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LAUNCHING FORWARD: AN EFFECTIVE CORE TEAM
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR LAUNCHING A
CHURCH PLANT OR MULTISITE CAMPUS

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

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

by
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May 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

LAUNCHING FORWARD: AN EFFECTIVE CORE TEAM
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR LAUNCHING A
CHURCH PLANT OR MULTISITE CAMPUS

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This project is dedicated to Marci Parrott,
who has gone above and beyond to support me in the research and writing of this project.

Being married to Marci is the greatest gift of grace outside of salvation.

What a joy it is to raise our wonderful family together as we do ministry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Definitions	4
Church Planting and the Multisite Movement	5
Unique Advantages to the Multisite Church Model	7
Training the Launch Team	8
Ministry Context	9
The Strategy	11
Desired Outcome	12
2. TRUTH: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 1-3	14
Every Member Identified	16
Every Member Devoted	26
Every Member Praying	32
Conclusion	37
3. COMMUNITY: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 4-6	39
Every Member United	42
Every Member Connected	54
Every Member Serving	60
Conclusion	66

Chapter	Page
4. MISSION: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 7-9	67
Every Member Equipped	69
Every Member on Mission	78
Every Member at War	86
Conclusion	92
5. CONCLUSION	93
Evaluation of the Method	94
Core Team Training Timeline	95
Building, Equipping, and Launching the Core Team from Start to Finish	96
Strengths of the Project	100
Weaknesses of the Project	101
A Warning to Lead Pastors	102
Personal Reflections	102
Conclusion	103
 Appendix	
1. TESTIMONY DOCUMENT	104
2. VOLUNTEER SIGN UP DOCUMENT	105
3. CORE TEAM SURVEY	106
4. CORE TEAM TRAINING TIMELINE	107
5. CORE TEAM MEETING SCHEDULE	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY	109

PREFACE

This project was the result of many incredible people in my life who allowed this process to happen. First, I want to thank my incredible wife, Marci Parrott, for allowing me the opportunity to pursue this doctorate. She has worked hard to ensure I had the time I needed to complete this degree. With five children at home and the travel responsibilities I have had in this season, she gave sacrificially to allow this project to happen. I am incredibly grateful for her, and I love her more today than ever before. I cannot wait to see how God will use us both in the coming years.

Second, I want to thank Jack, Anna Kate, Hudson, Silas, and Smith, who also had to make sacrifices for this degree to happen. They had many nights where Daddy was not at home, and there were many nights where our goodnight hugs and kisses were over the phone or FaceTime. Through it all, they were understanding and encouraging. Getting to be their dad is one of the greatest privileges on earth. I look forward to seeing them grow up and grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. I pray they would change the world for Him.

Third, I want to thank my parents, Ronnie and Paula Parrott, for loving me well. They always believed in me and encouraged me to pursue God's call in my life. From a young age, they taught me about Jesus and the gospel. They raised me to love the local church and honor Jesus faithfully. They taught me the importance of family and to make memories with those you love. I am grateful for their endless love and sacrifice for my brother, Kevin, and me. I am where I am today because of them.

Fourth, I want to thank Ronnie Floyd for allowing me to pursue this degree and serve him in a strategic role while he served as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. I am grateful for him hiring me six years ago and giving me the

responsibility of training the core team and launching the Fayetteville Campus of Cross Church. I appreciate his willingness to allow me to travel as many times as needed to Southern Seminary, as well as his constant encouragement along the way. His leadership in my life is irreplaceable and I am forever indebted to him.

Fifth, I want to thank Nick Floyd for his friendship over the last six years. When Nick and I set out to build a core team and launch the Fayetteville Campus, we had no clue what we were doing. We laid out the core team strategy on the fly one day, and through God's grace, he did something amazing. Much of this project is a combination of our ideas and strategy. The memories we made along the way will always bring joy to my heart.

