TRAINING THE STAFF OF VINEYARD LIFE CHURCH

IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, IN HERMENEUTICS

AND BIBLE STUDY METHODS

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Charles Duayne Fox

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APPROVAL SHEET

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Charles Duayne Fox

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. T. J. Betts

Second Reader: Dr. William Cook

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Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Wesley L. Gerig

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PREFACE

This project and my studies at Southern Seminary are the latest step in what has been a lifetime adventure of following the Lord Jesus. I am humbly grateful that he watches over and guides, picking us up when we stumble. That he has led me to this place was something I never would have been able to imagine when I began my walk with him.

I thank the Lord for my loving wife, Shirley, who knows me better than I know myself. She knew before I realized it that I would be returning to school repeatedly over my whole life. I am eternally grateful for her support and love.

I also thank the Lord for the influence of the late Dr. Wes Gerig, who was my first theology teacher at Ft. Wayne Bible College many years ago. His example of humble Christian scholarship and of a life dedicated to following Jesus changed my life for the better and placed me on this path, although I did not know it at the time.

I am thankful for the friendship and mentorship of my lead pastor, Tony Portel. He believed in me and made a place for me in his ministry at a time when I was not sure of my purpose and direction. It is under his leadership that this project is taking place.

I would also like to thank my faculty supervisor, Dr. T. J. Betts, and my editor, Betsy Fredrick, whose advice and guidance were invaluable. My hope and prayer is that this project has served to better equip the staff of Vineyard Life Church for the ministries to which God has called each one of them.

Charles Fox

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The quality of the leadership of a church is crucial for its success in fulfilling the Great Commission. The maturity of a church and the spiritual growth of its members depends to a large degree on the spiritual maturity and skills of its staff. People tend to rise only as high as their leaders are able to lead them. For the church to thrive and grow spiritually, it must train leaders as an intentional part of its ministry.

The Association of Vineyard Churches describes itself as "a missionally-minded community, committed to carrying the words and works of Jesus into every arena of human life."[1] One of the core values of the Vineyard is that all believers can play a part in the ministry of the local church.

Context

Vineyard Life Church (VLC) in Indianapolis, Indiana, was planted in 2006 by the current lead pastor, Tony Portell, and his wife, Lori. It was born out of a vision to establish an outwardly focused church that would serve the community and love them into relationship with Christ. There are 250 regular attendees and about 400 members as of December 2021.

Discipleship and instruction have always been important focuses of the church. This has enabled VLC to produce effective lay leaders for its ministries. Some of these leaders are now interested in taking a next step toward a deeper ministry but lack a clear

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[1] Vineyard USA, "Our Purpose," accessed September 15, 2021, https://vineyardusa.org/about/our-journey-together.

path to do so. Failing to provide a path forward for them risks missing opportunities to be used by God advance his kingdom.

One of the strengths of VLC is that the church has been able to attract a strong and capable staff. Staff continuing education has been a goal from the beginning of VLC. However, the church has never had the resources to pursue this objective in an organized and consistent manner.

It is common in the Vineyard movement for churches to develop and recruit staff from the ranks of their own memberships and this pattern was followed in VLC. While the members of the church staff are well-grounded in their job functions, they usually lack theological training. Only the lead pastor, the children's ministry director, and I (Director of Ministry Training) have a theological education and efforts to provide training to the others have been limited by a lack of dedicated resources.

Another strength of VLC is that it has a well-defined path for discipleship. New members are encouraged to attend a series of four classes that ground them in basic Christian beliefs and give them a good start on following the path of discipleship. However, there are several weak areas in VLC's educational and discipleship program where staff training is concerned. The discipleship program for the general membership is not intended to teach the skills necessary for ministry leadership and is inadequate preparation for staff roles. Also, as has already been mentioned, staff development has not been done in a consistent or organized manner. While regular staff education is offered at meetings, there has been no master plan and the effort has been undirected and prone to be reactive rather than proactive.

The Vineyard Institute had been the educational arm of the movement, serving to enable local churches to offer more advanced training for aspiring ministers and ministry leads. Unfortunately, the Institute recently terminated its certificate programs. This created a second weak area in VLC's staff development. The loss of the Vineyard Institute certificate programs left people interested in more advanced training and education with

no formal or recognized path forward. Currently, VLC does not have a blueprint for how to proceed. Providing that path to staff members in a formal and organized manner will address VLC's main deficiencies in its staff education and training program.

Rationale

With the termination of the Vineyard Institute certificate programs, VLC now needs to deal with the issue of how to provide training for its staff and candidates for ministry. VLC currently has three members engaged in seminary study, ranging from a certificate program to a doctorate. One is a staff member and two are not. There are also people on the technical staff who feel called to full-time ministry for whom seminary is not a viable next step at this time for various reasons. There was no program in place to provide training or guidance for these candidates until this project.

The Vineyard movement has always encouraged its people to find their calling, and one of the denomination's values is "everyone gets to play." This means that "we all have vocations, or callings, which are meaningful to God and reveal his heart to the world in a special way."[2] To assist people in finding and fulfilling their callings, VLC needed to provide a deeper level of training to the members of the staff so they could in turn provide training to others.

While there are no glaring deficiencies among the staff members in their handling of Scripture, many of them were not consciously aware of the hermeneutical principles they use so that they could be applied in a consistent and professional manner. In addition, many of the staff were unaware of some Bible study methods that could be used to enhance their teaching and evangelistic efforts. VLC wanted to raise the level of professionalism among its staff members by increasing their ability to capably handle

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[2] Vineyard USA, "Everyone Gets to Play," accessed September 19, 2021, 18, https://multiplyvineyard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Everyone-Gets-To-Play-Outlines.pdfe

Scripture. These weaknesses were addressed by teaching a class on hermeneutics and Bible study methods.

A Hermeneutics and Bible Study Methods class was selected as a starting point because skilled Bible study is foundational to being better equipped to understand the truths and values presented in Scripture and present them to others. Church leaders can only competently lead and teach others when they are committed to follow Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."[3]

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach a class in hermeneutics and Bible study methods for the staff of Vineyard Life Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, to increase their ability to capably handle Scripture.

Goals

Three goals determined the success of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study practices among VLC staff members.

2. The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods.

3. The third goal was to equip the VLC staff to capably handle Scripture.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the three goals. The first goal was to assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study

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[3] All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

practices among VLC staff members. This goal was measured by administering a pre-survey to determine the current practices in use by the staff.[4] The pre-survey was conducted prior to developing the curriculum so that the curriculum could be tailored to meet the weak areas discovered. The goal was successfully met when all staff members had completed the survey.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods. This goal was completed to satisfy a requirement of Foundations of Teaching. This goal was considered successfully met when the assignment received a score of 96/100 from the expert panel review.

The third goal was to equip the participants to capably handle Scripture. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey to measure the change in knowledge. This goal was successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. Also, each student presented a lesson based on two Bible studies done as assignments in this class as a lesson appropriate for a randomly assigned age group. The presentations were evaluated by the pastor and course instructor of Vineyard Life Church who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, age appropriateness of the language and application, and relevance of the lesson.[5]

Limitations and Delimitations

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project focused only on the church staff. Second, the project was confined to an eight-week timeframe. This timeframe gave adequate time to provide a pre-survey, refine the curriculum, teach the eight-week training sessions, and conduct the post-survey after sessions were completed.

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[4] See 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.

[5] See appendix 4.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach a class in hermeneutics and Bible study methods for the staff of Vineyard Life Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, to increase their ability to capably handle Scripture. Just as God throughout redemptive history has used godly and skillful teachers to lead others to faith and to spiritual maturity, this work is an effort to apply this pattern at VLC with biblical faithfulness and intentionality.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
TRAINING IN BIBLE STUDY METHODS

The preaching and teaching of the Word of God is a fundamental duty of the
church. Paul instructed Timothy to "preach the word; be prepared in season and out of
season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2
Tim 4:2). The maturity of the disciples a church produces is directly related to the quality
of the teaching done there.

Church leaders are tasked with becoming good students of Scripture as a
primary responsibility, both so they can live exemplary Christian lives to serve as examples
to the church and so they are able to teach and lead others to achieve spiritual maturity.
Grant Osborne begins his book on hermeneutics by observing, that "for the true believer
there is very little as important as studying God's Word seriously."[1] Serious Bible study
cannot be achieved unless leaders are equipped with the skills necessary to correctly
understand Scripture and be able to explain and apply it to real world situations so
peoples' lives will be transformed. Numerous passages in the Bible command leaders to
be careful in their handling of Scripture and explain the benefits of gaining a deeper
understanding of the Bible. A few of the more important of these passages provide a
biblical basis for this project.

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[1] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 21.

Exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:14-19 and Training in
Accurate Biblical Interpretation

The Pastoral Epistles are a distinct part of Paul's writings that focus on pastoral

responsibilities. Their special focus on pastoral practice sets them apart, and the

designation "Pastoral Epistles," first used by David Berdot writing in 1703 about Titus

and later applied by Paul Anton to all three epistles in 1753-1755, has been used by the

church ever since.[2] As George Knight notes concerning their unity of content, "the three

letters 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus stand in very close relationship to one another."[3]

A key passage concerning the necessity for good biblical scholarship is found

in 2 Timothy 2:14-19:

> Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against
> quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your
> best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be
> ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because
> those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will
> spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed
> from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they
> destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed
> with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who
> confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

An exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:14-19 shows that church leaders are tasked with becoming

good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility by showing that the passage

contains the command to rightly handle Scripture as a guard against divisions and heresy

in the church as well as instructions concerning proper teaching.

This passage contains three related instructions about how to handle Scripture.

Philip Towner writes that this passage contains the three instructions in a pattern of

negative-positive-negative directives.[4] Verse 14 contains the first negative command that

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[2] George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 3.

[3] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 3.

[4] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 516-19.

Timothy is to "keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen."

The first issue that needs to be addressed is to what the "these things" refer. Commentators vary in their conclusions. Towner says that "'these things' is a vague reference."[5] He suggests several possible interpretations. "These things" may refer to Paul's instruction Timothy to "remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel" (2 Tim 2:8). It may also refer to verse 8 in combination with the hymn contained in verses 8-13. It could even refer to the whole unit from verse 8-13, which contains reminders of both Paul's teachings and Paul's current example of suffering for the faith.[6] Donald Guthrie agrees with Towner that "these things" is unclear but that the message is clear: "The first necessity is maintenance of right doctrine. Timothy is to keep reminding them of these things. The things are either those contained in the previous hymn or perhaps more generally of the teaching in the whole of the preceding part of the Epistle."[7]

Knight takes a broader view and believes that "these things" refers more generally to all of Paul's teachings, noting that verse 2 instructs Timothy that "the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." He writes,

> At the same time the preceding words to Timothy, vv. 3-13, in addition to the ταῦτα of v. 2, are the very things that he is to remind them of (on ταῦτα see especially 1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2). ὑπομίμνῃσκε (Pl. also in Tit. 3:1) is used here in the sense of "call to mind," "bring up" (cf. 3 Jn. 10). Timothy is commanded to bring to the minds of these men the very things that Paul has just brought to his mind.[8]

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[5] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 518.

[6] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 518.

[7] Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 164.

[8] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 410.

Paul wrote to Timothy with awareness of his imminent execution (as is clear from 2 Tim 4:6-8) and was knowingly passing the torch to his younger associate. Throughout the book, he commands Timothy to remember all that he has been taught. Given this context, it seems reasonable to understand that "these things" may refer particularly to the specific matters Paul has just reviewed for Timothy in the epistle, but also generally to the entire body of Pauline teaching. The broader application for us of this passage is the necessity of accurate and orthodox teaching by the church's leaders as a counter to false teachings.

Next, Paul instructs Timothy to not only remind the church of the teachings they have received but also to "warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen" (v. 14). The addition of "warn them before God" serves to impress upon Timothy the serious nature of the warning he is to give. Towner observes that this language instructs Timothy to "call on God as an approving witness of what is taught, thus implying that it is God's teaching."[9] The content of this serious warning is to refrain from "quarreling about words" (v. 14).

Scholars disagree about the exact meaning of the phrase "quarreling about words." Guthrie suggests that one cannot be sure of what the content of the dispute was, concluding that the "content of these verbal bouts is immaterial."[10] Towner simply notes that the "phrase is difficult in Greek."[11] However, Knight believes the context indicates that Paul has a specific dispute in mind. He writes, "Paul is not referring to 'hair splitting' (contra BAGD[12]) but to the kind of serious dispute about the meaning and significance of words relating to the Christian faith that results, as this passage indicates, in straying from

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[9] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 518.

[10] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 164.

[11] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 518.

[12] BAGD (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich) is the second edition of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

the truth and saying that the resurrection has taken place."[13]

Regardless of whether Paul has a specific dispute in mind here, he was expressing his concern over serious conflict in the church. His deep concern about this is evident in that he returned to that theme almost immediately and made a similar command: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful" (vv. 23-24).

Paul's concern over the disputes was that "it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen" (v. 14). Luke Johnson points out that "ruins" suggests that rather than fulfilling the church's objective of building people up, the disputes taking place were seriously damaging the faith of the hearers: "The verb *katastrephein* means to 'overturn or tear down.'"[14]

Towner notes,

> In fact, the translation *quarreling about words* (v. 14) expresses one side of a single Greek word that can also mean "fighting with words." The one term sums up their activity as a whole, content and method. Their fight with words and disputable doctrines caused strife and division. The outcome of their efforts was negative in two respects. First, because of the spurious nature of the words and their improper motives, their arguments produced nothing of value. Second, the greater danger was that poorly grounded believers might be influenced by personality or cleverness of words to accept some novel view that could "ruin" their faith. Their quarrels about doctrine and "word fighting" did nothing to build up the church or the individual.[15]

Paul next turns to the positive command to "do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (v. 15). Johnson writes, "The thought here is pervasive in ancient moral teaching: unless character is tested and proved, it cannot be considered fully

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[13] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 410.

[14] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 35A (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 384.

[15] Philip Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 2 Tim 2:14-18, Logos Bible Software.

formed."[16] Towner expands upon that idea by noting that this command requires work

and conscious effort over time:

> What makes this worker different from the false teacher? First, this one's life and work must be oriented toward God. The opponents looked to people for approval, but God's servants must seek it from God. This orienting of oneself toward God involves an active (do your best, or "make the effort") and conscious (present yourself) decision. Avoiding the ways of the false teachers and remaining true to the gospel in teaching and life form the test that faced Timothy. God's approval would rest upon the one who passed this test (1 Cor 11:19; 2 Cor 10:18). Second, and inseparable from this focus on God, God's worker will demonstrate unashamed commitment to the gospel.[17]

In his more recent commentary, Towner adds that "approved" implies someone

will be assessing Timothy's work and it will be tested for its truth.[18] Knight makes a

similar observation.[19] All agree that this is more than a casual presentation of oneself and

involves consistent dedication over time coupled with conscious effort to remain true to

the gospel. This verse places a high requirement upon Timothy and by extension upon all

who would preach and teach the Bible.

The King James Version translates the phrase "correctly handles the word of

truth" as "rightly dividing the word of truth" (v. 15). This translation was often adopted as

a slogan by early dispensationalists. For example, C. I. Scofield writes, "The Word of

truth, then has right divisions, and it must be evident that, as one cannot be 'a workman

that needeth not be ashamed' without observing them, so any study of that Word which

ignores those divisions must be in large measure profitless and confusing."[20] Most modern

translators and commentators render the phrase as "correctly handle the word of truth."

