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IMPROVING THE PREACHING TEAM MODEL AT
BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH AND
ITS REGIONAL CAMPUSES

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Jacob Hamilton Strother
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IMPROVING THE PREACHING TEAM MODEL AT
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Jacob Hamilton Strother

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Timothy Paul Jones

Second Reader: Matthew D. Haste

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To Dr. Mike Glenn, Senior Pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church.

Dr. Glenn not only gave me the opportunity to preach but saw and called out a gift when

I was young and unconfident. He invested in my development as preacher, patiently watching hours of “game film” of my sermons and offering constructive feedback and

wisdom. Finally, when presented the opportunity to make himself the primary communicator of a multi-site church, Dr. Glenn modeled his deep conviction that the church must equip the next generation of pastor-teachers by building a team of preachers.

It is a privilege to be counted among this band of brothers and a joy to co-labor in the gospel with this group of men led by Dr. Glenn.

“As iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17)

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PREFACE

A successful project is never accomplished alone. I am profoundly grateful for Brentwood Baptist Church that prioritizes the development of its pastors and provides time and resources to complete a project such as this. I am grateful for the campus and staff I lead at The Church at Station Hill for being a congregation that stretches me to grow as a leader and for their patience with their pastor over the past several years as I have worked on this degree and project.

I want to express my appreciation to the two advisors who have guided me through this project. I would like to thank Dr. Danny Bowen, who not only helped me start and focus my project but showed genuine interest and enthusiasm for me as a student. Second, I am grateful for Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, who has not only walked with me to the finish line of this project but has become a trusted friend and partner in ministry over the past fifteen years.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife, Tanya, and our five children, for their love, encouragement, and support as they have sacrificed time and resources to enable me to complete this project. I love you! *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Jay Strother

Spring Hill, Tennessee

December 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Brentwood Baptist Church is “Engaging the Whole Person with the Whole Gospel of Jesus Christ: anywhere, anytime and with anybody.” Adopted in 2017, this statement reflects the desire to see a growing culture of gospel transformation and biblical disciple-making that is not dependent solely on large facilities, church-driven programs, or professional staff, but instead sees every member mobilized for gospel multiplication. The biblical values that drive this mission are (1) prioritizing the *gospel first and always* (Rom 1:16); (2) equipping each member for the mission as they are *uniquely called* (Ps 139:14-16); (3) practicing *intentional innovation* to steward human and financial resources effectively (Mark 2:1-12); (4) *crossing cultures* so all have access to the gospel (Gen 12:1); and (5) creating a culture of disciples who make disciples at all levels of church life because *multiplying matters* (Matt 28:19-20). The mission of the church and its values rest on biblical foundations that must be proclaimed through the preaching ministry of the church across all eight campuses for focus, clarity, and alignment. The preaching team model was first developed informally to help the teaching pastors balance their preaching and ministry duties on a weekly basis. With the expansion to eight campuses and more possible in the future, the preaching team need model needed to be formalized and documented to assist all teaching pastors with sermon preparation/planning, message alignment, and sermon evaluation. In addition, the leadership of Brentwood Baptist Church has a vision to equip and resource other churches to meet the gospel need of an exploding population in Middle Tennessee. The goal of the “Engage Church Network” (ECN) is to equip other like-minded missional churches to saturate their communities and neighborhoods with the gospel. A strong preaching ministry must be

central to those efforts and the principles of a preaching team model can be scaled to impact many more churches who are not part of the eight-campus congregation that makes up Brentwood Baptist Church.

Context

Brentwood Baptist Church (BBC) was founded in 1969 by members from Woodmont Baptist Church in the Green Hills area of Nashville, Tennessee. Brentwood, Tennessee was a growing suburban community just south of the city that was attractive to young families looking for affordable subdivision housing and quality education. The charter members were convicted that this growing Nashville suburb needed a Southern Baptist church in order to reach the community with the gospel, disciple young families, and partner for mission throughout the world. In its first thirty-three years the church grew from a church start meeting in the basement of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home to a large community church with over 1,000 members meeting in buildings filled to capacity on a fifteen-acre campus. The growth of both the community and the church was accelerating, and in 2002 the church took a major step by moving to a new site located off Interstate 65 and constructing a campus that would accommodate several thousand people weekly. Within five years of relocation, the conviction of church leadership was that one physical campus could not hold the regional growth potential of the church. The church voted to adopt a multi-site ministry strategy and launched its first regional campus, The Church at Station Hill, in early 2010. Today, BBC is made up of eight regional campuses in the middle Tennessee region with nearly 12,000 members committed to making disciples in their own communities and neighborhoods.

The Preaching Ministry at Brentwood Baptist Church

Biblical preaching with excellence has been one of the building blocks of BBC. Two senior pastors over nearly fifty years have given the church a stable and consistent preaching platform. Bill Wilson Sr. served as the first pastor from 1969-1992.

His steady leadership and expository style created a healthy appetite for biblical preaching from the start. Called in 1992, Mike Glenn is only the second pastor in the history of the church. His unique and creative “extemporaneous expository” style of preaching has spiritually challenged a rapidly growing congregation for the past twenty-seven years. When the church relocated to the Concord Road campus in June 2002, Wilson and Glenn together placed a Bible into the platform of the worship center, symbolically communicating that every communicator is standing on the authority of Scripture and not merely their own ability. Glenn is well-known for the “confession” he repeats every Sunday after reading the sermon text: “This is God’s Word, for God’s people. Hear it, believe it, and live.” This confession is a concise summary of the church’s philosophy of preaching. As the church has grown and developed a reputation for excellence in ministry, another core value of Glenn has been equipping future pastors. In a “Bible belt” city where “A-list” preachers and communicators are readily available, the senior pastor has intentionally prioritized developing the preaching of young pastors rather than using the pulpit as a way to draw a crowd. When the church adopted a multi-site model, this value factored in heavily when choosing a preaching model for regional campuses. Senior Pastor Mike Glenn championed a “campus teaching pastor” model in which all the campuses preach the same sermon series, biblical text, and “big idea” under his direction.¹ However, each campus pastor has the freedom to contextualize the message itself to fit both his unique preaching style but also the learning style of his respective campus/congregation. BBC currently has eight campuses as well as deaf and ethnic (Chinese and Hispanic) congregations and a church plant (Grove Hill Church) that participate in this model.

¹ The philosophy behind the “big idea” approach to annual sermon planning and preparation has been documented and advocated by several churches and networks, including Dave Ferguson of the NewThing Network. For additional information see Dave Ferguson, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message, Multiply the Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Challenges to the Preaching Team Model at Brentwood Baptist Church

The first challenge to the preaching team model at BBC is the need for organization and coordination. While preparing and keeping an annual sermon plan is an important discipline for a church with a single campus, the level of organization and planning required for a multi-site approach with communicators at each campus is essential. The coordination of the preaching team calendar, the weekly need to oversee the development of sermon support material and the vetting of both campus pastors and approved preaching team substitutes is a time-intensive process.

A second area of concern is the challenge of using a unified preaching plan with a growing diversity of campuses and congregations. The geographic reach of the campuses now encompasses nearly 700 square miles of Middle Tennessee.² Demographic research commissioned by BBC uses the “mosaic model” to evaluate potential new works and identifies the diversity of population groups within reasonable distances from each campus.³ Initially, the Brentwood campus and the first regional campus were made up of two primary groups: “affluent suburbia” and “upscale America.” With seven campuses, the reach has now extended to “American diversity” (Nashville is a United Nations relocation city with ninety-three documented different spoken language groups), “Metro fringe,” and “Aspiring Contemporaries.”⁴ While biblical exegesis is of first importance and is foundational for all biblical preaching, cultural exegesis that connects the biblical truth to its audience is crucial for disciple-making and gospel transformation. Determining sermon series and topics that connect culturally with every campus and congregation in

² “Google Maps Area Calculator Tool,” DaftLogic, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.daftlogic.com/projects-google-maps-area-calculator-tool.htm>.

³ “Mosaic USA” is a demographic tool owned and operated by Experian Marketing Services. It is a household-based lifestyle segmentation tool that provides insights needed to anticipate the behavior, attitudes and preferences of demographics within the US. “Consumer Segmentation,” Experian, accessed February 2, 2022, <http://www.experian.com/marketing-services/consumer-segmentation.html>.

⁴ This research was initially conducted in 2007 by Tom Carringer of ACS Technologies for Brentwood Baptist Church.

the increasingly diverse church family also presents an increasing challenge. Finally, campuses range of size from around 100 to over 3,000 in average weekly worship attendance, creating another challenge for the preaching moment as different skills are required for communicating effectively in each unique venue.

A third challenge of developing a preaching team model is ensuring quality and effective preaching. First and foremost, the preaching ministry is a gospel ministry, so the church must develop guidelines for every teaching pastor that ensure the gospel is clearly proclaimed and not assumed in any context. Second, in an era in which biblical literacy is historically low among church attenders, doctrinal integrity is important. The preaching team needs theological standards and “plumb lines” to ensure the preaching remains solidly biblical. Finally, maintaining standards of excellence in sermon preparation, delivery, and evaluation is difficult when there is no way for one senior pastor to assess seven or more sermons weekly.

Rationale

The leadership of Brentwood Baptist Church has adopted and embraced a preaching team model as an example of intentional innovation in multi-site models of church multiplication because it contextualizes the message to the campus, develops multiple communicators of the gospel, and provides a context that enables creativity and collaboration to flourish with the end result of more effective preaching. This project was designed to improve, strengthen, and document this model for multiple reasons.

First, the church’s primary value is “the gospel first and always.” Therefore, the preaching ministry is central to the proclamation of the gospel and the communication of the Good News. BBC wants to consistently improve preaching at all campuses to ensure that the message is proclaimed clearly and boldly. Clarifying and documenting the preaching team model will raise the bar for the preaching ministry by establishing consistent expectation and best practices for all teaching pastors. Like the early church in Acts, the church wants to place emphasis on preaching and biblically qualified leaders

and then trusts the Holy Spirit to work through ministries to engage each community with the hope of Jesus Christ.⁵

Second, the preaching team at BBC developed organically out of the implications of choosing a model with a live teaching pastor and the need to stay aligned weekly. Over the past eight years, the team has grown and meets weekly to collaborate for preparation, share study resources, and exchange ideas for illustrations and key points. The larger the team gets, the greater the need to move from informal practices to formalizing expectations. The preaching team needs to improve written standards and document best practices. This project strengthens the existing team by clarifying theological presuppositions, documenting expectations and processes, and examining the model employed to discover areas of potential improvement.

Third, the preaching team model can help provide a framework for other churches who might choose a similar model in their context. In the past few years, BBC leadership has received an increasing number of requests from other churches who have heard about the preaching team model and want more information or ask for coaching. An article published in *Preaching Magazine* in January/February 2016 was the catalyst for many of these contacts.⁶ This model has transferable principles that can be applied in other church contexts. If BBC can develop resources that makes the model more accessible to other churches to strengthen their preaching team ministry, then it would be an honor and blessing to contribute to kingdom impact by sharing what the preaching team has learned.

⁵ The preaching ministry seeks to place emphasis on what is known as the *kerygma* (Gk. For “preaching”), which is the gospel framework found in the preaching of the early church, as evidenced by Peter’s sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:17-36.

⁶ Michael Diduit, “Preaching in the Multi-Site Church: An Interview with Mike Glenn and Jay Strother,” *Preaching Magazine*, January/February 2016, 20-24.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to improve a theological and methodological framework for the preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church and its regional campuses that would result in greater unity, alignment, and effectiveness in gospel proclamation as well as provide transferable principles for other multi-site churches or networks that would prefer a preaching team model to a video preaching model.

Goals

To increase the effectiveness of the preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church, four goals were established for this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current effectiveness of the current preaching team in the areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration through weekly meetings.
2. The second goal was to increase knowledge by conducting a review of ten other multi-site preaching teams to borrow best practices and areas for growth and improvement.
3. The third goal was to develop a consistent set of standards and expectations, or “points of excellence,” for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a self-evaluation rubric that measures sermon focus, alignment, and areas of improvement for each teaching pastor to utilize in evaluation of their preaching.

Research Methodology

Each of these goals included corresponding actions that would enable goal completion. The first goal was to assess the current effectiveness of the current preaching team in the areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration through weekly meetings. The first goal was accomplished by administering a “preaching team survey” to the current attendees of the weekly preaching team meeting. This survey focused on the three key areas of (1) expectations, (2) resourcing, and (3) collaboration that contribute to effective sermon preparation as well as focus and alignment of the preaching ministry at all campuses. This goal was met when all participants completed the survey, follow-up

interviews were conducted, and a document summarizing the stated goals of the preaching team weekly meeting were written and adopted by the preaching team.⁷

The second goal was to increase knowledge by conducting a review of ten other multi-site preaching teams to discover best practices and areas for growth and improvement. The second goal was accomplished by creating a list of ten respected multi-site churches that utilize a preaching team format and then administering a short survey to each church that focused on the key areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration. Follow-up interviews were conducted with staff from each church to address questions raised. The goal was met when results from all churches were collected, collated, summarized, and captured in a “best practices” document for the BBC preaching team.⁸

The third goal was to develop a consistent set of standards and expectations, or “points of excellence,” for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was accomplished by the creation of a “points of excellence” document as the stated expectations and standards. A rubric was developed, reviewed by the preaching team, edited, and returned back to the team.⁹ This goal was met when the preaching team gave the document final approval and 90 percent of the criteria on the rubric were measured as satisfactory or above by self-evaluation. If the 90 percent benchmark was not achieved, the “points of excellence” document was revised.

The fourth goal was to develop a self-evaluation rubric that measures sermon focus, alignment, and areas of improvement for each teaching pastor to utilize in evaluation of their preaching. The fourth goal was measured by the use of a sermon evaluation tool that was implemented by all teaching pastors for a period of four weeks to self-evaluate

⁷ See survey tool in appendix 1 and the executive summary in appendix 2. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁸ See appendix 3.

⁹ The Preaching Team Points of Excellence is located in appendix 4.

their sermon.¹⁰ This goal was met when 80 percent of the teaching pastors reported that this tool informed their preaching by means of accountability for self-evaluation.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Campus and Teaching Pastor. The *Campus and Teaching Pastor* is the title given to each pastor who is responsible for one of the eight congregations. This position also has the responsibility of preaching weekly. In addition, this title distinguishes the campus and teaching pastors from the senior pastor who holds leadership responsibilities over BBC and all its regional campuses.

Multi-site. *Multi-site* is shorthand for a church that has a unified church governance and shared resources but gathers in more than one location in order to remove geographic barriers to ministry.

Preaching team. The *preaching team* for BBC includes the following participants: the senior pastor, all “campus and teaching pastors,” the deaf church pastor, the Chinese church pastor, ministry residency program participants, the discipleship minister, and a sermon research assistant.

Regional campus. A *regional campus* is the designation given to each of the seven unique campuses of BBC. This designation communicates that the primary multiplication strategy within a geographic “region” is to provide accessible campuses in under-churched communities in middle Tennessee. This designation is made clear in the naming convention for each campus, such as, The Church at Station Hill: A Regional Campus of BBC.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the preaching team surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about the current level of effectiveness of the preaching team. Accuracy can be difficult since

¹⁰ The Sermon Evaluation Tool Rubric is located in appendix 5.

the preaching team members relate closely to each other on a weekly basis. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were promised that their answers would remain nameless. Next, the second goal was dependent on ten respected multi-site churches that utilize a preaching team format and then administering a short survey to each church that focuses on three key areas. This goal hinged on identifying ten churches who meet these criteria and those ten churches choosing to participate. To mitigate this limitation, a list of fifteen churches were developed so there is an alternate for each church.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addresses the unique challenges of preaching in a multi-site church. While some of the findings of this project might be helpful to single-campus churches or even networks, it would primarily assist multi-site churches in improving their preaching team model. Second, the project addresses multi-site churches in which the campus pastor preaches weekly or regularly. This project is not intended to help churches that utilize sermon delivery via video to multiple campuses. Finally, this project was limited to churches in which all campuses align their preaching plan. The survey, rubrics, and evaluative tools all work with the assumption that the teaching pastors are preaching out of the same biblical text for each message.

Conclusion

The preaching ministry is central to the proclamation of the gospel through the local church. Brentwood Baptist Church has expanded its mission to impact its region through the launch of seven additional campuses. The primary unifying factor among these campuses is not merely shared church governance or resources, but an unwavering commitment to gospel transformation. Strengthening and improving the preaching team model will not only elevate the quality of sermons preached from pulpits but has the potential to impact more hearts and lives through effective contextualization and benefit the kingdom by equipping more men to preach powerfully. Finally, a healthy preaching team model has the potential to be embraced by other multiplying churches who seek to

create a disciple-making culture that is not dependent upon a sole communicator. The mission of BBC is to be faithful to the imperative command of the Great Commission through the preaching ministry: “Go and make disciples” (Matt 28:19). The conviction of BBC is that a preaching team model for a multi-site church is an effective means of making disciples who carry the gospel into every venue where church members live, work, and play for God’s glory and the joy of His people.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A PREACHING TEAM

There are many good reasons to begin a new gospel work, but one is primary: to join Jesus in his mission to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).¹ Church multiplication is a form of seeking the lost, as Holy Spirit-empowered witnessing bodies of believers are planted in new communities and neighborhoods. Salvation comes when the lost respond to the gospel message which must be proclaimed to them. Romans 10:14-15 makes this clear: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

The proclamation of the gospel through preaching is essential to the mission and health of the multi-site church where faithful men are equipped to contextualize the unchanging message to the audience in their community. The foundation for this approach is biblical and time-tested by historical Christianity. First, the early church developed the *kerygma*, or core set of essential gospel truths, that served as the framework for gospel proclamation beginning with the first recorded sermon of the church era, Peter’s sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:17-36. All gospel proclamation, including multi-site preaching, must include these essential truths and must be clear in the pulpit ministry of the church or campus.

Second, the early church did not merely repeat the exact same sermon to different audiences from different cultural and community backgrounds. The early church

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

contextualized the gospel as it reached new communities and cultures and yet did not compromise their core Christian beliefs and convictions. There are multiple examples of this in the New Testament, but this project will exam three passages: (1) The innovation of preaching the gospel to Greek-speakers by members of the church at Antioch in Acts 11:19-26; (2) Paul’s discourse with the men of Athens in Acts 17:16-34; and (3) Paul’s approach to sharing the gospel with the people of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. These New Testament examples will help show how the first generation of Christian evangelists and preachers pointed each person to Christ with the cultural sensitivity of a missionary while ensuring gospel clarity.

Third, this chapter will examine how developing multiple teaching pastors is preferred to utilizing a single communicator because it equips and trains more men to be effective preachers of the Word. The New Testament churches prioritized the equipping of pastor-teachers in order to raise up and send out leaders ready to proclaim the gospel and strengthen the church. Supporting this argument is Paul’s teaching on how local churches are a body of unified believers made up of a diversity of gifts, including pastoral gifts (Eph 4:1-16). Paul’s relationship and training of Timothy is another important example of how he put his principles into action, as seen in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:14-16.

The *Kerygma* Does Not Change (Acts 2:17-36)

Renowned pastor Martyn Lloyd-Jones declares, “Preaching is the highest calling and the greatest need for the church and the world.”² He argues effectively that every reformation and revival in the history of the church has been driven by true preaching. If gospel proclamation is so vital, then there is a need to be clear about preaching and there is no better place to begin than with the very first sermon of the church age. The opening chapters of Acts tell the story of the birth of the church. As his time on earth comes to

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9.

close, the resurrected Jesus leaves his disciples with a mission that is stunning in scope: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus then ascends to heaven while two angels appear, declaring, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10). Jesus said he would send “the promise of the Father” upon them and instructed them to “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The disciples remembered and obeyed these words, and just as promised, they were gathered in one place when suddenly there came from heaven the sound of a mighty rushing wind and divided tongues of fire came to rest on each one of them. Immediately, they begin to speak in other languages and the multi-cultural witnesses to this event heard these “Galileans” speaking perfectly in their native tongues. All were astonished and amazed, but some mocked the moment, claiming they were drunk on some new wine (Acts 2:1-13). Despite interpretations to the contrary, this was not “speaking in tongues,” but was a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. John Stott notes, “At Babel human languages were confused and the nations were scattered; in Jerusalem the language barrier was supernaturally overcome as a sign that the nations would now be gathered together in Christ, prefiguring the great day when the redeemed company will be drawn ‘from every nation, tribe, people and language.’”³ In this moment, the stage was set for the world’s first evangelistic sermon. The gospel would be declared that day in Jerusalem, and it has not stopped being preached ever since.

Simon Peter stands up to refute the mockers’ assumption that the disciples are inebriated early in the day with a strong assertion: what they are witnessing is not drunken speech but prophetic fulfillment (Acts 2:15-16). Peter was convicted that Jesus had inaugurated the “last days,” also known as the “Messianic age” spoken about by the

³ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 68.

Hebrew prophets (Joel 2:28-32). The final and convincing proof of this fulfillment was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, just as the prophet Joel had foretold (Joel 2:28-32). Peter points to Joel's signs of the last days, including wonders of nature (Acts 2:19-20). For example, the people of Jerusalem had just witnessed the sun going dark on the day of the crucifixion (Luke 23:44-45). Peter and the disciples saw this new moment in history as a word of judgment but also hope. Whereas in the old covenant only certain individuals received the Holy Spirit (i.e., Num 11:24-30), now God's Spirit was being poured out on all of God's people. This is the moment the world was waiting on, but they did not know it—at long last, God's promises were being fulfilled in Christ and it was time for a gospel harvest. The “old message” of Joel, that “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32) has been given a new twist: salvation is found in the name of Jesus, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). What Peter next shares in the power of Spirit changes the course of lives and history forever as it becomes the foundation for all gospel proclamation.

The Focus of Peter's Preaching: Jesus of Nazareth

Peter's Pentecost sermon has a singular focus, as should all preaching today. Peter's sole focus is “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). Peter does not have to spend much time or attention on the life and ministry of Jesus because the audience on that day had been eyewitnesses of those events. Peter then immediately turns his attention to the cross. One cannot preach the gospel without the cross. Preaching “Christ crucified” has a unique power to save as the apostle Paul would declare a few decades later (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Peter makes it clear that the cross is the most powerful example of the intersection of God's divine plan and mankind's moral responsibility before God. The cross was no accident of history, as Jesus was delivered

up according to the “definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). Jesus did not have his life taken, but he willingly laid it down in obedience to the Father and out of his great love for his chosen people. In *The Cross of Christ* Stott writes, “Despite the great importance of his teaching, his example, and his works of compassion and power, none of these was central to his mission. What dominated his mind was not the living but the giving of his life. This final self-sacrifice was his ‘hour’ for which he had come into the world.”⁴ At the same time, it was the sin of mankind that made the cross necessary and it was at the hands of “lawless men” that Jesus was unjustly put to death. From this point forward, all true gospel preaching must confront sinful men with the pain and sacrifice of the cross.

The Resurrection of Jesus in Peter’s Preaching

After one sentence each on the life and death of Jesus, Peter gives a significant amount of attention to declaring and explaining the resurrection of Jesus. While much of modern preaching expounds on the cross, at Pentecost Peter elaborates on the resurrection. There are several reasons for this focus. First is the nature of the resurrection itself. While some Jews of that time shared a fuzzy belief about the resurrection of the body at the end of the age, no one, not even the disciples who heard Jesus’s three predictions, believed in a dead person coming back to life right in the middle of history.⁵ Resurrection was not an easy concept to understand then, just like it is not an easy concept to believe now; however, Peter and the other disciples were convinced that Jesus was alive and they were not about to hide its fact or its importance in their preaching.