Sixth, I want to thank Kevin Ezell, Jimmy Scroggins, and Albert Mohler. I will soon be a three-time graduate from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. These three men have shaped my life and ministry for the last fifteen years. Jimmy took a chance on me in ministry, disciplined my wife, and modeled biblical fatherhood and marriage for me. Kevin has become a close friend and mentor, more so than I ever thought. Following a key conversation with Dr. Mohler regarding my pursuing a doctorate at Southern, he sent me a personalized letter encouraging me to do it. Because of that letter, I took a step of faith, and here I stand. I am indebted to these men for all they have done to support me in this life.

I hope and pray this project will serve church planters and lead pastors across the world as they seek to train people for church multiplication. I know the stress of uncertainty when entering a room of people who are counting on you to lead them to start a new work. I pray the pages in this project will take the pressure off and give the lead pastor or planter confidence in those early weeks of planning. May the body of Christ multiply for the glory of our great God.

Ronnie Parrott

Springdale, Arkansas

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Church multiplication is to be a central focus in the life and ministry of a local church. The intentional training and launching of pastors and laymen to multiply churches continues to grow in this generation. When it comes to the development and deployment of a pastor to plant a church or a multisite campus, many churches focus on preparing the church planter or new pastor and spend little time on preparing the people who are called to plant with him. Studies have shown that a trained church planter can be more effective launching a church. In *Planting Fast-Growing Churches*, Stephen Gray writes,

In 2003, the North American Mission Board completed an analysis that studied the church-planting process of the Southern Baptist Convention. This study shows that training made major impact on the effectiveness of their church-planting efforts. Of the churches whose pastors received this specialized training, their worship attendance was three times higher than those who had received no training. It is hard to deny: church-planting training is a key component in the church-planting process.¹

Too many church multiplication strategies lack any awareness or requirement of a core team. If the success of a church plant depends greatly on the training of the church planter, then why would the sending church not want to train the launch team as well? If the specialized training offered to the planter was available to the whole team planting with the planter, how much more successful could the church plant be?

Purpose

The purpose of this project was twofold: (1) to provide an understanding of the importance of training church planting launch teams and (2) to offer a robust core team

¹Stephen Grey, *Planting Fast-Growing Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 2007), 95.

training strategy that provides a foundation on which the new pastor is able to develop a spiritually healthy and prepared launch team, which is vital to the long-term spiritual growth of a new church.

In order for the kingdom of God to advance throughout the world, church multiplication must happen. A healthy church is a multiplying church. Some churches focus specifically on multiplying through the planting of other churches, while others focus on multiplying through multiple campuses. In both of these models, the church multiplies and the kingdom of God advances. While some debate the ecclesiology of these different approaches, both models involve a leader and a launch team. This project focuses specifically on the need to train the launch team, regardless of the approach to church multiplication.

A tool for developing the strategy, people, and leadership for launching a church plant or multisite is missing in the field of church planting. This project sought to provide a method of equipping that will, by God's grace, help a lead pastor adequately prepare his core team as they march toward launching a new campus. As this project approached the subject of church multiplication as a whole, it focused in on the multisite church movement. Eighty-five percent of multisite churches are growing and are doing so at an unprecedented rate compared to approaches in the past century.² In essence, this intentional training program helped propel the actual preparation process forward by multiplying the lead pastor's heart, vision, theology, and character in each of the core team members.

Much has been said about the need for church planting teams. A team-based approach to planting, whether it is a new church or a campus of an existing church, is ideal above the "lone-ranger" approach. Ed Stetzer has written comprehensively on

²Thom Rainer, "Six Major Implications of the Growth of Multisite Churches," accessed January 9, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2014/09/06/six-major-implications-growth-multisite-churches/>.

church planting. In *Planting Missional Churches*, Stetzer writes regarding the need for training the church planting team:

Most church-planting teams have one lead pastor and several volunteer laypersons. The church planter needs to train and equip those lay leaders before the church opens for worship. . . . Trained, committed laypeople must become engaged in ministry before the church launch. This prelaunch stage resembles the period of human prenatal maturation during which a fetus develops systems to enable it to function after birth. A baby born without these systems developed and functional will not thrive. Similarly, certain operational systems must be fully functional by this time the church has its first public worship service. Otherwise, the church will be born prematurely and won't have the necessary parts to achieve success for the kingdom of God.³

While Stetzer's comments on team-based training are traced throughout his church-planting book, a detailed training method is absent.