S. T. Bloomfield notes that the term translated "correctly handle" is probably a metaphor

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[16] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 384.

[17] Towner, *1-2 Timothy eand Titus*, 2 Tim 2:14-18.

[18] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 520.

[19] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 411.

[20] C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Columbia, SC: Pantianos, 1896), v.

with origins in quarrying or stone-cutting: "The metaphor is rather, I apprehend, from *stone-cutting*, in which operation to act aright, it is necessary for the workman to cut *straight*; whence, I suspect, the term in question was popularly transferred to any ἔργον, and those who handled it *aright* were said ὀρθοτομεῖν τὸ ἔργον."[21]

As Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann note, the Greek word translated "correctly handle" is rarely found, appearing once in the New Testament and twice in the Septuagint. They agree it was probably used in 2 Timothy idiomatically: "The Greek term translated with 'teach rightly' (ὀρθοτομεῖν) has not been adequately explained so far. It seems—in view of its occurrence in Pr 3:6 and 11:5, where it is connected with 'ways' (ὁδοί) in a figurative sense—to presuppose the meaning 'to clear a way' (τέμνειν ὁδόν)."[22] Frederick W. Danker et al. concurs, although he places more emphasis on the sense of guiding along a straight road than on clearing a path: "Then ὀρθοτομεῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας would prob. mean guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk."[23]

While the translation of the term is generally agreed upon, there remains a question: does "correctly handle" mean the act of teaching correctly or does it mean right conduct in conformity with the teachings of Scripture. Towner examines both alternatives and concludes that the context suggests Paul intended this to refer primarily to Timothy's teaching ministry.[24] While the conduct of a teacher is unquestionably important, Paul's focus here is on correct teaching as a remedy to false teaching.

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[21] S. T. Bloomfield, *A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840), 303.

[22] Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 111.

[23] Frederick W. Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 722.

[24] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 521-22.

The reward for Timothy is that by rightly handling the word of truth, he will be "a worker who does not need to be ashamed" (v. 2:15). Johnson treats "shame" here as used in the same sense in which Paul had previously instructed Timothy to not be ashamed or has asserted that he himself is not ashamed: "The note of shame here continues the theme that was established by Paul's warning not to be ashamed in 1:8, his declaration that he was not ashamed in 1:12, and the statement that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chains in 1:16. If Timothy is *dokimos* (proven worthy), then he has no need to be ashamed."[25] Walter Lock suggests that "shame" is "perhaps a conscious reminiscence of 1:8, 12, 17 'a workman who is not ashamed of his task or of his master'; but more probably 'a workman who will never be put to shame by being shown to have done bad work.'"[26]

Paul turns next to the final of these three directives in this section: "Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene" (vv. 16-17). While this verse appears to repeat the first directive where the warning to avoid godless chatter was outwardly directed toward the church, it is more specifically directed toward Timothy and by implication to all who preach and teach. As Knight observes, the responsibility to "avoid godless chatter" is an ongoing task. "The present tense of the imperative characterizes the action as that which Timothy must constantly do."[27] "Godless chatter" seems to describe a key feature of the Ephesian heresy. Towner thinks this "chatter" may have been destructive not only in terms of its content but also in how it was sidetracking the church into debating about trivial side issues instead of focusing on the gospel.[28]

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[25] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 384-85.

[26] Walter Lock, *I and II Timothy and Titus*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1924), 98-99.

[27] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 412.

[28] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 523.

Paul goes on to describe two detrimental effects of "godless chatter." First, "those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly" (v. 16). That is, engaging in "godless chatter" leads teachers down a path of becoming "more and more involved in godlessness" both in what they teach and in how they live.[29] Second, their false "teaching will spread like gangrene" (v. 17). False teachers not only cause themselves to progress toward greater godlessness, but their teachings infect the church and lead others astray. Guthrie notes that the medical imagery was apt. In an era before modern medicine, gangrene was a nearly unstoppable infection that would inevitably lead to destruction of the body and to death. This is a vivid picture of the effect of false teaching on both the church and on its individual members.[30]

Paul returns to the themes of the necessity of sound teaching and avoiding false doctrine repeatedly in the Pastoral Epistles. Doing these things requires teachers and preachers to become good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility so they can obey the command to rightly handle Scripture as a guard against divisions and heresy in the church. As a final note, it must be stated that faithfulness to orthodox doctrine alone is not sufficient unless blended with concern for the students. The goal is to gently lead people into the truth and not simply win debates. As Paul writes elsewhere in 2 Timothy 2,

> Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (vv. 23-26).

Exegesis of Psalm 1 and the Benefits of Meditating on the Law Day and Night

An exegesis of Psalm 1 will illustrate that church leaders are tasked with becoming good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility by showing that it

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[29] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 413.

[30] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 166.

identifies the benefits of meditating on the law day and night. The Word of God gives Jesus's disciples life and keeps them safe from falling away.

Whether there is any significance that this psalm was placed in first position within the book of Psalms is debated among scholars. Derek Kidner writes, "It seems likely that this psalm was specially composed as an introduction to the whole Psalter. Certainly it stands here as a faithful doorkeeper."[31] James Luther Mays agrees, adding that "its location as the first psalm is not accidental; the psalm is there to invite us to read and use the entire book as a guide to a blessed life."[32] It is therefore not inappropriate to look at this psalm as having the special significance of being an introduction to both the book of Psalms and to the reading and study of Scripture in general.

The psalm begins by pronouncing a blessing. Before examining the content of the blessing, the meaning of "blessing" must be examined. There are two Hebrew words for blessing. Hans-Joachim Kraus notes that "the 'secular' אשרי is to be distinguished from the solemn liturgical ברוך (Jer. 17:7). The English commentaries therefore correctly prefer 'happy' (A. Cohen, E. G. Briggs) to 'blessed' (G. Scroggie)."[33] Elaborating on this explanation, Mays explains,

> "Blessed" is the traditional translation of the saying's formulaic word; contemporary translations prefer "happy" in order to distinguish these sayings from pronouncements of blessing that invoke the beneficent work of God on persons and groups. In blessings, the formulaic Hebrew term is baruk; in beatitudes, 'ashre. The primary difference is that the blessing invokes God's beneficent support of life, while the beatitude points to and commends the conduct and character that enjoy it.[34]

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[31] Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 63.

[32] James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 40.

[33] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 115.

[34] Mays, *Psalms*, 41.

In Psalm 1, "blessing" is used in the sense of a beatitude and commends the conduct of meditating upon the law rather than invoking support for that effort. The psalmist begins by enumerating three ways in which the blessing is not received that are to be avoided by one wishing to be blessed. Artur Weiser notes that in this verse "the psalmist shows in detail and in phrases which are progressively intensified the various possible ways that lead to sin."[35]

The first way that leads to sin is to "walk in step with the wicked" (Ps 1:1). This phrase is more literally translated as "walking in the counsel of the wicked," meaning allowing oneself to be guided by the counsel and advice of the wicked.[36] Carl Bernhard Moll notes that these wicked persons may serve as both a model for others and as setting the standard by which others are measured.[37] According to A. F. Kirkpatrick, the word translated "wicked" is the "the most general term in the Old Testament for the ungodly in contrast to the righteous."[38] It is possible the term originally referred to someone who had been convicted in a court of law. However, it is used in the Old Testament in the more specific sense that "the רשע is one who has been found guilty before the Torah of God, one who is excluded from the sanctuary by order of a priest."[39] Therefore, the first snare that must be avoided is associating with ungodly people in a way that causes them to influence and guide a believer's behavior.

The second way in which blessing will not be received is to "stand in the way that sinners take" (Ps 1:1). Weiser understands this to be "conforming to the example of

[35] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998), 103.

[36] Weiser, *The Psalms*, 103.

[37] Carl Bernhard Moll, *The Psalms*, trans. Charles A. Briggs et al, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 50.

[38] A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1906), 2.

[39] Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 116.

the sinners."[40] A. F. Kirkpatrick adds the idea that the Hebrew word for "sinners" used here denotes habitual offenders, those whose lives are characterized by a pattern of chronic deliberate sin.[41] Mitchell Dahood notes that the language used suggests active participation and not just casual association with the sinners.[42]

The third way in which blessing will not be received is to "sit in the company of mockers" (Ps 1:1). Kidner points out that doing this is "adopting the most fatal of its attitudes—for the scoffers, if not the most scandalous of sinners, are the farthest from repentance."[43] "Scoffers" can also be translated as "scorners," and are "those who make what is good and holy the object of their ridicule."[44] Kraus notes of the scoffer that "his manner of speech and thought may in the OT be deduced from Isa. 28:15; Ps. 73:8-11; and Mal. 3:14. In wisdom poetry the 'scoffer' is a figure that occurs again and again."[45]

Examining Psalm 73, for example, one finds that "they scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore, their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, 'How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?'" (vv. 8-11). The picture is of scoffers who are arrogant, egocentric, and motivated by a desire to dominate and have power. They are people who lead others astray.

After stating in progressively more intense language what one is not blessed by being, the psalmist turns next to what one is blessed by: "Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night" (Ps 1:1-2).

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[40] Weiser, *The Psalms*, 103.

[41] Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 2.

[42] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 2.

[43] Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 64.

[44] Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 2.

[45] Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 116.

Charles Briggs and Emilie Briggs write that "law" is repeated twice in this verse, emphasizing its role as both a source of delight and of being blessed by meditating upon it continually.[46] Eugene Carpenter and Philip Comfort observe that "meditate" does not mean just thinking about what we have read:

> The Hebrew verb hagah, used in this psalm and in Joshua 1:8, means "to muse," "to meditate," "to moan," "to think," or "to speak." King David says that in times of distress, trouble, or oppression, he would "think" (hagah) upon the Lord (Pss. 63:6; 77:12; 143:5). The word often refers to internal meditation, but also to verbal utterances or sounds.[47]

Dahood agrees that "meditate" probably suggests some sort of speech activity.[48] Briggs and Briggs observe that a typical Asian practice was to study a subject by "reading it over and over again in the low, murmuring tone of one reading to oneself, to impress it upon the mind and commit it to memory, a method characteristic of oriental students, rather than meditating or musing upon what had been previously read."[49]

Therefore, this psalm is not recommending a casual reading of Scripture. It is instead commending a habit of study, committing what God has commanded to memory and deeply reflecting upon what it means. This kind of deep reflection is an essential habit for church leaders. It aids them in avoiding being drawn into listening to the teaching and counsel of the wicked. This psalm suggests that listening to such teaching and counsel is the first step in being seduced into behaving like the wicked and finally becoming one of them. Not only does that path lead a leader away from God, but it results in others following leaders as they depart from the truth.

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[46] Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's, 1906-1907), 1:5, Logos Bible Software.

[47] Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 123.

[48] Dahood, *Psalms I*, 3.

[49] Briggs and Briggs, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:5.

**Exegesis of Joshua 1 and the Benefits
of Meditating on the Law**

An exegesis of Joshua 1 will demonstrate that church leaders are tasked with

becoming good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility by showing that the benefit

of meditating on the law day and night is that the leaders will prosper in everything they

do. Deuteronomy closed by recounting that Moses had laid hands on Joshua, pronouncing

him as his replacement as leader of Israel. The book of Joshua opens by describing how the

Lord came to Joshua after the death of Moses, repeating his promise of the land to Israel

and assuring him that the people would be victorious because God was with them.

Immediately following this, God instructs Joshua and the other leaders that they will be

successful and prosperous in leading the people as long as they remain faithful and

obedient to the law:

> Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave
> you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever
> you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night,
> so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous
> and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be
> afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you
> go. (Josh 1:7-9)

The command to be strong and courageous, taken by itself, could be understood

in terms of bold military leadership. However, this command is followed immediately by

arguing for the necessity of obedience to the Lord. This is a reminder to Joshua that Israel

can only be victorious when he leads them by observing the law himself. Richard Hess

notes,

> Structured in this manner, the text affirms that Joshua will not be alone in striving
> for obedience to the law. Rather, the obedience and the success will be enjoyed in
> the presence of the Lord God who gave both the law and the promises. Joshua will
> not succeed because he obeys God's instruction; he will succeed because God is
> with him to enable him to obey his instruction.[50]

The key to Joshua's and Israel's success would not be military strength, but

spiritual strength directly related to how obedient they were to God. This established a

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[50] Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 80.

principle that was true throughout the history of Israel—that success would depend on

obedience to God's Word by leaders, kings, and the people rather than upon military

strength.[51] David Howard notes that the Hebrew translated "be careful to obey" is

emphatic:

> The command in v. 7 to be strong and very resolute is to ensure Joshua's scrupulous obedience to the law of Moses. The NIV's wording ("Be careful to obey") translates the verbs *šmr* and *ʿśh*. The first, *šmr*, means "to keep, observe," and the second, *ʿśh*, means "to do, obey." They are used as a word pair forty times in the Old Testament, almost always with reference to keeping and obeying God's words or commands. In such cases, *šmr* is often translated "be careful" and *ʿśh* "do, obey" (as NIV does here).[52]

The importance of obedience to the law as key to Israel's success is seen clearly

in Joshua 1:7-9 and is a theme all through the book. In these three verses, the importance

of obedience is repeated four times. First, Joshua is to "be careful to obey" the law.

Second, it was "all" the law that was to be obeyed. Third, Joshua was commanded to "not

turn from it to the right or to the left." Finally, he was to "keep this Book of the Law always

on your lips."[53] J. Gordon McConville and Stephen N. Williams write that all of this is a

reminder that "possession of the land, though legitimated first of all by God's gift, can

continue to be legitimate only when it is held according to God's law. God's writ will run

in the land that he gives to his people."[54]

God tells Joshua to "keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate

on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (Josh 1:8).

Though the meaning of "meditate" in the Hebrew Bible was discussed while examining

Psalm 1, Howard, writing about Joshua 1, agrees that

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[51] David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 85.

[52] Howard, *Joshua*, 85-86.

[53] Howard, *Joshua*, 86.

[54] J. Gordon McConville and Stephen N. Williams, *Joshua*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 14.

the Old Testament concept of meditation involves two things: First, a focus upon God himself (Ps 63:6 [Hb.7]), his works (Pss 77:12 [Hb. 13]; 143:5), or his law (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2), and second, an activity that was done aloud. This is why God told Joshua that this lawbook should not leave his mouth (as opposed to, e.g., his heart or his mind).[55]

The purpose of consistent meditation on the law was "so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful" (Josh 1:8). The meaning of being "prosperous and successful" is sometimes misread to mean "financially successful" and used to support a "prosperity gospel." The resulting corollary often drawn is that when a Christian is not well off, it must be a result of secret sin or lack of faith.[56] This is a misunderstanding of what the Hebrew text actually says. Howard writes,

> The two words we find here in our passage in Joshua (1:7–8) speaking of prosperity and success are almost never used in the Old Testament to speak of financial success. Rather, they speak of succeeding in life's proper endeavors. This happens when people's lives are focused entirely on God and obedience to him. . . . The Hebrew roots in question here are ṣlḥ ("prosper") and śkl ("be successful"). The first term occurs sixty-nine times in the Old Testament, and the majority of the time (fifty-nine times) it means "to prosper [or, better, "to succeed"] in one's endeavors."[57]

A good example of this Hebrew usage is found in 1 Samuel. David was a successful military commander, and it was written about him that "whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well" (1 Sam 18:5). This was clearly success in an endeavor and not financial success.