Second, Peter had been personally transformed by the presence of the resurrected Jesus. Prior to the crucifixion, Peter had grown afraid, and three times had denied his affiliation with Jesus, just as predicted. After the resurrection, Peter and the

⁴ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 37.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 60.

faithful few remaining followers of Jesus went into hiding, afraid of what would happen to them now that Jesus had been killed (John 20:19-23). But locked doors or roads leading away from Jerusalem were no barriers for the resurrected, glorified body of Jesus, as he appeared to them in multiple ways and multiple times (1 Cor 15:1-7). A few days later, by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the resurrected Jesus three times asked Peter to affirm his love, thus restoring him to the ministry of “feeding his sheep” (John 21:15-19). There is no record of any of the disciples recanting or changing their story—every one of them passionately believed and declared that Jesus was alive, and all of them were persecuted and most died for this belief. Chuck Colson, who was high-level member of the Nixon Presidential Administration was sent to prison for his role in the Watergate scandal, explains why their witness is convincing proof of the resurrection:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified, they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every single one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.⁶

A third reason for resurrection focus is that Peter makes it clear to an audience with a high percentage of Jews that King David himself prophesied that death could not hold the Messiah when he wrote Psalm 16:8-11. This contextualization of the gospel message is an important feature of Peter's first sermon that became key to the effectiveness of preaching: sharing the gospel story in the language and culture of the people to whom it is preached for receptivity and understanding. Here, Peter declares that while the great King David is dead and buried, Jesus is alive, being raised up by God, and of this “we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32). The implications of Peter's words are stunning. God planned for Jesus to die and to live again. Since death had no claim on him due to his sinless nature (Rom 6:23) and Jesus paid the penalty for sin (Rom 5:8), if a person now belongs to Jesus, then death has no hold on that person, either.

⁶ Charles Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 61.

The Conclusion to Peter's Sermon

Having made clear the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Peter powerfully draws his sermon to its conclusion and main point: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Peter wants everyone to know who Jesus is, and he is not ashamed of the gospel, no matter the cost or response to his message. Terms like “Lord” and “Christ” are used interchangeably in the modern era because it is common to use both to speak and sing of Jesus. However, there is a need to understand how both verses were crucial in their original context to this Pentecost-Day audience who were moved by the work of the Holy Spirit through Peter. The term “Lord” was for kingship among the Greco-Roman culture of the first century. “Caesar is Lord” would have been the most common use of that term throughout the Roman Empire. For the Greek and multi-cultural audience present on that day, Peter was making it clear that Jesus, not Caesar, is the true king. Validated by his life, obedient in his death, and proving his victory over sin and death by his resurrection, Jesus has been given ultimately authority to him by God the Father. God has “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). Though, Jesus is not just Lord of the Greeks but is also Lord of his people, the Jewish people. The term “Christ” is a term for the Jewish Messiah, or “promised one.” Here Peter is speaking to his own people group, as he knew their longing for the Messiah to come. Peter is bold in declaring that they rejected Jesus, the very one they were hoping to save them, by going as far as to crucify him on a Roman cross. Peter does not soften or adjust the story out of fear, which is another important key of gospel proclamation: courage and boldness. Greg Gilbert states, “The gospel is a stark message, and it intrudes into the world’s thinking and priorities

with sharp, bracing truths. . . . The gospel is good news, but we must be careful to not round off the gospel's sharp points. We must preserve the edges."⁷

Peter powerfully and faithfully preached the first gospel sermon of the new covenant. In doing so in the power of the Holy Spirit, he laid the foundation for what is often called the *kerygma*, the Greek word for "preaching." Stott notes that the fullness of the gospel comes in stunning "stereo": there are two gospel events, the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are two gospel witnesses, the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New. Peter's preaching "cuts them to the heart," indicating both conviction over their sin and a belief that Jesus is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:37). Peter declares two gospel promises: the forgiveness of sins past and the gift of the Holy Spirit for a new birth. Also, there are two gospel conditions: repentance and faith, with baptism as the outward sign of an inward spiritual transformation.⁸ Luke tells that Peter taught them more on that day, and there is a clear gospel response: "Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). The first sermon had been preached and there was a gospel harvest. The gospel is not something simply to be discussed, it is a message so powerful that it calls for a response. All preachers must always work toward and clearly call for a response to the sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Contextualization: Preaching Cross-Culturally without Compromise

From Acts 2 onward, the gospel spreads by proclamation exactly as Jesus predicted in Acts 1:8. First preached in Jerusalem, early evangelists refuse to let persecution, threats, or even ministry obstacles keep them from "speaking of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). After the martyrdom of Stephen, the first systemic persecution breaks out against the church. However, as God superintends his purpose

⁷ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 21.

⁸ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 80-81.

through the acts of men, this simply spreads the gospel further as “they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). Luke alludes to this spread of the gospel by choosing the same term for “scatter” as a farmer scattering seed. As they go, they take the message of Jesus with them into the surrounding villages and cities. Philip proclaims Christ in Samaria, where his message is received with joy (Acts 8:8). In a Spirit-led encounter, Philip baptizes an Ethiopian court official who was pondering the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:26-40). The great persecutor of Christians, Saul, is confronted by the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus and converted (Acts 9:1-19). Peter is given a vision and led to the home of a God-fearing Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius who believes and is baptized along with his entire household and the first Gentiles are converted (Acts 10:1-48). The spread of the gospel quickly reaches a key moment when some unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene on their way to Antioch “spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20). Luke recounts that the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord because “the hand of the Lord was with them” (Acts 11:21). God’s “hand” refers to his power.⁹

The Church in Antioch: Acts 11:19-26

The evangelization of Hellenists by the church at Antioch is a turning point in the expansion of the gospel mission for several reasons. First, up to this point in Acts, the narrative has been dominated by the apostles, such as Peter and John, and key leaders in the early church, such as Stephen and Philip. The multi-cultural church at Antioch was birthed when unnamed “ordinary” people (“men from Cyprus of Cyrene”) shared the gospel of Jesus with their Greek neighbors. This demonstrates that it does not matter who communicates the gospel as much as it matters that the gospel is communicated. In the context of multisite preaching, the application is that the church does not have to develop an unhealthy dependence on a sole gifted communicator to deliver the gospel, but the

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker New Testament Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 414.

church can and should equip and empower many to evangelize. This would set a lasting precedent in the church that not all faithful witnesses would be widely known or have a large “platform.” Centuries later, the conviction that the message takes precedent over the messenger would be famously articulated by Nikolaus Zinzendorf, the “missionary count” of the eighteenth century. “Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten.” In other words, complete your assignment and then go home to be with your Savior.¹⁰

Second, cross-cultural witness was a bold innovation. The gospel crosses another massive cultural barrier when it moves from reaching those with primarily a Jewish background to those with a Graeco-Roman worldview. Luke gives a short but important description of the message delivered by these anonymous evangelists: “They preached the Lord Jesus.” Scholar Darrell Bock notes, “In the Greek context, the title ‘Lord’ makes sense as the key concept to associate with Jesus, for reasons of authority made clear in Acts 10:34-35: Truly God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”¹¹ If the men preached Jesus as the Jewish Messiah alone, then it would have little meaning to the Greeks. But the Hellenists were well-acquainted in the Roman Empire with the title “Lord,” as in “Caesar is Lord.” The application point for preaching is clear. Jesus is both Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:36), but an effective communicator of the gospel will contextualize the message to connect with the understanding of his audience. These early evangelists did just that and it was effective at bringing many to faith. In fact, some speculate that Luke himself was one of these converts “because the Western text introduces verse 28 with the words ‘when we were gathered together,’ indicating that Luke was present, and because a tradition can be traced back to the end of the second century that Luke was a native of

¹⁰ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 212.

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, 414.

Antioch.”¹² There is no mention of compromising the essential elements of the gospel. Preaching that Jesus was “Lord” instead of Caesar was a bold and dangerous message that could have been considered traitorous. These men declared Jesus as Lord and called for a response, and the gospel crosses yet another barrier, and yet the names of the faithful men responsible remain unknown. Multisite preaching allows communicators to follow the faith example of these gospel pioneers as the gospel message is contextualized without compromise to the communities in which campuses, church plants, and revitalizations live.

Finally, the Acts 11 narrative is important because it demonstrates the missionary nature of the gospel message. Up to this point, Jerusalem had been the geographical base of the church, but early in its history the focus moves to Antioch as the launching pad for the Gentile mission. One of the distinctive marks of Christianity is that, unlike other religions, its geographical “center” is not static but is always moving to where the gospel is breaking through. In God’s sovereign plan for the spread of His Word to the ends of the earth, Antioch was an ideal springboard for the worldwide Christian mission. The city was the third largest in the Roman Empire at the time, behind only Rome and Alexandria. Known as the “Queen of the East,” the city was a commercial hub and extremely multi-cultural, with a large population of Greeks, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, and Indians. Bock notes, “Antioch was a cosmopolitan city full of gods, where Judaism functioned as an exception in clinging to the one true God. In this context, the church in Antioch emerged and reached out into the larger commercial world with its own mission.”¹³ In Antioch, the church not only survived, but thrived. These new first generation multi-cultural believers would be discipled by Barnabas and Saul, and the church grew there to the point they were first called Christians (“little Christs”) in that city. After about a year of preaching and teaching, the Antioch church was led by the

¹² Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 201.

¹³ Bock, *Acts*, 413.

Spirit to call and send out Paul and Barnabas on the world's first mission journey of the church age. The obedience of the church at Antioch to send out preachers and leaders demonstrates for the multi-site church the call to church multiplication. Today, 70 percent of megachurches in the United States have more than one site because of a commitment to this same missionary mindset.¹⁴ The gospel can break down any barriers, so church movements must find ways to establish “forward operating bases” for gospel proclamation and ministry in new or underreached communities. The multi-site church is one expression of this missional conviction that is producing spiritual fruit in communities throughout the world.

The first mission journey of Paul and Barnabas is not without its obstacles but proves successful in spreading the gospel and establishing churches in what is now called Asia Minor. Their success combined with opposition from “Judaizers,” who demanded Gentile believers first follow Jewish practices to be part of the church, led to what is known as the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Here, the apostles unanimously agree, and the entire church affirms, that Gentile converts should not be made to follow Jewish practices to be part of the church but should be sensitive to the cultural norms of their Jewish brothers and sisters as a sign of unity. This defense and clarification of the gospel strengthens the church and re-affirms the Gentile mission as not merely a new innovation, but as in reality the fulfillment of God's promises through the prophets (Acts 15:15-17; Amos 9:11-12). The verdict of the Jerusalem Council sets the stage for Paul's second mission journey, which carries the gospel in a Spirit-led leap to the continent of Europe for the first time through the “Macedonian call.” This journey reveals another important passage for understanding the contextualization of the gospel: the story of Paul in Athens in Acts 17:16-34.

¹⁴ Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, “The Changing Reality in America's Largest Churches: Megachurch Research Report,” Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, accessed August 19, 2022, https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Megachurch-Survey-Report_HIRR_FACT-2020.pdf.

Paul in Athens: Acts 17:16-34

Arriving in the great Greek cultural city of Athens, Paul is “provoked” by the idolatry of the citizens and engages in conversations that lead to gospel witness first among the Jews, and then among the philosophers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16). Commentator Kent Hughes reflects on the collision culture with the gospel that Paul brought to Athens:

Despite all her glory, Athens was empty because she was living on the memories of the past. In philosophy she simply repeated the echoes of men long gone. Her art was no longer innate overflow but lingering reflex. It was to such a city that the apostle came—proud, glorious to the eye, but dead. What a contrast between the apostle and the metropolis.¹⁵

In Athens, Paul shows how to engage a proud and intellectual culture with the life-giving gospel. First, Paul witnessed colliding worldviews.¹⁶ There was a saying at the time that, “In Athens, it’s easier to find a god than a man.” The city was so “smothered with idols” that Paul was not amused, but rather strongly provoked. Luke chooses a very strong verb here, the same one used in the Septuagint (LXX) for God’s reaction to idolatry. Paul is not impressed by the famed culture of Athens, but instead deeply disturbed. Every idol (by some historical estimates, over 30,000 of them) demonstrated the Athenians’ hunger for soul-searching but each testified to their spiritual emptiness. In the same way, preachers of the gospel today should not be enthralled with culture but should see it through a critical gospel lens, exposing the longings of the lost and searching all around them.

Second, Paul’s models an approach to cross-cultural preaching by looking for cultural connection points for the gospel message. Paul did not throw up his hands in despair but looked for a point of engagement. While Paul would speak to whomever the Holy Spirit led his way, Luke tells that he specifically engaged three groups at first: Jews in the synagogue, the crowd in the agora, or marketplace, and Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:18a). Paul’s attempt to connect with such diverse people groups demonstrates his confidence that the gospel was able to engage all kinds of people from

¹⁵ Kent Hughes, *Acts, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 230.

¹⁶ Outline adapted from Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 276-91.

all kinds of backgrounds. Predictably, Paul was both misunderstood and maligned by his audience. He is called a “babblers,” which was Athenian slang literally meaning “seed-picker,” in reference to birds who live off scraps they find in the gutter (Acts 17:18b). Because they had never heard someone with a message quite like Paul’s, they first assumed he was the intellectual equivalent of a second-rate debater, picking up scraps of various philosophies and worldviews and plagiarizing or parroting them. However, Paul’s willingness to engage, and the risk of being mischaracterized, paid off, as he was invited to the famed Areopagus (“Mars Hill”) to share his ideas (Acts 17:19-20). Paul’s preaching and evangelism models risk for the sake of the gospel. Too many Christians today are wary of being rejected and therefore are reticent to share the gospel when the opportunity presents itself.

Third, Paul boldly points out the errors of their idolatry as he proclaimed the one true God in five ways (Acts 17:22-31). Paul takes his best shot, giving what New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce rightly calls a “masterpiece of communication.”¹⁷ Paul first “hooks” his audience with his observation of the statue to an “unknown god.” The word translated “unknown” is the root from which is derived the Greek word for agnosticism, which means, “without knowledge.” Because the Athenians prided themselves on their wide knowledge base, Paul’s hook was compelling because in essence he says, “The one thing you don’t know. . . . I know and will proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). Paul is bold in his five assertions. First, God as an engaged, active Creator would have challenged their entire way of thinking. The Epicureans were practical agnostics who believed the gods were far off and disinterested. The Stoics were panentheists who functionally believed creation was God. Second, if God sustains this universe, then He does not need and cannot be contained by temples, shrines, or idols made by human hands. Third, God is the ruler and sovereign over all, who is not swayed by the opinions

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce. *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 189.

of philosophers or the might of an empire. Fourth, Paul asserts that God is the Father of humanity, and he uses two quotes from their own philosophers and poets to make his point. The first section of Acts 17:28, “In him we live and move and have our being” is from the work of Epimenides. The final line of verse 28 is from the writings of Aratus, originally penned about the Greek god Zeus. God, not Zeus, is the true creator and father. Now Paul is positioned to take on the idolatry that troubles him. By quoting their own poets, Paul exposes their logical inconsistency. Stott notes, “All idolatry tries to minimize the gulf between the Creator and his creatures, in order to bring them under our control. . . . There is no logic in idolatry; it is a perverse, topsy-turvy expression of the human rebellion against God.”¹⁸ Now Paul is ready to make his fifth and most controversial point: God is judge of the whole world. For Paul, his message is leading somewhere. He is not here to merely debate ideas, but to confront with gospel truth. Intellectuals love their books and degrees and lecture halls and coffee shops and blogs and chat rooms, but they do not love being called to change their thinking or way of life. Paul’s preaching applies pressure to their paradigms. Mankind is not moving toward extinction (as the Epicureans thought) nor toward becoming “one with the cosmos” (as the Stoics thought). Mankind is moving toward judgment day. Paul is basically telling them that they have been following the wrong story.

God is the Creator of the world, but he is also the righteous Judge who is going to bring justice and restore the broken order of this world. Proof of this is the vindication of his Son, Jesus, whom He raised from the dead. Paul’s bold, intelligent, and nuanced presentation of the gospel has stayed true to the *kerygma* and has at the same time landed with his audience. Finally, Paul experiences a mixed response to his proclamation, which is what all preachers should expect in the delivery of the gospel message as well. As with many people throughout history, it is the message about the resurrection that catches people off guard. To the Greeks, the afterlife was a mystery. Some believed a person ceased to

¹⁸ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 287.

exist, and others believed a person become one with the universe. Many hoped they would shed their mortal coil and be a free spirit at last. But to the Greeks, the road to the underworld was “one way.”

No one had ever heard anything like the Christian story—that Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead and his followers will be one day as well. The responses of those mirror the reaction evangelists expect to get when faithfully preaching the gospel. Just like the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9), it is sobering to realize that many will reject the Word of God, but it is also hopeful to know that the gospel does indeed bring about a response and that the gospel will bear fruit. Paul receives criticism, ridicule, and mockery. Some people want nothing to do with the gospel message and will openly make fun of it. Paul did find some to be curious: “We will hear you again about this” (Acts 17:32).¹⁹ Finally, in reaction to Paul’s message, there is a response of credibility. There were some who believed. To validate this effectual call, Luke gives a couple of names as verification for the early church (Acts 17:34). Eusebius tells that Dionysius became a leader in the church in Athens, its first bishop and eventually a martyr. Paul’s stirring in his spirit was indeed a Spirit-appointed moment in the life of the early church and the spread of gospel. Paul demonstrated at Mars Hill how the gospel can be clear and at the same time contextualized to the audience, whether Jew, merchant, or philosopher.

Paul in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

From Athens, Paul went to the city of Corinth where he continued to preach the gospel to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:1-18). In this city, the Jewish population was strongly resistant, but he found great success among the Gentiles, and many believed and were baptized. Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth, “teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). The leading commercial center of southern Greece, the culture of

¹⁹ This is why Brentwood Baptist Church uses the term “gospel conversations” to describe evangelism, because the process of dismantling a worldview and coming to embrace the gospel message does not always happen immediately. It is an encouraging sign when any person says, “I want to hear more about this Jesus.”

Corinth, was infamous for its immorality and paganism, which led to continual challenges within the church. As believers were constantly tempted to compromise biblical truth and values in defiance of the gospel and as a result, they questioned Paul's authority. In essence, Paul planted a church in Corinth, but he found it difficult to keep Corinth out of the church.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth not just a church planter or theologian, but as a caring pastor and spiritual father. He shows a deep concern over divisions in the church (1 Cor 1:10-20). The church at Corinth deserves close attention because many of the same issues surfacing in churches today. The themes Paul has to address in 1 Corinthians can be divided into two main areas: conflict within the congregation and compromises with the unbiblical values of Greco-Roman society. The themes Paul engaged resonate today: broken sexuality, struggling marriages, singleness, adopting cultural habits, dress codes, ranking spiritual gifts, disorder in church meetings, and more. Commentator Stephen Um explains why Corinth gives a roadmap for engaging cultures with the gospel.

It is often assumed that there are only two ways for us to engage our cities, our culture, and the world. We tend to think that either we are going to become overly protective and separatist, or we are going to assimilate and become just like the world. But Jesus tells his disciples in John 17:15-18 that we are to be in the world but not of the world. In other words, we are not called to under-contextualize (becoming evasive) or to over-adopt (becoming accommodating). Instead, we are to be a counter-cultural alternative society of God's people—to be a light to the world and salt to the earth. This was the very tension that the Corinthian believers faced in their own particular context—the dual dangers of separatism and assimilation, of isolation and absorption, both of which are equal threats to the gospel. So how can we avoid these pitfalls? We need to understand the narrative of the context in which we live.²⁰

Like prosperous and powerful Corinth, achievement has become the addiction of today's culture as well. Culture drives people to achieve for selfish gain and personal prosperity. People are highly motivated to make themselves look "big," which leaves little to no room for gospel conviction. Paul undercuts this thinking not by accommodating the Corinthian,

²⁰ Stephen Um, *1 Corinthians*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 31.

but instead by proclaiming Christ and his cross as great and making the intellect and influence of man “small” instead.

Paul first points to the counterintuitive wisdom and power of God. The Roman cross would have been viewed culturally as an embarrassment, a form of punishment so degrading and socially reprehensible that it was not to be even mentioned in polite company. The Corinthians would have no category for seeing the cross and inspiring or heartwarming. In the ancient world, the image of someone being crucified was utterly and completely unacceptable.²¹ But Paul is not ashamed of the cross: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). The wisdom and power needed is not found in the culture or even in knowledge, Paul declares, but in the “upside down kingdom” of God on display through the crucifixion of Christ. While Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, the cross demonstrates the surprising nature of the gospel, “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor 1:25). The Corinthian culture currency was intellect, but the cross points to a way of salvation that no man would ever devise by his own thinking. Their cultural commodity was influence, but Jesus did not come touting his status, flashing his degrees, or pointing to his achievements. He came and made himself nothing. “God chose what is low and despised in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor 1:28-29). Paul’s argument confronts the values of the Corinthian culture with a complete paradigm shift. The way “up” in the kingdom Jesus came to establish is first “down,” demonstrating that in all generations God’s ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa 55:8-9).

If the cross holds the power of God to save, then Paul now makes his strategy clear in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2): “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming

²¹ Um, *1 Corinthians*, 41.

to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Paul confesses his own personal sense of weakness and fear at the challenge of confronting such a culture. Yet, Paul deliberately chooses not to rely on human knowledge or man-centered persuasion, but in a “demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5). Paul’s encounter in Athens demonstrated that he was capable of going toe-to-toe with the philosophers of his time. However, Paul understood that while intellect and persuasion are tools that the Spirit can use, they are not the crucial ingredient for gospel preaching and witness. The message of the cross is indispensable, and he is careful to be sure the cross takes center stage in his preaching and mission, lest people be tempted to put their trust in man and not God. Paul will not water down the gospel message nor soften the sharp edges of the gospel by bowing to the Corinthian culture nor any culture. While Paul will argue persuasively later in the letter for the contextualization of ministry (1 Cor 9:19-23), the priority he places on the cross being front and center makes is clear. “Becoming all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor 9:22) never means gospel compromise or a cross-less message. In all preaching and teaching, evangelists are not ashamed of the cross because it confronts people with the deep ugliness of sin and the desperate need for a salvation that cannot be achieved by merit. Paul is a clear and effective example of missionary thinking. Preachers must adapt their methods to meet the needs of the people, but they never compromise the message of the gospel. Instead, preachers discover bold new ways to share the gospel when they encounter new people and new cultures, having full confidence that the message of the cross and the resurrection alone have the power to save.

Equipping and Empowering Pastor-Shepherds for the Church

New Testament churches prioritized the equipping of pastor-shepherds to raise up and send out leaders to proclaim the gospel and strengthen the church. As the gospel

spread throughout the world, just as Jesus has predicted (Acts 1:8), Paul knew that a key strategy was to equip and empower other ministers of the gospel to preach and lead. While Paul planted many of the churches in the New Testament, there was no way Paul could lead all of them, nor could he personally go to every village, town, and city. Paul spends much time developing faithful men into pastors who can preach and lead themselves. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul understood along with Peter and the other apostles that he was not just seeing people come to faith in his own generation, but he was sparking a movement that would witness to the gospel for generations to come, until the second coming of Christ (Acts 2:39). In a similar way, multi-site churches prioritize the development of the next generation of pastors by giving them opportunity to preach, teach, and lead in the communities in which their congregations are called. The multi-site church provides developing pastors with the opportunity to carry out true gospel ministry while still being supported by an invaluable mentoring and support structure. Key insights to how Paul understood the priority of leader development is found in his New Testament letters, specifically in Ephesians and the pastoral letter of 1 Timothy.