When looking at the scope of resources on the subject, three resources are worth considering regarding the topic of team-based church planting. First, J. D. Payne's *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members* provides a solid list of attributes for someone planting a church on a team, but falls short of providing adequate training before launching a church.⁴ Dick Scoggins' "Building Effective Church Planting Teams" also provides similar information regarding the need for team-based church planting, but it too comes up short on the equipping of the core team.⁵ Third, Ed Stetzer's *Planting Missional Churches* is a go-to book for church planters and is one of the most important resources on the subject of church planting, but absent from the pages of the book is a detailed look at training a core team.⁶

Each of these resources provides a wealth of information and knowledge on the subject of church planting. All speak to the necessity of planting with a team and why

³Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 106.

⁴J. D. Payne, *The Barnabas Factors: Eight Essential Practices of Church Planting Team Members* (Smyrna, DE: Missional, 2008).

⁵Dick Scoggins, "Building Effective Church Planting Teams," accessed April 20, 2015, www.dickscoggins.com.

⁶Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*.

a team is important. While overall informative and extremely beneficial to church planting as a whole, these resources, and many others like them, barely skim the surface of the actual training of the team of laypersons and fall short in providing a detailed, teachable, and reproducible resource.

This project is my attempt to fill a void in the area of church planting and multisite training resources. In a time where church planting is booming and more than 8,000 multisite churches exist,⁷ teaching resources are needed. The aim of this project was to provide a biblical and theological framework for practice in ministry. This project sought to provide a model worthy of duplication. However, it is not beyond the scope of refinement. As it stands, this model has proven effective in two different contexts.

Definitions

Since this project covers two primary types of church multiplication and deals more specifically with the multi-campus launching, it is important to define key terms.

Multisite church. A multisite church is an autonomous church that meets in two or more different locations. These churches usually have one leadership team of pastors who oversee the church as a whole, as well as campus-specific pastors that serve each location. They also have one budget and one administrative office for the church, allowing each campus to operate on a much smaller budget than they would if they were an autonomous church. *The Multi-site Church Revolution* offers this definition,

A multi-site church is one church meeting in multiple locations—different rooms on the same campus, different locations in the same region, or in some instances, different cities, states, or nations. A multi-site church shares a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.⁸

Multisite campus. A multisite campus can be defined as a location of a multisite

⁷Jim Tomberlin, *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World* (Nashville: Rainer, 2014), 3.

⁸Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 18.

church led by a pastoral team that provides leadership and oversight to the members of the church who attend at that specific campus. The campus often provides programming and other ministry needs that are specific to the community in which the campus exists.

Core team. The core team is the team of people who leave the church to go plant another campus or church with the church planter or campus pastor. This team is also often referred to as a launch team.

Church Planting and the Multisite Movement

In the last decade, church planting has dramatically risen to prominence among evangelical pastors, leaders, and mission strategists. Church planting has been around since the New Testament era, but in recent years has become a key strategy for growth within denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention. The desire to engage large metropolitan cities in the United States with the gospel of Jesus Christ through planting new churches holds promise for a new generation of fruitful ministry.

Historically, churches have engaged in church planting in multiple ways.⁹ In the New Testament book of Acts, Apostolic church planting is being done throughout the Middle East in cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and Philippi. In these places the gospel was planted and churches were formed from new believers. Discipleship took place over a period of time and a pastor was raised up to lead the church. Many missionaries are focused on this form of church multiplication throughout the world today.

Many churches were birthed from churches sending a seed group of people to begin a new work in another community in the same city or a surrounding city. These churches have been termed “missions” in the past. This type of church planting is highly reliant on the sending church financially until the church becomes self-supporting.

Another key method is the raising up of a church planter within a local church and sending him out to plant a church in another city or community. Often planters

⁹Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 53.

parachute into the city not knowing anyone but his family and must spend much of his time building relationships with people strong enough to bear the weight of the gospel he is called to give them. Once he has a small group of believers bought into his vision, then he is able to disciple, train, and multiply them to formalize a launch date that may yield a solid turnout. These methods of church planting have birthed thousands of churches throughout history.