Joshua 1 concludes with a restatement that as long as Joshua is obedient, God will be with him and that he should "not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9). In these last words, the Lord has

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[55] Howard, *Joshua*, 86.

[56] Howard, *Joshua*, 87.

[57] Howard, *Joshua*, 88.

returned to the theme of the conquest of the land.[58] However, this section echoes what Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy 1:21. In that case, Israel failed the test of "do not fear." God now speaks similar words to Joshua, reminding him that he need not fail the test because God is with him.[59] Richard Hess writes that, for Joshua, "the obedience and the success will be enjoyed in the presence of the LORD God who gave both the law and the promises. Joshua will not succeed because he obeys God's instruction; he will succeed because God is with him to enable him to obey his instruction."[60]

Joshua 1 reminds leaders that the benefit of meditating on the law day and night is "prospering in everything you do." This "prosperity" is success in the work set before them. They are reminded by the words of Joshua 1:7-9 that they can set their minds on obedience to God, keeping their minds fixed on Scripture, with the assurance that he will be with them and enable and empower them as they are faithful to him and obedient to his Word.

Exegesis of John 17:17 and Spiritual Growth and Sanctification through Studying Scripture

An exegesis of John 17:17 will show that church leaders are tasked with becoming good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility by demonstrating that spiritual growth and sanctification result from studying God's Word. This key verse is part of one of Jesus's prayers on his journey to the cross and is commonly referred to as the "high priestly prayer." D. A. Carson notes,

In some respects the prayer is a summary of the entire Fourth Gospel to this point. Its principal themes include Jesus' obedience to his Father, the glorification of his Father through his death/exaltation, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the choosing of the disciples out of the world, their mission to the world, their unity

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[58] Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 34.

[59] McConville and Williams, *Joshua*, 14-15.

[60] Hess, *Joshua*, 80.

modelled on the unity of the Father and the Son, and their final destiny in the presence of the Father and the Son.[61]

A number of outlines have been proposed for this prayer. The most common is: (1) Jesus prays for himself (John 17:1-5); (2) Jesus prays for his disciples (John 17:6-19), and (3) Jesus prays for the church (John 17:20-26).[62] Therefore, John 17:17 needs to be read in the overall context of Jesus's prayer for his disciples. This prayer follows chapters 15 and 16, which contain Jesus's final teachings prior to his crucifixion. Martin Luther notes in his sermon on John 17 that "this is the sum and substance of this chapter: After a good sermon belongs a good prayer. That is, once you have set forth the Word, you should begin to sigh and seek that it may have power and produce fruit as well."[63] This prayer is linked back to the teachings of chapters 15 and 16. As Carson explains, "This prayer is not free-standing; it is intimately connected by themes and link-words with the discourse that precedes it (chs. 14-16), as even the first words of 17:1 ('After Jesus said this . . .') intimate."[64] Therefore, Jesus's prayer for his disciples must be understood in the context of his final pre-crucifixion teachings, asking that the disciples will be preserved "from evil and for the priceless privilege of seeing Jesus' glory."[65]

Jesus prefaces his prayer that his followers will be sanctified: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (17:15). There is some scholarly debate about whether "the evil one" is the correct translation versus an impersonal "evil." Most scholars agree that the former interpretation is correct. Raymond Brown observes that the "word *ponēros*, 'Evil One,' is capable of

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[61] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 551.

[62] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 553.

[63] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 69, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 17-20*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009), 69.15, quoted in Christopher Boyd Brown, ed., *John 13-21*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 114.

[64] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 550.

[65] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 551.

being translated as an abstract noun, 'evil'; but on the analogy of 1 John 2:13-14, 3:12,

5:18-19, a personal application to the devil is probably intended."[66] Carson agrees and

adds that this prayer was necessary because, while the death and resurrection of Jesus

would defeat the devil, he retained considerable power to inflict harm and the disciples

would need God's protection until Satan's final defeat.[67]

Jesus continued his prayer, saying of the disciples, "They are not of the world,

even as I am not of it" (John 17:16). This is an appropriate prelude to the petition that

follows asking that they be sanctified. Osborne observes,

> While the disciples are to remain in the world and conduct mission, they "are not of the world" (17:16), for they belong to God and follow Jesus, who as their model is also "not of it." You cannot be a Christ follower and a person "of the world" at the same time. The world is under the control of Satan, so to be victorious in Christ demands that we live apart from the world and conquer Satan.[68]

After praying that his disciples will be protected from the Evil One while

remaining in the world, Jesus asks the Father to "sanctify them by the truth; your word is

truth" (John 17:17). John Lange writes that this verse has had several different

interpretations in the history of the church.

> Sanctify them in the truth [ἀγίασοναὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, as the element in which the ἀγιάζειν takes place]. Explanations:
> - Chrysostom, Euthymius [Lücke, Godet, Wordsworth]: Make them holy *through* [ἐν instrumental, as in the E. V.] the gift of the Holy Ghost, and by true doctrine.
> - Luther: Adverbially construing *in the truth:* Make them *truly* [ἀληθῶς] holy [in distinction from the present *imperfect* holiness—Hengstenberg. Against this is the article, and still more the following ὁ λόγος, *etc.*—P. S.]
> - Erasmus, Calvin: Take them away from the fellowship of the world.
> - Theophylact, Lampe: Separate them for the office of the ministry.[69]

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[66] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI)*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 29A (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008), 761.

[67] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 565.

[68] Grant R. Osborne, *John: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 400.

[69] John Peter Lange, *The Gospel According to John*, Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 3, trans. Philip Schaff (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 520.

Modern commentators incorporate many of these same ideas in their writings. Carson emphasizes the aspect of sanctification as being "set apart for sacred duty, reserved for God."[70] In his understanding, this means that "if someone is set apart for God and God's purposes alone, that person will do only what God wants, and hate all that God hates. That is what it means to be holy, as God is holy."[71] Ronald Trail examines what "sanctify" means and outlined several characteristics. First, sanctification is setting someone apart for a special purpose. In John 17:17, Jesus is asking the Father to set his disciples apart and devote them completely to himself. Second, sanctification means to make someone holy, which involves placing them on the path of continual spiritual growth so they will progress toward holiness. Finally, Trail notes that being sanctified not only sets the person aside for special service, but also equips them to serve.[72] Osborne writes that the purpose of sanctification was not only the empowerment for service, but also that the "best protection for the disciples is sanctification—growing in holiness. To make the disciples holy is to provide spiritual power that will enable them to rise above the burdens of this world."[73]

The means of sanctification was to be "by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Osborne notes that the Greek preposition *en* could be translated as either "by the truth" or "in the truth." The phrase "could have double meaning, referring to both sphere ('in the truth,' that the disciples be immersed in God's truths) and means ('by the truth,' that God's truth be a change agent in their lives)."[74] Brown similarly notes, "The article (missing when the phrase is repeated in 19) means that the expression is not simply

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[70] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 565.

[71] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 565.

[72] Ronald L. Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of John 10-21*, Exegetical Summaries (Dallas: SIL, 2018), 327-28.

[73] Osborne, *John*, 400-401.

[74] Osborne, *John*, 400.

adverbial: 'truly consecrate them.' 'Truth' has power to act; cf. 8:32: 'Truth will set you free.' Here 'truth' is both the agency of the consecration and the realm into which they are consecrated; the 'in' means both 'by' and 'for.'"[75]

This understanding is credible since Jesus followed that phrase by adding, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Therefore, Jesus is asking the Father to set aside his disciples for service and also identifying the means by which that will be accomplished: by the Word of God. This section of Jesus's prayer closely associates growth in holiness with the study of Scripture. Only when believers study God's Word can they grow in holiness; it cannot come about through human effort. Church leaders must, therefore, be careful to remember that spiritual growth and sanctification result from God's Word and be diligent in their study of it.

Conclusion

An examination of a few key passages shows that the study of the Bible is essential to achieve Christian maturity. Second Timothy 2:14-19 reminds leaders that they are responsible for teaching God's people the truth and leading them away from false teachings. This requires that they be equipped to correctly handle God's Word. Leaders can only teach what they know and model. Therefore, they must be diligent to study and learn.

Psalm 1 identifies the benefits of meditating on the law day and night: The Word gives believers life and keeps them safe from falling away. The study of Scripture must be a constant activity and not an occasional pursuit. By studying and knowing the Bible, leaders can draw both life and the strength to stand firm from it.

Joshua 1:7-9 reminds leaders that they can set their minds on obedience to God and remain fixed on Scripture with an assurance that he will be with them to enable and empower them as long as they are faithful to him and obedient to his word. When facing

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[75] Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI)*, 761.

opposition or difficulties, church leaders need to remember that while God has not promised leaders an easy path, he has promised to empower them in their ministry.

Finally, John 17:17 in the context of Jesus's prayer for his disciples reminds church leaders that God works through his Word to sanctify his people. Scripture is not only a source of truth, but an agent of change in people's lives.

Church leaders are tasked with becoming good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility, both so they can live exemplary Christian lives to serve as examples to the church and so they are able to teach and lead others to achieve spiritual maturity. Since this can only occur by being good students of the Bible, training in Bible study is both desirable and necessary.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES
RELATED TO TRAINING IN HERMENEUTICS
AND BIBLE STUDY METHODS

The last chapter observed the biblical mandate for church leaders to become good students of Scripture as a primary responsibility. This is necessary both so leaders can live exemplary Christian lives to serve as examples to the church and so they are able to teach and lead others to achieve spiritual maturity. It is no accident that Paul included "able to teach" in his list of the qualifications to be an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2. The importance of discipleship being directed by mature and capable leaders must not be underestimated and it is a prominent instruction of the Bible that leaders be capable of performing that function.

This chapter will examine practical ways the ability and skill of church leaders in Bible study and interpretation impacts the spiritual health of the church. In the history of the church, when its leaders have neglected the study of Scripture, the church has drifted into being lukewarm. Revivals always seem to be preceded by a new devotion to the Word of God.

**Intentional, Spiritually Mature Leaders
Produce Mature Disciples**

An examination of the role of leaders in the spiritual formation of their followers will show that intentional, spiritually mature leaders are necessary to produce mature disciples. Leaders can only teach what they themselves practice and know. The role of biblical knowledge in contributing to spiritual maturity has been understood since the time of the early church.

One of the most prolific writers in the young church was Augustine, whose career spanned the late fifth and early sixth centuries. His surviving works comprise over five million words in books, letters, and sermons. While he wrote most extensively to answer heresies in his era, he also addressed Christian teaching, most notably in the book *De Doctrina Christiana* (*Teaching Christianity*).[1] Augustine noted that living a holy life requires that disciples have a base level of knowledge to enable them to rightly determine what is true and avoid falling into error:

> But living a just and holy life requires one to be capable of an objective and impartial evaluation of things; to love things, that is to say, in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally.[2]

To help students acquire the ability to evaluate spiritual matters, Augustine suggested, "There are some rules for dealing with the scriptures, which I consider can be not inappropriately passed on to students."[3] He also noted, "There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood."[4] Therefore, he considered it the responsibility of teachers to instruct their students in the correct handling of Scripture.

As Edward Smither notes, Augustine did not limit the realm of study to just the Bible: "Augustine clearly believed that books were an invaluable resource for mentoring the clergy as well as the laity. . . . He sometimes responded to a question by sending a relevant book written by another author."[5] Augustine was aware that his own writings were

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[1] Gregory W. Lee, "Augustine of Hippo," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 102-4.

[2] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, Works of Saint Augustine, vol. I/11, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 122.

[3] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 103.

[4] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 109.

[5] Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), chap. 4, sec. "How Did Augustine Mentor?" subsec. "Books," para. 2, Logos.

of value in training students about Scripture: "I have decided, if the Lord wills, to spend on my work in the field of studies connected with sacred literature all the time left me from my duties which the Church urgently claims from me by reason of my obligation to that service. I think, if it pleases the mercy of God, that this work will be useful to posterity."[6]

Augustine demonstrated four ways he thought sound teaching and mentoring of other church leaders should be done: "First, we noted his involvement in the African church councils between 393 and 427 in which he mentored the clergy by providing much-needed teaching from the Scriptures, by modeling how to deal shrewdly yet graciously with heretics and by carrying out the decisions of councils through follow-up visits, letters, and books."[7]

Second, Augustine believed that only sound teaching could produce holy living in his students. He understood that nothing except rigorous and thorough instruction in Scripture could transform both the heart and mind of a student. Smither notes that Augustine believed this because "sound teaching calls the Christian to conform his thoughts and actions to the teachings of Scripture."[8]

Third, Augustine taught that sound teaching was required to provide a guide for proper practice in the Christian life. His writings contain much practical advice applying the Bible to marriage and other aspects of life. He makes it clear that proper practice depends upon a correct understanding of what Scripture teaches.[9]

Finally, Augustine consistently criticized any teaching that had a basis in

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[6] Augustine, *Letters*, vol. 1, 1-82, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, Fathers of the Church 20 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1953), 278.

[7] Smither, *Augustine as Mentor*, chap. 5, sec. "Sound Teaching," subsec. "Augustine's Example with Sound Teaching," para. 1.

[8] Smither, *Augustine as Mentor*, chap. 5, sec. "Sound Teaching," subsec. "Augustine's Thought on Sound Teaching," para. 2.

[9] Smither, *Augustine as Mentor*, chap. 5, sec. "Sound Teaching," subsec. "Augustine's Thought on Sound Teaching," para. 3.

anything other than Scripture. One of the major themes in his writing was defending

Christianity against heresy. For Augustine, sound teaching was the teaching of Scripture

itself and not the teaching of any fable or human wisdom.[10] He summed up his philosophy

of teaching in *Teaching Christianity* as involving both the teaching of what is true and the

unteaching of what is error:

> The interpreter and teacher of the divine scriptures, therefore, the defender of right
> faith and the hammer of error, has the duty of both teaching what is good and
> unteaching what is bad; and in this task of speaking it is his duty to win over the
> hostile, to stir up the slack, to point out to the ignorant what is at stake and what they
> ought to be looking for. When, though, he finds them friendly, attentive, willing to
> learn, or renders them so himself, further tactics have to be employed, as the case
> requires. If the listeners need to be instructed, this calls for the narrative style,
> provided, at least, that they need to be informed about the subject being dealt with,
> while for the clearing up of doubts and the establishment of certainty, reasoned
> arguments and documentary proofs are needed.[11]

Thus, for Augustine, teaching is fundamental to producing discipleship. His thoughts on

how to understand Scripture and, more critically, how to communicate that understanding

to others, is set forth clearly in his works so they are still relevant today. Unfortunately,

the medieval church did not follow Augustine's example of dedication to Scripture.

Richard Lovelace writes, "The basic failure of Christian theological integration from the

second century through to the Reformation was taking the church's authority too

seriously in comparison with the biblical norm."[12] This led to problems that will be

discussed in the second section of this chapter.

One of the emphases of the Reformation was to return to the principle of the

Bible as the supreme authority for the church and refuse to accept church tradition or

authority as having equal authority. An outcome of this was that the Bible was translated

into the vernacular languages of the people, resulting in a renewed emphasis on teaching

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[10] Smither, *Augustine as Mentor*, chap. 5, sec. "Sound Teaching," subsec. "Augustine's
Thought on Sound Teaching," para. 4.

[11] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 209-10.

[12] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, exp.
ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 176.

lay people.