Ephesians 4:1-16

The church at Ephesus played a key role in the development of church leadership, and the spread of the gospel to what is now known as Asia Minor. Ephesus was a strategic city both economically, due to its famous harbor, and spiritually. Ephesus contained the Temple of Diana/Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul's message made such an impact on the city on his first visit that it created a riot, documented in a dramatic understatement by Luke as "no little disturbance" (Acts 19:23). Paul had a deep affection for the elders of the Ephesus church, having endured some intense spiritual warfare over a span of three years of gospel ministry that created close bonds among them. Having been forced to move on, in Paul's farewell speech to them he exhorts them to "pay careful attention to yourselves and your flock" (Acts 20:28). He also warns them of the challenges to come: "I know that after my departure fierce wolves

will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29-30). In this narrative Paul shows both a deep love and a profound concern for the importance of the Ephesian church and a particular interest in the health of the leadership. It comes as no surprise that Paul would write a letter to the Ephesian church around AD 60 to reinforce his convictions to them.

Ephesians is beautifully laid out, both logically and theologically, making it a favorite of many pastors to this day. Stott says, “Ephesians is marvelously concise, yet comprehensive, a summary of the Christian good news and its implications. Nobody can read it without being moved to wonder and worship and challenged to consistency of life.”²² The first three chapters of Ephesians focus on what doctrine and core Christian beliefs, as the second three focus on how Christians live out those beliefs. Fittingly, Paul does not start with the individual but with the church. Paul had a challenge to confront, and he knew it. Author Bryan Chapell writes,

He knows that gathered in the various house churches will be people from different ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds—people with different personalities and priorities—who must work together in order for the church to fulfill the grand calling of spiritual and cultural transformation that he has envisioned in the opening chapters of this epistle. How will he get such different persons together in work and worship?²³

Paul begins by reminding them of the gospel he has just proclaimed and that they are to “walk worthy” of this calling. Paul is not referring here to some mystical call for the spiritual elite, but rather to the “effectual call” of salvation. He follows this with a powerful call to unity, declaring that the one thing all believers have in common—salvation in Christ alone—supersedes all other differences of culture, personality, and experience. Many New Testament scholars believe that this section (4:4-6) may have been an adapted early Christian creed or confessional hymn. It teaches that unity is rooted in shared confession, calling it “one hope.” Jesus Christ is Lord (Rom 10:10). Faith is in

²² Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 89.

²³ Bryan Chapell, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 182.

him alone. Baptism identifies believers with his death and resurrection. Having established that Christians are one in Christ, Paul moves to sharing that all believers are certainly not the same. Unity does not necessitate uniformity in the kingdom of Christ. Rather, its unity in the fullness of diversity that displays the glory of God.

Paul explains that those in the church are given spiritual gifts, not for the building up of the individual, but primarily for the building up of the body. Theologian Wayne Grudem defines *spiritual gifts* as “any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.”²⁴ “Grace” here is not saving grace (*charis*) but rather “serving grace” (*charismata*). Gifts are a great grace to Christians because God does not need mankind to accomplish His plan and purpose, but he chose, out of his abundant riches, to allow disciples of Jesus to participate in a supernatural way in all He is doing in the world to advance the gospel.

The New Testament letters list specific spiritual gifts in six passages (1 Cor 7:7; 12:8-10, 28; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Pet 4:11; and here in Eph 4:11). This approach indicates that Paul was not constructing exhaustive lists of gifts, but rather listing gifts alongside the themes he was teaching. The point of spiritual gifts is not to compete or draw attention to the individual believer. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in distributing the gifts, and Christians do not get to pick and choose. Spiritual gifts are given to build up the church. In Ephesians, the gifts Paul lists have to do with the proclamation of the Word of God, since he is focused in Ephesians on the unity and maturity of the church. First, Paul lists apostles. In a narrow sense, apostles and prophets do not exist anymore, as they were foundational gifts given to establish the church. The twelve apostles (the eleven remaining disciples plus Paul) all spent time with Jesus on this earth. Today, their role is assumed by the canonical writings of the New Testament. The apostles and prophets with their

²⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1016-18.

unique roles did not extend beyond the apostolic age.²⁵ However, in the broad sense, the word *apostle* simply means “sent ones.” Whether sent to share Christ with neighbors or to the nations, God is clearly still empowering people to live as “sent ones.”

The second spiritual gift Paul lists is prophecy. Prophets are usually associated with future-telling, but in a biblical sense they have always done more forth-telling. As with apostles, there are not biblical prophets any longer. But in a general sense, the church does still have people who are gifted to apply God’s Word to God’s people. Third, Paul lists evangelists. All disciples of Jesus are called to evangelize, but some are uniquely gifted and effective at proclaiming and explaining the gospel (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5). Some call evangelists the “obstetricians” of the church because they are gifted at bringing about new births. Fourth, and of greatest interest to this project is the category of pastor-teachers. The term *pastor* is interchangeable in the New Testament with the word *shepherd*, which describes what true pastors do—they shepherd the flocks entrusted to them (1 Pet 5:2). These are the “pediatricians” who help new believers grow into healthy mature believers. These gifts are linked by a single definite article, which most likely refers to overlapping functions—all pastors teach (since teaching is essential to pastoral ministry), but not all teachers are also pastors.²⁶ The role of these gifts is clear: to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). This means that God’s plan is to use the entire congregation, not just a single leader or even a small group of leaders (i.e., church staff) to carry out the duties and opportunities of ministry.

This paradigm is vital for ministry and to deepen the understanding that while churches may effectively use biblical organizational principles, they are living organisms, the living and active spiritual body of Christ. Kent Hughes explains,

This is a watershed text for the doctrine of the local church. It effectively eliminates the traditional model of the local church as a pyramid, with the pastor perched

²⁵ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 131.

²⁶ Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 99-100.

precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It also shoots down the model of the bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him.²⁷

The church is to have “every member ministry.” Church members should not be immature consumers but eager servants. As leadership follows the biblical blueprint for equipping the church, the body of Christ matures in both Christlikeness and in the understanding and application of sound doctrine. Believers even develop the hallmark of Christian maturity, which is the ability to hold to both truth (1 Tim 3:15) and love (1 Cor 13). The word in Greek is “exquisite” (*aletheuontes*), which means “truthing in love.” It carries the idea of not only speaking the truth but doing it. Put practically, it should be the goal of every pastor that it would be said about the church they shepherd: “They love and teach the Bible boldly and faithfully.” Throughout this process of sanctification, Christians are dependent first on Christ and then on each other. The “whole body, fitted and knit together, by every support ligament, promotes the growth of the body” (Eph 4:16). Believers have a deep obligation to each other. Everyone must do his or her part. Each has a calling to make the body work. It might seem that some parts of the body are more visible or are more important than others, but all parts of the body must be working in order to be healthy. Even the smallest parts of the body effect overall health and the ability to function. For a church to be healthy, all its members must function and work properly.

An Ephesians 4:1-16 ministry model is imperative for the growing and multiplying multi-site church. Without it, the church is tempted to superimpose a secular organizational model on the church of Jesus Christ. In this model, the pastor is not primarily a spiritual shepherd and teacher of Scripture, but more like a CEO. In the world’s model, the ministerial staff are treated like managers of church activities and programs. This sadly leaves church members to become consumers. Not using their time or spiritual gifts for ministry purposes, they atrophy, and are reduced to becoming an audience, a

²⁷ Hughes, *Ephesians*, 132.

customer, or even a critic. This pragmatism explains why so many churches are unhealthy and dysfunctional. They fail to apply biblical principles to the way their church functions.

The biblical model Paul explains is much different from a business-type model. In Paul's model, the pastor functions primarily in the role of chief shepherd and lead preacher. He enlists a team around him of gifted men to equip the church for ministry. In this much healthier model, every member is a spiritually gifted, equipped, and an empowered servant minister and missionary, serving both the church and reaching out into the community. Multi-site churches are effective because if led to embrace and follow a biblical paradigm, they utilize and develop more spiritual gifts than one mega-church at a single location. The larger the church, the less opportunity there is for most lay people to serve in positions of key leadership, as it requires a high bar of training and experience to lead at such a high level. In addition, a multi-site church enables many future senior/lead pastors to be developed rather than all the communication coming from a single preacher. In this way, multi-campus churches prioritize the equipping of pastor-shepherds in order to raise up and send out leaders to proclaim the gospel and strengthen the church.

First Timothy 3:1-7, 14-16

A biblical model of church leadership is necessary for the church to display the glory of God in its worship and witness. This includes not only the model for ministry, but the character of the leadership as well. As churches expand to multiple campuses, there is a temptation to take shortcuts and employ leaders who are talented communicators or capable organizational leaders without taking seriously their biblical qualification. In the pastoral letters, Paul teaches Timothy that the character of leaders cannot be overlooked (1 Tim 3:1-7). In 1 Timothy, Paul is writing to encourage his protégé to lead the church at Ephesus toward greater maturity in Christ through developing godly leaders, combating false doctrine, and faithfully overseeing the church while carefully conducting his own life

as an example for the believers. Pastoral leadership is a daunting and multi-faceted task, one that requires strength from the Spirit and a capable leadership team. Paul makes it clear that the role of “overseer,” or pastor/elder, is a “noble task” (3:1). He later notes that those who “serve well . . . gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (3:13). However, not everyone is qualified to serve as an elder or overseer. Just because someone is successful by the world’s standards does not necessarily qualify on is to be a spiritual leader in the church. Spiritual leaders model for the church a healthy progression toward Christlikeness. While no one except Jesus Christ himself can perfectly fulfill all of these qualifications, a genuine Spirit-filled leader will show progress in each of these areas of his life.

The first area Paul addresses is *calling*. Spiritual leaders respond to God’s call with a healthy ambition to serve. Jeff Iorg notes that the ambition of a pastor is markedly different than worldly ambition: “To aspire to become a spiritual leader means to desire to serve others, to sacrifice for them, and to prioritize spreading the gospel above all personal agendas.”²⁸ Paul emphasizes the *character* of the leader (1 Tim 3:2-3). Paul sets the bar high when it comes to character and lower when it comes to skill; churches tend to do the opposite today. Spiritual leaders are to be “above reproach” in their conduct. A leader must be self-controlled and mature, including in areas of drink, money, temper, and tongue.

Next, Paul stresses the spiritual leader’s ability to *care* effectively for those around him, beginning in his own home (1 Tim 4-5). For example, every pastor should be a “one woman man,” who upholds and follows the biblical pattern for marriage: one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant monogamous relationship. Marital faithfulness was especially of note in Ephesus, where the Temple of Artemis filled the city with prostitutes. Spiritual leaders resist temptation and stand out by holding to a biblical sexual ethic that provides the foundation for strong marriages and healthy homes. Not only must the pastor

²⁸ Jeff Iorg, *JourneyOn: Spiritual Leadership* (Brentwood, TN: EquippedChurch.es, 2016), 16.

be faithful to his wife, but he must be able to disciple *and* discipline his children, because the church and the home are to reflect and support one another. Many of the same relational skills needed to build a healthy family are necessary for building a healthy church.

When it comes to ministry *competencies*, Paul lists one: he must be able to teach. Why? Because a leader in the church must have a foundation of truth. Teaching Scripture not only enables a leader to understand and grasp truth, but it holds him accountable for understanding it at a deeper level, at which he communicates it to others. No matter what role or staff position a leader holds, he should be able to teach and do so on a consistent basis. Note that the text says “able,” not spectacular (1 Tim 3:2b). The role of church leadership is not to evaluate as a consumer the style or flashiness of the presentation, but to evaluate the content being taught. On a related note, Paul clarifies that recent converts are not candidates for spiritual oversight in the church, as they must be mature enough to avoid the many pitfalls of spiritual pride. Finally, spiritual leaders impact their *culture* through their godly reputation. Ministry leaders should be outstanding citizens who are involved in their community. People in communities often form impressions of churches and ministry organizations based on how their leaders act in public settings—not what goes on in church services or ministry meetings. Spiritual leaders are leaders wherever they go and are ambassadors for the gospel in the community, not just within the walls of the church. These qualifications for a pastor-shepherd are vital because the health of the church depends on the health and spiritual depth of its leaders. Godly spiritual leaders leading vibrant and healthy congregations as designed by God is nothing less than a display of his glory, “a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim 4:15). In the multi-site church contexts, spiritual leaders are developed to lead not just a single congregation, but to work alongside a network of churches that can saturate a region with gospel witness and ministry.

Conclusion

Through faithful preaching, careful contextualization, and a commitment to a biblical model of church organization and leadership, multi-site churches can maximize resources to fulfill the Great Commission in the communities in which they exist. While the moniker “multi-site church” is relatively new, the biblical and theological principles just reviewed make clear that a contextualized approach to the spread of the gospel is not. While not the only structure for expanding the gospel reach of churches, it is a biblically faithful model that prioritizes Great Commission ministry. The next chapter will examine the theoretical, practical, and historical development of this methodology for gospel ministry.

CHAPTER 3

THE THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES OF MULTI-SITE CHURCH MINISTRY

In the early 1950s, it is estimated that 98 percent of all hotels in the United States were stand-alone establishments that varied widely in occupancy rates, cleanliness, and amenities. Today, over 80 percent of hotels are owned by an established brand, such as Marriott or Hilton. The dramatic change in approach had its genesis a few years earlier, in the late 1940s when businessman from Tennessee came up with a new concept for accommodations away from home. After a frustrating family vacation involving too many nights at motels that were unclean, unfriendly, or both, he pioneered creating a trusted network of family-friendly hotels. When asked for a name, he decided on Holiday Inn, having recently watched the classic 1942 movie starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. The idea was a smashing success. People quickly embraced the idea of a hotel experience they could count on for quality accommodations and consistent service.¹ This innovation revolutionized the hospitality industry, and today more than 80 percent of hotels are owned by a recognized brand. This “paradigm shift” created a new method for how people traveled. Paradigm shifts are no stranger to the church landscape, as the earliest Christians embraced an approach to gathering for worship that revolutionized the growth of the early church. Multisite ministry is one approach that is a biblically faithful model in this long traditional of intentional innovation for the sake of the gospel.

¹ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 9.

A Brief History of Multi-Site Church Strategies

After Peter’s Spirit-filled sermon at Pentecost, over 3,000 new believers had to be discipled and assimilated into the church family. Acts 2 tells that they devoted themselves to prayer, praising and thanking God, serving one another, and ministering to others. This activity took place in two primary locations: in the temple and from house to house (Acts 2:46). A careful reading of the New Testament finds that this pattern of gathering in multiple locations took hold in other cities in addition to Jerusalem. In Rome, the church gathered in the home of Priscilla and Aquila and what appears to be at least two others (Rom 16:5; 14-15). The Laodiceans gathered in various locations (Col 4:15) and it can be inferred that the Corinthian church gathered in the homes of Gaius (1 Cor 14:23), Crispus (Acts 18:8), and Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15), as well as others. Whether meeting in one large assembly when and where possible, or meeting in smaller homes, the New Testament considers all these gatherings the “church” (Heb 10:23-25)—one body of believers existing in multiple locations and venues.²

Historically, the church continued to embrace a “multi-church” structure in the early centuries of Christianity. The one-bishop framework identified geographically distinct congregations, but they all came under the same church authority. The bishop model eventually developed into a full-blown hierarchical model that dominated church life until well after the Protestant Reformation. Reacting to the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and inspired by the values of independence and freedom that marked the spirit of the new world, the autonomous, independent church began to dominate the religious landscape for several hundred years.³ However, during those years attempts were made for churches to collaborate and networks of like-minded pastors to work together to reach more people together than they could apart. For example, a British church recently discovered in their charter that Charles Spurgeon (who lived from 1834-1892) started their

² Brad House and Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 33.

³ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 34.

congregation with the aim of establishing a preaching point in the south London suburbs for those who had difficulty getting to the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle. Spurgeon initially considered this part of their outreach and not an autonomous congregation. Whether the “Prince of Preachers” started the first “modern” multi-site church is debatable, but what is not debatable is that multi-site churches have become the norm for large churches in the United States today.⁴ As a method of multiplying churches, it appears that churches operating with multiple aligned campuses is a concept for which the time is right. According to the latest “Megachurch Research Report” published by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, in 2000, 23 percent of megachurches had more than one location. By the year 2020, a stunning 70 percent of megachurches operated as “one congregation in multiple locations.”⁵ Most pastors today embrace the complexities of being a multi-site congregation for the payoff of being able to reach a larger and more diverse group of people than a church can reach at one site alone. Erwin McManus states, “The multi-site movement is a strategic response to the question of how to maintain momentum and growth while not being limited to the monolithic structure of a megachurch.”⁶ While this movement has both its challenges and its detractors, it is embraced by pastors and congregations looking for new paradigms to expand mission and ministry.

On any given Sunday, over 5 million people will worship in one of more than 8,000 multi-site churches, making up 9 percent of American Protestant churchgoers.⁷ In

⁴ Most church growth experts believe that Perimeter Church in Atlanta, Georgia holds the distinction of being the first contemporary multisite church because while other early multisite churches experimented with expansion to more than one site, Perimeter Church launched in 1989 with the explicit purpose of being one church in multiple locations. House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 35.

⁵ Warren Bird and Scott Thumma, “The Changing Reality in America’s Largest Churches: Megachurch Research Report,” The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, 2021, https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Megachurch-Survey-Report_HIRR_FACT-2020.pdf, 5.

⁶ Erwin McManus, quoted in Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Revolution*, 7.

⁷ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 10.

2010, more than sixty years after Holiday Inn opened its first hotel, Brentwood Baptist Church launched its first campus, named The Church at Station Hill, in suburban Nashville. The church has learned much in the past twelve years as each campus has grown and has added six additional campuses. BBC has discovered that for all its complexities and potential pitfalls, multi-site ministry is worth it because it has enabled the church to carry out the Great Commission in ways that would not be possible if limited to one site. Multi-site churches are an emerging paradigm of local church multiplication that builds on the biblical calling of churches to reproduce healthy congregations urgently, to utilize team-based leadership strategically, and to develop strong pastors effectively.

Growing Brentwood Baptist beyond One Location

In the mid-2000s, Brentwood Baptist Church was at a crossroads. The church had relocated in 2002 to a large new campus just off Interstate 65 and had quickly outgrown the capacity at that facility. Adding multiple worship services, starting new ministries, such as a young adult outreach, and developing a family-equipping model of ministry to balance ministry efforts between the church and home, had all proven effective ministry models, enabling the church to grow rapidly alongside suburban Nashville's population boom. The church leadership began to evaluate ministry models that would allow the church to continue to grow and reach more people with the gospel in the future without being heavily dependent on the need to build even larger and more costly facilities at the current campus.

Church multiplication had been a vision of Bill Wilson, the first pastor of the church, and the church had helped support several church plants over the decades with varying degrees of success. As the church evaluated the need for multiplication, it began to evaluate emerging models, specifically the multi-site movement. A "research and development" team was put into place in 2008, and that team read books, attended conferences, enlisted consultants, and made in-person visits to multi-site churches. In the mid-2000s as House and Allison note, "the early days of the multisite revolution felt like

a frontier expedition,” and “less was known about the implications of adopting this new model because there were so few churches to learn from.”⁸ Despite the challenges of the unknown, the multisite team pressed ahead, sensing the urgency of both the Great Commission and the window of opportunity that had opened. As the team evaluated various models and strategies within the concept of multisite, priorities began to emerge, and convictions were solidified.

First, it was agreed that a multisite strategy would be effective to multiply the reach of Brentwood Baptist across middle Tennessee. Almost 40 percent of the church’s regular attendance came from families driving twenty minutes or more to reach the campus. The forecasted population growth for the area indicated that not only would there be more people moving to the area, but those families preferred to establish weekly rhythms of living, working, and worshiping in their own neighborhoods and communities. These surrounding communities were populated by newcomers whose lifestyle choices and preferences were compatible to those of the Brentwood community. Despite a nationwide recession in 2008, the Nashville economy proved resilient and giving and church growth remained strong, making Brentwood Baptist Church a church with the resources, both human and financial, to commit to a campus model.

Second, it was decided that the first campus should be located to the south, in the Thompson’s Station and Spring Hill area. The greatest concentration of future growth was predicted to happen down the Interstate 65 corridor, and the church already had a significant number of active families living in those communities, including current staff members.

Third, it was decided that the campus model would replicate the core mission, vision, values, and ministries, but that each campus would have its own campus and teaching pastor in order to contextualize both the weekly sermon and the ministry strategy to fit the community in which it was placed. Video venue models were evaluated but

⁸ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 9-10.

passed over in favor of live preaching for several reasons. A conviction of the development team was that people wanted a relationship with their teaching pastor and would prefer a live communicator to one on a screen that they would not be able to know personally. In support of this decision, the team noted that several video venue churches had been started in the Spring Hill area only to shut their doors after a season in which they were unable to gain traction or reach new people. A conviction of the senior pastor, Mike Glenn, was that the best way to develop future preachers and pastors was to give them the chance to preach weekly. As part of his personal calling to develop leaders, Glenn for years prioritized asking developing pastors to fill the pulpit at the Brentwood campus rather than host guest speakers. In addition, the opportunity to create a “preaching team” meant the church could gain synergy and maximize resources by sharing a research assistant, graphics, videos, and online resources developed for sermon series, and more. This approach, centered around a weekly collaborative preaching team meeting, also meant that there was consistent opportunity for mentorship, feedback, and evaluation, all critical elements for developing young pastors.

Going beyond preaching, the development team enlisted the help of every ministry team lead (worship, discipleship, next generation ministries, connection, pastoral care, and missions) to develop working philosophy of ministry documents that outlined both the “why” and the “how” of each ministry area that would need to be re-created at a campus. The decision was made that while governance, budget, and by-laws would be unified, it was most effective ministerially for each campus to function like a local church as much as possible. Therefore, the staff and key leaders at each location would report directly to the campus pastor, while the church-wide ministry team leads would champion ministry strategy, serve as coaches/consultants for best practices, and collaborate with the ministry team leader whenever possible. Among the strategy models being tried at the time, the model selected is the closest to what has been described as the “Federation Church Model” of multi-site. The “federation” approach focuses on being one church

contextualized in multiple locations. The key distinguishing factor that sets a “federation” approach apart from a “franchise” model is live preaching at each campus and that each campus has dedicated leadership and staff. Each campus pastor must own the overall vision of the church while capably adapting it to his particular neighborhood or community.⁹

After months of meetings, town hall gatherings, and communication campaign, in November 2008, Glenn and myself, as the development team chair, co-preached a message from Acts 13:1-4 entitled “Running Members Off.” After the message, the church was presented with this motion:

We, the Trustees of Brentwood Baptist Church affirm that the mission and vision of Brentwood Baptist Church, in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, is to be an evangelistic replicating church. We further affirm that the creation of regional campuses that remove geographic and social barriers in communities that are under-reached will be a primary strategy in carrying out this vision.

In response to this mission and vision the Brentwood Baptist Church Trustees recommend that a South Campus Implementation Team be formed to proceed with developing and implementing a Trustee approved plan for the first regional campus to be located in the South Williamson County area.

