at 4 reasons we can be assured we are not, and never will be, abandoned by God.

I. GOD DIDN'T ABANDON UNFAITHFUL ISRAEL

A. ISRAEL'S FEELINGS (IN JUDGMENT)

Isa. 49:14-16; “But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me,

the Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...”

C. HE LOVES US & IS MERCIFUL

1. If you think about how disobedient the Israelites were during the 40 years in the wilderness, that would have been an ideal time for God to say, “They’ll never measure up! I need to start over with someone else.”

2. But Nehemiah recounts how patient and loving God was with them (and with us!):

3. “Because of Your great compassion You did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take...But in Your great mercy You did not put an end to them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and merciful God.” Neh. 9:19, 31 (NIV).

4. God continues to perform His promises, despite our unworthiness to merit them.

II. JESUS (AS SIN) WAS ABANDONED

1. Now understand, the Israelites **DESERVED TO BE ABANDONED**. But it was God's **GRACE** that that covered over the multitude of their sins and kept them in fellowship with God.

2. But **SIN MUST BE PUT AWAY, AND THE SINNER TOO MUST BE JUDGED!** That's why Jesus was abandoned -- so you and I would never be abandoned.

A. JESUS CITED HIS ABANDONMENT

1. "Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will abandon Me. Scripture says, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" Mark 14:27 (God's Word Trans).

2. "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Mark 15:34.

3. Jesus was abandoned by all His followers. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied that he knew his close friend, Jesus. God the Father abandoned Jesus' sin-infested body on the Cross, turning His back on the sins of the world placed upon His Son.

4. Jesus was abandoned so you and I would never be abandoned in this life or the life to come.

B. BUT THE FATHER NEVER ABANDONED HIS SON

1. EVEN THOUGH IT LOOKED LIKE GOD ABANDONED JESUS, THE TRUTH IS, HE NEVER DID. Listen to the words of Jesus:

2. “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let your Holy One see decay” Ps 16:9-10 (NIV).

3. No matter what our feelings or fears tell us, THE LORD OUR GOD WILL NOT ABANDON US.

4. Sometimes, God does invoke “radio silence.” That’s when we must continue to believe – without evidence!

III. WHY WE’LL NEVER BE ABANDONED

A. GOD IS WITH US AT ALL TIMES

1. Immanuel, “God with us,” came so that He could always be among us. Jesus came to earth so we would never be abandoned.

2. Acts 17:28 says “‘In Him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed His offspring.’ (ESV)

3. He is always WITH you and me... IN you and me; AROUND you and me and OVER you and me. ‘Lord, We need You to be in us, around us and over us today.’

B. JESUS PROMISED HE WOULDN'T

1. John 14:16-18 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another [Paraclete] to...be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth....You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

2. John 14:20 (Jesus says) “On that day you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.” (NIV)

3. Matthew 28:20 (Jesus says) ... “And remember that I am always with you until the end of time.” (GWT)

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS OUR GUARANTEE

1. Eph. 1:13-14; “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

2. 2 Cor. 5:5, “Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (1 Cor. 1:22; 2 Tim. 1:14).

3. An “earnest money” contract is one in which a sum of money is applied/ a down payment, to guarantee that the purchaser is serious and will follow that payment with many more.

4. The Greek word is arrabon. In modern Greek arrabona is the word for the engagement ring! The Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee that He will raise you up from the dead and seat you on the throne with Christ, no matter what happens in this world!

IV. GOD IS FAITHFUL

A. ILLUSTRATION

1. A man named Russell Edward Herman left trillions of dollars to thousands of people he’d never met. What was the catch? Russell Edward Herman didn’t have trillions of dollars. He was just a simple, poor carpenter.

2. While the wild, wild will of the late Russell Herman never paid off for his “beneficiaries,” it certainly enlivened conversations.

3. Take the tiny Ohio River town of Cave-In-Rock, for example. Herman bequeathed \$2.41 billion to them. Cave-In-Rock’s mayor, Albert Kaegi had this to say, “It’s an odd thing to happen, isn’t it?” He had no trouble imagining uses for the willed imaginary monies.

4. Russell Edward Herman had great intentions, but he lacked the resources needed to make them a reality.

5. The greatness of God, however, stands in sharp contrast.

God not only has made great and precious promises, He has the ability to follow through on every single one of them. [David Owens]

B. FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

1. Numbers 23:19, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

2. 1 Kings 8:56, “Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

3. Joshua 21:45, “Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.”

4. Joshua 23:14, “You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”

5. Hebrews 10:23, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

C. ACQUIRING THE ASSURANCE

1. No matter what our feelings may say or what fears we have; the Lord always lives up to His Word... He is with you... He is with me... He will never abandon us.