Modern writers recognize that effective Christian education requires equipping teachers to be able to teach effectively. Unfortunately, the contemporary church has not always implemented an effective teaching strategy. Lovelace notes that untrained leaders have been very effective in some areas of ministry, but their lack of training has resulted in some avoidable weaknesses in the movements they have led.[13]

A. W. Tozer writes that the "absence of the concept of discipleship from present-day Christianity leaves a vacuum that we instinctively try to fill with one or another substitute."[14] He further notes,

> Charles G. Finney taught that it was wrong—morally wrong—to teach objective doctrine without a moral application. I have gone to Bible classes and listened to men who were learned in the Word of God. Still I have come away as cold as a pickled fish. There was no help, no lift in my spirit, nothing to warm the inside of my heart. The truth had been given to me just like a proposition in Euclid or a mathematical formula from Pythagoras. And the answer is, "So what? Let's go and have a soda!"[15]

Thus, Tozer highlights a common problem with church educational programs: Bible teachers often communicate facts without applying them effectively to people's lives. To teach Christianity successfully, teachers must be spiritually mature leaders who are able to apply Scripture to real world situations and train people to explore more deeply in their own Bible study to understand how it relates to their lives.

It has too often been the practice of the evangelical church to teach and preach only for conversion while neglecting the topic of holy living. Some churches deny the need for human teachers and assert that the Holy Spirit directly teaches people all they need to know.[16] This way of thinking may be explicit but is most often held implicitly

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[13] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 49-50.

[14] A. W. Tozer, *Discipleship: What It Truly Means to Be a Christian—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer*, ed. Kevin P. Emmert (Chicago: Wingspread, 2018), 10.

[15] Tozer, *Discipleship*, 30.

[16] Roy B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 51-52.

and is reflected in a lack of much thought or planning for teacher training. Lovelace

notes, "While Evangelical churches have been preaching incessantly on the love of God

since the Moody era, in far too many instances the justifying work of Christ has not been

spelled out clearly and balanced by an equal stress on sanctification, so that the grace of

God can be both intelligible and credible for the individual believer."[17]

There is a common misconception among Bible teachers that they should teach

only to their students' current level of spirituality and understanding. J. T. English

reminds that growth in discipleship only takes place when leaders push people beyond

where they already are:

> Again, one of the most important things you can do is to start to raise the bar for your
> people. It is impossible to create deep and holistic disciples if you are not raising the
> bar for them past an elementary learning space. In this discipleship space you are
> going to raise the bar past where you raised it before. This is where change and
> growth happen. This is where more dissonance happens. This is where your people
> will continue to grow as lifelong learners. Remember, in this space you are not
> teaching new topics, but you are teaching at a deeper level.[18]

If leaders believe it is necessary to not only evangelize but also disciple people

toward holy living, then teachers and leaders need to be equipped to "raise the bar." This

requires that teachers be continuous learners and have the skills to lead students into a

deeper understanding and critically learn to apply Scripture to their lives. Harold

Senkbeil eloquently notes that the ministry of the church is the ministry of the Word

empowered by the Holy Spirit and that pastors and teachers must live lives of continuous

learning: "We remain spiritual physicians in training throughout our ministry. As much

as we all need competent and knowledgeable mentors to learn our craft, we also need

faithful and diligent colleagues to polish those skills."[19]

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[17] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 211.

[18] J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), chap. 5, sec. "Sound Teaching," subsec. "Discipleship for Disciple-Making Disciple," para. 2, Logos.

[19] Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 57.

While it can be tempting to relegate ministry training to a purely academic pursuit, church leaders cannot lose sight of the real goal of Christian teaching. Bible teaching is not meant to merely increase knowledge but to lead people into transformed lives. This requires church leaders and teachers to go beyond communicating facts to helping people apply the Bible to their lives as well as understand the broader implications of biblical teachings. Mark Noll writes of the necessity for Christian teachers to help students understand how the things they are being taught fit into the broader context of Christianity:

> But then I think there's a whole other level of teaching well that is—it's not *independent* of teaching information or teaching how to think, but it maybe supersedes those. And that is to convey something about the importance of the subject you're lecturing on. And in this case, I think, for seminary professors, the importance lies in the connections between the individual subject and then the broader enterprise of the church, the broader sweep of Christianity through the ages.[20]

Relating what is being taught to the bigger picture of Christianity is necessary because the mere teaching of facts without application and context will usually fail to produce spiritual maturity. Lovelace notes, "Biblical doctrine (spiritually energized and illuminated propositional truth) is normally the instrument through which regenerative transformation of the human personality takes place in the Holy Spirit's application of redemption."[21] Lovelace later explains that "sound doctrine does not necessarily guarantee spiritual life or force within a person or a movement."[22] However, the need to teach the background of Scripture as described by Lovelace is not a license to go on irrelevant tangents or expound upon personal theories. Christian leaders need to be adequately trained to discern what is relevant and what is superfluous and likely to distract students from what is important. Thomas C. Oden writes,

[20] Mark Noll, "Teaching with Expertise and Empathy," *Didaktikos* 1, no. 1 (2017): 19.

[21] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 82.

[22] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 84.

The freedom of the pulpit will be maintained only with vigilance. Yet the free pulpit does not give the preacher the general license to express any and every private opinion about whatever happens to be of personal interest. Luther, who did as much as anyone to free the pulpit from intrusions from state power, argued the case rigorously. . . . If Luther is correct, the best pastoral preaching is clear, forceful, relevant exposition of the texts of scripture. That is what distinguishes the ministry of the Word from editorial opinion on economics, politics and domestic affairs.[23]

Finally, Israel Galindo lists six areas of knowledge that Christian teachers must have: know the theory, know the craft, know the content, know the goal, know the student, and know yourself.[24] This brief examination of the role of teachers in discipleship focuses only on knowing the content and knowing the goals, but none of these areas should be neglected in a church's educational ministry.

Modern scholars have written extensively on Christian education. While evangelical scholars acknowledge the essential nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in producing mature disciples, they also recognize the importance of intentional good teaching practices. Teachers must be trained to go beyond just teaching facts. They must understand how to apply Scripture to people's lives and how to relate the parts of the Bible to the greater whole and to the context of the work of the church throughout the ages. This suggests that if intentional, spiritually mature leaders are necessary to produce mature disciples, then those leaders need to be trained to be effective teachers and know how to handle Scripture competently. Dallas Willard suggests that the health of the church depends on its success in adequately discipling people:

Set upon this path of "teaching them to do everything he said," the local congregation will be stabilized and drawn onward if it will explicitly do two things. These are actually very simple things, but, as you will see, they also are great acts of confidence in Jesus. First, openly expect the apprentices to learn to do the various things that Jesus taught us to do. . . . Second, announce that you teach people to do the things that Jesus said to do. . . . Publicize and run training programs designed to develop specific points of the character of Christ as given in the New Testament.[25]

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[23] Thomas C. Oden, *Ministry through Word and Sacrament*, Classic Pastoral Care 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 30.

[24] Israel Galindo, *The Craft of Christian Teaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1998), 34-38.

[25] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 250-51.

The role of teachers in discipleship has been recognized throughout church history. Spiritually mature teachers produce spiritually mature disciples. Unfortunately, there have been eras in which best practices were not followed and spiritual growth suffered.

Medieval Catholicism and the Problem of Uneducated Church Leaders

An examination of the medieval church and the problem of poorly educated priests will support the conclusion that when church leaders neglect the study of Scripture the church will drift into being lukewarm. When led by uneducated leaders, the people remained spiritually immature, and the understanding of biblical Christianity was largely lost among the common people.

The fall of the Roman Empire has been extensively studied by historians and there has been considerable scholarly debate over the effects it had on Western civilization. Most of this discussion is not relevant to the ideas presented here, but it is unquestionable that the fall of the Roman empire had a negative impact on the church. A major problem for the church was that education became rare and was not generally available to most people. Glenn Myers writes,

> For hundreds of years in the Middle Ages, common people labored long hours to earn little, unable to read or write. Local priests were often illiterate as well, and sermons were few. Copies of the Scriptures were virtually unavailable, except in church. While monks and nuns had access to education and the Bible, the vast majority of the laity had neither.[26]

By the fourth century, Latin translations of the Bible had proliferated. Many of these translations were in local and often idiosyncratic Latin dialects, so the Bibles in use in different regions were not identical. An effort was undertaken in the late fourth century by Pope Damasus I to enforce a "proper" Latin tradition by commissioning Jerome to compile a new Latin translation to replace the various local versions. This became the Latin

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[26] Glenn E. Myers, "A Spiritual Awakening for the Laity: For 300 Years, Renewal Swept Europe," *Christian History Magazine* 127 (2018): 6.

Vulgate.[27] An unfortunate result was that when the Western Roman Empire fell and Latin morphed into different languages, the church continued to enforce the use of the Vulgate and the people gradually lost the ability to understand the Bible as classical Latin faded from common usage. In addition, Bruce A. Demarest writes that the fall of Rome led to "widespread illiteracy and ignorance. For centuries, in the absence of public education, all learning and study of the Scriptures was restricted to monasteries. Medieval theologians held that Scripture could be interpreted only by the learned few, under the direction of the church."[28]

Demarest explains that the problem was compounded by the medieval church's belief that it should "uphold the traditions and dogma of the early Christian writers" as having equal authority to Scripture.[29] In addition, an allegorical method of interpretation took hold in the church. These approaches led to biblical scholars producing a large volume of work that "had hardly any connection to the biblical text."[30] This served to effectively remove direct access to the Bible from the common people. Gregg Allison explains,

> Of course, this viewpoint rendered the Bible a very obscure book for new believers and superficial readers, not to mention the many illiterate members of the church. Because the literate members of the church were primarily its priests, the solemn duty of studying and teaching the Bible to the laypeople fell almost exclusively upon their shoulders. A division between clergy and laity concerning the interpretation and understanding of Scripture was well under way.[31]

The Vulgate gradually replaced older Latin translations of the Bible, although it

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[27] Ivor J. Davidson, *A Public Faith: From Constantine to the Medieval World, AD 312 to 600*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and David F. Wright Baker History of the Church, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 122-24.

[28] Bruce A. Demarest, "Interpreting the Bible," in *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 304-5.

[29] Demarest, "Interpreting the Bible," 304.

[30] Demarest, "Interpreting the Bible," 304.

[31] Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 126.

was not decreed to be the sole authorized Bible of the Roman Catholic Church until 1546.[32]

Even though Latin had become a dead language, it continued to be the language of the

church and of the Bible for centuries. Little effort was made to translate the Bible into

vernacular languages and such efforts were often violently suppressed. Howard Hanke

notes,

> During the Dark Ages (A.D. 476-1000) scarcely any Bible translation work was
> done. During this time civilization sank to a new low in western Europe. Academic
> work was limited mainly to a few cathedrals, monasteries, and palace schools.
> Knowledge of both ancient Hebrew and Greek almost completely disappeared. Few
> people went to school, and the few writers who remained had little sense of style. In
> this literary darkness, popular stories and rumors were accepted as true. With the
> growth of papal power the Bible fell into general disuse, being supplemented by
> decrees and dogmas of councils and popes.[33]

The effect of this was that common people lost touch with the Bible, which

created difficult challenges for the church. John Van Engen identifies some of these

challenges: "Teaching in an illiterate culture was one; helping people, most of whom did

not understand Latin, appreciate the Latin Mass, was another. A third was eradicating

superstition."[34] These challenges were made more difficult when many of the clergy were

often poorly educated or even illiterate.

Church leaders were aware that an illiterate priesthood created difficulties in the

church and attempted to mandate that clergy be properly educated, although with mixed

results. For example, Samuel Eales writes that "Pope Hilary (AD 461-468) decreed that

an illiterate person (*litterarum ignarus*) incurred irregularity, i.e., disqualification for holy

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[32] Jeffrey E. Miller, "Vulgate," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), "Historical Reception," para. 2, Logos.

[33] Howard A. Hanke, *Thompson Chain Reference Bible Companion: A Handbook for the Classic Chain-Reference Bible* (Indianapolis: Kirkbride, 1981), 443.

[34] John Van Engen, "Medieval Christianity: Stepping into Luther's World," *Christian History Magazine* 115 (2015): 7.

orders."[35] This decree and similar others were enforced with mixed success, and the

standard to be applied was not clearly defined. Among the lower ranks of the clergy, the

church liturgy was often learned and repeated by rote memorization.[36] Church councils

made repeated efforts to address the problem with limited success. For example: "The

Council of Narbonne (AD 589) even tried to enforce learning by suggesting that a cleric,

obstinately illiterate, had no right to his share of the ecclesiastical revenues, and should

be sent to a monastery, since he could not edify the people (*Can*. 10)."[37]

Efforts to deal with the problem of illiterate clergy were made by secular rulers

as well. Charlemagne ruled from AD 768 to 814[38] and attempted to implement strict rules

for clerical literacy. However, as Eales notes,

> Even these it was impossible to enforce with any strictness. Lupus, Abbot of Ferrara,
> writing during this reign to Hincmar, apologises (sic) for a bishop, who was unable to
> teach his flock otherwise than by his good example, because of his ignorance. And
> Agobard, in a letter to Bernard of Vienne, concludes that ignorance in parish priests
> would do even more harm than an evil life. . . . The complaint of the English Alfred,
> reported by Asser, is well known, that "from the Humber to the Thames there were
> very few priests who understood the liturgy in their mother tongue, or who could
> translate the easiest piece of Latin; and that from the Thames to the sea, the
> ecclesiastics were still more ignorant" (De Reb. Gest. Alfred. apud Camden,
> Anglica, p. 25).[39]

The combination of a poorly trained and often illiterate clergy with both the

Bible and church liturgy being in a language no longer understood by the masses inevitably

led to spiritual ignorance and immaturity. While there were notable theologians working

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[35] Samuel John Eales, "Illiterate Clergy," in *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, ed. William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (London: John Murray, 1875-1880), Logos Bible Software, s.v. "Illiterate Clergy" by Samuel John Eales.

[36] Eales, "Illiterate Clergy,",s.v. "Illiterate Clergy" by Samuel John Eales..

[37] Eales, "Illiterate Clergy,",s.v. "Illiterate Clergy" by Samuel John Eales..

[38] B. L. Hanson, "Charlemagne," in *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), para. 1, Logos Bible Software.

[39] Eales, "Illiterate Clergy," s.v. "Illiterate Clergy" by Samuel John Eales.

in that era, their work often did not result in much spiritual renewal among the masses of people. Lovelace writes,

> It is not surprising that despite the deep personal piety of Thomas and other theologians in his tradition the scholastic theology somehow lacked the spiritual force of the earlier patristic theology. Much of it was generated by purely intellectual problems, not developed out of new spiritual encounter with the Word of God and centrally anchored to a theology of Christian experience.[40]

Instead, Christian practice became dominated by liturgy in an unintelligible language and a behavioral code dominated by legalism.[41] John Albert Broadus explains,

> It is true that in that period preaching was generally very much neglected. Over wide districts, and through long years at a time, there would be almost no preaching. When men assembled in churches it was only to witness ceremonies and hear chanting and intoning. If sermons were given, it was in many countries still the custom to preach only in Latin, which the people did not now understand, even in Southern Europe.[42]

The monasteries preserved much knowledge and kept learning alive during the medieval era.[43] However, those efforts were limited to a small number of monks and nuns and did not extend to most members of European society. The medieval church recognized the problem poorly educated priests worked against in producing spiritual maturity, but efforts to combat this were met with limited success. Much of the local church was led by uneducated leaders and most people remained spiritually immature and lacked a deep understanding of biblical Christianity.