While other effective methods of church planting could be discussed,¹⁰ this project focused on a specific method of church multiplication that has gained momentum: the multi-site church movement. Over the last twenty years, a noticeable shift to multi-site campuses as a mechanism for church growth and church multiplication has occurred. Since its inception, the multi-site church movement has witnessed consistent growth. The majority of its expansion has occurred in the last twenty years: in 1990 there were only 10 multisite churches; in 1998 that number had expanded to about 100 multisite churches; in 2005 just seven years later, there were more than 1,500 multisite churches in the United States.¹¹ Today, the number has surpassed 8,000. It is now estimated that 5 million people attend a multi-site church, nearly 10 percent of all Protestant churchgoers.¹²

Worthy examples of multi-site churches include Journey Church in St. Louis, Missouri; Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, Kentucky; Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; The Village Church in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas; Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas; Longhollow Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee; and Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas. These seven churches are examples of an effective implementation of the multisite model as a means of church planting to reach their cities for Christ.

¹⁰Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 53.

¹¹Tomberlin, *Church Locality*, 3

¹²Jim Tomberlin, "What's Trending in Multisite?" accessed January 9, 2014, <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/10881-whats-trending-in-multisite.html>.

Many people have come to faith in Jesus Christ through gospel preaching and discipleship toward Christian maturity in each one of these churches. With the vision of the Great Commission set before Christ-followers, healthy multiplication should be taking place. Healthy multiplication is the essence of discipleship. If churches wish to see more people reached and disciplined, the natural response will be to plant more churches and the multisite movement provides impetus toward this commission.

Unique Advantages to the Multisite Church Model

There are many unique advantages to the multisite church model. First, a multisite church allows for a new fellowship to focus on evangelism and discipleship without all of the financial overhead or lack of creative elements a new church plant might have, including printing costs, design elements, administration, and other resources that are typically covered by the sending or mother church. The launching church provides these resources allowing the pastoral staff to not have to worry about these items.

Second, multisite allows for the DNA that is deeply imbedded in the church to easily transfer over to the new campus. Many people will drive long distances to come to a church with a healthy DNA. Multisite allows for the church to multiply herself out with the same DNA to a community that may be more convenient for many of the members and it engages them to live on mission better than they could before. The DNA factor is a huge plus to the multisite movement.

Third, the uniqueness of a multisite allows for a church to multiply itself by launching not only a campus pastor, but also many of its key members who become foundational for the growth of the new campus. These members allow the church to gain a sizeable core team to launch the new campus which propels its potential for growth, both spiritually and numerically. Essential to this strategy, as well as team-based church planting, is effective and reproducible training structures.

While church planting and multisite are different, both are a means of church multiplication. In time, more multisite campuses will be launched out to form autonomous

churches, which is healthy and needed. Both traditional church planting and multisite campus launches involve a pastor leading a team to start a new work in a particular location. This is why this project is for both types of church multiplication.

Training the Launch Team

A strength of church planting, and more specifically the multi-campus approach, is the opportunity to build launch teams of people within the church. Not developing the launch team is a failure to maximize one of the embedded strengths in the approach. The goal of training is to grow a team that is spiritually healthy, and a healthy church planting team is vital to the long-term spiritual growth of a new church.

A spiritually strong core group of believers who will start the new work with the planter will become the core foundational disciple-makers for the new church. This core team, will be those people that are most trusted to handle the leadership responsibilities that will come within the first days, months, and years of the new church. Therefore, churches who desire to plant churches or launch multisite campuses must spend the necessary time investing in and training their core team in order to build the healthy foundation needed to focus on their mission.

Churches typically take one of two approaches when it comes to training their core team. Either they provide training for the lead pastor/planter and assume the core team is already deeply connected and growing, or they provide what I call hospitality training. Hospitality training is instruction in practical programmatic ministries within the church, including first Impressions, children or student ministry, worship, or other logistical groups, such as the parking team, baptism team, or decision counselor team.