The church approved this proposal with 98 percent in favor, and the first campus of Brentwood Baptist Church was born. The “South Campus” hosted a first gathering, a Christmas Eve service, in the old Spring Hill High School Gymnasium on December 24, 2008, with 160 in attendance, lighting candles in celebration of the incarnation of Jesus and symbolic of the commitment to bring the light of Christ to a new community. In January 2009, fifty families committed to the launch team, comprising 100 adults and 75 children and students. These families committed to a semester-long equipping class, to launch in-home small group Bible studies, and to begin sharing the gospel and inviting neighbors to join. On February 28, 2010, The Church at Station Hill hosted its first official Sunday morning worship gathering at Heritage Middle School, with 359 in attendance.

⁹ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 61-63. The authors identify Brentwood Baptist Church in their book as an example of the “Federation Model” approach.

From the decision to begin a multi-site church multiplication strategy, the church has both embraced and wrestled with the many implications of being a multisite congregation. As everyone involved with a multisite church will agree, one of the characteristics of this movement is constant evolution that often feels akin to “building a plane in the air.”¹⁰ A multisite church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and governance, but that is the bare minimum. A multisite strategy must be subject to consistent evaluation and re-evaluation of nearly every aspect of ministry, including but not limited to best practices, resource allocation, staffing, and leadership development.¹¹ Similar to parenting for the first time, launching the first campus had the mixed emotions of excitement and experimentation. Re-creating the core ministries of a large and well-established church in a middle school cafeteria with a fraction of the staff on a fraction of the budget came with significant trade-offs. Over the years, with the growth of staff and budget, the church addressed problems by hiring more people or spending more money, developing complex solutions to overcome challenges. New campuses could not solve problems in the same way, so it forced the Station Hill congregation to become more innovative and creative with limited resources. Core ministries were forced to adapt to the new normal, and many became more focused as a result. If a ministry was not healthy at the first campus, then why re-create it at a second? If a program was not effective at the reaching the lost, then why attempt that same program in a different community? This new methodology forced not only the campus to adapt but for the entire church to think more critically about its approach to ministry. While the multi-site launch process was healthy, that process is also hard for some people to accept. Staff who had become highly specialized now had to lead and think more globally. Lay leaders who were fond of particular programs or events sometimes found those programs and events phased out

¹⁰ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 21.

¹¹ Surratt, Ligon, and Bird, *The Multi-Site Revolution*, 18.

because they were ineffective or because there simply were not enough leaders or resources to support them all.

Despite the challenges and the steep learning curve, one outcome made it all worth it: new people were reached with the gospel. Launching a first campus solidified a core conviction that the mission of spreading the gospel can and should trump methodology. From the beginning, the Station Hill campus saw people coming to faith in Christ, being baptized, being discipled, and being mobilized to serve. Within the first two years, over one hundred people came to saving faith in Christ and were baptized, and the average weekly attendance nearly doubled. New leaders were developed to oversee ministry and early on the campus attracted a number of members with significant ministry experience who wanted to use their time and talent to help grow this new work. The Station Hill campus not only reached new people who likely never would have been reached by one campus alone, but it re-ignited the church planting vision of the church as a whole.

In 2014, through a unique combination of proactive vision and reaction to opportunities presented, the church added three more campuses in less than one year, bringing the total number of campuses to five. The Church at Avenue South was launched to reach young professionals and families closer to the urban core of Nashville. The church merged with the former West Franklin Baptist Church in the influential and historical suburb of Franklin and with the former Woodbine Baptist Church, a congregation in a neighborhood that had transformed into the primary ethnic corridor of diversifying Nashville. This season of opportunity was exciting, as such growth almost always is, but churchwide leaders and systems were beginning to feel the strain. While the daily complexities had to be navigated, the momentum continued to grow because the church was baptizing and reaching more people than ever before. In 2017, Brentwood Baptist merged with Lockeland Springs Baptist Church in historic and now urban-chic East Nashville as a sixth campus. Around that same time, a core team formed to launch another strategic campus in the town of Nolensville, a suburban enclave dubbed one of

America's "Millennial Mayberrys" by the *Wall Street Journal*.¹² Most recently, in 2018, the church merged with Harpeth Heights Baptist Church to have a campus in the western part of the Nashville Metro area. The church now has a total of eight campuses, all under the Brentwood Baptist banner. The impact on every ministry area was significant. Church membership swelled to around 12,000 members and the average weekly attendance at the campuses (3,500) now on most Sundays exceeds the weekly attendance at the Brentwood campus (3,000). However, the "federation" approach, while healthy for ministry, is challenging to manage organizationally. In a model in which each campus is allowed to contextualize, how much adaptation is too much? How much focus is placed on "core" ministries and how much time and effort is given to ministry unique to each different community? What is the best way to allocate resources when some campuses are in wealthier suburbs and others in economically depressed neighborhoods with high numbers of ethnic residents? Taking on this much change stretched the highly structured systems of the church nearly to their limits. The tension was felt at every level of church life of trying to balance "Brentwood Baptist DNA" while launching and merging into new and diverse locations throughout the area. Brad House and Gregg Allison note, "Multisite has the unfortunate advantage of helping churches to expand faster than the leadership can grow to lead them" and we were in danger of outrunning our capacity.¹³ The leadership model at the time centered around the role of a Senior Executive Pastor and when he resigned in late 2018 under the weight of so much responsibility and complexity, the trustees of the church used the opportunity to re-think the organizational structure. While the church had been blessed with excellent leadership for decades, it was clear the scope of the multi-site vision could not be carried out any longer by a system that hinged on one key administrative leader supporting the sweeping vision of the senior pastor.

¹² Valerie Bauerlein, "American Suburbs Swell Again as a New Generation Escapes the City," *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/american-suburbs-swell-again-as-a-new-generation-escapes-the-city-11561992889>.

¹³ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 25.

In 2019, the trustees created a regionalized structure to better undergird the campus system and empowered an Executive Leadership Team instead of sole Executive Pastor to utilize a more team-based approach to the multi-site challenge. The church had answered the call to reproduce congregations urgently, with eight campuses, a deaf congregation, a Chinese congregation, and over thirty additional church multiplication partners in traditional church planting, in ethnic church plantings, and in strategic partnership. The senior pastor cast the compelling vision for Brentwood Baptist Church to not only be a multi-site church, but for it to create a network of one hundred healthy churches in partnership in middle Tennessee and the church leadership and membership had embraced this goal. Next it was time to focus on leadership structure and development that can support even more multiplication in the future. Over a decade of launching campuses, Brentwood Baptist Church discovered that multi-site ministry was an effective method of multiplying congregations, developing leaders, and revitalizing churches.

Discovering the Strengths of Team-Based Leadership

Multi-site ministry is not only effective at expanding the gospel outreach of a church, but it can also steward kingdom resources efficiently, specifically the crucial human resource of leaders. Single site churches can dramatically limit the leadership opportunities of a growing congregation because there can only be one primary preacher, one primary worship leader, and a select few ministry team leaders. Multi-site churches, however, immediately create a number of leadership roles to be filled by gifted and talented staff and members who otherwise would not have the opportunity to develop to their kingdom potential.

The multi-site model also allows less people to be “spectators” and more people to be full “participants” in the life of the church. To illustrate this point, a key leader who had served on the media team at the Brentwood campus for over two decades suddenly stopped serving. When I reached out, he communicated that the church had hired a

professional media director who served in the role he used to serve in as a volunteer. With the massive growth of the church and the increasing investment and complexity of the media ministry, he understood the need for the professional role. He was not bitter or angry, yet he felt disenfranchised, and was not sure where to serve. I shared with him the vision to launch the first campus and told him I could use him to volunteer to help build the media team, to which he immediately agreed. He lives within walking distance of the original campus but was more than willing to commute thirty minutes to church because he had a place to serve once again. Multi-site ministry creates a greater number of opportunities to identify, equip, and exercise the time, talents, and gifts of staff and lay leaders. While Brentwood Baptist Church is well-resourced, no church can hire enough staff to carry out all the ministry that needs to be done. In fact, it is unbiblical to give all the leadership to the hands of a few while neglecting to develop the calling and gifts of each member. One of the five stated values of BBC is “uniquely called”—the conviction that every believer has Spirit-empowered gifts that can and should be used to advance the gospel. This approach makes team-based leadership an essential for multi-site ministry.

Despite the myth of the heroic leader, it is widely acknowledged that team-based leadership has strengths that organizational models built upon individual leaders cannot match. Respected organizational researchers Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson note that “teams are now everywhere: in business and industry, in government, in schools, hospitals and professional associations . . . the movement to collaborative teamwork has been one of the sea changes that have swept through organizations during the last two decades of the twentieth century.”¹⁴ Jon R. Katenbach and Douglas K. Smith in their highly acclaimed book *The Wisdom of Teams*, acknowledge that “a real team—appropriately focused and rigorously disciplined—is the most versatile unit organizations have for

¹⁴ Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), xi.

meeting both performance and change challenges in today's complex world.”¹⁵ From Moses who took instruction from his father-in-law Jethro to create teams to help him lead the million-plus Israelites into smaller and more manageable groups (Exod 18:21-23), to the apostles who identified and developed servant leaders to help them with the daily distribution of bread to widows (Acts 6:1-7), God's people have been instructed in “team-based leadership” principles as found in the Bible for generations. Team-based leadership is critical in the multi-site church due to not only the simple need for leaders, but the complexity and coordination needed to operate a church meeting and minister at more than one location. As the model of church grows in complexity, the solutions require the active participation of diverse perspectives.¹⁶ “Life is better as a team” is a common phrase that communicates there are more perspectives, gifts, and experiences than just one person at work. Multi-site ministry can and should empower teams that are intentionally built, empowered for service, and maximized for effectiveness.

Just as no one person can perform a symphony, no one in a church has all the spiritual gifts, not even a highly gifted senior pastor. While the role of the pastor is key as a “chief among equals,” Jesus never sent anyone out alone in ministry. He personally disciplined a team of twelve men. When he sent them out into villages, he sent them two by two. When he sent them out after his resurrection to wait on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, he sent 120 of them. When the first missionaries were commissioned in Acts 13, two leaders and one protégé were sent to spread the gospel and start churches. Teamwork and collaboration are crucial to the spread of the gospel in the Bible and that principle remains true to the spread of the gospel now. Multi-site churches must build multiple effective teams that can re-create and carry out the core ministry functions of the local church, contextualized to the local community. A good team always starts with the right

¹⁵ Jon R. Katenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press Review, 2015), 11.

¹⁶ LaFasto and Larson, *When Teams Work Best*, xix.

people; people who are committed to the vision of the church, called by God to serve, and willing to sacrifice their time, talent, and treasure to advance the mission. Teams are built not just by identifying a group of people and holding a meeting but by a group of people collectively facing great projects, compelling goals, and shared tasks.¹⁷ Great teams are not merely formed but are forged as they serve together. The task of launching a new church work is a multi-faceted challenge that creates strong bonds among the launch team. The work can be physically demanding, emotionally draining, and spiritually depleting, but the joy that comes from watching God move and work to establish a witnessing body of the believers is life changing.

After years of planning, months of equipping, and a long week of details, I remember the incredible thought coming over me during the very first worship gathering: Lord willing, there will be a body of believers called “The Church at Station Hill” worshipping and witnessing until Christ returns from this day forward. While I was the pastor, I could clearly not have done it on my own, but only with a committed team of leaders who were willing to serve alongside me in ministry. Initially, I was the only full-time staff member devoted to launching the campus, and I learned quickly that I could not do all God wanted the campus to do. By necessity, I had to identify, equip, and empower leaders and teams in order to “give ministry away.” As Ken Blanchard notes, “Today’s leader must be an enabler of people and a facilitator of teams—not only as an effective team leader but as an effective team member as well.”¹⁸ An illustration of this kind of leadership comes from the world of baseball. Today teams are highly specialized, but in the early decades of professional baseball, it was not uncommon for players to have multiple roles. In some cases, a position player also doubled as the manager of the club in the early twentieth century. He not only made strategic decisions for the team, but he hit,

¹⁷ Robert C. Crosby, *The Teaming Church: Ministry in the Age of Collaboration* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012), 42.

¹⁸ Ken Blanchard, Donald Carew, and Eunice Parisi-Carew, *The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams* (New York: Morrow, 2000), vii.

ran, and fielded a position as well. Likewise, as a pastor I must participate in the life of the church and model what it looks like to serve, while at the same time guiding and organizing others to do the same. I was blessed to have an outstanding team of committed leaders who were both gifted and servant minded. Fully committed to the mission, they got to experience the same joy I did by having a front-row seat to watch God bring a new worshiping, disciple-making, and witnessing congregation to life.

Team-based leadership not only is effective within the campuses, but across campuses as well. With eight campus pastors guided by a senior pastor, we get to share insights from each of our perspectives and tackle pastoral challenges with collaborative feedback. While all eight of us share the same core convictions and ascribe to the same theological framework, we all have different areas of strengths, interests, and ministry backgrounds. Two campus pastors have served as missionaries and bring a missionary mind-set to the pastoral team and preaching team meetings. One campus pastor is a former professional athlete and brings great energy and insight from a lifetime of discipline and coaching that enabled him to compete at the highest level. We have been educated by a number of different seminaries and have unique interests and hobbies, so we get to share from a lifetime of experience. We spend time together weekly, and longer periods of time together seasonally, to create healthy relationships, which helps create a leadership culture of truthfulness and candor, where knowledge, insights, conflicts, and potentials are not ignored, but honestly and regularly acknowledged.¹⁹ To illustrate the point, the pastoral team was both stretched and strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic. While we each had our own personal convictions and the unique temperaments of our own congregations to shepherd through a confusing and chaotic pandemic, we were able to hammer out churchwide policies to help navigate gatherings as safely as possible with as little disruption to ministry as possible. Churches with a single pastor do not have other staff pastors to rely on for prayer, wise counsel, and collective wisdom of the team. We were

¹⁹ Crosby, *The Teaming Church*, 44.

far from unanimous agreement on every decision, but we committed to walk in unity in whatever the team decided.

In addition, when policies were challenged by church members, we were able to assure them that we did not make any decisions unilaterally but only after prayer, wise counsel, and deliberation from an experienced team. During a two-year stretch, our team was able to immediately put into practice the very principles we had been learning about through adaptive leadership as we learned to “canoe the mountains” together through a challenge none of us had experienced before, a worldwide pandemic.²⁰ The relational trust we had built with our congregations and our past competency in ministry effectiveness enabled our church leadership to guide our church into uncharted territory with minimal losses and confusion. According to data collected in late spring 2020 by Barna Group, one in three practicing Christians dropped out of church completely during COVID-19.²¹ While most churches experienced significant losses of members, leaders, and giving due to disagreements and politics related to the pandemic, our core remained united, and we even moved forward with some ministry goals during a difficult season. There were a fair share of critics and second-guessing, but because of the team-based leadership model and church governance that shares decision-making among staff and key lay leaders, no one had to walk the difficult journey of leadership alone.

By God’s grace and because of best team-based leadership practices, ministry never came to a standstill during the pandemic as it did for many congregations. We simplified and adjusted in some ways that were healthy and needed. For example, we had

²⁰ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015). In the book, the author uses the story of Lewis and Clark’s expedition to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase as an example of how many leadership principles are built on false mental models. When the famous explorers arrived at the headwaters of the Missouri River, they expected to find the “Northwest Passage”—a river leading gently down to the Pacific Ocean. They instead discovered the Rocky Mountains. They had to lead their “Corps of Discovery” to adapt or risk failing their mission. The church staff had read this book and was in a day-long seminar with the author when the first stay at home orders were issued in March 2020, an unforgettable moment.

²¹ Wendy Wang, “The Decline in Church Attendance in COVID America,” Institute for Family Studies, January 20, 2022, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-decline-in-church-attendance-in-covid-america>.

grappled with our approach to the bulletin for years. With eight contextualized campuses, it was challenging, expensive, and time-consuming to produce a visually excellent bulletin for each congregation every week. The pandemic allowed us to transition to a virtual bulletin delivered directly to smart phones, which is not only much easier for the communications team to produce but saves us nearly forty thousand dollars a year that can now be used for ministry and missions. No one person was solely responsible for this innovation, but rather a team-based approach enabled us to see an opportunity, develop a solution, and implement it effectively, even during a season of disruption and change.

One of the great joys of team-based leadership is the opportunity to work together in relationship. Working side-by-side to accomplish a goal and to see the kingdom advance is life-giving because it connects leaders beyond just the outcome. People are built and hard-wired for relationship and one of the ways people bear the image of a Triune God is through the need and desire to work with others to do more together than apart. Some experts in team-based ministry call this doing “church in the round.”²² If a multi-site church is to succeed in carrying out healthy ministry and developing true biblical community, there must be a high degree of trust, stability, and high-caliber relationships at all levels of church life. Multi-site churches create a catalytic environment in which teams-based leadership is a must because it leverages time and talent across multiple congregations and maximizes spiritual gifts. Nowhere is this more important than among campus pastors and leadership teams. For the church to fulfill its high calling of finishing the task of getting the gospel to all people groups (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20), a new generation of pastors must be equipped and developed. Brentwood Baptist has discovered that multi-site ministry enables churches to utilize team-based leadership strategically, leveraging time and talent across multiple congregations and maximizing spiritual gifts.

²² George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 10.

Developing a Team of Pastors for the Future

In today's world, a leadership gap threatens the future of many institutions, organizations, and non-profits. Scripture is clear that the church will ultimately endure and prevail, yet the effects of poor leadership hindering the reach of the gospel and the health of churches is evident. To make matters worse, anecdotal evidence and research is beginning to emerge nationally showing that the pandemic has led many pastors to re-think their careers in ministry or to give up on ministry altogether.²³ One of the great challenges for the church in every era, but especially for this cultural moment, is how to train the next generation of pastors to understand and deepen their sense of calling, which is what maintains a sense of long-term commitment when pastoral leadership grows difficult. In addition, developing pastors need a safe place to discover and practice their gifts—where they can be nurtured and coached without facing immense pressure to perform under the “spotlight” or in the “fishbowl” of public ministry. Finally, future leaders must be given the opportunity to develop leadership competencies over a long period of time in an environment in which they are empowered to carry out their ministerial calling and duties, but at the same time in a setting in which they can find support and encouragement. There are simply things that one cannot learn solely in a classroom, such as how to preach the funeral of a young child, how to biblically counsel a struggling marriage with both grace and truth, or how to handle a sensitive and emotionally charged situation that calls for church discipline. There are also things a pastor only learns once fully engaged in ministry, such as the discipline of weekly sermon preparation. It is one thing to be asked to preach on occasion, when there is ample time to prepare and discover excellent illustrations, stories, and anecdotes. It is another when a pastor preaches to the same congregation week in and week out. As we like to joke about in our preaching team meetings, it often feels like Sunday comes around every three days: It is the day before, it

²³ Michelle Boorstein, “The First Christmas as Lay Person: Burned Out by the Pandemic, Many Clergy Quit in the Past Year,” *The Washington Post*, December 24, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/12/24/christmas-covid-pandemic-clergy-quit/>.

is Sunday, it is the day after—and then you get to do it all over again. It is estimated that if a pastor preaches on average two messages a week he will produce around one thousand pages of new content a year—in a thirty-year preaching ministry that is the content equivalent of the latest edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica.²⁴ How does a pastor balance sermon preparation with other pastoral duties? The best way to learn is by practice and faithful, consistent application of leadership principles. This is one of the main tangible benefits of multi-site church models. Rather than having only a senior pastor and primary preacher, a church has the opportunity to develop multiple young men as pastors, shepherds, and communicators of Scripture. House and Allison concur, “The federation model also has some very practical benefits in developing leaders. Campus pastors have more opportunities to exercise their gifts as leaders by expressing their ownership of the church’s vision, adapting the church in their multiple locations, and developing their preaching gifts and other leadership skills.”²⁵

One of the gifts of being a pastor in a multi-site church is the opportunity to clarify and deepen the conviction and direction of a calling. Most young men called to pastor have been counseled at some point, “If there’s anything else you can see yourself doing, go do that for the glory of God. But if you are called to be a pastor, you won’t be satisfied doing anything else!” While that is helpful practical advice for clarifying a call, it takes mentorship and experience to authenticate and validate that calling. A calling to ministry will be tested, as a pastor cannot have an enduring ministry without a strong sense of a divine summons. The perceived prestige of the pulpit is no longer a reality in a post-evangelical culture, nor is it the road to a life of wealth and ease. The legacy pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, the late Adrian Rogers, was famous for joking about his call to preach: “I’d rather be a Baptist preacher than have a paying job!” In the

²⁴ Kie Bowman, “Exegesis for the Busy Pastor,” Preaching Resource, August 7, 2020, <https://preachingresource.com/blog/exegesis-for-the-busy-pastor/>.

²⁵ House and Allison, *MultiChurch*, 64.

multi-site context of ministry, young men called to pastor can be identified and equipped all while serving in a system that enables them to serve while still being developed and mentored.

Serving under a senior pastor and alongside other experienced pastors enables those called into ministry to chart a biblical direction for their leadership from the start. In an era in which leadership is viewed through the lens of rank, status, celebrity, style, or the number of followers on social media, Jesus taught a view of leadership that was distinctly out of step from the wisdom of our age. Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must first be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:26-28). John MacArthur summarizes, “The truest kind of leadership demands service, sacrifice, and selflessness. A proud and self-promoting person is not a good leader by Christ’s standard, regardless of how much clout he or she might wield.”²⁶ MacArthur goes on to note, “Put simply, leadership is influence. The ideal leader is someone whose life and character motivate people to follow. The best kind of leadership derives its authority first from the force of a righteous example, and not merely from the power of prestige, personality, or position.”²⁷ Where can a young pastor cultivate the character he needs to match his leadership gifts? Where can he learn to use his influence to guide others toward Christ instead of himself? Where can he learn that pursuing righteousness will yield more spiritual fruit in the long run than pursuing prestige or position? The structure of a multi-site church allows the young pastor to grow into his calling while at the same time placing him around an experienced and wiser pastoral team for accountability and shepherding.

²⁶ John MacArthur, *Called to Lead: 26 Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), v.

²⁷ MacArthur, *Called to Lead*, vi.

Shepherding is one of the primary metaphors by which biblical authors conceptualize leadership.²⁸ Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises, “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). This short promise speaks to the reality that a “good shepherd” is not only competent to manage, guide, and protect a flock of sheep, but that the shepherd knows ultimately the sheep are not his, but belong to the Father. The good shepherd seeks to lead the sheep according to God’s heart for the sheep, with a sharp, godly mind. Young pastors need to not only believe this to be true in their head, but they need to be convicted in their hearts that this is the essence of pastoral ministry. As Glenn often says, “There is an important difference between delivering a message and preaching to a congregation you know and love.” In a multi-site ministry model, pastors learn that ministry is caught as well as taught as they walk with other pastors who are shepherding their flocks in the same larger church family.

Another gift of being a pastor in a multi-campus system is a great freedom to develop and maximize spiritual gifts rather than trying to compensate for a lack of gifting. Mike Glenn, Senior Pastor of BBC, models this well. While he has strong spiritual gifts in the areas of visionary leadership, preaching, and exhortation, he has the humility to admit that he has few administrative gifts. Glenn likes to joke that he can see “A to Z,” but he has no idea about “B, C, D, etc.” In other words, he can see where the church needs to go, but he does not have the gifting or patience to work through all the details. Over the years, the church body has recognized this as well, and has encouraged him to pursue and develop his gifts while placing around him a staff with strong administrative pastors and organizational leaders.