Renewal and Reformation

When church leaders neglect the study of Scripture, the church drifts into being lukewarm, but revivals seem to be preceded by a new devotion to the Word of God. An examination of the Reformation era and the rediscovery of the Bible by the common people

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[40] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 177.

[41] L. B. Smedes, "Ethics," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 2:185.

[42] John Albert Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (New York: Sheldon, 1876), 94.

[43] Walter A. Elwell, "Monasticism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 786.

will support this thesis. As has often happened in the history of the church, when the situation in the medieval church looked most dire, God began to intervene to bring about his purposes. Meyers writes,

> For hundreds of years in the Middle Ages, common people labored long hours to earn little, unable to read or write. Local priests were often illiterate as well, and sermons were few. Copies of the Scriptures were virtually unavailable, except in church. While monks and nuns had access to education and the Bible, the vast majority of the laity had neither. All of this began to change, however, in the twelfth century—a change that can only be explained as a fresh move of God's Spirit. Devout monks and hermits came out of seclusion and began to preach in towns and villages across Europe. Proclaiming the gospel in vernacular languages so that common people could understand it, they called laypeople and clergy to repent and enter a genuine relationship with the Lord—ultimately leading toward intimate oneness with Christ.[44]

This preaching in the vernacular enabled the common people who did not understand Latin to begin to grasp biblical teaching and move beyond what had become an unintelligible liturgy. In an era in which the church had drifted into works righteousness, this itinerant preaching began to spread the idea of Christianity as a relationship with a loving God. Gradually the Bible itself began to be more accessible to common people, although it is uncertain how widespread that actually was. On the one hand, Catholic scholar Francis Urquhart writes, "This much, at any rate, is certain: that the Bible was familiar even to laymen in the fourteenth century and that the whole of the New Testament

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[44] Myers, "A Spiritual Awakening for the Laity," 6.

at least could be read in translations."[45] Though taking a somewhat more limited view,

Donald Roberts explains,

> Only fragments of the Bible could be found in English, and these scarcely accessible to the masses of people. Serving as the inspiration of the activity, Wycliffe lived to see the first complete English translation of the Bible. This first effort immediately prompted work on a revision, which was completed after Wycliffe's death, yet came to be identified as the "Wycliffe Bible."[46]

A. N. S. Lane writes that Wycliffe "broke with Catholic tradition in making Scripture the final authority."[47] He wrote that the Bible and not the church or the pope was the sole authority for the Christian life. In *The Truth of Holy Scripture*, written in 1348, Wycliffe upheld the sufficiency of the Bible for all matters of faith and practice and said that there was no need for traditions in addition to Scripture, making even the pope subject to its authority. Since the Bible was the sole rule for faith and practice, Wycliffe believed it should be accessible to all people and not just the clergy, which motivated him to begin working on an English translation of the Bible.[48]

Despite his views, Wycliffe was not officially condemned as a heretic until 1415, some thirty years after his death when his bones were disinterred, burned, and dumped into a river.[49] While his efforts had limited success during his life, his writings

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[45] Francis Urquhart, "John Wyclif," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1907-1913), Logos Bible Software, s.v. "Wyclif" by F. Urquhart.

[46] Donald L. Roberts, "John Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation," *Christian History Magazine* 3 (1983): para. 39, Logos Bible Software.

[47] A. N. S. Lane, "Wyclif, John," in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 753.

[48] Lane, "Wyclif, John," 753-54. See also F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), s.v. "Wycliffe, John."

[49] Roberts, "John Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation," para. 42-48.

influenced both John Hus and Martin Luther, thus contributing to the eventual Protestant Reformation.[50]

The ministry of Martin Luther had a profound and wide-ranging influence on the Protestant church. The most relevant impacts for purposes of this project were that Luther exceeded Wycliffe's influence in restoring the doctrine of Scripture as the supreme authority for the church and established the sufficiency of Scripture as one of the guiding principles of the Reformation. For example, Luther wrote in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, "For what is asserted without Scripture or an approved revelation, may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed."[51] Luther also opposed the fourfold interpretation of the Bible then in use in the Catholic church, noting, "The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth, and therefore his words cannot have more than one, and that the very simplest, sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense."[52] Thus, Luther promoted a Protestant hermeneutic that emphasized the plain meaning of the biblical text and rejected allegorical interpretation, which had several lasting effects on Protestant practice.

First, as Thomas Oden notes about preaching, "if Luther is correct, the best pastoral preaching is clear, forceful, relevant exposition of the texts of scripture. That is what distinguishes the ministry of the Word from editorial opinion on economics, politics and domestic affairs."[53] Second, Luther recognized that the purpose of all Scripture is to point people toward Christ and salvation through faith. He took note of this in his essay on spirituality:

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[50] Walter A. Elwell, "Wycliffe, John," in Treier and Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., 1305.

[51] Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, ed. T. W. Albert Steinhaeuser (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1916), 2:188.

[52] Martin Luther, "The Letter and the Spirit," in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, ed. Richard Lischer (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 191.

[53] Oden, *Ministry through Word and Sacrament*, 30.

Therefore, the prophet Isaiah beheld the treasure of this faith and said, "God will make a brief summation on earth, and this summation will flow into righteousness like a primal flood"; that is, faith, in which, in brief, every commandment stands fulfilled, will overwhelmingly justify all who have it, so that they need nothing else to be righteous and justified. In the same way St. Paul says in Romans 10:10, "For one believes with the heart and so is justified."[54]

Finally, recognizing the authority and simplicity of Scripture, Luther believed that the Bible should be in the hands of the common people in their vernacular language. One of his most significant accomplishments was to translate the Bible into German, beginning in 1522.[55] This gave a major boost to returning Scripture to the people and promoting Bible study by the laity.

John Calvin and other later Reformers echoed and reinforced the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Writing in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin noted, "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures."[56] He elaborated on that declaration at length as a fundamental truth of the Christian faith. He believed that a deeper understanding of the Bible was critical to Christian discipleship. Beginning in 1540, Calvin began writing and publishing a series of commentaries that eventually included most of the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament.[57]

The concern of the Reformers that people know and understood the Bible extended beyond the clergy to include the laity as well. One of the lasting impacts of the Reformation was the founding of schools throughout Europe so as many people as possible could read the Bible. How successful this movement was in reducing illiteracy has been debated by scholars, but it is generally agreed that there was a significant increase in the

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[54] Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, eds. and trans*., Luther's Spirituality,* Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2007), 73.

[55] Tony Lane, "A Flood of Bibles," in Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 396.

[56] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:69.

[57] Andrew S. Ballitch, "Calvin, John," in Haykin, *The Essential Lexham Dictionary of Church History*, para. 2, Logos Bible Software.

literacy of the general population during this era.[58] Rudolph W. Heinze writes that, by the end of the Reformation era, "the Bible was more widely available in the vernacular than ever before, and more people could read it. Even the illiterate public was being presented with a view of God that differed radically from the stern judge commonly pictured in the late medieval representations that so terrified Luther."[59]

The Protestant Reformation was driven by a renewed devotion to Scripture. Luther's turning point was rediscovering the biblical truth that "the just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). Calvin and other Reformers showed a new fidelity to the Bible, a refusal to equate church tradition or authority with Scripture, an affirmation of the priesthood of all believers, and a concern that the Bible should be available to all people, not just the clergy.

Clearly, the leaders of the Reformation had discovered a more authentic spirituality based in the Bible and the renewed focus on Scripture in turn drove the Reformation. While the extent to which the Reformation transformed all of society is debated by historians, but the impact it had on the church is obvious.[60] Therefore, an examination of the Reformation and the rediscovery of Scripture supports the thesis that revivals always seem to be preceded by a new devotion to the Word of God. The renewed emphasis on Bible reading and study by church leaders produced spiritual growth in church leaders and in the churches, and resulted in the explosive growth of Protestantism in the sixteenth century and beyond.

Later Renewal and Revival

The centuries following the Protestant Reformation have seen periodic renewals and revivals. An examination of revivals since the Reformation supports the thesis that

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[58] Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion, AD 1350 to 1648*, Baker History of the Church, vol. 4, ed. John D. Woodbridge and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 199-200.

[59] Heinze, *Reform and Conflict*, 406.

[60] Heinze, *Reform and Conflict*, 385-408.

when leaders have neglected the study of Scripture the church has drifted into being

lukewarm, and that revivals always seem to be preceded by a new devotion to the Word

of God. This renewed emphasis on the Bible produced long-term spiritual growth among

Christian believers.

The Enlightenment era saw the spiritual zeal in Europe and the Americas

diminish sharply. A. Skevinton Wood writes,

> By the beginning of the eighteenth century the American churches had been
> overtaken by a creeping paralysis. The evangelical enthusiasm of the pioneering
> generations of colonists had not been maintained. The reasons for decline are clear.
> The development of commerce, and with it the increase in wealth, bred a materialism
> which blunted the keen edge of Protestant witness. The fervour (sic) of the fathers
> was not reproduced in their children.[61]

Just when Western culture was beginning to look most unhospitable to biblical Christianity,

new outpourings of the Holy Spirit brought revival. The accounts of these revivals

suggest that several traits were common to all of them. Of these, the moving of the Holy

Spirit is always the principal attribute. Other traits that recur are a widespread confession

of sin and a renewed focus on the Bible. For purposes of this study, only the renewed

emphasis on the Bible will be examined.

As previously noted, the Reformation placed the supremacy of the Bible at its

center. By the time of the Enlightenment beginning in the seventeenth century, much of

Western culture had shifted to skepticism and atheism. However, the faithful part of the

church remained committed to biblical truth, encouraging people to continue to trust the

Bible. Noll explains that among conservative Christians during the Enlightenment, "so it

was, among evangelicals, that the personal experience of God's grace always held a

privileged place, that injunctions urging laypeople to read the Bible for themselves

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[61] A. Skevinton Wood, "Awakening," in Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, 438.

proliferated and that wide use was made of natural theology (step-by-step reasoning moving from ordinary experience to proof for the existence of God)."[62]

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was one of the leading figures of the first Great Awakening. He was highly influential both during his life and, through his writings, after his death. Edwards wrote extensively about the role of the Holy Spirit in revival. Lovelace states, "Revival, in his understanding, is not a special season of extraordinary religious excitement, as in many forms of later American revivalism. Rather it is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which restores the people of God to normal spiritual life after a period of corporate declension."[63]

While Edwards correctly attributes the revival to the work of the Holy Spirit, he notes it was also distinguished by confession of sin and a renewed interest in the reading and study of the Bible.[64] In his discussions of the revival, Edwards writes,

> Now, through the greatest part of *New England*, the holy Bible is in much greater esteem and use than before. The great things contained in it are much more regarded, as things of the greatest consequence, and are much more the subjects of meditation and conversation. . . . And much has been lately done at making up differences, confessing faults one to another, and making restitution: probably more within two years, than was done in thirty years before.[65]

Additionally, during the first years of the eighteenth century, Anglican minister Griffith Jones began to promote literacy in Wales in the Welsh language. This laid the foundation for later revival. It is noteworthy that the revival had the greatest impact in the areas most effected by Jones's literacy and Bible distribution program. Noll states,

> Soon Jones was promoting the distribution of the Welsh Bible and other Christian literature in that language, and he was actively promoting education in basic Welsh

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[62] Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, History of Evangelicalism 1 (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2004), 141.

[63] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 40.

[64] Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Edwards, Jonathan."

[65] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (London: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:374.

literacy for children and adults alike. These latter activities were formalized in 1731 with the establishment of a circulating school movement whereby itinerant teachers moved from parish to parish and, after gaining permission from the local Anglican officials, taught locals to read the Bible, the Anglican Prayer Book and other Christian writings in Welsh. The cumulative effect of these schools was greatly to expand the literacy of the Welsh, but also to prepare the way for revival. Methodism later progressed most rapidly in Wales where the circulating schools were strongest.[66]

The First Great Awakening looked forward to the triumph of the church at the end of this age. The revival's leaders were aware that a movement of the Holy Spirit needed to be accompanied by a renewed understanding of the Bible as well. Lovelace writes, "The great prophets and pioneers of evangelical renewal who looked forward to this ultimate unveiling of the church's grandeur constantly stressed that this goal could only be attained through a strategy of spiritual revitalization combined with doctrinal and structural reformation."[67]

Any discussion of historical revivals must include John Wesley. Much of his success as a leader has been attributed to his genius for organization. Wesley, unlike many other leaders of the revival, had a plan for the nurturing and development of converts. R. P. Heitzenrater explains,

> Unlike Whitefield, Wesley spent as much time organizing his followers into societies as he did preaching to the masses, to ensure that his people enjoyed spiritual fellowship and nurture and did not become 'a rope of sand.' The laity provided much of the leadership for the societies: preachers, class leaders, band leaders, stewards, trustees, visitors of the sick. For these leaders, Wesley not only developed rules and "methods" for their groups, but also provided educational and devotional publications for their edification.[68]

Wesley is said to have had a method for everything. His method for growing in holiness included performing "works of piety" and "works of mercy." His "works of piety" included Bible study, which he endorsed for all believers.[69] Kenneth S. Kantzer states,

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[66] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 64.

[67] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 16.

[68] R. P. Heitzenrater, "Wesley, John," in Larsen, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, 713-14.

[69] Virginia Todd Holeman, *Theology for Better Counseling: Trinitarian Reflections for Healing and Formation* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2012), 111-12.

But perhaps the greatest single contribution of Wesley to American evangelicalism was his balanced emphasis on evangelism and discipleship. Wesley understood the commission to preach and to disciple as one commandment. He introduced his converts to regular Bible instruction, confession, and mutual sharing, with responsibility by the group for each member to lead every convert toward perfection.[70]

Wesley went on to give practical instructions for how disciples should approach the Bible:

(i.) Reading: Constantly, some part of every day; regularly, all the Bible in order; carefully, with the Notes; seriously, with prayer before and after; fruitfully, immediately practicing (sic) what you learn there?

(ii.) Meditating: At set times? by any rule?

(iii.) Hearing: Every morning? carefully; with prayer before, at, after; immediately putting in practice? Have you a New Testament always about you?[71]

Noting Wesley's influence, Evan Howard writes, "Bible study is *the* discipline of evangelical Protestantism."[72] He traces that theme through not only Wesley's writings but also through diaries and other Puritan and Pietist writings influenced by Wesley. Therefore, it is clear that Wesley and his emphasis on the essential role of Bible study in the Christian life was a major influence on the direction of revival in the church.

Following Wesley, Thomas Taylor (1738-1816) served longer as an active itinerant preacher than any other early English Methodist. His conversion was a result of his devotion to prayer and Bible study. When he began his preaching ministry, he continued Wesley's practice of encouraging local societies in their work of discipleship and Bible study. He often attributed the success of his preaching to the prayer meetings and Bible studies that paved the way for his messages.[73]

The Second Great Awakening continued to emphasize the role of the Bible. Walter Elwell notes, "The Second Awakening also had a great impact on ecclesiology. . .

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[70] Kenneth S. Kantzer, "If Only Wesley Were Here," *Christianity Today*, March 1991, 25.

[71] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist, 1872), 8:323. For more detailed instruction see also Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14:252-53.

[72] Evan Howard, "Evangelical Spirituality," in *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Bruce Demarest, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 181.

[73] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 276-77.