2. A feeling of abandonment stimulates fear, worry and anxiety. The Presence of the Lord eliminates the false perception of abandonment. The only way to cure our feeling of abandonment is to daily sit in prayer in His Presence.

3. So the threefold strategy of 1). memorizing what God tells us in His Word of His faithfulness and 2). Getting into His Presence and 3). Hanging out with people of like precious faith/ church – are the three best deterrents to feelings of abandonment.

CONCLUSION

B. THE CALL

1. It's the same with God. Sometimes it seems like He's not around – that we're alone. But He's always near us, watching after us for our good.

2. "For the LORD your God is a merciful God; HE WILL NOT ABANDON...YOU or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath" Deut. 4:31 (NIV).

3. “For THE LORD WILL NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE on account of His great Name, because the LORD has been pleased to make YOU a people for Himself.” 1 Samuel 12:22 (NAS).

4. These verses mention God’s COVENANT and His GREAT NAME as additional assurances that He will ever abandon us.

1. Let’s pray for healing for those who have felt disappointed; then, let’s pray for renewed faith in God. God who promised it is faithful!

WEEK SIX:

Nehemiah sermon 6 9:22-31

I. The cycle of Israel's relationship with God.

Moreover, you gave them kingdoms and nations, and divided them into districts. So, they took possession of the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven and brought them into the land which You had told their fathers to go in and possess. So the people went in and possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they wished. And they took strong cities and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all goods, cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So, they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, "Which if a man does, he shall live by them." And they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear. Yet for many

years You had patience with them and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore, you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful.

a. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness: The cycle began with God showing His goodness to His people (You gave them kingdoms and nations) and with God's people being blessed.

b. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You: Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, Gods' people turn from Him.

c. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies: Then, God brings correction - a "wake-up call" to His people.

d. And in the time of their trouble ... they cried out to You; and God delivers them: You heard from heaven ... You gave them deliverers: As a result, God's people then turn back to Him.

e. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You: Then, blessed and satisfied, God's people again turn from Him, and the cycle continues.

f. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful: As the cycle continues, the motions of each cycle get deeper and deeper - but God doesn't change.

i. We sometimes feel as if God has gotten tired of us; that we can't ask him to forgive us for something He has forgiven us for so many times before. But God never gets tired of us, and never turns away the repentant heart.

II (Neh 9:32-37) A plea to God for intervention.

Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us, our kings and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. However, you are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly. Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works. Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also, they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; and we are in great distress.

a. The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: Because of who God is, and because of who they are (rebellious and wicked), they needed God to do the work of saving them from their enemies.

i. Israel, at this time, was not an independent nation - they were a province of the Empire of Persia and were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations. They ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression!

b. You are just in all that has befallen us: This gives a good description of what real confession is all about. It recognizes that God is right, and we are wrong (but we have done wickedly). Confession is agreeing with God about both things.

i. "It is a tremendous moment in a Christians' life when he can honestly look up into the face of God and say, 'Yes, Lord, You are right and I am wrong,' when he stops arguing with God, and drops his controversy. He says, 'Lord, yes. I've got what I deserved in this situation. You are right; I am wrong.' That is the thing for which God has been working in your life and mine from the very moment of our conversion." (Redpath)

III (Neh 9:38) Conclusion: a point of decision.

And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.

a. We make a sure covenant: Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a covenant with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to His ways.

b. We make a sure covenant and write it: The fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our

sinfulness, is a renewal of our obedience. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

i. God's work in us often must come to a place of decision - where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If you need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:

What about my relationship with men?

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts? Do I exaggerate?

Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church?

Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God I am not as other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?

What about my devotion to God?

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Do I go to bed in time and do I get up in time?

Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it this morning? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?

Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?

When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win him for Christ?

Am I a slave to books, dress, friends, work, or what others think? How do I spend my spare time?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Peter. *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.
- Baker, William R., and Thomas D. Ellsworth. *Preaching James*. Preaching Classic Texts. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.
- Blomberg, Craig L., and Mariam J. Kamell. *James*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Breidenbaugh, Joel. *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011.
- Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. New American Commentary, vol. 3. Nashville: Holman, 1993.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Cox, James W. *Biblical Preaching*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983.
- Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Doriani, Daniel M. *Putting the Truth to Work*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001.
- Dumas, Dan. *A Guide to Expository Ministry*. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2012.
- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: Guide to Understanding the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- Fensham, F. Charles. *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.
- France, R. T. *1 Timothy*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. *Ezra*. In vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Dick Polcyn, 164-201. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.
- Gangel, Kenneth O. *Feeding and Leading*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989.
- Gibson, Scott M., ed. *Making a Difference in Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.

- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2000.
- Goswell, Greg. *A Study Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*. Wyoming, MI: Evangelical Press, 2013.
- Greidanus, Sydney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2001.
- Hendricks, Howard G. *Living by the Book*. Chicago: Moody, 1991.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond. *First Timothy*. Everyman's Bible Commentary. Chicago: Moody, 1958.
- Kidner, Derek. *Ezra & Nehemiah*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. #. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979.
- Knute Larson, Kathy Dahlen, and Max E. Anders. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. Esther Holman Old Testament Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Richard Duane Patterson. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011.
- Lawson, Steven J. *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching*. Chicago: Moody, 2003.
- Levering, Matthew. *Ezra & Nehemiah*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.
- Lowry, Eugene L. *The Homiletical Plot*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- MacArthur, John. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*. Dallas: Word, 1992.
- Magruder, Jeff C. *Spirit and Truth: A Handbook on Expository Preaching for Pentecostal Students*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006.
- Marshall, I. Howard *The Pastoral Epistles*. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004.
- Martin, Ralph P. *James*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48. Waco, TX: Word, 1988.
- McConville, J. G. *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*. Old Testament Daily Study Bible Series. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985.
- McDill, Wayne. *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Mounce, William D. *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000.
- Olford, Stephen. *Anointed Expository Preaching*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.

- Piper, John. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.
- Ramey, Ken. *Expository Listening*. The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2010.
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Sisters, CO: Multnomah Publishers, 2006.
- Richard, Ramesh. *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon W., and Torrey W. Robinson. *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Towner, Philip H. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006.
- van Wijk-Bos, Johanna W. H. *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger, and William White. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville: Nelson, 1996.
- Vines, Jerry, and Jim Shaddix. *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Wells, C. Richard, and A. Boyd Luter. *Inspired Preaching*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002.
- Williamson, H. G. M. *Ezra/Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. #. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985.

ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE CONGREGATION OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP ASSEMBLY OF GOD IN FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS, TO PRACTICE EXPOSITORY LISTENING

David Lee Watts, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Terry J. Betts

This project was designed to train laypeople in expository listening through a combination of preaching, practice, and evaluation. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to Grace Fellowship Assembly of God and the community in which the church is located. The demographics of the region and church are described, along with the history of the church.

Chapter 2 discusses the biblical and theological mandate for expository preaching and the training of parishioners to hear, respond, and apply preaching in their lives. Biblical preaching is intended to change both the heart and the mind, thus learning to listen to sermons is vital for a church's long-term health.

Chapter 3 covers the theoretical/practical and historical issues when it comes to Pentecostals and expository preaching. Historically, the Pentecostal Church has neglected expository preaching and thus hindered church members from becoming expository listeners.

Chapter 4 discusses the details and description of the project: the preparation period, implementation period, and follow up period.

Chapter 5 covers the evaluation of the project, including an evaluation of the project's purpose, project's goals, strengths of the project, and weaknesses of the project. In addition, there are sections covering what I would do differently, and theological reflections and personal reflections.

VITA

David Lee Watts

EDUCATION

BS, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, 2000
MA, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, 2012
MDiv, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, 2014

PUBLICATIONS

“Addressing False Teachers.” *Pursue Godliness: A Devotional from First Timothy* (2014): 4-5.
“Divergent.” *Stepping Up: A Devotional from Ephesians* (2015): 26-27.
“The Truth Awakens: *God Is Life, Truth and Love: A Devotional from 1 John* (2016): 8-9.

ORGANIZATIONS

Theta Alpha Kappa
The Evangelical Homiletics Society
Ordained Assemblies of God Minister

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, Oaks School of Leadership, 2012-2014
Adjunct Faculty, Bethesda School of Ministry, 2015-2016
Adjunct Faculty, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, 2012-2016
Adjunct Faculty, Bridges Christian College, 2018-2020
Professor, Jimmy Swaggart Bible College, 2020-

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Youth Pastor, Calvary Chapel Assembly of God, Pasadena, Texas, 2003-2006
College and Career Pastor, Faithbridge Church, Deer Park, Texas, 2006-2008
Pastor, Anahuac Assembly of God, Anahuac, Texas, 2008-2010
Resident Hall Director, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, Waxahachie, Texas, 2010-2014
Assistant Dean of Students, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, Waxahachie, Texas, 2014-2016
Interim Pastor, Dayspring Church, Arlington, Texas, 2016-2017
College and Career Pastor, Family Cathedral of Praise, Mesquite, Texas, 2017-2018
Pastor, Grace Fellowship Assembly of God, Farmersville, Texas, 2018-2020
Professor/Recruiter, Jimmy Swaggart Bible College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2020-