The positive by-product of this approach has led to a carefully thought-out system of checks and balances. Despite the size and influence of the church, the senior

²⁸ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 21.

pastor has a system of accountability and balance that actually strengthens his pastoral ministry. Church members who know Glenn can affirm his gifts and at the same time affirm other key leaders who have the strengths he does not. Newcomers are pleased to discover that there is little “cult of personality” at Brentwood Baptist Church. The freedom and balance of this model has made Glenn passionate to be sure that the pastors being trained under his leadership operate in the same way. In a time in which pastors are expected to function like CEOs of major companies, the leadership structure of the church works to protect pastors from the areas that are not in their gifting. For example, my gifts are in preaching, teaching, and developing leaders. While I have some administrative gifts, there is still not time in the day for one pastor to “do it all.” When the Station Hill campus launched, I was responsible for creating an entire campus of ministry opportunities and outreach, but I did not have to do it by myself. The campus had a team full of gifted creatives who created the website, communication platforms, and print pieces. Our church had a business office full of administratively gifted and trained people who handled the accounting and payroll functions for the new work. While I was still ultimately responsible for campus communications and ethical operating principles for handling finances, I did not have to manage or deal with those issues on a daily basis. I had to be sure that the team followed the policies and worked within the system, but my time and energy went toward preaching the Word, sharing the gospel, and equipping leaders and ministry team.

The multi-site “federation” approach also gives campus pastors the invaluable opportunity to develop their ministry competencies alongside of their gifts. One of the greatest challenges for any organization is the development of a “leadership pipeline” that continually trains up the next generation of leaders. In the church, the best way to train ministers and disciple-makers is to entrust ministry to “faithful men” so they can learn “on the job” (2 Tim 2:2). In a multi-campus system with eight teaching pastors, eight men are weekly preparing and preaching sermons. Not only does the preaching team

prepare eight young men to preach the Word “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), but each campus pastor also has staff members he is developing for ministry. Ten to fifteen Sundays out of the year, one of the staff at that particular campus has the opportunity to preach as well. In this way, around twenty-five different men preaching across the campuses in any given year. While some of these men will be developed for campuses and ministries within the Brentwood Baptist church family, several will also move on to lead and preach at other churches, training leaders for kingdom growth as well. Campuses also become outstanding “learning labs” where pastors can learn the week in and week out disciplines and habits of effective pastoral ministry, and they can serve as “research and development” sites for intentional innovation. When the church wanted to launch an equipping class to train members in gospel conversations with the goal of having 500,000 witnessing opportunities in the next five years, the first step was training a small group at the Avenue South campus to see what was effective and helpful and what was not. The pastor at that campus has a passion for evangelism, so he was empowered to lead the way in developing that important ministry strategy. Once the content and delivery of the class were refined, it was reproduced across all eight regional campuses, training nearly one thousand people in how to share their faith within less than six months. From leading staff meetings to making hospital visits, campus pastors get to experience every aspect of ministry, but they are surrounded by teams who not only help carry the pastoral load but who can help coach them to improve their skills. Multi-site churches create ministry environments in which a future generation of lead pastors can be equipped to deepen their calling, maximize their spiritual gifts, and develop crucial competencies for leadership.

Challenges and Pitfalls to a Multi-Site Model

No ministry model is perfect this side of heaven. There are some potential pitfalls to this model as well. A number of pastors believe that multisite and even multiservice church structures are contrary to the biblical idea of a church being a single

“assembly.” Jonathan Leeman believes that despite the Great Commission focus of multisite churches, their wise financial and time stewardship, and the strong potential for greater pastoral health, their models prize conversion and spiritual growth over a one-body assembly. He believes that multiservice and multichurch churches repudiate the Bible’s definition of a church, redefine what a church is, and reshape the church morally. This allows abdication of key functions by the members of the church and amounts to usurpation by the leaders.²⁹ As demonstrated above, while multisite is clearly not the only structure that has biblical support, it is a biblically faithful model that does come with its own set of practical challenges. A large multisite system does not make decisions quickly in order to respond to real-time ministry needs and opportunities. Due to sharing a unified budget, requests must be made months (even years) in advance for new staff, new ministry budgets, and for facility upgrades to get requests into a planning cycle. Campus members can sometimes feel disenfranchised from the decision-making process. Campuses can be tempted to “coast” because they are not solely responsible for making budget each year or that ministry goals are met. The multi-campus model in particular can exist is an organizational “no man’s land,” where campus pastors have some freedom but can also be frustrated with the feeling of being micromanaged or having limited freedom to pursue the ministries they are convicted could be the most fruitful.³⁰ Church leadership is continually tasked with balance between a strong central mission with greater freedom and input from the campuses with the federation model approach. Campuses can plateau after a season of growth and need a catalyst to spark healthy progress. This requires church leadership always having to stay a step ahead developmentally. Brentwood Baptist trustees are currently working on creating pathways for campuses to grow into fully developed, independent congregations in the future. The

²⁹ Jonathan Leeman. *One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Models* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 35-36.

³⁰ House and Allision, *MultiChurch*, 65.

goal is to never build an empire, but to advance the kingdom of Jesus, one healthy local church with one healthy pastor in leadership, at a time. Moving beyond a “franchise” model, the vision is to see the day where over 100 healthy churches in network and partnership together saturate every community in middle Tennessee with the gospel. The Engage Church Network will be built on the strength of pastors working in close relationship with one another, a model tested and refined through the preaching team of the church. The desire is for God to use what has been learned from experience as a multi-site church to fuel the multiplication of many more healthy churches, to maximize the gifts of staff and lay leaders alike, and to develop strong pastors who can lead and multiply even more churches until people across the region speak the same words as the people of Thessalonica: “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” (Acts 17:6).

Conclusion

The preaching team model of BBC has implications for the future of the church far beyond the pulpit. The entire model is built to reproduce healthy churches top to bottom with gospel urgency, make the most of team-based leadership, and help develop strong pastoral leadership, both for campuses and for other churches. If led effectively, this model has a “sweet spot” in which several key pastoral values overlap to create a healthier and more sustainable model for pastoral leadership. As a pastor who has experienced twelve years in this model, I can testify to its strengths. Pastors are able to develop preaching skills, pastoral leadership competencies, and lead congregations toward missional growth concurrently without being out on the “leadership limb” all alone. For growth to take place, the church must constantly improve its preaching, the development of its leaders, and its ability to learn from like-minded churches in order to document and codify best practices for effective multi-site ministry. The next chapter describes the process engaged to improve preaching, collaboration, and leadership.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to improve a theological and methodological framework for the preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church and its regional campuses that will result in greater unity, alignment, and effectiveness in gospel proclamation as well as providing transferrable principles for other multi-site churches and networks that would prefer a preaching team model to a video preaching model. In consultation with the senior pastor, sermon research assistant, and preaching team, it was agreed that four methods would be the most helpful in improving the team already have in place. The first goal was to assess the current effectiveness of the preaching team in the areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration through weekly meeting. The first phase of the project to complete this goal was accomplished over six weeks with the preaching team at BBC. The second goal was to increase knowledge by conducting a review of ten other multi-site preaching teams to borrow best practices and areas for growth and improvement. The second phase of this project was accomplished over a three-month period in electronic and phone communication with the teaching pastors of ten churches. This phase took additional time as I awaited responses to the questions I distributed electronically. The third goal of the project was to develop a consistent set of standards and expectations, or “points of excellence,” for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was accomplished over a period of eight weeks working with the preaching team. Finally, the fourth goal was to develop a self-evaluation rubric that measures sermon focus, alignment, and areas of improvement for each teaching pastor to utilize in evaluation of their preaching. This phase of the project took eight weeks to accomplish, working with the preaching team to distribute the rubric, allowing

them a month to complete their self-evaluations over the span of a four-week sermon series, and then to gather and collate the evaluations.

Phase 1: Assessment of the Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team

The preaching team of Brentwood Baptist Church has grown out of the logical outcome of the “federation” multi-site model adopted by the church. Prior to the mid-2000s, the senior pastor tackled sermon preparation alone. In 2004, the first sermon research assistant was hired to help with background research and alignment of sermon messages with the other ministries of the church. Seeing both the need for trained substitute preachers and the opportunity to develop younger preachers, the senior pastor expanded this team to include two younger staff ministers (including myself) in 2006. BBC utilized a “gallery” church model at the time (one church expanded to multiple services and venues), over time the preaching team expanded to include the deaf church pastor, the Chinese congregation pastor, and at times the Kairos (young adult ministry) pastor.¹ This team met weekly to study the preaching text, plan future sermons and series, and evaluate gospel response.

In the early days of the preaching team, it was informal, relational, and felt very much like a small study group. Adding the first campus did not change that dynamic much because the first campus pastor (myself) had already been a part of the meetings for several years. However, in 2014, the church added three new campuses and the environment shifted from a small group of less than five each week to a regular meeting of ten and sometimes more. The “preaching team” adjusted everything from the way sermon research materials were delivered to the size and location of the meeting room. The sermon research assistant initially customized sermon research documents for each pastor based on his favorite commentaries and resources, but that research brief now had to be

¹ For a more detailed explanation of the “Gallery Church Model,” see Brad House and Gregg Allison, *MultiChurch* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 55-56.

standardized for a larger team. With the addition of campuses and greater complexity over the years, a representative from the discipleship/groups ministry was added to align sermon-based small group curriculum. The preaching team enlisted representatives from the communications team to help refine series and sermon titles, and to create design graphics packages and videos that support each series. Seasonally, the worship ministers join so they can hear the thought process behind each series and sermon and consider what songs, hymns, and creative moments in the worship service best align with the “big idea” of each Sunday.² These additions and adjustments were made primarily “on the fly,” without slowing down to formally evaluate what is still effective and what is no longer helpful. Therefore, to improve the team and maximize time together, it was agreed that this project would assess the preaching team in three tangible areas: the levels of satisfaction of the (1) sermon research materials; (2) weekly preaching team meeting; (3) and annual sermon planning and equipping cycle. This assessment was accomplished through the following process.

To meet this goal, I developed a satisfaction survey that provided the opportunity for both quantitative (rank 1-10) and qualitative (“in your opinion” questions) feedback for all three areas.³ In week 1, I presented the survey to the preaching team for feedback and suggestions for improvement. After minor editing, the survey was distributed electronically to the preaching team with instructions for completion. During week 2, the survey was collected from all participants and the data was collated. In week 3, a summary document of the results was presented to the preaching team for discussion and feedback. During weeks 4 and 5, I interviewed the eight campus pastors for a greater depth of qualitative feedback as well as reaction. In week 6 of the project, I wrote a one-

² Dave Ferguson, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message, Multiply the Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). This resource outlines how one multi-site church aligns their ministries around the central idea of the sermon weekly through intentional worship planning and sermon-based small groups.

³ See appendix 1 for survey.

page executive summary of the finding and presented it to the preaching team for further clarification of findings and to discuss steps of improvement.⁴

The results of the survey demonstrated that, overall, the preaching team is “very satisfied” with both the weekly sermon research briefs and our team meetings. This does not mean that there is not room for improvement however, as the research identified areas of potential growth. First, on “sermon research materials” the team gave a score of 7.75 on a 10-point scale. The highest score (most helpful) was the “sermon synopsis statement” (sometimes called a “sticky statement”), which ranked at 7.67. The lowest score was given to the “suggested sermon outline,” which received a 5.92. The greatest overall strength of the weekly sermon research document is the time savings per pastor of at least two to three hours of research time per week. In the interviews, several pastors noted that the sermon research document helped guide their research by quickly helping them identify sermon themes and “jump starting” the sermon preparation process. Weaknesses noted by the team were the repetitive use of the same or similar resources. In addition, the team wanted to see more consistent illustration and application suggestions. If one thing could be added, the team agreed it would be more keyword studies and language helps. This is no surprise from pastors who value the deep study of Scripture but still must juggle several ministry responsibilities every week.

Table 1. Preaching team satisfaction survey results

Research Brief Items	Average Score (10-point scale)
Sermon Synopsis Statement	7.67
Suggested Outline	5.92
Word Studies (Biblical Languages)	6.92
Commentary Summaries	7.17
Example Sermons from other Pastors	7.25
Articles	7.5
Illustration Ideas	6.25
Sermon Brief Overall Satisfaction	7.75

⁴ See appendix 2 for the complete executive summary of the Preaching Team Satisfaction Survey.

The “weekly preaching team meeting” ranked even higher than the research material, 8.47 on a 10-point scale, indicating the high value the pastors place on this highly collaborative and engaging meeting. The low score was given to our time in prayer at 5.75, which usually consists of a short opening and closing prayer. The men universally indicated that while they understand the need to respect schedules, they would like to put a higher priority on praying together as a team. The highest score was the “opportunity to contextualize” at 9.58. This high score can be attributed to the method of the senior pastor, who makes it a common practice near the end of the meeting to ask each pastor the pointed question, “How do you plan to preach this text to your congregation?” In the interviews, the pastors shared that the strength of the preaching team meeting is the high level of engagement and participation. This speaks highly of the way the meetings are facilitated, with no one person, not even the senior pastor, dominating the conversation. Several pastors commented on the helpfulness of the contributors due to the depth of ministry experience present in the room and the diversity of perspectives from the deaf pastor (who brings a very literal, practical, and visual interpretation to the text), the Chinese pastor (who brings a non-Western lens to the study), and the ministry residents (who bring the millennial and Gen Z perspective). The greatest weakness of the meeting is the timing of the meeting on late Monday afternoons (3:30-4:30 PM CST), which can lead to fatigue and a lack of focus at times. The greatest needs of the group moving forward are more time in prayer and more time in sermon evaluation.

Table 2. Preaching team meeting evaluation scores

Component of Preaching Team Meeting	Average Score (10-Point Scale)
Time of the Meeting	8.17
Length of Meeting	8.42
Location of the Meeting	7.67
Prayer Time	5.75
Evaluation of Previous Sermon	6.00
Presentation by Research Assistant	6.17
Participation in Discussion	9.08
Opportunity to Ask Questions	9.25
Opportunity to Contextualize	9.58
Overall Preaching Team Meeting	8.47

The survey clarified that the greatest growth edge for the preaching team is in annual planning and on-going equipping of pastors. Due to the size and complexity of the church, several planning processes must be taken into consideration to arrive at the optimal time for the preaching team to retreat to focus on the annual sermon plan. Holiday seasons, review periods, and key initiatives in the life of the church, such as the timing of campaigns and projects, make this a moving target. In interviews, the team agreed that ideally the week of the three-day retreat should be free from other required meetings, such as guest workshops, churchwide quarterly staff meetings, and mandatory trainings. While ministry never stops, some seasons are busier than others and the pastors want to give their full focus to the important task of developing the annual sermon plan. In addition to timing, series preparation could also improve. There is a widespread conviction that developing the discipline of getting out ahead of each series with a creative planning meeting to develop themes, consider creative illustrations, and share ideas for worship and media-supported elements would be ideal. Many of the most creative ideas are not able to be implemented because there is not enough time to put them into place the week of the sermon to be preached.

The final outcome of the preaching survey was finding that the team would like to spend more time evaluating each other's sermons. While it is uncomfortable to have a sermon evaluated, it is in some ways even more uncomfortable to critique a fellow pastor's sermon. Nevertheless, we have used this tool intermittently in the past, and it is of practical and pastoral benefit. Research shows and experience bears out that capturing, watching, and peer-evaluation of preaching is one of the most effective ways to improve. "Faithful are the wounds of the tape machine," says Richard Bewes. In a time before the days of digital recordings, Bewes points out that pastors can and should use sermon review to evaluate sermon length, cliches, unnecessary jargon, inept illustrations,

distracting mannerisms, and stale presence.⁵ In a preaching team model, the pastor has the benefit of not having to review his sermon in a vacuum, as he has a “band of brothers” who can both be encouraging and point out deficiencies he may overlook otherwise. In a team setting, not only does the preacher being evaluated receive constructive feedback, but everyone in the room can benefit from the suggestions made. It takes intentionality and humility to engage in such a process, but our pastors agree it would be a helpful and necessary next step to implement on a consistent basis in order that sermons improve for the sake of the gospel.

Phase 2: Review of Multi-Site Preaching Teams

Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird documented that the early days of the multisite revolution around the turn of the millennium felt like a frontier expedition in church life.⁶ Very little was known, churches were experimenting with models and methods, and there were few examples to learn from. However, with this model being adopted by thousands of churches over the past two decades, there are now other churches to benchmark against and learn from. For this reason, this second goal of this project was to reach out to other theologically aligned multi-site churches to learn from their preaching teams and pastors as part of this project.

During phase 2 of the project, an email was sent to fifteen large multi-site churches containing a short synopsis of this project and a one-page survey, with the goal of receiving ten responses.⁷ The survey contained five questions for each church to answer, with the request of a four-week deadline on submitting responses. I received nine

⁵ Richard Bewes, quoted in Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 198.

⁶ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 12.

⁷ See appendix 3 for the executive summary of the survey.

responses and gathered a tenth through an in-person conversation.⁸ During week 2 and 3, an administrative assistant created a spreadsheet and documented the qualitative responses to the questions asked for comparison purposes. In week 4, phone interviews were conducted with three of the ten pastors who responded to gain further insight and clarity. In week 5, a summary document was created and in week 6, I presented the findings to the Brentwood Baptist preaching team. Written feedback from the churches who submitted responses produced the following summarized results.

The first question was, “What are the expectations you set for teaching pastors in your church?” This question was designed to get a baseline for weekly preparation, attendance at meetings, amount of preparation time, and adherence to specific sermon elements for comparison. Three dominant themes emerged. First, each senior pastor places a high expectation that every teaching pastor is well prepared prior to the regular preaching team meeting, whether the meeting is in person or online. Pastors expect this preparation to be holistic, not just scholarly. There is an understanding that teaching pastors be prepared to engage spiritually through prayer and humility, placing themselves under the authority of Scripture and allowing it to speak to them before they attempt to preach from it. Second, is the expectation that the pastors be prepared academically through some level of study and research prior to the meeting. For some that means reading and being familiar with a research document given to them ahead of time. For others, this means having the bulk of their commentary research completed and bringing detailed notes to the meeting. Third, most preaching teams noted that the attitude of participants is important. Of all the responsibilities a pastor has, the careful exposition of Scripture and bold declaration of the gospel in preaching is essential. Therefore, preaching team members are expected to be fully engaged with team meetings, making them a high priority in their weekly schedule, and marking a high level of participation while in the meetings themselves. Because the pace of ministry makes it feel like “Sunday comes around every

⁸ See the introduction to appendix 3 for a list of churches that participated in the survey.

three days,” the discipline of weekly preparation and the role it plays in the consistent delivery of quality sermons are closely related. Andy John King from Lindsey Land Baptist Church emphasized how Paul exhorted Timothy to

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not want to tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:2-5 CSB)

For an entire team of teaching pastors to meet this challenge week in and week out, the expectation of focused and disciplined preparation is key.

Second, “How do you resource your preaching team?” This question intended to explore how other teams utilize research assistants, how they provide background research, and if they invest in preaching team development through books, conferences, and workshops. Regarding “who” provides those resources, answers varied from paid professional researchers with academic degrees to in-house volunteers. Every team finds a creative way to use their best people to help resource their sermons and distribute that content, from curating a content library to text message threads. Some are paid and some are not, some are staff and some are not, but every church has a team of gifted and willing people to assist with sermon research. Another common theme is that each preaching team points their team to the best research tools. Some churches provide or help offset the cost of Bible software such as Logos for their team. Nearly every church either purchases or recommends for purchase several key commentaries or book studies. Finally, most churches surveyed find time for a preaching team retreat that not only helps with planning but shares best practices and resources for sermon preparation. In all, any church that uses a preaching team model marshals a great deal of time, money, and energy into being sure their pastors are well-resourced and that those resources are in alignment with the doctrine and philosophy of preaching in their church.

The third question posed to other preaching teams asked, “What are your methods for effective collaboration?” The aim of this question was for churches to provide a walk-through of how they communicate and work together weekly. Collaborative work environments are better than ministry silos, but it takes a great deal of intentional effort to make them work. Across the churches surveyed, it was consistent that weekly meetings are the foundation for consistent collaboration. Whether face-to-face or virtual (using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.), regular preaching team meetings establish both a weekly rhythm for collaborative sermon preparation and increase the depth of working relationship between the team members. Several pastors mentioned how important it is to develop relational trust among the participants, which provides a sense of camaraderie to overcome the potential for a spirit of competition to develop. A second method that has proven helpful, but most have not mastered, and many have not implemented, is the “mid-range” planning meeting. Teams that use mid-range planning usually find a way to collaborate about every eight weeks, or more specifically, before a new sermon series. Houston’s First Baptist Church, for example, calls these bi-monthly gatherings “sermon summits.” The main purpose of these gatherings is to give enough time for creative sermon elements to come to life. The naming and branding of a series, the development of graphics, visuals, and videos, and the opportunity for the worship ministry to build setlists and gather song ideas around the central theme of the upcoming series, all happen with greater excellence and more consistent execution when there is time to plan. Finally, every preaching team has implemented some kind of long-range planning cycle, usually built around an annual preaching team retreat. Some churches find a quiet place on campus for a few days, and others travel to retreat setting to focus. During this time, most teams work from the “big picture” down to outlining specific sermon series for the upcoming year. Many kickstart their process by evaluating how God is at work in their ministry, how the church is moving toward their stated mission and vision, and what cultural issues need to be addressed from Scripture. From there, sermon series ideas are

proposed and debated. In some churches, the senior pastor brings most of the ideas for content and the team suggests improvements and modifications. In other cases, the entire team presents sermon ideas. In both scenarios, series topics and themes are agreed upon and put into the church's annual planning calendar, where the sermon themes will help focus the annual goals, planning calendar, and even the budget of the church. Good annual sermon plans are not just about the number of days away, but the year-round thought process, the on-going evaluation, and that everyone is prepared to bring their best thinking to the team.

The fourth question asked, "How do you evaluate sermons for improvement?" The aim was to see if they had practical tools, evaluation processes, metrics, or rubrics that might prove helpful. As previously noted in this project, sermon evaluation is the most important tool for improvement, yet due to time investment and the difficult art of constructive criticism, it is the least frequently practiced. While methods vary, there was unity among the churches surveyed that sermon review is the path to better preaching. Most churches have a review process in place. The approaches are not uniform, but the expectation is there that pastors are reviewing and improving their sermons and delivery. As part of the review process, mentoring and coaching is key. Some senior pastors prefer to coach one-on-one, and others review sermons as a group, but having an experienced preacher guiding less experienced preachers is the irreducible minimum for improvement. Some churches use written sermon evaluations from both coaches and/or selected members, but most agree that individualized coaching is the most effective and valuable. Rubrics can help as an evaluative tool, but they are not a substitute for the crucial relationship between a mentor/senior pastor and a student.

Fifth, a "catch all" question was asked, "Is there anything else that we should know about your model that has been helpful or a hindrance?" By nature of the question, this was the most subjective, but it was also practical. A handful of responses stood out. First, some preaching teams find sermon outlines helpful, and some do not. Several

churches felt like there was greater alignment and clarity gained by using a collaborative outline. However, others felt like it was too constricting and limiting. The “outline” approach seems to work best where there is a strong central system and more of a “franchise” model in place. Second, some churches with preaching teams find success with a hybrid of live preaching and video. This demonstrates that a preaching team format is not necessarily “all video” or “all live preaching.” These churches intentionally use a hybrid approach for different legitimate reasons. Some want to keep a greater system of unity and alignment, so the senior pastor is not on video every week but still on a regular basis. This is often done on a “percentage” formula. For example, 80 percent of the time is from the teaching pastor, and 20 percent they hear from the senior pastor on video. In other churches, they started video but are moving toward more live preaching, and they are wanting to develop teaching pastors over time rather than suddenly having to add preaching every week to their already-full plate. Finally, some preaching teams are experimenting with bringing in bi-vocational pastors. Acknowledging the need to resource part-time pastors, churches such as Family Church in West Palm Beach, Florida, have developed a residency program focused on this often-overlooked opportunity. If every community is going to be reached for Christ, then many small neighborhood churches simply cannot afford a full-time pastor, but the gospel need in those areas are just as great. A large church network can effectively train and consistently resource bi-vocational pastors if they are willing to be creative with meeting times, sermon planning rhythms, and sharing resources.