. Christians insisted that the Bible and the Bible only, free from traditional interpretations, was the standard for organizing churches."[74] Christian scholars such as Edward Bickersteth and Charles Hodge repeated this theme that growth in holiness is the result of prayer and personal Bible study.[75]

However, Lovelace notes that the Second Great Awakening began to depend on leaders who lacked formal theological training and that this lack of depth of knowledge also influenced the church:

> Evangelicals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a remarkable extent depended on the leadership of lay evangelists without formal theological training, men like Charles Finney, D. L. Moody and Billy Sunday. This was not without positive effects. It continued the gradual laicization of Protestantism visible in earlier awakenings, and it freed evangelists of inherited formalism which might interfere with their practical outreach. But it led also to a progressively shallower spirituality among evangelicals and to a loss of intellectual command.[76]

History strongly suggests that revivals are always accompanied by a renewed focus on the Bible. Revivals that have had the greatest impact are led by leaders who are committed to biblical scholarship and encourage and support Bible study by the laity. A renewed emphasis on the Bible produces long-term spiritual growth among Christian believers.

Conclusion

An examination of the role of Bible teachers reminds the church that biblical instruction is central to producing mature disciples. Teachers can only teach what they themselves practice and know. The early church took discipleship very seriously. As was noted, Augustine wrote extensively on discipleship and the teaching of Christianity.

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[74] Walter A. Elwell, "Great Awakenings," in Treier and Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., 523.

[75] Howard, "Evangelical Spirituality," 182.

[76] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 49-50.

Spiritually immature teachers will produce immature disciples. This brief examination of church history shows that when leaders neglect the study of Scripture, the church drifts into being lukewarm. The Western world following the fall of Rome entered a difficult period. Education and literacy declined severely and as Latin became a dead language known only to the educated minority, the common people lost access to the Bible and even many parish priests were illiterate. This caused the Western church to drift from the truth and into works righteousness. The fervor of the early church was replaced with formal religion and legalism.

When Martin Luther rediscovered the truth of God's grace and that faith, not works, was the center of the gospel, the Protestant Reformation was born. A key strategy of the Reformers was to make the Bible as widely available to the common people as possible in their vernacular languages. It is significant that a renewed interest in the Bible accompanied the launching of the Reformation and founding of multiple Protestant denominations during that ear.

Similarly, this brief survey showed that the periodic revivals since the Reformation have been accompanied by a new devotion to the Word of God. While these revivals were clearly works of the Holy Spirit, the role of sound biblical teaching cannot be underestimated. The most successful revival and renewal leaders have almost always been those who stress disciplined discipleship focused on meaningful Bible study.

Therefore, in the history of the church, when leaders have neglected the study of Scripture the church has drifted into being lukewarm. Revivals always seem to be preceded by a new devotion to the Word of God. To have a successful teaching ministry that produces mature disciples, church leaders need to first be trained to be capable students of Scripture. By achieving this, the impact of a ministry is significantly multiplied. In conclusion, what Broadus wrote over one-hundred years ago concerning the impact of good training in the church is still true today: "We see in this work of Wyclif (sic) and his friends an example of the fact that a professor may sometimes do more through his pupils

than he could have done by personal labor as pastor and preacher. In fact, every gospel

worker should strive to infuse the spirit of work into others."[77]

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[77] Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 189.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach a class in hermeneutics and Bible study methods for the staff of Vineyard Life Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, to increase their ability to capably handle Scripture. Three goals were established to plan, execute, and evaluate the project: (1) assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study practices among VLC staff members; (2) develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods; and (3) equip the VLC staff to capably handle Scripture. This chapter will describe the preparation and implementation of the project.

Project Planning and Preparation

Preparation for this project started in the spring of 2022. One of the assignments for the Applied Empirical Research class was to design a research survey tool that could be used in my ministry project. I made an early decision to keep the survey as concise as possible. Given that the class was for the church staff, it seemed unnecessary to delve into their beliefs regarding the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture since they have already been vetted in those areas by the lead pastor as part of the hiring process. Therefore, the survey was designed to zero in on their Bible study practices and habits.

The initial draft of the survey consisted of fifteen Likert-scale items. The professor's initial review revealed numerous problems with the survey. The review noted that several of the items asked about two different topics. For example, one item was, "Bible study methods are best developed by experience and discovering what works for

me." These compound items were split into two separate statements so each item could be responded to independently.

Some items were vague and open to interpretation, and/or would not yield any useful information to evaluate the effectiveness of this project. These items were deleted and the rest rewritten to implement the professor's suggestions. Several open-ended questions were added to the pre-survey to obtain a better a picture of what Bible study tools and books were in use by staff members. The survey also asked about their biggest challenges in Bible study.

Following the Applied Empirical Research class, the survey was reviewed by two professional educators. Some final refinements were made as well as adding two additional items. The post-survey was developed as well, repeating the same Likert-scale items and replacing the pre-survey's open-ended questions with two questions asking what new tools or methods they learned about and what could be done to improve the class. At this point, all that remained to meet the first goal (assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study practices among VLC staff members) was to perform the survey prior to the beginning of the class.

The main assignment for the *Foundations in Teaching* class in the fall of 2022 was to create an eight-week curriculum that could be used for the ministry project. I selected Rick Warren's *Bible Study Methods* as the textbook for the class.[1] Since the book contains more methods than the eight sessions allotted to the project, the most useful of his methods were selected with self-study of the rest of the book following the conclusion of the class recommended to students.

The curriculum plan was written in stages over the course of the *Foundations in Teaching* class. The final version of the curriculum was submitted and graded by Dr.

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[1] Rick Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

Matthew Haste. The curriculum received a 96/100, which was adequate to validate it and send it to the expert panel for review.

Prospective panel members had already been identified as the lead pastor and two Christian high school teachers with master's degrees and years of teaching experience. The next step was to reconfirm the expert panel's willingness to participate and explain the panel's role in more detail. I gave them a description of the expectations, time commitment, and process of sitting on the panel review team. Once they confirmed their willingness to participate, I gave them a copy of the eight-week curriculum submitted and the evaluation rubric. The review resulted in only some minor changes, so it was sufficient to deem the second goal (develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods) as successfully met. Upon the completion of the two seminars and the expert panel review, the primary research tools and course curriculum for the ministry project had been prepared. After receiving final approval from the ethics committee, project implementation began.

Project Implementation

Pre-Project Steps

Vineyard Life Church had been conducting staff training classes for about eighteen months prior to implementing this class as part of the ongoing staff training program. It was unnecessary to promote the class since all staff members are required to participate in this training and the class was not being offered to the general church membership. Prior to the first training session, the survey was conducted anonymously. Reviewing the open-ended questions showed that the staff members were all engaged in regular Bible study. The most cited challenge in doing Bible study was finding time in their busy schedules to do it regularly. The staff's awareness of books and tools varied, with the more theologically educated staff members listing more resources that they regularly use than other staff members.

The numeric scores on the pre-survey ranged from a high of 72 to a low of 55. Given that the lead pastor has a seminary degree and the children's ministry director has a bachelor's in biblical studies, some high scores were expected in the pre-survey. While the survey was anonymous, it can be assumed that these two individuals were at the high end of the pre-survey scores. The wide range of scores suggested that the classes would need to cover the basics but also include more advanced information for the more advanced students.

Week 1: Tools for Bible Study

The first class session was held on May 23, 2023. The session began by introducing the course's key verse: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

The class members next discussed the idea that the assumptions people read the Bible with influence the conclusions they reach. It is therefore it is essential to be sure that a valid hermeneutic is being used. The class members agreed that the grammatical-historical method is used within the Vineyard Movement, defined as a hermeneutic that focuses "on word meanings and word relationships and with some consideration of historic context, it has magnified the so-called literal sense."[2] Some specific ways in which this is applied within in Vineyard churches were briefly discussed:

1. The Bible should be interpreted according to our stance as empowered evangelicals.
2. The Bible should be interpreted in ways consistent with the practice of Christ.
3. The Bible should be interpreted consistent with our view of the eschaton (the end or future for the world and humanity).
4. The Bible should be interpreted in ways consistent with the creation accounts of men and women.

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[2] James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 4th ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 1:166.

5. The Bible should be interpreted in ways that promote the spread of the gospel.

6. The Bible should be interpreted in ways that are not inherently incoherent or illogical.

7. The Bible ought to be interpreted in ways that maximize opportunities for ministry and service.

I spent the rest of the session demonstrating tools that are available for Bible study, both books and computer applications. Some examples of Bible dictionaries and lexicons, Bible handbooks, Bible encyclopedias, and commentaries were made available and examined by the students. I gave particular attention to commentaries, examining the differences between whole Bible commentaries, popular commentaries, preaching commentaries, and academic commentaries. While all of these are useful for Bible study, I noted that popular commentaries are written mainly for a lay audience and often do not discuss alternate interpretations and/or complex exegetical issues. My recommendation was that for serious in-depth study, academic commentaries are preferred.

Next, the class examined and experimented with several web-based tools. YouVersion.com and BibleGateway.com were reviewed first. I stated that both of these websites allow a user to compare passages in various translations of the Bible. Students were able to name several reasons why comparing translations results in better Bible study. The class members then spent time working with the BibleHub.com website, concentrating on using the Interlinear tab on the site which enables the user to access tools and resources to do basic original language word studies. Time was spent in class practicing the use of this feature.

Finally, I did a brief demonstration of the Logos Bible software, limited to the tools most useful in basic Bible study. The lead pastor strongly recommended Logos at the Gold level for staff members involved in preaching and teaching, supporting the points I was making about the application. Students were given an assignment for the next class session to read the chapter in the Rick Warren book on the devotional method[3] and do a

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[3] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 35-51.

Bible study using the forms and resources provided in that chapter. I also announced that there would be an unanticipated delay before the next class meeting because of scheduling conflicts caused by a regional church conference.

Week 2: The Devotional Method

The second class session was held June 20, 2023. The subject of session 2 was the devotional method of Bible study. This session began with a discussion of the statement, "The ultimate goal of Bible study is application, not interpretation." Students discussed this statement and the consensus was that while a correct interpretation of the Bible is essential, it can only change lives when it is properly applied. A key verse discussed was "do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Jas 1:22).

The class next discussed Warren's four steps to devotional study: pray, meditate, apply, memorize.[4] A key here is that a devotional study must begin with prayer, so we are prepared to hear God's voice speaking through his Word. I then demonstrated using the forms for conducting a devotional study from *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* as well as the similar workflow from the Logos Bible software. While either of these options will work, the advantages of an electronic study were noted, including the ease of linking to helpful resources and the value of having an easily searchable record of studies compared to paper records.

The discussion then turned to applications. I stated that there are both personal applications and general applications and it is important not to confuse the two. Within the Vineyard Movement, the Bible should be interpreted according to our stance as empowered evangelicals. This means that we read Scripture with an expectation that the Holy Spirit will speak to us and that he can use it to guide our lives.

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[4] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 35-51.

Students suggested that personal applications may be something very specific to the reader. Personal applications (1) should be personal—what God wants you to do/change; (2) should be practical—it must be something you can do; (3) should be possible—it must be something you know you can accomplish (i.e., not unrealistically broad); (4) should be provable—can be measured so you can know you have done it.

General applications, on the other hand, are clear teachings of the Bible and apply to all Christians. In preparing to preach or teach, care must be taken in how the Bible is applied. It is easy to confuse a personal application with the general teaching of a passage and to misconstrue what the passage means. This requires considering whether the application is really the clear teaching of the passage and can be asserted as a general rule. The consensus in the class was that if an application is not a clear teaching of a passage and/or supported elsewhere in Scripture, then it is most likely a personal application and we need to be careful about assigning it as the "the meaning" of the passage. The class also agreed that we need to encourage people to prayerfully consider how a general application may suggest a personal application. The lead pastor noted here that while it is best to avoid making a personal application into "the meaning" of a passage, personal applications are still valuable in teaching and preaching as examples or illustrations.

The last exercise in that class session was to do a devotional Bible study of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13). While time did not permit an in-depth study, the class was able to discuss and practice how they might approach a devotional study using either Rick Warren's forms or the Logos workflow.

Before class was dismissed, I gave the assignment for the next session, which was to read chapter 5, "The Biographical Method," of *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*,[5] and be prepared to share thoughts and experiences about a biographical study of Jonah.

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[5] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 103-21.

Week 3: The Biographical Method

The third session was held on June 27, 2023, to regain a week lost by the delay following the first class. During this session, the biographical method of Bible study was discussed and practiced. Since the Bible is largely the record of men and women and their relationships with the loving God who created them and over 3,000 people are mentioned, there is a wealth of material for conducting biographical studies.

The class began with a discussion question: who do you find to be the most interesting character in the Bible other than Jesus and why? While some students picked major and obvious personalities, such as Paul and Peter, others selected some less central characters. The reasons for students' selections were diverse and underlined the idea that different characters in the Bible resonate with different people and/or in different stages of their lives. A practical use noted by one student is that the biographical method provides individuals who preach or teach with a rich resource for finding examples and illustrations.

As I discussed how to conduct a biographical study, I listed several caveats. First, avoid doing a first character study on a major personage like Paul. The volume of information found in the Bible might make such a study too ambitious for a first attempt. Second, we can learn valuable lessons from the lives of all the people mentioned in the Bible, so avoid the temptation to study only the heroes and neglect the failures and villains. Finally, learn about the historical and cultural settings in which the people lived to better understand them, but do not consult books written about Bible people in the initial stages of the study to avoid an author's impressions, "short circuiting" building one's own impressions.

I emphasized that a biographical study requires multiple readings of the Bible passage being studied. In the first reading, we gather general impressions and then progressively drill down to more details and explanations until we finally arrive at developing applications.

The class then presented the results of their studies of Jonah assigned at the end of the previous class session. Many interesting observations were made, and everyone appreciated that the theme of Jonah having been a reluctant prophet had much to teach despite his flaws and failings.

As the class concluded, students were assigned to read chapter 4 in *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* on thematic studies.[6] The students were also asked to begin making a list of what they considered important themes in the Bible.

Week 4: The Thematic Method

The fourth class was held July 13, 2023, and introduced the thematic method of Bible study. The thematic method is like a topical Bible study (scheduled for week 5) but is more limited in scope. Thematic studies zero in on a specific aspect or theme within a bigger topic. They involve approaching a biblical theme with a limited number of questions.

I asked the class what themes they might look at for a Bible study. Suggestions included faith, forgiveness, and similar topics. At this point, it became clear that most of the class either had not read the textbook carefully or did not grasp the distinction Warren makes between thematic studies and topical studies. I pointed out that their suggestions were mostly larger topics. To illustrate, the class took the topic of faith and listed a few themes found within that topic, including faith that God will provide for our needs, faith that God is working for our good even when our situation is troublesome, faith that God will answer prayer, and the like. The class went on to take a few of the broader of these themes and divide them into smaller subthemes. After this exercise, the class seemed to have a better understanding of theme versus topic.

I next discussed the process of conducting a thematic study, which consists of a series of steps:

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[6] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 85-102.

1. Choose a theme. Be sure it is a theme and not a topic.

2. List all the verses you intend to study.

3. Decide on the questions you will ask.

4. Ask your questions of each reference and record the answer.

5. Draw some conclusions.

6. Develop a personal application.

I next explained the difference between a thematic study and a larger topical study by noting that the thematic method is a simplified topical study. The difference is that the scope is limited to "what do I want to know" instead of what is everything the Bible teaches on a subject. An advantage of a thematic study is that it is useful for producing lessons and messages since the limited scope forces the interpreter to stick to the main point he intends to make instead of wandering off into side issues.