From my experience, the core team that agrees to go with the planter is a diverse group of individuals. Some are leaders, some were leaders, some have no clue about leadership, others may not attend church consistently, and many will agree to go because it will save them gas money. In the campuses I have launched, new leaders arose out of the core team training time. Men and women who were not leading and would never have

led if they had stayed where they were, were asked to step up to a new level of ministry. In each circumstance, God called out new leaders in his church. Raising up new leaders is a foundational reason for training the core team. Pastors simply cannot assume people in the churches they lead are walking faithfully with God and using their gifts effectively. Opportunities to step out in faith and be stretched to a new level of dependency on God must be given.

Ministry Context

I have spent the last five years in ministry serving Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas. Prior to being named Cross Church, the church was called the First Baptist Church in Springdale. FBC Springdale existed under that name for nearly 100 years. In the year 2000, FBC Springdale launched her first multisite campus in Rogers, Arkansas, called The Church at Pinnacle Hills. This new campus grew at a rapid speed to over 2,000 people within 4 years.

FBC Springdale and The Church at Pinnacle Hills existed as one church, but with two names for ten years. In 2010, Senior Pastor Ronnie Floyd, led the church to examine planting a much needed campus in Fayetteville. After a thorough study regarding the lack of effective gospel ministry taking place in Fayetteville, a clear need arose. In the same year, Floyd led the church to change her name to Cross Church in order to bring everyone under one name. It was also this year that I was hired to join the Cross Church staff team to help oversee the training and eventual launch of the Fayetteville Campus.

Following the addition of the Fayetteville Campus, a dying church in Southeast Fayetteville invited our church to assume their building, property, resources, and the 13 remaining members for the purpose of revitalization. This transition took place in 2013 and now is growing and making disciples in an underserved part of the town. The fifth campus was a struggling church plant in Neosho, Missouri, that asked Cross Church to adopt them. The leadership at Cross Church agreed and launched that campus on Easter Sunday, 2014.

Since joining the staff team of Cross Church in 2010, I have direct involvement in the training of the core team and the launching of the two most recent campuses. The strategy I am proposing has been successful in two completely different places with differing sizes of teams, and in two separate states. Both places have seen success in the equipping of the core team, as well as overall commitment to the church.

In the first location, a staff member and I trained over 200 people in order to launch Cross Church in Fayetteville. Fayetteville has nearly 85,000 residents and is the home of the University of Arkansas. It is an eclectic city, which champions the slogan “Keep Fayetteville Funky.” This progressive city is on the forefront of the culture wars with subjects such as same-sex marriage and abortion. The location of the Fayetteville campus is approximately eleven miles away from the launching campus, Cross Church Springdale. The core team met for fifteen weeks on Sunday mornings following the worship service at Springdale for specific training. After four years, 49 of the 88 families who left to plant this church remain connected to this church plant, with 45 active in leadership positions. Eleven families went back to the mother church that planted Cross Church in Fayetteville after one year. Thirteen families moved, 6 families have left the church, and 11 families were unaccounted for in this study.

The second campus I helped launch is in the rural city of Neosho, Missouri. Neosho is a small, blue-collar, county seat town about twenty miles southeast of Joplin, Missouri. Roughly 10,000 people live within thirty miles of Neosho. It is on the opposite end of spectrum from Fayetteville, yet great success has been seen with reaching that city for Christ. The core team began with 45 people. The team met for ten weeks on Sunday mornings before the launch date. I taught a modified version of the curriculum but kept the bulk of the biblical theology intact. The launching of this campus drew over 200 people and continues to see new people reached for Christ each Sunday. All of the core team still remains involved in leadership, with the exception of one who has since moved.

The Strategy

As I set out to plan this strategy, two themes were kept in front of the core team throughout the training. These two themes went well beyond our launch day, and were frequently referenced on Sunday mornings after the launch, as well as in key leadership meetings as the church continued to grow. The first is the importance of being a member of a local church. The second is the importance of holding high the church's mission, which is to reach people for Jesus Christ and to make disciples.