Phase 3: Points of Excellence

Senior pastor Mike Glenn has said over the years, especially with the development of our multi-site model, “what we used to do informally, we must now formalize and document.” Over the years, as the preaching team model has developed, we needed to develop a set of standards or “points of excellence,” that serve as a quality-control baseline for campus and teaching pastors. This document, which outlines the

philosophy and methodology behind our preaching team process, is important internally for accountability of current teaching pastors, for the on-boarding of new teaching pastors, and for the equipping of future teaching pastors. It is also an important tool externally, as we consistently get calls and consult with churches several times a month who reach out interested in our preaching team model and asking for supporting documentation. The creation of this document was a straight-forward process, but one that will both clarify expectations for preaching team members and help other churches develop their own documents for alignment and clear communication. The first step of phase 3 was to pull together from previous documents, emails, and conversations a working list of items to include in this document. In week 2, I met with the senior pastor to gather his input and to prioritize the points to include and emphasize. In week 3, I wrote a “first draft” of the document. In week 4, I presented the document to the preaching team for discussion, clarification, and feedback. In week 5, I edited the document from my notes and the preaching team discussion. In week 6, I brought the completed document back to the team for their endorsement and approval.

With the preaching team’s feedback and help, I started the document with introductory thoughts from the senior pastor. Since he developed the model under his leadership, his voice and priorities are clarifying and pastoral. I then decided to use the “priority triangle” approach to the remainder of the document, which denotes categories of “must do,” “should do,” “nice to do,” and the important fourth category, “don’t do.” This approach ranks the priorities of what is essential, what is preferred, and what is optional. “Must do” items include, for example, the necessity of following the annual preaching plan. From time to time, we are questioned on how we can discern twelve to eighteen months ahead of time what God would want us to preach on. The response has been focused on two realities. First, the same Holy Spirit who can give guidance the week before a sermon is preached is the same Holy Spirit who can give guidance months in advance. Second, if messages are predominantly gospel-focused and cross-centered,

then they are always timely. This approach allows us to customize the outline and illustrations to fit the moment while never compromising the truth. Third, we have the caveat that in unusual circumstances a teaching pastor can request from the preaching team permission to deviate from the plan for a Sunday when it would be ministerial malpractice to not address a crisis within a particular congregation. The accountability of having the team's approval means that this is a rare event, and most congregants are amazed at how relevant each week's sermon is to the cultural moment, even when it was planned months in advance. Other "must do's" include standardizing the Bible translations approved for use in the pulpit and clarifying our doctrinal standard of the Baptist Faith and Message.

"Should do" points of excellence include coordinated prayer support for each pastor, timely assignments and meetings, and working with communications and discipleship/groups team to be sure sermons are aligned with the other ministries of the church. "Nice to do" points of excellence are attending conference and seminars as forms of "professional development" to learn and grow as preachers. The "nice to do" point of excellence that gets the greatest amount of attention is the challenge and coaching of the senior pastor to preach extemporaneous sermons (without notes) as much as possible. The senior pastor has not made this a "must do," but it is his strong preference for several reasons. First, he argues that it makes preparation more focused. If a preacher knows he is stepping up to preach without notes, then he must internalize the sermon to a greater degree than one who reads from a manuscript or notes. Second, in a cultural moment that is now infamous for short attention spans, a preacher must establish an emotional bond with his congregation through a conversational method of delivery to gain and keep their attention. Finally, and most important, his conviction is that preaching largely without notes allows the Holy Spirit room to work as while delivering the message—leading a preacher to withhold some things he might have planned to say, but also prompting his heart and mind to share things he did not plan to say but are inspired by the overflow of

his time studying the text and in prayer. Finally, “don’t do” items were included as “guardrails” for the preaching team. The document reminds communicators that preachers do not preach without offering an invitation to respond to the gospel or without next steps for application. The Bible is clear that Christians are not to just be hearers of the Word, but doers as well (Jas 1:22). The preaching team must protect the pulpit from the worship service being a time for too many other distracting messages, pushing back against the idea that if “the pastor doesn’t say it then it doesn’t matter.”

These practical suggestions have been invaluable not only to the teaching pastors at our campuses, but to other churches who need help with that kind of specific clarity as well. Overall, developing the “Preaching Team Points of Excellence” document has been a simple but important step for our church. It has documented, strengthened, and clarified the “how” of our process and has been shared with several churches who have found it instructive and helpful.⁹

Phase 4: Sermon Evaluation Tool (Rubric)

Sermon evaluation is both a great blessing and a great challenge. Self-improvement in general requires a healthy dose of humility, honesty, and desire to improve. Self-improvement specifically in the pulpit requires all those same characteristics and adds to them a necessary degree of spiritual maturity. All pastors must recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ saves, not pastors, and yet they are God’s chosen and called communicators of the gospel, so the goal is to be as clear and compelling as possible. While having a sermon evaluated by congregants or coaches is a good practice, the most challenging and most fruitful discipline to improve as a communicator is self-evaluation. For this project, a sermon self-evaluation rubric was created to be used by each campus pastor over a four-week period. For clarity and simplicity, the rubric was based on the “hook, book, look, took” format of *Creative Bible Teaching*, by Lawrence O. Richards

⁹ See appendix 4 for the “Preaching Team Points of Excellence” document.

and Gary J. Bredfeldt. While written primarily to equip Bible teachers in small group settings, since being introduced to this work over twenty years ago, I have found it one of the most practical, easy to explain, and transferable concepts for holistic Bible teaching and preaching that engages all learning types and three learning domains: cognitive (head), affective (heart), and behavioral (hands).¹⁰ I have equipped hundreds of small group leaders, interns, residents, and pastors in both our own church and across the world in places like Kenya, Nepal, and Northeast England to use this template to both structure and evaluate teaching and preaching, and it is memorable and effective in all contexts. To those four categories, I added “presentation” and “gospel response” to the rubric, so teaching pastors could self-evaluate those important aspects of sermon delivery and impact as well. I asked the campus and teaching pastors to review their sermons and rank themselves in one of four categories: excellent, good, satisfactory, or needs improvement. I added a fill-in-the blank section at the bottom of each one-page evaluation for “additional comments” (context is helpful) and “practical takeaways from improvement.”¹¹

The Brentwood Baptist preaching team preached a four-week series on the book of Ruth in May 2021. This month-long series was an ideal length of time for me to enlist the pastors in this phase of the project and have them self-evaluate their sermons. In week 1 of this phase of the project, I distributed the self-evaluation rubric to the preaching team, explained my rationale and gave instructions on how to use it for the ensuing four-week period. During weeks 2-6, each campus pastor reviewed his sermon using the rubric. On week 7, I gathered the rubrics, reviewed them for common themes, and wrote a review. On week 8, I presented the executive summary to the preaching team.¹²

¹⁰ Lawrence Richards and Gary Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 137.

¹¹ See appendix 5 for the Sermon Self-Evaluation Rubric.

¹² See appendix 6 for the Sermon Self-Evaluation Executive Summary.

The first category for self-evaluation was sermon preparation. The preparation process for a sermon is just as spiritual as the preaching of the sermon itself. If the pastor does not have the time or spiritual focus for a genuine encounter with God as he studies the Word, then the sermon will be equally as empty of spiritual life and power to change lives. The introspective question was asked: is there evidence that you as the teaching pastor prepared thoroughly for this sermon? The pastors indicated that 75 percent of the time they feel excellent or good about the amount of time they are putting into preparation. Upon reflection, there is likely a correlation between this high score and the strong encouragement and example of the senior pastor to protect “like a bulldog” our time in prayer and study leading up to preaching.

The second category was “hook,” or the sermon introduction. The survey tool asked, “Did you feel the introduction grabbed the attention of the audience and introduced the ‘big idea’ of the message? Did the sermon capture both the head and the hearts of the congregation?” With 81 percent of the pastors marking either “good” or “excellent,” it is clear that our collaborative sermon preparation process helps the preaching team share ideas for “big hooks” and an effective “big idea” that is clear to everyone.

The third and fourth categories were “book” and “look,” which are closely related. What did you learn personally from the Scripture being taught? Did you feel your exposition of the text was clear? In the “book” category, not a single teaching pastor on a single Sunday marked anything other than “excellent” or “good.” This was the strongest metric. Clearly, preachers at BBC campuses are all Bible teachers at heart. Anecdotally, this is confirmed by the numerous stories of first-time guests and observers who comment on how much we use and handle the Bible when preaching. Many note that it is common these days to find pastors who “read a verse and then never touch the Bible again the rest of the sermon.” In the “look” category, 93 percent marked “excellent” or “good,” pointing to a strong bent to exposit the text being preaching line-by-line and verse-by-verse.

The fifth category was “took,” which refers to application. This category has been of some debate among the team for several years as we have discussed how far to go in providing suggested application. The alternative is that the text is preached, biblical truths clarified, and the Holy Spirit convicts the congregations regarding specific pathways of application. In recent years, the preaching team has focused more and more on clarifying next steps. The year 2021 was the first year the preaching team asked the writer of each sermon series to include clearly suggested “next steps” for application in the annual sermon planning document for every single sermon. The preaching team only gave a 9 percent “excellent” rating, while 50 percent ranked themselves “good” and 41 percent only “satisfactory.” This means the team personally feels that although next steps are getting stronger, there is still room to grow regarding application.

The sixth category was presentation. The question was asked, “Were you clear and confident handling the text? Did your voice, gestures, and body language help or hurt the sermon? Were visual aids or slides helpful and free from distracting errors.” While the message is central and the power of the Spirit essential, all preachers can and must improve their presentation in order to be clear and compelling. This response was the most mixed: 16 percent felt excellent; 59 percent good, and 25 percent satisfactory. While those are generally positive numbers, the teaching pastors still feel like one out of every four sermons is just “satisfactory” and could use some significant improvement. This indicates that in general the preachers feel they are good communicators, but with some more focused work in this area, could become excellent. Several pastors also noted in the comments that the month of May is one of the more challenging from a presentation standpoint, since there are many different messages to communicate and navigate that month, including Mother’s Day, graduations, Memorial Day, and people leaving town for summer vacations and trips. More than one pastor shared they felt they and their congregations were not as focused during the four weeks of this sermon series in Ruth.

The seventh and final category was gospel response. The question was asked: “Was the text clearly connected to the gospel? Was a gospel invitation offered and clear instruction given on how to respond? What types of response were there to this message?” Unfortunately, gospel response was the lowest evaluated category of all. While all the campus pastors offer an invitation of some kind, the pastors long to see a greater response to the proclamation of the good news. Only 13 percent marked responses were “excellent,” 22 percent were “good,” 47 percent were “satisfactory,” and 19 percent scored “needs improvement.” As a team, there is an awareness that all know and understand that it is their job to preach faithful sermons and trust “the Word to do the work.” While it is impossible to fully evaluate the impact of a sermon series on this side of eternity, there is a desire to see a stronger response to the gospel. BBC church records from May 2021 indicate that there were 8 professions of faith, 47 baptisms, and 124 joined the church across all campuses. We praise God for each and every life changed by His Word, but for a church of our size and average attendance, we strongly desire to see a greater response.

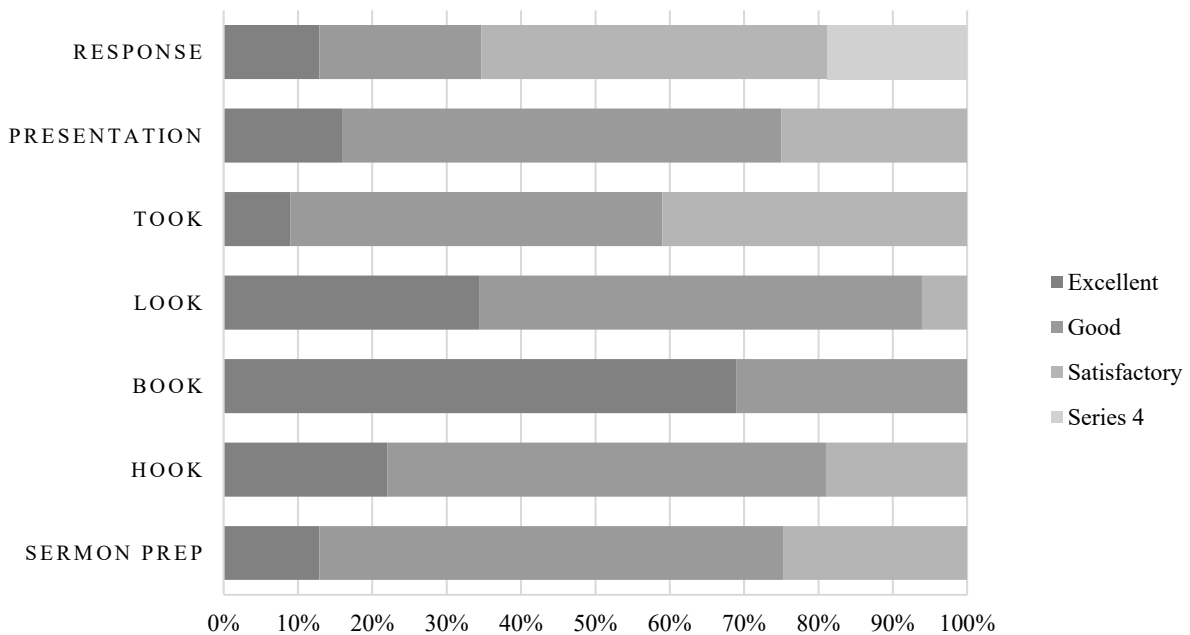


Figure 1. Sermon self-evaluation summary

Conclusion

There exists a dynamic tension between the ideal project and the realities of time and feasibility constraints. The details and description of this project demonstrate that a limited number of four goals were established to improve a methodological framework for the preaching team model of Brentwood Baptist Church. While other methods were considered, these four were chosen in consultation with the preaching team because they were the most practical and accessible. By assessing the current effectiveness of the preaching team meetings, we discovered several growth edges for the future that will deepen our preparation. By reviewing ten other multi-site preaching teams for best practices, we gained a breadth of knowledge regarding what others have learned. By developing preaching team “points of excellence,” we finally formally documented the standards we have held in place informally. And by developing a self-evaluation rubric, we created a tool to help the pastors weekly assess and improve their sermons. If any or all of these goals improve the competency of our communicators to preach God’s Word and proclaim the gospel with greater clarity and confidence, then the project, however limited, was worth the time and effort. The final chapter of this project will focus on evaluation in greater detail, as faithfulness to the task of preaching well is the ultimate aim of this project.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Ministry in the local church is both a sacred calling and a unique challenge. The gospel truth upon which Christianity rests will never change, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Until the return of Christ, people will be saved by hearing the Word of God proclaimed verbally (2 Pet 3:9-10). Paul’s divinely inspired logic reaches a clear conclusion: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom 10:14). Yet to fulfill Christianity’s end goal of preaching the “good news” message to all nations (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8), over time methods must adapt to be faithful to the mission entrusted by Christ.

Our Creator God has given living things in his world the ability to adapt to their respective environments so they can both survive and thrive in a changing landscape. Because the church of Jesus Christ is a living body of believers, not merely an organization but a living organism, it has the ability to adapt as well. During the course of this very project, the spread of the COVID-19 virus led to a worldwide crisis that affected every culture globally. The pandemic led to widespread disruptions to everyday lives, including the ability to gather for church worship, groups, and activities. While the consequences of the pandemic for persons ranged from merely inconvenient to deadly, the same could be said for churches. Churches that were healthy faced challenges but survived and a few even thrived by using the season to get more focused on the core mission of the church and the message of the gospel. The effects of COVID-19 were devastating for some congregations as it rapidly accelerated their decline. As outlined in *Future Church*, Will

Mancini and Cory Hartman articulate that “all of us had been hearing for a long time that the future was coming fast [but] change overtook the church at supersonic speed . . . the COVID pandemic probably constitutes the greatest innovation opportunity that leaders will have in a lifetime. Yet there is a danger that the church will miss the moment.”¹

The church should never waver from the authority of Scripture and purity of the gospel and yet cannot miss the opportunities God gives to humbly adapt strategies, methods, and delivery methods to reach the lost and searching. Multi-site or “multi-church” churches are one tool God is using in our generation to expand the reach of the gospel to under-discipled communities, to wisely maximize kingdom resources to reach the lost, and to develop and amplify the time and efforts of called pastors and leaders. This project helped clarify and improve the development of the multi-site ministry model, specifically in the area of preaching. Over a decade of trial-and-error has given our preaching team valuable insight and expertise to share with others so they can accelerate the health and reach of their ministries and so they can avoid pitfalls that could cost precious time and resources. Because leaders are learners, this project represents the desire to continue reforming and improving upon our existing model for the sake of gospel ministry. The desire of church leadership is to not build an “empire” but rather build the “Jesus kingdom” by stewarding the preaching team and the opportunities before us effectively.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of this project was to improve a theological and methodological framework for the preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church and its regional campuses that would result in greater unity, alignment, and effectiveness in gospel proclamation as well as provide transferable principles for other multi-site churches or networks that would prefer a preaching team model to a video preaching model. This

¹ Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 17.

project was chosen for reasons both internal and external. Internally, this project was a priority because of the advanced preaching team model that had been developed over the course of twelve years but not academically evaluated or documented. By the nature of preaching to eight congregations every Sunday, the preaching team of Brentwood Baptist Church had developed a theology, structure, and specific methodologies, but no one had assessed or captured the details in a way that would clarify and solidify the best practices. This project also provided an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of those practices for improvement. Externally, primarily through word of mouth and by reputation, an average of three churches per month inquire about Brentwood Baptist Church’s preaching team model. These churches are either considering expanding to a multi-site model and prefer live preaching to video, or they are existing multi-site churches that want to move away from video and to live preaching. As the video venue model of ministry grew in popularity, many churches found the long-term implications of this method of contextualization problematic, including a loss of relational orientation of ministry (1 Thess 2:8), the inability to disciple through imitation of a godly shepherd (1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6), and the lack of opportunities to reproduce leaders who teach and preach (Titus 1:9; Acts 13:1). These issues have led an increasing number of churches to pivot to a preaching team model and away from a video venue approach. In an era in which social scientists are encouraging people to decrease “screen time” in their lives, many churches have become convinced that live preaching is the preferred approach.² This project gives researched, documented, and relevant information to help inform churches of the “why” and “how” of developing a preaching team model. Thus, the stated purpose of this project was met for both internal and external uses.

² Joe Hellerman, “The Dangerous Disconnect of Video-Venue Preaching,” The Gospel Coalition, August 2, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dangerous-disconnect-video-venue-preaching/>.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Achieving the purpose of this project depended on the execution of the four goals stated in chapter 1 and described in detail in chapter 4. The first goal was to assess the current effectiveness of the current preaching team in the areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration through weekly meetings. The first goal was accomplished by administering a preaching team survey to the attendees of the weekly preaching team meeting. This goal was successfully met with 100 percent participation by all members of the Brentwood Baptist preaching team. The findings were quantitatively documented in a Preaching Team Survey Executive Summary that was presented to the senior pastor and subsequently to the entire preaching team. In addition, three qualitative follow-up conversations took place with the research assistant, the Chinese congregation pastor, and the deaf congregation pastor respectively to interpret the findings of the survey and to make practical suggestions for implementation. Overall, the findings pointed to a preaching team that is “very satisfied” with the weekly research brief and the weekly team meetings. While there is room for incremental improvement in both areas, the real growth identified by the preaching team come in the area of the timing of the preaching team processes and the need to be more proactive in preparation for upcoming sermon series, which gives more time for creativity and alignment. The greatest need as communicated by the teaching pastors was for more consistent sermon evaluations. While sermon evaluations can be personally challenging, the clear desire was to develop a process to capture and schedule peer-evaluated sermons for improvement, accountability, and encouragement. This first goal was helpful to the preaching team because it gives research validity that confirms much of what we have sensed as a team; namely, that the weekly preparation and meeting rhythm is key to stronger sermons and that there is still room for improvement in the form of evaluations and proactive planning.

The second goal was to increase knowledge by conducting a review of ten other multi-site preaching teams to discover best practices and areas for growth and improvement. The second goal was accomplished by creating a list of ten respected multi-

site churches that utilize a preaching team format and then administering a short survey to each church that focused on the three key areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration. This goal took some time to accomplish as several churches did not respond, meaning alternates had to be chosen and surveyed. Despite the delay, this goal was successful and helpful because this goal gave outside perspective to the project and its findings. Generally, any of priorities for the preaching team, such as high expectations for preparation and a weekly/annual rhythm of collaboration, were shared across the board. This was affirming both for the Brentwood Baptist preaching team and the preaching teams at other churches that the structure of teams and time is producing more focused sermon preparation. Several senior pastors interviewed came to the same conclusion as Christopher S. Stephens, pastor of Gurnee Community Church in Illinois, who joked about developing “Pre-Message Syndrome” after thirteen years of trying to prepare sermons by himself: “My team approach to sermon preparation is far from perfect, but to quote my wife as she recently addressed my team, ‘You people have radically transformed our lives.’”³ The pastors in the survey indicated they would prefer to never go back to solo sermon preparation on a consistent basis. The survey also affirmed the preaching team’s conviction that sermon review is the most helpful path to better preaching. Many of the pastors noted that sermon feedback is helped by tools like rubrics, but that it is done best within the context of a mentoring relationship. This creates a valuable window of opportunity for most senior pastors to be intentional with a “Paul and Timothy” type of coaching relationship (2 Tim 2:2) that goes beyond preaching to pastoral ministry as a whole. In addition, this survey gave the Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team new insights to consider, including debating whether everyone preaching the same outline is too limiting or helpful for clarity. While most of the churches surveyed primarily use live preaching, some large congregations are finding success with a hybrid of live preaching

³ Christopher S. Stephens, “A Team: It Is Not Good that Preachers Should Prepare Messages Alone,” *Christianity Today: Pastors Special Edition*, Fall 2018, 56-59.

and video for alignment and to give more time for young leaders to develop. One church in particular (Family Church in South Florida) has found a niche in recruiting bivocational pastors onto their preaching team to serve in communities that cannot afford full-time pastors and to maximize the preaching and teaching gifts of men who do not feel called away from the marketplace. While this has significant implications for meeting times and sermon planning rhythms, it may also be a key strategy in the future as even large churches have a limit to the financial resources required to pay all full-time staff. Where there is a need for gospel proclamation, these ten churches should be encouraged for developing a preaching team that meets the Bible teaching needs of their communities both creatively and effectively.