The class practiced this method briefly by selecting the theme of faith for healing. The class worked to develop a short list of the questions they wanted to ask and passages they might consult in seeking answers. The assignment was given to read the chapter in *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* on topical studies[7] and to practice picking a topic and seeing what themes it could be broken down into.

Week 5: The Topical Study Method

The next class was held July 25, 2023, and introduced the topical method of Bible study. I began by reviewing in greater detail than in the last session the differences between a thematic study and a topical study. The main differences were noted as falling into several areas:

1. A topical study usually takes longer because we study more verses.

2. A topical study usually has multiple themes, and in a topical study we study all themes in a topic.

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[7] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 122-40.

3. In a topical study we do not decide ahead of time what questions to ask. The idea is to learn all we can about a topic, not limit the study to just a selected theme.

4. We examine each verse and record all observations about it.

The class discussed how these differences made a topical study different from a thematic study. The consensus was that the scale of a topical study is much bigger and is self-directed in the sense that we let it lead us toward the questions to ask instead of starting with a specific and limited set of questions to answer as in a thematic study.

The class next conducted a practical exercise. Beginning with the topic of faith, students made the beginning of a list of passages to study using concordances and topical Bibles. For each reference, the class discussed what tools were available to them that would be useful for each and what type of information they might expect to find in each.

One student made the observation that a topical study would probably require a variety of the Bible study methods. A biographical study or word study would probably be useful in contributing valuable insights to a topical study. It was a positive development that students were beginning to understand that *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* is an integrated system and just not a set of stand-alone methods.

As the class concluded, I assigned the reading of the chapter in *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* on word studies.[8] Students were reminded to try the BibleHub.com website and look over its resources for conducting word studies if they had not already done so. Finally, assignments of random target audiences and age groups for the presentations assigned for sessions 6 through 8 were made.

Week 6: The Word Study Method

Session 6 was held on August 8, 2023. The first activity was for four students to make their presentations. The assignment was to take one of their Bible studies and present a five-minute devotional or lesson for a randomly assigned target group. Both the

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[8] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 141-59.

age and composition of these groups were determined by a random drawing at the end of the previous class.

The presentations went well. They were biblically accurate, age appropriate and relevant to the group assigned. All had a good application included. Some highlights included:

1. The associate pastor made excellent use of personal experiences as illustrations, which made his presentation relatable and relevant for his target group of the men's ministry.

2. The worship leader's group was the members of her ministry team. Given that these are all musicians, she did something very creative and did her devotional in the form of a new song she wrote based on her Bible study. It covered all the bases and was suitable for a group of musicians.

3. The children's ministry director presented a lesson intended for fourth to sixth graders. It was biblically correct but was probably too academic for the age group and covered a few too many points.

After the presentations, the class examined how to do a Bible word study. The class understood and agreed that word studies must be based on the original language words, not the English words. Also, the context must always determine the meaning, no matter what the English equivalent may be.

I briefly outlined some of the less technical errors discussed in D. A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies.* The first was the root word fallacy that assumes that every word's meaning is determined by its root word. The second was the problem of unknowingly relying on resources on classical Greek instead of on Koine Greek. The last was the problem of making false assumptions that a word was used with a special technical meaning just because it has acquired one in systematic theology.[9] I also discussed the need to remember that Greek and Hebrew words can often be translated by several different English words and that the context will usually suggest which is most likely correct. Care must be taken not to let possible alternate translations of words take on too much significance.

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[9] D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 28-33.

The class briefly covered some of the possible questions they might want to ask in doing a word study:

1. How many times does the word occur?

2. In what books does it occur?

3. What writers used the word?

4. In what book does it appear most?

5. Where does the word first appear in the Bible?

6. Where does it occur first in the book I am studying?

The remainder of the class time was spent practicing using the resources on BibleHub.com and Logos to do basic word studies. The selected text was Romans 5:1-2 and the word chosen was "justified." At the end of the session, chapter 9 in *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods* on the book survey method studies was assigned,[10] and the students doing presentations in the next session were reminded to be prepared. Reading the book of Jude was also assigned for next week's practice exercise.

Week 7: The Book Survey Method

On August 22, 2023, class session 7 was held and examined the book survey method. The class began with four student presentations as in the last session. All of them were well done, but the standout was by a student whose role is administrative rather than ministry. She presented a lesson for children in first through third grade. The lesson was age appropriate and so clearly taught that the director of children's ministry has been trying to recruit her to be added to the teaching rotation for the children's ministry since that class was held. The student had previously never considered herself qualified for that role, so this exercise possibly helped her discover an unsuspected gifting for teaching children.

The class then examined the book survey method of Bible study. This was the first of three sequential studies that could be done to progressively dig deeper into what

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[10] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 177-97.

the Bible says: survey, analysis, synthesis. In this method, what the book says as a whole is examined so the parts can be examined in more detail and summarized using the other two methods.

I discussed the steps of this method. The first step is to read the book. Students agreed that reading the book in one sitting whenever possible is best to get an overview. There was a good discussion of translations. Most students understood that it is best to use a modern translation, but to avoid paraphrases. Most but not all were aware that modern translations vary, with some being word-for-word and others thought-for-thought. The consensus was that a mix of both kinds of translation might yield more clarity.

The second step is to begin taking notes about what is being read. Students observed some items they would want to note:

1. What type of literature is it? History? Poetry? Letter? Narrative or teaching/instruction?

2. What was the author's purpose in writing the book?

3. What key words does the author use/repeat?

4. How does the writer use figures of speech? Illustrations and parables? Poetic expression?

5. What are the main themes in this book?

6. How is the book organized? Is there an obvious structure to it?

7. Who are the major people mentioned in the book?

8. Which of the major people and key words merit further study using the biographical and word study methods.

The third step is to start examining the background of the book. Students discussed what resources they have and use to research the background of a book.

The fourth step is to make a horizontal chart of the book. Most students were unfamiliar with this step and much of the rest of the class time was spent working through how a horizontal chart of Jude might be constructed. This step leads into the last step of expanding the chart into a tentative outline of the book.

At the conclusion of the class, reading was assigned for the final class session of Rick Warren's *Bible Study Methods*, chapter 10, "The Chapter Analysis Method"[11] and reminders was given to student presenters for the final week be prepared.

Week 8: The Chapter Analysis Method

The final class session was held on September 5, 2023, and covered the chapter analysis method. The first order of business was student presentations. All four students were doing their second presentation, and all were noted to have made improvements from the first round.

The discussion then turned to the chapter analysis method of Bible study. I noted that the chapter analysis method is the second of three stages in studying an entire book of the Bible. It depends on having first done a good book survey study as a basis for a more detailed analysis. After an overview has been obtained, the next step is to do a deeper examination of its parts. This study involves taking a close look at each chapter, verse, and word, seeking a deeper and detailed understanding.

I then asked students how they might approach writing a summary of a chapter and several methods were suggested:

1. Paraphrase and summarize the chapter in their words in paragraph form.

2. Outline the chapter following the paragraph structure of the chapter and listing the subpoints for each paragraph.

3. Rewrite it in simplified language, using only subject-noun-object sentences.

4. Produce a sentence diagram for complicated sentences.

The second step is to list observations. The class reviewed and discussed appendix F of the textbook, which covers various things to look for at the observation stage.[12]

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[11] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, 198-215.

[12] Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods,* 280-81.

The third step was to begin to ask interpretation questions. Students were asked what their available resources are to perform this step. There was also some discussion of the pros and cons of consulting commentaries and at what point they should be used. The consensus was that Warren's suggestion to use them only at the final stage of this step made sense since using it too early could result in relying on the commentator too much and missing things that would otherwise be observed. The Logos Factbook feature was demonstrated and the power of the application for examining background material was displayed.

It was impossible to conduct a meaningful practice session for this type of study in detail in the time available, so I recommended that students take their book survey of Jude and expand upon it on their own, continuing to use the Warren book as a guide.

Conclusion

This project had three goals: assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study practices among VLC staff members, develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods, and equip the VLC staff to capably handle Scripture. The first goal was met by developing and employing a pre-survey. The second goal was met by developing a course curriculum to meet a requirement of the Foundations of Teaching class and having it reviewed by an expert panel. To identify whether the third goal was met, a post-survey was taken, and a t-test was done to evaluate the success or failure of the class in improving the staff's knowledge and skills in Bible study. The results of this analysis are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter examines the statistical analysis of the project's results as measured by administering both a pre-survey and a post-survey and analyzing the change. Attention is also given to evaluating the purpose and goals of the project, the project's strengths and weaknesses, what I would do differently, my theological and personal reflections, and my concluding thoughts.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop and teach a class in hermeneutics and Bible study methods for the staff of Vineyard Life Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, to increase their ability to capably handle Scripture. This project was a small part of the much larger effort to provide training for the church staff.

As noted in chapter 1 of this project, the Vineyard Institute has stopped offering certificates or expanding its course offerings. This left Vineyard churches with a problem as there is now no clear path toward training pastoral and other staff or what the educational requirements are for ordination. The denomination recognizes that this is a worrying problem and is investigating educational requirements as part of its overall examination of ordination. Vineyard Life Church's local efforts at staff training intended to meet immediate staff needs while waiting for a wider resolution to training issues. Moving forward, Vineyard Life Church is going to be working with the national training director as a beta test site for a new program using Seminary Now, having been selected partly because we have been proactive in conducting regular staff training classes for the past two years.

<center>**Evaluation of the Project's Goals**</center>

Three goals determined the success of this project. Each goal will be examined and evaluated in this section.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current hermeneutical and Bible study practices among VLC staff members. This goal was measured by administering a pre-survey to determine the current practices in use by the staff. The results of the pre-survey are included in table 1.

<center>Table 1. Pre-survey results</center>

Participant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Pre-Survey Total
1	6.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	72
2	5.0	4.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	3.5	6.0	6.0	6.0	3.5	6.0	4.0	4.0	69
3	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	68
4	6.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	55
5	5.0	5.0	5.0	3.0	4.0	6.0	4.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	67

Examining the results of the pre-survey suggests that one of the challenges in designing this course would be the disparate levels of participant knowledge coming into the class. This led to a conscious design decision that the class would include both basic information and practical exercises to allow students to practice skills in a way that would challenge them at every level.

One issue seen in the survey results was that while there is no neutral option between "slightly agree" and "slightly disagree," a student created their own neutral options by circling both choices. This is noted in the results by using "3.5" score for those questions.

The pre-survey was conducted prior to developing the curriculum so that the curriculum could be tailored to meet the weak areas discovered. The goal was successfully met when all staff members had completed the survey.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum focused on basic hermeneutical principles and Bible study methods. Having noted that students coming into the class had a broad range of existing knowledge, the course was designed to both introduce new information to less advanced students while giving more knowledgeable students some more advanced information, and to provide some practical exercises that would be beneficial to students on every level.

The curriculum plan was designed in the Foundations of Teaching class and received a score of 96/100, which was deemed sufficient to refer it to the expert panel. The curriculum was then reviewed by a panel consisting of Vineyard Life Church's lead pastor and two professional educators who are dedicated Christians with master's degrees and years of teaching experience. Most of the curriculum development and revision had been accomplished during the Foundations of Teaching class. The expert panel had only a few minor suggestions, most notably that there were too many practical exercises to fit into a limited time frame. The second goal was accomplished when the curriculum was revised in response to the panel's suggestions and finalized.

Goal 3

The third goal of the class was to equip the VLC staff to capably handle the Scripture. This goal was measured by administering a post-survey to measure the change in knowledge. Two students were not included in the data tested. One student was a part-time staff member who took the pre-survey and attended the first two classes, but had to drop out when her main job's work schedule changed. The second student missed the

first three class sessions because he was out of town and was unable to attend two of the remaining five classes.

At the conclusion of the class, the post survey was administered, and the results tabulated. The results were as follows:

Table 2. Post-survey results

Participant	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Post-Survey Total
1	5.0	5.0	3.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	4.0	5.0	4.0	72.0
2	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	3.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	70.5
3	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	3.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	72.0
4	6.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	1.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	70.0
5	5.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	3.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	78.0

The mean score increased from 66.2 to 72.5, so there was an increase in the mean as a result of the class. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-training survey scores: $t_{(4)} = -2.188$, p = 0.0469.

Examining the individual results more closely, I noted that participant 1 had the highest score on the pre-survey and the score did not change at all on the post-survey. The next highest score on the pre-survey was for participant 4. That student's score improved only by 1.5 on the post-survey. The change in scores for the other students was greater, ranging from +4 to +15 points. Running a second *t*-test that excluded the students with the top two scores on the pre-survey resulted in in the mean score increasing by 10 instead of 6.6. The *t*-test result for those response was $t_{(2)} = -3.111$, $p = 0.0448$.

In both *t*-tests there was a statistically significant difference in the participants' pre-and post-survey results, showing that the class had a positive impact. However, comparing the two *t*-tests suggests that the class was more successful in increasing the knowledge of students who began the class with a lower level of knowledge than students

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who had the highest pre-survey scores. Given that some of the staff have a formal theological education and some do not, it is not surprising that the students who had the most to learn learned the most. Students who already had a good theological background did not greatly benefit from the class in terms of increased knowledge while the less knowledgeable students benefited from a modest gain to a large gain (+4 to +15 points).

In addition, each student presented two lessons based on Bible studies done as assignments in this class as a lesson appropriate for a randomly assigned age group. The presentations were evaluated by the pastor and course instructor of Vineyard Life Church who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, age appropriateness of the language and application, and relevance of the lesson.[1] The scores for each item for these presentations were all either 3 (sufficient) or 4 (exemplary). While the evaluators had a few suggestions on some of the presentations,[2] participants showed a good understanding of how to convert a Bible study into a lesson and always included relevant applications.

Strengths of the Project

This project had a number of strengths. First, this project was an opportunity for the staff members to meet together and study a topic as a group. The theologically trained members of the staff may not have learned as much new information (as noted in the previous section) but were able to share their experience with the less advanced students. This staff interaction in the classes had a two-way benefit. The more advanced students were given multiple opportunities to guide the other students and give them the benefit of their experience. They had a lot of insight on tools and methods that would not have been immediately obvious to a novice. On the other side, the staff interaction gave some more seasoned participants who would not ordinarily be working closely with

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[1] See appendix 4.

[2] See chap. 4, lessons 6 through 8, for specific comments.

administrative staff members an opportunity for meaningful discipleship interaction. The project enhanced team building in the staff.

The textbook was another strength in this class. Rick Warren's *Bible Study Methods* is a well-organized resource. The forms provided are useful to students. The book also presents its methods as an integrated system for Bible study instead of a collection of random and independent methods. For some students, having an overall plan in a Bible study and doing studies that require an extended period of effort were seen as falling more into the academic than the ministry area. There was also a tendency noted for some students to limit Bible study to the devotional method. Expanding the concept of Bible study beyond a personal quiet time and examining the benefits of going deeper was a positive result of the class.

A third strong point was that I was able to introduce new software and web-based tools to the students. That this was a strong point became clear toward the end of the class when the worship leader's and associate pastor's turns came in the Sunday preaching rotation. Neither had spoken much about the original languages previously, but both included a short and appropriate discussion of a Greek word in their most recent messages. Talking to them, I was told that they had used the methods and tools they had learned in the word study session to prepare those parts of their messages.