My strategy development begins with what it means to be a member of a local church. Biblical church membership matters and is the foundation on which this whole strategy is built. I desired to build a culture of membership permanence that would not allow someone to leave the church and bounce to another so easily. The Bible holds a high view of church membership. Ephesians 2:19 teaches that because the Christian is "in Christ" he is now "fellow citizens and members of God's family." In the New Testament, members were accountable to elders in an organization of local churches (Acts 14:23; 15:4; 20:17; Jas 5:14; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:5), and elders were accountable for their members (Acts 15:22; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1). In his book on church membership, Jonathan Leeman writes, "What is church membership? It's a declaration of citizenship in Christ's kingdom. It's a passport. It's an announcement made in the press room of Christ's kingdom. It's the declaration that you are an official, licensed, card-carrying, bona fide Jesus representative."¹³ Because of the high regard the Bible places on the Christian's role in the local church, each of the sessions begin with "Every member." Each person should understand their unique role, given to them by God, in the local church. Every member is important to the local church and each has been uniquely gifted to be the hands and feet of Christ in the community and around the world. Every Christian has a role to play in the kingdom of God.

¹³Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 64.

The second key mark of the training was emphasizing the importance of holding the mission high. The goal was to keep everyone's eyes on the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) as the call to plant a campus in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Neosho, Missouri. If the mission was not held high and the focus of reaching people with the gospel and making disciples shifted, then all sorts of other things could potentially distract or divide the team. When there is no clear God-glorifying mission lifted up, people will always drift toward personal preferences, desires, and wants, instead of looking to where God has called them. The first day of training begins with stating the mission and calling everyone to be focused on holding it high in their lives each day, through prayer and time in God's Word.

Desired Outcome

It is my hope that churches will find this project to be a helpful tool as they look toward the preparation and training of a core team of people who will launch a new campus, or perhaps a church, for the glory of God. I desire to prepare people for gospel impact. If preparation matters in the business world and in sports, then how much more should it matter in the church world? The fact remains that church members and planting teams must be trained for every day gospel living so that they may make an every day gospel impact.

In *The Barnabas Factors*, J. D. Payne asserts, "In God's economy, the team was and is vital to the propagation of the gospel and the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches."¹⁴ Since the team is this important, better tools and methods for training and equipping core teams are needed. Right now thousands of multisite churches are, or are thinking through, planting campuses, or hundreds of soon to be church planters are building teams to plant and there is no specific curriculum for training these teams in a solid theological, yet practical curriculum. I hope this resource will foster more resources

¹⁴Payne, *The Barnabas Factors*, 2.

in the future. I pray that through equipping people for the cause of Christ, more church planters and campuses will be launched by laypeople who desire to live on mission for God where they are. I hope this work fosters a greater move toward healthy team planting in every church, no matter the size.

CHAPTER 2

TRUTH: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 1-3

Equipping the local church to plant healthy, multiplying churches is essential for future gospel advancement in America and across the world. American culture today is hard-pressed to affirm anything to be true. Secularization has risen in dominance over the Judeo-Christian values that have been a staple of American culture for many decades. With a swatch of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and beliefs, American culture celebrates pluralism, the idea that all religions are equal, and that none can or should claim exclusivity.¹ Pluralism is an “every-man-for-himself” theology. According to one’s own mind, each person can believe what they want to believe about life, death, evil, good, and God . . . or not. Postmodernism, the worldview that rejects the existence of truth altogether,² has ushered in a realm of incoherent thinking. Those who hold this view think it perfectly fine that if two beliefs oppose one another, then that is okay, fair, and even right. American culture needs a dose of truth.

At one time in history, the church could assume people coming in the doors had some basic knowledge of whom Jesus was; however, that day is long over. Culture is growing more hostile toward Christianity and those who hold to a biblical worldview. While this may be reality, the church of Jesus Christ is called to labor for the Great Commission, seeking to save those far from God through the message of the gospel, while holding firmly to truth; God’s truth. If the church is going to flourish in the new

¹Bruce J. Nichols, *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralist World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 9.