The third goal was to develop a consistent set of standards and expectations, or “points of excellence,” for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was accomplished by the creation of a document that clarifies the stated expectations and standards that can later be added to a “teaching pastor playbook” alongside other sermon helps. With the help of the senior pastor, a draft was developed, reviewed by the preaching team, edited, and returned to the team for final approval. While this goal was the most simple and straightforward of the four, the preaching team agreed it was one of the most practical and helpful steps of this project for several reasons. First, there was the need to document formally what the preaching team had developed informally. This document clarifies expectations for current teaching pastors, assists the on-boarding of new teaching pastors, and will be an asset for the equipping of future teaching pastors. The desire of the preaching team is to be as practically helpful to other churches and networks as possible, this supporting documentation creates a great starting point for conversations with them. In addition, it can be used as a template to help churches create their own “points of excellence.” In fact, in just the few months since its creation the “points of excellence” have already passed it along to several interested churches, which fulfills the ultimate goal of this project of improving ministry.

The fourth goal was to develop a self-evaluation rubric that measures sermon focus, alignment, and areas of improvement for each teaching pastor to utilize in evaluation of their preaching. The fourth goal was measured using a sermon evaluation tool that was implemented by all teaching pastors for a period of four weeks to self-evaluate their sermon. Opposite of goal 3, this was the most challenging aspect of the project to complete. First, the self-evaluation rubric itself was created and then edited multiple times in attempt to strike a balance between the ideal world of self-evaluation and the real world of weekly preaching and sermon preparation. Second, while a short four-week sermon series was an ideal length, that window of time was in May, which has become one of the busier months of the year with school finals, spring sports, and Mother's Day and Memorial Day weekend. Thus, the accountability process for completing and returning the self-evaluation forms became a challenge, as well as the fact that not all the pastors were in the pulpit for all four weeks. They had to spend extra time with their guest teaching pastor explaining the process. Despite the challenges of a self-evaluation process, in the end this goal was completed with 100 percent participation and yielded important insights. This part of the project enabled the team to see connections between the intentional effort of preparation, alignment, and standards and the outcome of stronger sermons. For example, many pastors who prep on their own confide in their own struggle with time management, specifically feeling well-prepared each Sunday. However, 75 percent of the Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team feel "excellent" or "good" about the amount of time they put into sermon preparation. Because there is an intentional process and expectation in place, discipline and accountability for adequate spiritual, emotional, and academic preparation is built in. The self-evaluation also revealed that areas of improvement in both application of the text and offering a gospel response. These points of emphasis would not have been brought to attention without a self-evaluation process; rarely have I heard constructive criticism from the congregation about application or response, because it is clearly offered in the sermons. Brentwood's pastors have a strong conviction that these are areas for personal

improvement and their convictions were validated by their peers. The most encouraging part of this project was to see several preaching team members continue to use the self-evaluation rubric on their own and introduce it to their ministry residents and staff members as well.

Strengths of the Project

The leading strength of this project was embedded in its title: the requirement that the project be practical to everyday ministry. The opportunity to take a sacred and holy calling like preaching, share the journey of that calling with other like-minded men, and have the opportunity to improve the process for all involved made completing this project a labor of love. Using the preaching team as the willing subjects, this project has already improved the preaching team. We have already shared some findings with others upon request, which is a blessing and an early indicator that this project will not merely sit on a shelf collecting dust as an academic exercise, but that it will prove useful for kingdom work.

In addition to its practical application, this project seems timely. The COVID-19 pandemic forced pastors to reevaluate their preaching, as the joke has been told that all pastors suddenly became “televangelists” overnight. Having relied heavily on relational skills, suddenly pastors who never dreamed they would be livestreamed or posted on social media found themselves needing to improve their content and delivery. The trend of people evaluating a church or preacher online is not going away as the pandemic wanes; instead, online has become the new front door of the church as people attend worship only after first watching a church online. Pastors are not only looking to improve practical preaching skills but are also lonely, isolated, and looking for community. While this team approach to preaching in this project primarily applies to the preaching team of a multi-site church, the principles could be used across a network, association, or even among a few like-minded churches. “Future Church” has arrived quicker than anyone thought it would, bringing with it several shifts. One is that the identity of the church is shifting from a focus on community

institution or activity center to a training center where disciple-making is expected of everyone. This means pastors are not merely striving to be relevant or attractional, but they must preach deeper and more focused sermons to equip people to integrate their faith into their weeklong mission field.⁴ If the future of the church is collaborative, team-based, and creative, then a preaching team approach helps pastors navigate these seismic shifts in church paradigms.

Finally, this project uncovers many transferable principles that can help churches of all shapes and sizes. The state of preaching is poor in many churches, as noted by R. Albert Mohler in *He Is Not Silent*. “The last few decades have been a period of wanton experimentation in many pulpits. One of the most troubling developments is the decline and eclipse of expository preaching.”⁵ Instead of “wanton experimentation,” this project outlines how spiritual, emotional, and academic preparation can encourage the pastor, strengthen expository sermons through shared study, and thus advance the gospel. When the church rightly values the Word of God and its application, it brings life change and revival to the church and to the community it serves. As Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert write, “When competing priorities and competing philosophies tempt us sorely to displace the preaching of the Word from the center, the Valley of Dry Bones (Ez. 37:1-14) ought to remind us that true spiritual life-giving power is found in God’s Word. That is how our God, in His wisdom, has decided to give life to His people.”⁶ Pastors today face many competing agendas, and a preaching team model creates a weekly and annual process that protects the teaching pastor’s valuable time in Scripture, gives him “iron sharpens iron” relationships with other preachers (Prov 27:17), and encourages his spiritual preparation for the preaching moment.

⁴ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 93.

⁵ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 17.

⁶ Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 30.

Weaknesses of the Project

Like many aspects of life, a great strength can also have a shadow side and be a key weakness. The greatest weakness to this project is that is most applicable to large multi-site churches with the ability to hire multiple campus and teaching pastors. While there are more large multi-site churches today than there were even ten years ago, they still make up a fraction of the total US churches. For example, Lifeway Research notes that the US religious landscape is increasingly dominated by smaller congregations. In 2000, 45 percent of churches had fewer than one hundred in weekly attendance. Now, that number has climbed to 65 percent. Half of all churches have fewer than sixty-five people total in their weekly worship service.⁷ As many churches continue to shrink in size and resources, this might present an opportunity for greater collaboration, cooperation, revitalizations, and potential church mergers. Nevertheless, the limitations of this project require it be specific to a current ministry context, which translates into limited transferability of its model, even if many of the underlying principles apply to subjects like preaching, collaboration, establishing standards and self-evaluation.

Another weakness was the inherent tension between depth of the subject material and what was manageable for a project with a limited scope. By the nature of this project, several church-related disciplines come together: ecclesiology (specifically, the multi-site model of local church ministry), theology, preaching, adaptive leadership, collaborative work environments and more. The wide variety of sources and research materials collected for this project were vast. It is difficult to feel that both depth and breadth are covered adequately. Yet, this is what makes ministry such a dynamic and unique calling: pastors must be equipped with a working knowledge in a number of disciplines in order to think, write, preach, and lead well in today's church contexts.

⁷ Aaron Earls, "Small Churches Continue Growing—but in Number, not Size," Lifeway Research, October 20, 2021, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/10/20/small-churches-continue-growing-but-in-number-not-size/>.

Finally, while working on chapter 4 it was evident that there was an internal/external imbalance to the focus of the goals. While the goals met practical needs for the Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team, three of the goals focused primarily on the internal perspective while only one brought in an outside point of view. Borrowed perception is important for improvement, and it was helpful to survey other churches for their perceived strengths, weaknesses, and best practices. When too focused internally, churches often end up the victim of ministry treadmills, competency traps, needs-based slippery slopes, or cultural whirlpools, all which limit innovation and pull a church toward the status quo.⁸ A weakness of this project was the heavy internal focus which gave practical tools but limited the amount of objective perspective and fresh, creative thinking that could benefit the process.

What I Would Do Differently

In addition to addressing the weaknesses, I would address the timing of the project and my focus differently. With many other professional doctorate students, I found it challenging to create the large pockets of time needed to devote to completing this project. The weekly challenge of consistent personal spiritual disciplines, being a husband and father of five children ranging in ages from twenty-two to five years old (including God's provision in adding the youngest member to our family through an unexpected and unusual foster care arrangement during the course of this project), the campus and teaching pastor of a growing congregation, and an executive-level leader overseeing three congregations put demands on my time and energy that I had not experienced before beginning the program. While every student has their story, the COVID-19 pandemic created the most unusual and challenging leadership climate of my lifetime. At first I thought I would have additional time to work on this project. However, the nature of the virus meant that every decision had to be considered and re-considered, and I found myself

⁸ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 10-13.

spending twice the time simply to accomplish everyday tasks. Not only was timing an issue for me, but focus was a challenge as well. While I have never shied away from challenges or projects, I consistently saw time blocked out on my calendar taken by family needs, pastoral care crisis, or simply the demands of everyday ministry. As a result, I ended up in a cycle of “starting and stopping” on the project that prolonged completion. If I could “do it over again,” I would start when I was younger, more energetic, and when the demands on my time were a bit less heavy. However, I also believe in God’s sovereign timing as the one who declares the “end from the beginning” (Isa 46:10) and that I learned important life lessons about perseverance, focus, and commitment during this season.

Theological Reflections

The completion of this project has led to greater personal reflection and appreciation for the nature of the church, the careful application of contextualization, and the importance of preaching. While the church today certainly faces great challenges with the increased secularization of culture and mounting pressure to silence biblical truth, the true church remains God’s Spirit-filled community of believers confessing Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God and the “gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt 16:19). Within biblical boundaries, the church in every age has adapted its methods without changing its core message (*kerygma*) in order for proper contextualization to take place. The Word of God must be made intelligible to edify (1 Cor 9:19-23; 14:22-25).⁹ This project challenged me to look deeper into the nature of the church and the roots of the multi-site movement to ensure that Brentwood Baptist had not adopted a model that was merely pragmatic.

While the normative principle applies (the church is free to incorporate any and all elements in its worship unless Scripture explicitly or implicitly prohibits them),

⁹ Hellerman, “The Dangerous Disconnect.”

this project affirmed that there is indeed biblical precedent for early churches existing as one church meeting in multiple locations. In the New Testament, the gathering of believers is referred to as the *ekklesia*, but that term can also be translated in ways other than “assembly.” It is used to refer to a meeting of early believers in a home (Acts 12:12), the church in a city (1 Cor 1:1-2), all the churches in a region (Acts 9:31), the universal church (Eph 1:21-23), and even of all the saints already in heaven (Heb 12:23). The church in Jerusalem gathered in both the temple courts and in homes (Acts 2:42-46) and yet was considered “one church.” Critics of multi-site contend that the model is unbiblical because it is not an assembly of *all* the members of the church. Scripture reveals this is a faulty premise drawn from an overly narrow ecclesiological position that may be preference for some but is not a biblical mandate for all.¹⁰ While not all churches are called to be multi-site, it is a movement that God is using in our generation not just in the US but globally as well where networks of “underground” house churches function together when and where possible under one larger unifying structure with qualified biblical leadership. This study again led me to marvel at the amazing ability that God has given his church to adapt without compromise to get the gospel to more people. Multi-site church ministry maintains a high view of both Scripture and the church, elevating the importance of the “neighborhood mission” of the local church. Campuses are designed with the specific missional purpose to reach their community and reverses the trend that takes people out of their neighborhood to attend the megachurch thirty miles away. Not only does the multi-site models of ministry incorporate the growth God brings, but it can also wisely steward resources across multiple locations (such as many teaching pastors sharing the same research assistant) and multiply ministries and leadership. In an era in which the influence of the local church is waning, all these functions elevate the importance of the local church. As John Stott declares in *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*,

¹⁰ Brad House and Gregg Allison, *Multi-Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 40-41.

For the church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God's new community. For his purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in a future eternity, is not to just save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory.¹¹

Because it is God's idea and plan, the church is worth living and dying for. Multi-site models of ministry nourish the theological values of unity, cooperation, contextualization, and independence that bring glory to God and health to the local church.

This project also renewed in my mind and heart the central importance of preaching in the local church. When there are vast physical, emotional, and spiritual needs to meet in the world, this project led me to step back and ask if it was really worth all this time and effort to develop, coordinate, align, and evaluate preaching across multiple congregations. I became deeply convinced that the answer is yes, because a healthy preaching team model elevates the proclamation of the gospel, which is and will remain people's greatest need. John MacArthur spells out the impact of effective preaching: "True biblical preaching ought to be a life-changing endeavor. The conscientious preacher does not merely seek to impact abstract doctrine or plain facts to his people; he also pleads with them for their heartfelt and earnest obedience. After all, to be hearers of the Word without being doers is to be dangerously deceived (James 1:22)."¹²

God has sovereignly chosen to use the verbal proclamation of His Word to change lives. It is a humbling and awesome task to be entrusted with a sacred task such as preaching. Therefore, pastors should commit as much intentionality, time, focus, and resources to preaching as possible in order that the Word might be proclaimed and heard, and that it might bring about the gospel response that God planned and purposed. A preaching team model not only prioritizes the faithful preaching of Scripture, but it

¹¹ John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 19.

¹² John MacArthur, foreword to Michael Fabarez, *Preaching that Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), vii.

creates a uniquely committed and called fraternity of brothers in Christ who walk together in that noble task. It reduces the risk of doctrinal error through accountability, increases the depth and richness of weekly sermon preparation by learning in a small learning community rather than isolated study, and serves as consistent source of encouragement for the continual challenges pastoral ministry brings (Heb 3:13). Time and effort are required to develop and align a team of preachers, invest in relationships, and manage different personality types. However, in the end it is worth it because a preaching team model brings glory to God by strengthening both the messenger and the message in order to advance the kingdom of God and fulfill the Great Commission.

Personal Reflections

As this project concludes and I prayerfully reflect on the journey of these past few years, the word that the Spirit continually brings to mind is *gratitude*. As the Psalmist declares, “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High” (Ps 9:1-2). First and foremost, I am grateful to the Lord for the joy of my salvation, for His calling on my life, and for the opportunities for me to learn and grow that He has ordained. Growing up in a small Baptist church in a small community in south central Illinois, God has always given me a love for His Word and the local church. I could have never dreamed then of the opportunities He would place before me now, to preach His Word weekly, to get to walk with a team of fellow teaching pastors, and to further develop my calling through the professional doctorate program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Second, I am grateful for the support I have received from my family who have been patient with me as husband and father during the long hours of reading, writing, and seminar work. When God calls a man, his family shares in that calling and I could not have completed this project, nor could I be successful in ministry, without the loving support of my wife, Tanya, and the understanding of our five children. I am thankful for a church

family and leadership that not only encourages its ministers to continue their theological education, but that supports that calling with both time and financial resources. Senior Pastor Mike Glenn and Senior Executive Pastor Stan Breeden have encouraged me to complete this program from day one.

Finally, I am grateful to the entire faculty and staff of the seminary who have encouraged and patient with me. I am especially thankful for Danny Bowen, who walked with me from the beginning of this project; and to my friend and partner in the gospel, Timothy Paul Jones, who was willing to help me see this project to completion with his very busy workload. One of the best parts of the program were my fellow classmates, who, coming from a wide variety of ministry backgrounds, were a joy to get to know personally, even as they enriched our time together in our coursework academically. As this project concludes, I cannot help but be drawn to the same emotions that led David, reflecting in God's presence on his life, to compose these timeless words of praise and gratitude: "Who am I, Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me this far?" (2 Sam 7:18)

Conclusion

Over the course of fifty plus years, God has richly blessed Brentwood Baptist Church with the opportunity to declare and demonstrate the power of the gospel starting in the hills of suburban middle Tennessee through local church ministry and stretching to the ends of the earth through mission partnership. By God's grace and through the faithfulness of the body of Christ, Brentwood Baptist Church is the 72nd largest church in the US, also categorized as one of the "fastest" growing churches that is also "reproducing."¹³ Brentwood Baptist Church has never made it a goal to be on the list, but rather to be faithful to preach the gospel, reach the lost and searching, and minister to the community and world in the name of Jesus. To that end, the church has developed a multi-

¹³ Outreach100, "Largest Participating Churches Revisited," accessed August 2, 2022, <https://outreach100.com/largest-churches-in-america?page=4>.

campus approach to ministry in order to continue to expand outreach while at the same time connect people to a healthy congregation in their community. One of the key developments to this approach has been the development of a preaching team model that utilizes the calling and gifts of eight campus and teaching pastors to declare the same gospel and share the same preaching plan, but to weekly contextual the message into their own community church. This project has for the first time documented the structure, values, and methodology of this preaching team approach. This project sought to improve the work of the preaching team by evaluating the weekly meeting for expectations, resourcing, and level of collaboration. It reviewed established preaching teams at other churches in order to mine knowledge, expertise, and creative thinking for improvement. The project defined and documented the “points of excellence” for the clarity and benefit of the preaching team and for other churches who might like to learn from our experience. Finally, the project created a sermon self-evaluation rubric for teaching pastors to use to increase the effectiveness of their preaching. My prayer is that God will use this project to improve the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church, its campuses, and other churches and networks and contribute to gospel response, greater biblical literacy, deeper disciple-making, and the call to ministry and mission until Christ returns or calls us home. *Soli deo gloria!*

APPENDIX 1

PREACHING TEAM SURVEY

The Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team Survey was created to collect feedback regarding the sermon research materials and the weekly preaching team meeting. This survey assessed the effectiveness of the preaching team in the areas of expectations, resourcing, and collaboration through weekly meetings.

BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH PREACHING TEAM SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help improve a methodological framework for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church (TN). This research is being conducted by Jay Strother for purposes of project research for a Doctorate of Ministry in leadership. In this research, you will be asked to answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Instructions: Please answer this satisfaction survey on a scale of 1-10 by circling ONE number, with 1 being the LEAST satisfied and 10 the MOST satisfied.

1. **Weekly Research Materials:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you are the following items in the research brief in accomplishing the following as you prepare for Sunday?

- A. Sermon Synopsis Statement:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- B. Suggested Outline:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- C. Word Studies / Biblical Language Help:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- D. Commentary Summaries:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Sermons from Other Pastors:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- F. Articles (Web articles, blogs, etc.):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- G. Illustration Ideas:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. **Sermon Brief:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you is the weekly sermon brief OVERALL to your sermon preparation?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. In your opinion, what is the greatest **STRENGTH** of our weekly research material (sermon brief)?

4. In your opinion, what is the greatest **WEAKNESS** of our weekly research material (sermon brief)?

5. In your opinion, what would be the most helpful **ADDITION** we could make to the research materials to help your weekly sermon preparation?

6. **Weekly Preaching Team Meeting:** On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with the following components of the weekly preaching team meeting?
- A. Time of the Meeting (3:30 PM Mon.):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - B. Length of Meeting (+/- 1 Hour):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - C. Location of the Meeting (BW 2140):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - D. Prayer Time:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - E. Evaluation of Previous Sermon:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - F. Presentation by Research Assistant:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - G. Opportunity to Participate in Discussion:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - H. Opportunity to Ask Questions:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - I. Opportunity to Contextualize:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7. **Weekly Preaching Team Meeting:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you is the weekly preaching team meeting **OVERALL** to your sermon preparation?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8. In your opinion, what is the greatest **STRENGTH** of our weekly preaching team meeting?
-
-
9. In your opinion, what is the greatest **WEAKNESS** of our weekly preaching team meeting?
-
-
10. In your opinion, what is the single greatest **ADJUSTMENT** we could make to our preaching team meeting that would be **MOST** helpful to you?
-
-
11. **Preaching Team Collaboration:** On a scale of 1-10, how important to you is the following?
- A. Annual Preaching Team Planning Retreat (3-Day):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - B. Annual Preaching Team Planning Retreat (1-Day):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - C. Weekly Preaching Team Meetings:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - D. Workshops with Guest Speakers:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 - E. Logos Bible Software Training:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- F. Availability of the Preaching Team Assistant:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- G. Opportunity to have Your Sermons Evaluated:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. In your opinion, what would be the SINGLE most helpful ADDITION or ADJUSTMENT we could make to help you make your weekly sermon preparation more effective.

APPENDIX 2

PREACHING TEAM SURVEY RESULTS

After the preaching team survey was completed, an executive summary was created to collate the findings. This document was presented to the preaching team of Brentwood Baptist Church in January 2020 for discussion and the implementation of findings.

BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH PREACHING TEAM SURVEY RESULTS

Executive Summary

January 2020

Project Context: In 1990 there were 10 multi-site churches in North America. According to Leadership Network, by early 2019 there were over 5,000 churches using the multi-site strategy to reach people utilizing more than one campus. Since 2010, we have been developing and refining a preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church. My larger doctoral project is to document our model for multiplication and find ways to improve our process both for our pastors and a growing number of interested churches/networks. The purpose of this specific mixed method research was to measure the level of satisfaction of our (1) weekly research materials; and (2) the weekly preaching team meeting; and (3) the annual planning/equipping process. What I discovered is that our preaching team is *very satisfied* with both the research brief and our team meetings. This does not mean there is not room for improvement however, as the research identified areas of potential growth.

Sermon Research Materials: 7.75 (on a scale of 1-10)

- **High/Low:** The lowest score was on “suggested outline” which received a 5.92. The highest score was for the “sermon synopsis statement” which ranked at 7.67.
- **Strengths:** A time savings of 2-3 hours per pastor per week. Helps identify key themes early in the week. “Jump starts” the sermon preparation process.
- **Weaknesses:** Repetitive use of the same or similar resources. The material could use more consistent illustration and application suggestions.
- **Add:** More key word studies and language helps.

Weekly Preaching Team Meeting: 8.47 (on a scale of 1-10)

- **High/Low:** The lowest score was on “prayer time” at 5.75 and the highest score was the “opportunity to contextualize” at 9.58.
- **Strengths:** High level of engagement and participation. Depth of ministry experience and diversity of perspectives (deaf, Chinese, millennial) in the room are helpful.
- **Weaknesses:** Timing of the meeting on a late Monday afternoon which can lead to fatigue and a lack of focus at times.
- **Add:** More time in prayer and peer-reviewed sermon evaluations (see below).

Annual Planning and Equipping: Growth Edges

- **Timing:** Refine our annual preaching team calendar to ensure that non-regular events (retreats, guest workshops, Logos training) don’t conflict with busy seasons.

- **Series Preparation:** Develop the discipline of getting out ahead of each series with a creative planning meeting to develop themes, creative illustrations and worship/media-supported elements.
- **Sermon Evaluations:** Develop a process to capture and schedule peer-evaluated sermons for improvement, accountability, and encouragement.

Results

Please answer this satisfaction survey on a scale of 1-10 by circling ONE number, with 1 being the LEAST satisfied and 10 the MOST satisfied.

1. **Weekly Research Materials:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you are the following items in the research brief in accomplishing the following as you prepare for Sunday?
 - A. Sermon Synopsis Statement:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.67** 8 9 10
 - B. Suggested Outline:
1 2 3 4 **5.92** 6 7 8 9 10
 - C. Word Studies / Biblical Lang:
1 2 3 4 5 **6.92** 7 8 9 10
 - D. Commentary Summaries:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.17** 8 9 10
 - E. Sermons from Other Pastors:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.25** 8 9 10
 - F. Articles (Web articles, blogs):
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.5** 8 9 10
 - G. Illustration Ideas:
1 2 3 4 5 **6.25** 7 8 9 10
2. **Sermon Brief:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you is the weekly sermon brief OVERALL to your sermon preparation?
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.75** 8 9 10
3. In your opinion, what is the greatest **STRENGTH** of our weekly research material (sermon brief)?
 - Helps provide focus, insight, and a variety of resources/ideas
 - It provides a strong starting point for research and prep.
 - The diversity of the commentary material.
 - It summarizes the basic message and gives good material to follow up with more in-depth study.
 - The beginning stuff is all in the same place. The speed of getting started.
 - Articles on a particular passage/subject.
 - It helps you identify the major themes of the text early in the week.
 - Helps me quickly get a handle on the passage.
 - Saves 2-3 hours gathering materials, good quality of resources represented.
 - Consolidation of resources, direction, provides a solid start
 - Big idea focus.
 - Suggested sermon illustrations to connect content with the listener.