The practice exercises in the class were generally valuable. Working through some short Bible studies together allowed the group to share their insights and learn from each other. The presentations conducted in the last three class sessions allowed students to practice taking a Bible study and turning it into a lesson or devotional. This was especially valuable for the less advanced students because it gave them a non-threatening environment in which to do something that was, for some, outside their experience and comfort zone.

Weaknesses of the Project

The biggest weakness of the project was that it attempted to cover too much material, trying to meet everyone's needs in too little time. It is difficult to design a class for a group with a wide difference in training and experience. On the one hand, preparing the class for the less advanced students risks not offering much that would be new to the more advanced students. On the other hand, designing the class for more advanced students risks leaving those who lack an adequate background behind. In reflecting on the class, I attempted to cover too much material in too little time and probably shortchanged both groups to an extent.

A second weakness was that the class schedule was irregular. On the post-survey, a couple students noted that it was difficult to maintain continuity in a class that meets only every two weeks. This was a structural problem because the training was given following staff meetings. The meeting schedule itself is a little inconsistent and is subject to being cancelled when external events, such as church conferences, intervene. This weakness may be difficult to resolve since most of the church staff are part-time and have other jobs and family responsibilities to attend to.

Another weakness of the project was that insufficient time was allotted for in-class practice exercises. Less time could have been spent reviewing material students should have read before the session and more time spent applying and practicing what was learned. The post-surveys agreed that the practice exercises were valuable and that students benefited from them. Unfortunately, time restraints prevented the class from working through many complete Bible studies together.

A final weakness was the lack of accountability in the class. Students were expected to do the reading and conduct Bible studies on their own, but no method of determining whether they had done the work was in place. That some students may not have been consistently doing the work seemed possible when the children's ministry director commented that one of her student presentations was based on a paper she had done in college instead of on a current new Bible study.

What I Would Do Differently

I would do several things differently if completing the project again. Given that the biggest weakness of the class was trying to cover too much material in too little time, I would plan a longer class. The class covered only what I saw as the most important chapters in the textbook. In retrospect, it would have been more effective to cover the whole book sequentially instead of skipping sections and leaving it to student initiative to read the extra chapters.

I would also spend more time doing practical exercises and less time reviewing material students were supposed to have read. Several students suggested this in their post-surveys, commenting that they benefited from working together and sharing insight on how to utilize the various Bible study methods covered in the class.

I would have preferred to offer the class in a different context than after staff meetings. Linking the class with staff meetings had several detrimental effects. The class schedule was biweekly and was still subject to change and delay. Tacking the class onto the end of staff meetings often led to time issues when meetings ran long and meant that the class members came into class with no break after having already sat through a two hour or longer meeting. Unfortunately, as a practical matter when dealing with a staff with many bivocational members, finding a solution to this problem may be difficult. Available time slots are limited.

I would also split the class into two classes. The first class would cover only the book and be a basic Bible study methods class. This class would be for the less advanced students and not include the entire staff. The second class would cover more advanced concepts and be offered to the entire staff once the less advanced students had taken the first class and had a background on which to build. This would have helped minimize the struggle to make the class equally relevant to beginning and advanced students in a way that probably negatively impacted both groups, but especially the more advanced students. As was noted in the "Evaluation of the Project's Goals" section, the

class saw much more positive change for students who had the lowest level of initial knowledge.

Theological Reflections

The theme verse for the class was 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." This verse was a fitting choice for a couple of reasons. First, the verse is found in 2 Timothy, which was Paul's final letter to his apprentice as he prepared to face death. This epistle must be read with an understanding that Paul was reminding Timothy about matters of considerable importance to church leaders. It is of great significance that he included being equipped to correctly handle God's Word among his final instructions.

Second, this letter was written against a background of false teaching that was already finding its way into the church. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul reminds Timothy that church leaders have an absolute duty to oppose false teaching. This requires that church leaders be trained to be capable of properly interpreting and applying Scripture. It is plausible to assume that many of the false teachers in the early church were sincere in their beliefs. This points out the danger presented by teachers and leaders who are superficial and careless in the conclusions they reach about what the Bible teaches. Given that many laypeople lack a depth of knowledge, it is easy for them to uncritically accept the teachings of leaders whom they assume to be experts. Then, as now, a convincing but mistaken teacher can easily lead people astray. Paul vividly notes this danger in verse 17 when he says concerning the false teachers that "their teaching will spread like gangrene."

Paul's prescription for preventing the spread of false teaching is for leaders to take great care that they work to present themselves "to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Therefore, an essential part of training for church leaders includes a thorough foundation in handling Scripture. This Bible study methods class was certainly not the final answer

and left much work to be done. However, it was a positive step in the direction of

providing a good foundation for the church staff for further study.

James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers,

because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This warning

underlines the seriousness of the responsibility of teachers. James is saying that the

judgment of teachers will be especially strict because greater responsibility rests on them.

Since they teach the Word of God, great care must be taken to avoid leading people astray.

It would be easy to misinterpret this admonition as discouraging gifted people

from teaching. Instead, as Peter Davids notes, it is more likely intended to warn people who

are motivated by a desire for position and status to rethink their aspiration. He notes,

> The leading role in Christianity was probably thought of as rabbinic or scribal in some
> communities (e.g. 13:52), but of course it was charismatic as well (1 Cor. 12:28).
> Clearly it was an office of some social rank (mentioned with prophets in Acts 13:1;
> cf. Did. 13:2). Thus there was quite an impulse for those fit and unfit to press into
> this office.[3]

While James reminds that teaching carries a great responsibility, potential

teachers of the Bible should also carefully consider their motives for pursuing that ministry.

Once sure that their motives are pure, they still must exercise care to handle Scripture

properly and avoid falling into error and misleading others. This, coming full circle,

means a teacher must be diligent to follow Paul's admonition in 2 Timothy 2:15 to strive

as all times to correctly handle God's Word. Paul discipled and trained Timothy and was

probably reminding him of something he had always been taught. Following Paul's

example, the church has a responsibility to do all it can do to equip its leaders and

teachers with the skills they need to perform the duties of the ministry to which they are

called.

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[3] Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 136.

Personal Reflections

I am a teacher by calling and gifting. My instinctive response to needs within the church is often "we need a class on that." I recognize that that is not always the appropriate response, and that ministry can take many forms. Nonetheless, I am committed to education within the church.

This class and the staff training that was done before the project was illuminating to me. While teaching in general is rewarding, I have found that I draw a deeper sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from training church leaders. It simply feels "right." This, perhaps, confirms the lead pastor's decision to recruit and assign me to the role of staff training at Vineyard Life Church.

The Vineyard movement is currently revisiting questions of ordination and training for ministry. Local efforts over the last couple of years have provided something of value to the staff while Vineyard Life Church waits for a determination from the denomination on where we are going. A recent development is that the Vineyard is beta testing SeminaryNow.com as the first step toward a theological education. Vineyard Life Church has applied to be a beta test site and has been accepted. I am excited about this beta program going forward for a couple of reasons.

First, the Vineyard will finally have a recognized path for staff training that will be more widely accepted within the denomination. In-house training has been of value, but outside the walls of our church it carries little weight. The lack of a clear path does not enhance the career possibilities for staff members outside of our local church.

Second, the Seminary Now program will involve recorded lectures from a variety of scholars and experts. This will introduce staff to a wider variety of viewpoints than they can get from the lead pastor and myself.

Finally, my hope is that this program will lay enough foundation to spark interest among the more junior staff, especially those aspiring to the role of pastor, in going on to a formal seminary education. The Vineyard movement's roots are in the Jesus movement of the 1960-1970s, and education has often been ignored because gifting

and experience have been emphasized without also focusing on advanced education. One result of this has been a lack of depth among some of Vineyard pastors. Experience has often been emphasized at the expense of scholarship. It is exciting to see a growing interest in finding a better balance between head and heart in leadership training and education within the Vineyard.

Another way this experience influenced me is that I am now prayerfully considering how to pursue my ministry to have the greatest impact. While I intend to remain fully involved in Vineyard Life Church's staff training, I am looking closely at also applying for a mentoring professor position with Redemption Seminary. Redemption is a fully on-line seminary that offers classes through the Logos Bible software taken under the supervision and guidance of mentors.

Conclusion

This project succeeded in improving the knowledge of most of the students in the class in Bible study methods. It was, admittedly, a beginner class, so a couple senior staff members did not benefit a great deal from the concepts taught. However, aside from the t-test results, the class was successful in team building among all students and allowed more knowledgeable students step up to help mentor the others. Post-survey conversations with some of the more senior participants suggested that they gained more from the practice exercises and class discussion than from the lectures. In designing classes for staff members with a wide range of educational backgrounds, it will be good to remember to build in a variety of learning experiences since that seemed to work well this class.

More junior staff members commented that the class increased their confidence and gave them some tools to use in preparing lessons and messages. One obvious example of that was that the new associate pastor and worship pastor both started using basic Greek word studies in their messages and doing it well.

This project and my studies toward this degree had a positive impact upon me. I thank the Lord for the opportunity I was given and for the growth I have seen in myself and in the participants in this Bible study methods class. As I consider my future going forward, I will always be grateful for the way this experience changed my life.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLE STUDY METHODS CURRICULUM
EVALUATION TOOL RUBRIC

This rubric was used by the expert panel to evaluate the curriculum. The panel

consisted of a senior Vineyard pastor and two experienced professional educators.

Bible Study Methods Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Comments**
The lesson plan is clearly relevant to Bible study.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on Bible study.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The lesson utilizes appropriate sources that are documented accurately.					
The main idea of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The subpoints of the lesson clearly support the main idea and flow logically.					
Each lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the method being taught.					
Each lesson has practical examples and applications.					

APPENDIX 2

PRE-SURVEY FOR HERMENEUTICS AND
BIBLE STUDY METHODS TRAINING

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help us design a course of study to meet your ministry training needs more successfully. This research is being conducted by Charles Fox for purposes of project research. In this research, you will answer some questions about your current Bible study practices. 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 voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

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

Instructions for creating a PIN
To preserve anonymity in this survey while allowing the results of the pre and post course surveys to be compared and analyzed, create a personal identification number that you can easily remember. A suggestion for an easy to remember PIN is to use the house number of your street address and your zip code as your PIN. For example, if your address is 123 Main St, City, State 46204, you would use 12346204 as your PIN.

PIN (Personal Identification Number): _____

Please answer the following questions briefly:

What is your biggest challenge in doing Bible study?

What types of books and what other resources do you regularly use for Bible study?

Please circle Yes or No for the following statements:

1. I keep written records/notes of my Bible studies.   YES   NO

2. I can easily find my notes about a passage I have studied later.   YES   NO

3. I use at least three different types of Bible study methods.   YES   NO

Please circle your agreement to the following statements using this scale:
SD= strongly disagree   D= disagree   DS= disagree somewhat
AS= agree somewhat   A= agree   SA= strongly agree

1. Regular daily Bible study is the most essential thing a believer can do to achieve spiritual growth and maturity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. I am confident that my level of training in Bible study methods has adequately equipped me to perform my ministry function.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. Bible study methods are best developed by experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. Bible study methods are best developed by discovering what works for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I get a deeper understanding of the Bible when I regularly and intentionally vary my Bible study routine.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. I can find applications of the Bible passages I study.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. The best way to find application in a passage is because of how it speaks to me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. Understanding the Bible's various forms of literature is necessary for proper interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. It is important to be aware of the historical context and setting of a Bible passage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. It is important to be sensitive to the grammar or word usage of a Bible passage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. A passage in the Bible should always be read and understood in the most literal way possible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I use several different Bible study methods.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I am confident in my knowledge of what resources I can use for Bible study.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I can confidently teach someone else how study the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 3

POST-SURVEY FOR HERMENEUTICS AND
BIBLE STUDY METHODS TRAINING

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help us determine how successful the class you took was in meeting its objectives. This research is being conducted by Charles Fox for purposes of project research. In this research, you will answer some questions about your current Bible study practices and how the class impacted them. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential,* and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

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

Reminder of the Instructions for creating a PIN
To preserve anonymity in this survey while allowing the results of the pre and post course surveys to be compared and analyzed, you created a personal identification number that you could easily remember. The suggestion for an easy to remember PIN was to use the house number of your street address and your zip code as your PIN. For example, if your address is 123 Main St, City, State 46204, you would have used 12346204 as your PIN.

PIN (Personal Identification Number): _____

Please answer the following questions briefly:

What improvements could be made to this class?

Did you learn about any new types of books and other resources that you can use for Bible study? What are they?

Please circle your agreement to the following statements using this scale:
SD= strongly disagree   D= disagree   DS= disagree somewhat
AS= agree somewhat   A= agree   SA= strongly agree

1. Regular daily Bible study is the most essential thing a believer can do to achieve spiritual growth and maturity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. I am confident that my level of training in Bible study methods has adequately equipped me to perform my ministry function.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. Bible study methods are best developed by experience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. Bible study methods are best developed by discovering what works for me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I get a deeper understanding of the Bible when I regularly and intentionally vary my Bible study routine.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. I can find applications of the Bible passages I study.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. The best way to find application in a passage is because of how it speaks to me.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. Understanding the Bible's various forms of literature is necessary for proper interpretation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. It is important to be aware of the historical context and setting of a Bible passage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. It is important to be sensitive to the grammar or word usage of a Bible passage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. A passage in the Bible should always be read and understood in the most literal way possible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I use several different Bible study methods.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I am confident in my knowledge of what resources I can use for Bible study.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I can confidently teach someone else how study the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 4

STUDENT TEACHING RUBRIC

This rubric was used to evaluate each of the two student teaching assignments. Students will teach a lesson, devotional, etc., based on one of that student's Bible studies and produced for a randomly assigned group.

Student Lesson Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson was sound in its handling of Scripture.					
The lesson was faithful to the biblical passage being taught					
The lesson was clearly taught.					
The language used was age appropriate for the assigned target group.					
An application was included in the lesson.					
The application was clearly drawn from the passage being taught.					

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING THE STAFF OF VINEYARD LIFE CHURCH
IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, IN HERMENEUTICS
AND BIBLE STUDY METHODS

Charles Duayne Fox, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. T. J. Betts

This project was undertaken to equip the staff of Vineyard Life Church by increasing their ability to capably handle Scripture. The impetus for offering this class was that leaders need to be capable students of Scripture so they can help the people who follow them grow spiritually. The first chapter describes the context at VLC in which the class was offered and explains why it was necessary. Chapter 2 examines selected texts from the Old and New Testaments that illustrate why church leaders are tasked with becoming good students of Scripture. The reason proposed was so they can live exemplary Christian lives and be able teach and lead others to achieve spiritual maturity. Chapter 3 details the lessons to be learned from history and today's culture. Particular attention was paid both to how periodically failing to adequately equip and educate leaders has resulted in churches that do a poor job leading people to spiritual maturity and how churches that have paid attention to equipping leaders realize the result of Christian maturity. Chapter 4 describes how the course was taught. Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of the class in meetings its goals.

VITA

Charles Duayne Fox

EDUCATION
        BS, Ft. Wayne Bible College, Indiana, 1979
        JD, Indiana University School of Law, 1989
        MA, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2016

ORGANIZATIONS
        Society of Vineyard Scholars

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT
        Pastor, Wilson Chapel, Elizabethtown, Indiana, 1979-1980
        Discipleship Pastor, New Day Church, Brownsburg, Indiana 2012-2016
        Director of Ministry Training, Vineyard Life Church, Indianapolis, Indiana 2019-