4. In your opinion, what is the greatest **WEAKNESS** of our weekly research material (sermon brief)?
- Its heavy on content/hermeneutics and not very robust on homiletical application.
 - More robust theologically and more word studies.
 - Can be too general.
 - Not enough diverse sources
 - It would be grateful to get it farther in advance, maybe even before the series
 - Lack of illustration ideas, repetitive resources used
 - Repetitive resources
 - Too much reformed material
 - Sometimes there are too many suggestions and I can get bogged down with too much to say
 - There is not much of a cohesive focus to the research resources
 - Could become replacement for time in the Word itself
5. In your opinion, what would be the most helpful **ADDITION** we could make to the research materials to help your weekly sermon preparation?
- Select commentary on basis of the general direction of the sermon series
 - To be honest, I don't know. I think we have a very good thing and I wouldn't change much at all.
 - More language work
 - More key word studies and/or contextual insight about the passage
 - More language work and quality illustration ideas
 - Greater variety of commentaries and more language work
 - Not much
 - More language and word studies
 - Sharper focus to the organization of the materials
6. **Weekly Preaching Team Meeting:** On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with the following components of the weekly preaching team meeting?
- A. Time of the Meeting (3:30 PM Mon.):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.17** 9 10
- B. Length of Meeting (+/- 1 Hour):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.42** 9 10
- C. Location of the Meeting (BW 2140):
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.67** 8 9 10
- D. Prayer Time:
1 2 3 4 **5.75** 6 7 8 9 10
- E. Evaluation of Previous Sermon:
1 2 3 4 5 **6.00** 7 8 9 10
- F. Presentation by Research Assistant:
1 2 3 4 5 **6.17** 7 8 9 10
- G. Opportunity to Participate in Discussion:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9.08** 10
- H. Opportunity to Ask Questions:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9.25** 10
- I. Opportunity to Contextualize:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **9.58** 10
7. **Weekly Preaching Team Meeting:** On a scale of 1-10, how helpful to you is the weekly preaching team meeting **OVERALL** to your sermon preparation?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.47** 9 10

8. In your opinion, what is the greatest **STRENGTH** of our weekly preaching team meeting?
- Synergy and idea sharing
 - Hearing the direction the other pastors are going for their sermon
 - Hearing the pastor's struggles and takeaways
 - The collaborative conversations, ideas, and level of participation
 - Getting all the preachers in the same room
 - Collaboration
 - Collaboration and Collegiality
 - Fresh ideas to explain and illustrate
 - Collaboration
 - Varied perspectives and experience of the pastors
 - Collaboration
 - Collaboration and shared knowledge
9. In your opinion, what is the greatest **WEAKNESS** of our weekly preaching team meeting?
- Late in the day, creativity and focus are waning
 - Lack of focus at times
 - Lack of guided discussion sometimes
 - Timing; later in the week would be better for me
 - Too much sharing
 - Lack of focus in the discussion some weeks
 - We don't hear enough from Mike regarding his thoughts and approach
 - Late on Monday; everybody is tired
 - We need to pray more in the meeting
 - Lack of time praying for the specific topic
 - Engagement level varies; sometimes it is directionless
10. In your opinion, what is the single greatest **ADJUSTMENT** we could make to our preaching team meeting that would be **MOST** helpful to you?
- Have one pastor come with a devotional thought from the sermon passage and set a prayerful, focused tone for the meeting.
 - Spend the last 15 minutes praying for each other in the meeting.
 - Move it to Tuesday morning.
 - As much as I would hate this, perhaps watching and evaluating one another. Maybe read a preaching book together.
 - More structure
 - Find a more creative venue; more collaboration
 - Move to Tuesday
 - Clear takeaways for application and group use
 - More prayer together for the upcoming sermons.
11. **Preaching Team Collaboration:** On a scale of 1-10, how important to you is the following?
- A. Annual Preaching Team Planning Retreat (3-Day):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.83** 9 10
- B. Annual Preaching Team Planning Retreat (1-Day):
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.75** 9 10
- C. Weekly Preaching Team Meetings:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8.75** 9 10
- D. Workshops with Guest Speakers:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.42** 8 9 10
- E. Logos Bible Software Training:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.58** 8 9 10

- F. Availability of the Preaching Team Assistant:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.67** 8 9 10
- G. Opportunity to have Your Sermons Evaluated:
1 2 3 4 5 6 **7.58** 8 9 10

12. In your opinion, what would be the SINGLE most helpful ADDITION or ADJUSTMENT we could make to help you make your weekly sermon preparation more effective.

- Additional resources to comb/glean stories, illustrations, etc.
- Less other meetings that take away focus and energy
- More constructive feedback on my sermons
- Looking out at a whole series in advance
- Evaluation of sermons and creative planning ahead for each series
- Personal evaluation and/or one-on-one sermon feedback
- We need to be more intentional in sermon review. Getting everyone on video is the next step.
- I would want to be careful when we have the extra meetings so that we don't have them during times we are doing reviews or other major events. This is a small issue but it happened twice in 2019.
- Mid-week collaboration with 1-2 other pastors.

APPENDIX 3

SURVEY OF OTHER MULTI-SITE PREACHING TEAMS—RESULTS

The second goal of this project was to increase knowledge by conducting a review of ten other multi-site preaching teams to borrow best practices and areas for growth and improvement. Below is the executive summary of the electronic survey taken by ten churches with additional comments from three pastors interviewed for further insights. The churches that participated in the survey include:

1. Church at the Mill, Spartanburg, SC
2. Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL
3. Family Church, West Palm Beach, FL
4. Houston's First Baptist Church, Houston, TX
5. Lindsey Lane Baptist Church, Athens, AL
6. New Life Church, Chicago, IL
7. The Orchard Church, Tupelo, MS
8. Real Life Church, Orlando, FL
9. Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, KY
10. Woodside Bible Church, Troy, MI

SURVEY OF OTHER MULTI-SITE PREACHING TEAMS

Executive Summary

April 2021

Ten multisite churches with preaching teams responded to this qualitative survey designed to identify best practices. Their written feedback combined with follow-up interviews of three of the pastors produced the following summary answers.

1. **What are the EXPECTATIONS you set for teaching pastors in your church?** (Weekly preparation, attendance at meetings, amount of preparation time, adherence to specific sermon elements, etc.)
 - **Be prepared.** There are high expectations that every preaching pastor come well prepared to the preaching team meeting and sermon preparation process. This preparation is spiritual (prayer), academic (research), and attitude (fully engaged).
 - **Follow the preaching plan.** While how far out they create a sermon plan varies widely, all multisite churches expect the sermon plan to be followed with few exceptions. Every campus preaching the same series and text is viewed as a key part of the “glue” that holds together multiple contextualized campuses.
 - **Share your best insights and illustrations.** Some churches are more formal about documenting their best study notes, insights and illustrations (sharing full sermon manuscripts) and some are less (text messages over the weekend), but all agree that one of the gifts of a preaching team is sharing great ideas together to strengthen sermons.
2. **How do you RESOURCE your preaching team?** (Do you have a sermon research assistant? Do you provide a weekly sermon brief and if so, can you provide an example? Do you invest in preaching team development through books, conferences, workshops, etc?)
 - **Use your best people to resource your sermons.** Some are paid and some are not, some are staff, and some are not, but every church develops a team of gifted and willing people to help with sermon research.
 - **Point your team to the best tools.** Nearly every church either purchases or recommends several key commentaries or books that are helpful annually.
 - **Preaching team retreats are essential.** Most churches find time for the preaching team to get away from the grind of day-to-day ministry a key to success. All use it to plan and some use it to sharpen and equip as well.
3. **What are your methods for effective COLLABORATION?** (Provide a walk-through of how you communicate and work together weekly; Do you evaluate sermons on a regular basis? If so, what evaluation tools do you utilize?)
 - **Weekly meetings are the foundation for consistent collaboration.** Whether face-to-face or on Zoom, regular preaching team meetings establish both a weekly rhythm for sermon preparation and deepen relationships.

- **Mid-range meetings help with creativity.** “Sermon Summit” planning that happens once every 2-4 months helps teams get ahead of the next season or big series and gives enough planning time for creative ideas to come to life.
 - **Long range planning is a process built around a retreat.** Good annual sermon plans are not just about the days away, but about the year-round thought process, the on-going evaluation, and that everyone is prepared to bring their best thinking to the team.
4. **How do you EVALUATE sermons for improvement?** (Have you developed tools, evaluation processes, metrics, rubrics, etc.?)
- **Sermon review is the path to better preaching.** Most churches have a review process in place. The approach varies, but the expectation is there that pastors are reviewing and improving their sermons and delivery.
 - **Mentoring and coaching is key.** Some senior pastors prefer to coach one-on-one and others review sermons as a group, but having a mentor/coach with experience giving constructive feedback is the irreducible minimum.
 - **Rubrics can help but they don’t replace relationship.** Some churches use written sermons evaluations from both coaches and/or selected members, but most agree that individualized coaching is the most valuable and effective.
5. Is there ANYTHING ELSE that we should know about your model that has been helpful or a hindrance?
- **Some find outlines helpful...some don’t.** Several churches collaboratively develop an outline, but most don’t. It works where there is a strong system in place and more of a “franchise” mindset.
 - **Some churches are finding success with a hybrid of live preaching and video.** In a few churches, a hybrid approach enables the congregation to still see and hear from the senior pastor while committing to develop campus preaching pastors usually on a “percentage” formula.
 - **Bi-vocational strategies have a bright future.** Acknowledging the need to resource part-time pastors, a few churches have bi-vocational pastors in their network but the need and the trend is growing. This has significant implications for meeting times and sermon planning rhythms.

APPENDIX 4

PREACHING TEAM POINTS OF EXCELLENCE

The third goal of the project was to develop a consistent set of standards and expectations, or “points of excellence,” for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church. This document was created from responses made on a rubric given to the team generated from a previous list of priorities. An initial document was created, presented to the preaching team, and then revised into the information provided in this appendix.



Preaching Team

Points of Excellence for Teaching Pastors

Under the leadership of the Senior Pastor, the Brentwood Baptist Preaching Team is responsible for the preaching and teaching of Scripture in all Brentwood Baptist campuses and venues.

Introductory Thoughts from Senior Pastor Mike Glenn:

At Brentwood Baptist Church, we take preaching very seriously. We also love it more than anything else we do. We're blessed to have the opportunity to serve with a team of preachers. This structure creates a comfortable place for mutual support, accountability, and maximum creativity. With this in mind, I would ask that you do the following in order to be prepared for our weekly time together:

- Read the text. If reasonable, read the entire book. Do your best to understand the passage in context.
- Think about how your people will hear this text and what issues they'll want you to address.
- Identify the "big rocks" for your campus or congregation.
- Read through the research. You probably won't have time to complete your sermon research, but familiarize yourself with the work done by our research assistant.
- Identify any problem areas of the text that might need special attention from you.
- Identify themes your people will readily identify.
- Pray. For yourself, each other and our church.

Must Do:

- Each teaching pastor must align with the **Annual Sermon Plan** that is developed by the Senior Pastor and Preaching Team Coordinator in collaboration with the preaching team. Each major series should be preached in all venues. Each Sunday the same Scripture text and main point should be preached with the exception of "open Sundays," when the text and focus is the discretion of the teaching pastor.
- Each teaching pastor should preach using the **Christian Standard Bible (CSB)** unless another translation is approved for a particular Sunday by the Preaching Team. This is to ensure consistency across campuses, venues and for our next generation ministries.
- **The Baptist Faith and Message (1963)** is our doctrinal standard as a church and serves as our statement of faith. All preaching and teaching should align with these doctrines.
- The preaching team meets from **3:30-4:30 on Monday afternoon**. It is expected for teaching pastors to attend.
- The preaching team research assistant provides a **research document** at minimum 1-2 weeks before each sermon. While no teaching pastor is required to use the material provided, it is expected that the document is reviewed prior to the preaching team meeting.
- Teaching pastors should be available to **rotate** to other campuses/venues as requested and/or needed.

- **Substitute** teaching pastors must come from the approved list or be approved by the regional lead pastor and/or senior pastor's office.

Should Do:

- Each teaching pastor should enlist **prayer support** of key leaders and/or staff. How prayer needs and updates are distributed is at the discretion of the teaching pastor.
- The Senior Pastor or Preaching Team Coordinator will occasionally **call meetings** as needed for long-range sermon planning or addressing key issues. It is expected that these called meetings are a priority.
- The Senior Pastor or Preaching Team Coordinator will on occasion give **assignments** or **readings** to the preaching team. These are expected to be a priority.
- Teaching pastors should give feedback to the **communications** team as needed and within the timeframe requested for items like sermon series artwork, supporting projects and videos.
- Feedback should be given to the discipleship/groups team and Lifeway Christian Resources as requested for the creation and evaluation of **sermon-guided resources**.

Nice to Do:

- The Senior Pastor reserves the right to request that the Preaching Team attend **conferences, seminars or make visits** to area churches for professional development.
- Under the coaching of the senior pastor, **extemporaneous preaching** is preferred (preaching without notes).

Discouraged – Don't Do:

- Don't preach without offering an invitation to respond and clear next steps.
- Don't allow the preaching moment to become a time for programming announcements; work with the worship planning team to ensure those happen at other times during the service.
- Don't give undue focus to civil and "Hallmark" holidays.
- Don't do anything without asking the Model-netics Main Event Compass questions – especially the "Why" question.

Preaching Team:

- Senior Pastor – Mike Glenn
- Preaching Team Research Assistant – Rob Tims
- Preaching Team Coordinator / Station Hill Campus Pastor – Jay Strother
- Avenue South Campus Pastor – Aaron Bryant
- West Franklin Campus Pastor – Matt Pearson
- Nolensville Campus Pastor – Wade Owens
- Woodbine Campus Pastor – Doug Jones
- Lockeland Springs Campus Pastor – David Hannah
- Harpeth Heights Campus Pastor – Brandon Owen
- Chinese Congregation Pastor – Matthew Wang
- Deaf Church Pastor – Aric Randolph
- Kairos Pastor – Mike Harder
- Discipleship/Groups Team Representative – Paul Wilkinson/Eddy Mosley
- Communications Director – Darrel Girardier
- Residency Program Students and Church Planting Residents, by invitation

APPENDIX 5

PREACHING TEAM SERMON SELF-EVALUATION TOOL

The fourth goal of the project to develop a self-evaluation rubric that measures sermon focus, alignment, and areas of improvement for each teaching pastor to utilize in evaluation of their preaching. The pastors used this self-evaluation tool for four consecutive Sundays.

PREACHING TEAM SERMON SELF-EVALUATION TOOL

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help improve a methodological framework for the preaching team at Brentwood Baptist Church (TN). This research is being conducted by Jay Strother for purposes of project research for a Doctorate of Ministry in leadership. In this research, you will be asked to answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Instructions

Research shows that self-evaluation can be an effective tool for skill improvement. Self-evaluation tools help us as communicators to think not only about our content but also the process of preparing and delivering a sermon. For four weeks we ask that you take time to self-evaluate your sermon using the rubric on the following page. Rank yourself in each of the following areas described below. For simplicity and clarity, we are using the “Hook, Book, Took, Look” approach.¹ Adding comments weekly is highly encouraged as this will increase awareness and document your own thoughts for future improvement.

Sermon Preparation – Is there evidence that you as the teaching pastor prepared thoroughly for this sermon? Was the sermon well-organized and points well-developed? Were a variety of illustrations used and sources quoted?

Hook - Did you feel that the introduction grabbed the attention of your audience and introduce the “big idea” of the message? Did the sermon capture the heads and hearts of the congregation? Were your illustrations clear and compelling? Could an unbeliever track with this message?

Book - What did you learn from the Scripture being taught? Did you feel your exposition of the text clear? Was there a clear connection with the text and the key points of the message?

Look - Did the sermon flow with the “bent” of the text? Was the text used to “afflict the comfortable” (challenge believers) and “comfort the afflicted” (bring gospel hope to unbelievers) appropriately? Was there a gospel connection and was it clear?

Took - Did this message speak to the head (truth), heart (emotions) and hands (application)? Were next steps for application clearly presented? Did the message answer the “so what?” question?

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1988).

Presentation – Were you clear and confident in handling the text? Did your voice, gestures, body language help or hurt the sermon? Were visual aids/slides helpful and free from distracting errors?

Gospel Response – Was the text clearly connected to the gospel? Was a gospel invitation offered and clear instructions given for how to respond? What types of response were there to this message?

Sermon Title and Text:

Date:

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Sermon Preparation				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Hook				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Book				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Look				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Took				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Presentation				
<i>Comments:</i>				
Gospel Response				
<i>Comments:</i>				

Additional Comments:

Practical Takeaways for Improvement:

APPENDIX 6

SERMON SELF-EVALUATIONS

This appendix is the executive summary of the sermon self-evaluations. After completing the surveys in May 2021, this summary was presented to the preaching team of Brentwood Baptist Church.

SERMON SELF-EVALUATIONS

Executive Summary

June 2021

Research shows that self-evaluation can be an effective tool for skill improvement. Self-evaluation tools help us as communicators to think not only about our content but also the process of preparing and delivering a sermon. For four weeks we asked our teaching pastors to take time to self-evaluate their sermon using a rubric. They ranked themselves using the “Hook, Book, Took, Look” approach.¹ They also evaluated their sermon preparation, presentation, and gospel response. Finally, we asked them to make additional comments and list practical takeaways weekly in order to increase awareness and document their own thoughts for future improvement.

1. **Sermon Preparation** – Is there evidence that you as the teaching pastor prepared thoroughly for this sermon? Was the sermon well-organized and points well-developed? Were a variety of illustrations used and sources quoted?
 - Excellent – 13%; Good – 63%; Satisfactory – 25%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - Over 75% of the time our pastors feel excellent or good about the amount of time we are putting into sermon preparation.
 - Our senior pastor’s strong encouragement to protect time in prayer and study creates a culture that helps guard our teaching pastor’s preparation.
2. **Hook** - Did you feel that the introduction grabbed the attention of your audience and introduce the “big idea” of the message? Did the sermon capture the heads and hearts of the congregation? Were your illustrations clear and compelling? Could an unbeliever track with this message?
 - Excellent – 22%; Good – 59%; Satisfactory – 19%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - 81% of the time our pastors feel like they good or better at grabbing the attention of our people with the “big idea” of the sermon.
 - The collaborative sermon preparation process helps us share ideas for big hooks and sermon illustrations.
3. **Book** - What did you learn from the Scripture being taught? Did you feel your exposition of the text clear? Was there a clear connection with the text and the key points of the message?
 - Excellent – 69%; Good – 31%; Satisfactory – 0%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - As a preaching team, we feel we are best at clear exposition of the text. This is our strongest metric. We are Bible teachers at heart.
 - Anecdotally, this is confirmed by the numerous stories we have of first time guests and observers who comment on how much we use the Bible when preaching, how we don’t just “read a verse and then never touch the Bible again” in our sermons, etc.

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1988).

4. **Look** - Did the sermon flow with the “bent” of the text? Was the text used to “afflict the comfortable” (challenge believers) and “comfort the afflicted” (bring gospel hope to unbelievers) appropriately? Was there a gospel connection and was it clear?
 - Excellent – 34%; Good – 59%; Satisfactory – 6%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - “Book” and “look” are the most closely related, so its no surprise that our teaching pastors rank ourselves high in this category as well.

5. **Took** - Did this message speak to the head (truth), heart (emotions) and hands (application)? Were next steps for application clearly presented? Did the message answer the “so what?” question?
 - Excellent – 9%; Good – 50%; Satisfactory – 41%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - While still nearly 60% positive, we still do not feel as strong in our application as we do our exposition.
 - 2021 was the first year we explicitly put “next steps” in the annual sermon planning document for each sermon. We are getting stronger in application, but we still have room to grow.

6. **Presentation** – Were you clear and confident in handling the text? Did your voice, gestures, body language help or hurt the sermon? Were visual aids/slides helpful and free from distracting errors?
 - Excellent – 16%; Good – 59%; Satisfactory – 25%; Needs Improvement – 0%
 - This indicates that the general attitude of our teaching pastors is that we are good communicators who with a little more work could become excellent.
 - The month of May is filled with unique challenges (Mother’s Day, Graduate Recognition, Memorial Day Weekend) and several mentioned in their comments feeling they and/or their congregations were not as focused during this 4-week window.

7. **Gospel Response** – Was the text clearly connected to the gospel? Was a gospel invitation offered and clear instructions given for how to respond? What types of response were there to this message?
 - Excellent – 13%; Good – 22%; Satisfactory – 47%; Needs Improvement – 19%
 - Gospel Response was our lowest evaluated category by far. While we all offer some form of invitation, we all desire to see greater response.
 - Our church records indicate that in May 2021 we had 8 professions of faith and 47 baptisms and 124 join the church across all campuses.

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ABSTRACT

IMPROVING THE PREACHING TEAM MODEL AT BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH AND ITS REGIONAL CAMPUSES

Jacob Hamilton Strother, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Timothy Paul Jones

This project was designed to improve a theological and methodological framework for the preaching team model at Brentwood Baptist Church and its regional campuses that would result in greater unity, alignment, and effectiveness in gospel proclamation as well as provide transferable principles for other multi-site churches or networks that would prefer a preaching team model to a video preaching model.

Chapter 1 introduces the ministry context regarding Brentwood Baptist Church and the development of its multi-site structure and the preaching team model. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for preaching in a multi-site church structure where faithful men are equipped to contextualize the unchanging message of the gospel to their campus and congregation. Key passages examined are Acts 2:17-36, Ephesians 4:1-16, and 1 Timothy 3:1-16. Chapter 3 examines the multi-site movement and how it is an emerging strategy to fulfill the mission of the church that leverages team-based leadership, collaboration, and the ministerial development of pastors. Chapter 4 details the preaching team meeting assessment, a survey of other churches that utilize preaching teams, the development of “points of excellence” for the preaching team, and the sermon self-evaluation rubric introduced to improve preaching. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the project and suggestions for improvement.

VITA

Jacob Hamilton Strother

EDUCATION

BS, Greenville University (Illinois), 1997
MDiv, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006

PUBLICATIONS

Essential Truth: Inviting Christ into My Reality. Nashville: Serendipity, 2005.
Loving Well: Healthy Relationships. Brentwood, TN: Equipped Church.es, 2006.
“Family-Equipping Ministry: Church and Home as Co-Champions.” In *Perspectives in Family Ministry*, edited by Timothy Paul Jones, 161-90. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007.
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ORGANIZATIONS

Ministry Team Chair, Rockettown Board of Directors, 2004-2010
Leadership Council, Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2019-2021

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Minister, Wisetown Baptist Church, Beaver Creek, IL, 1994-1997
Coach and Teaching Pastor, Crosspoint Sports Ministry, Lifeway Christian Resources, 1997
Discipleship and Student Minister, Shiloh Baptist Church, Somerville, Alabama, 1997-2001
Student Minister, Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, Tennessee, 2001-2006
Next Generation Minister, Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, Tennessee, 2006-2010
Campus and Teaching Pastor, The Church at Station Hill, Spring Hill, Tennessee, 2010-
Lead Pastor, South Region, Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, Tennessee, 2018-