²J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003), 131.

secular America, then she must be trained to know what truth is and how to discern it from other non-truths.

Media has a huge impact on culture. All types of media are pumped into the ears, eyes, minds, and hearts of Christians each day. The songs, television shows, and movies people watch are all written from the writer or producer's worldview. A worldview is an ordered set of propositions that one believes, especially propositions about life's most important questions.³

Everyone lives life from a personal worldview that is made up by his or her upbringing, decisions, beliefs, and attitudes. Christians are called to operate from a biblical worldview, which views the world through the lens of God's revealed Word and fully lives according to it. Philosopher Ronald Nash writes,

Christianity is not simply a religion that tells human beings how they may be forgiven. It is a total world- and life-view. Christians need to recognize that their faith has important things to say about the whole of human life. Once Christians can understand in a systematic way how the options to Christianity are also world-views, they will be in a better position to rationally justify their choice of Christianity.⁴

Sadly, the more pop culture invades the hearts of Christians, the more syncretistic they become in their worldview. Syncretism is when the truth of the gospel bends to the culture.⁵ It is not unusual to hear of believers who affirm God's Word as true, yet align with varying belief systems, such as Karma or Buddhism. The overlap of biblical Christianity and cultural Christianity can cause blurriness in those who truly belong to God. Postmodernism has brought all sorts of thoughts and opinions into the

³Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 13.

⁴Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 26.

⁵John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, eds., *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 550.

sphere of cultural life; it permeates the minds, conversations, and beliefs of all kinds of people—Christians included.

Because of these different worldviews that seek to lead Christians away from the truth of the Scriptures, a biblical understanding of truth is needed. Building a biblical worldview revolves around the need to distinguish what is true and what is not. Ronald Nash explains that the right eyeglasses can put the world into clearer focus.⁶ A biblical worldview will bring into focus what really matters in life. A strong commitment to teaching the truths of Scripture, and helping a core team gain spiritual discernment in this culture, is the first focus of this training.

The first three subjects focus specifically on topics that contend for the core team to hold God’s truth of the gospel high as they begin the march toward launching a new work. The topics covered in these three weeks include (1) the truth of the gospel and the role of baptism in the local church, (2) the Christian’s devotion to walking obediently with God in reading God’s Word, worship, and biblical giving, and (3) the role of prayer in the Christian’s life. If truth is to be central to the way Christians live, then it must be rooted deep into their hearts internally in order for it to come out externally. Each of these lessons may be molded to fit the context and needs of the church in training.

Every Member Identified

Today, the church needs clarity on what the gospel actually is. It is dangerous for any pastor or leader to assume the people that make up a church know the truth of the gospel, how to live in the gospel, or how to share it effectively. If a survey was given with the question “what is the gospel?” one might get any number of answers. In *The Gospel*, pastor and theologian Ray Ortlund writes, “Every generation must pick up their

⁶Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 25.

Bibles and rediscover the gospel afresh for themselves and rearticulate the ancient message in their own words for their own times.”⁷

A healthy understanding of the gospel is the fuel that drives the spiritual life of the disciples of Christ. Christians grow in worship when the gospel is rightly understood. In his book *What Is the Gospel?*, Greg Gilbert writes, “The biblical gospel is like fuel in the furnace of worship. The more you understand about it, believe it, and rely on it, the more you adore God both for who he is and for what he has done for us in Christ.”⁸ Christians grow to be deeply committed followers of Christ when they spend time reading God’s Word and growing in the gospel. Without a biblical understanding of the gospel, many will live apart from God’s will and one day find themselves in a Christless eternity. A clear definition of the gospel propels churches to live on mission in their cities and is vital for the flourishing of any local church.

The obsession with self runs rampant in pop culture. People seek to find their identity in materialistic possessions, athletics, or celebrity gossip columns. Many struggle with depression and anxiety over past failures and struggles, leading to a diminished identity. Christians need to stop seeking to find their identity in areas outside of the gospel and begin looking at how the gospel gives a person a new identity. The gospel teaches that the Christian’s new identity is in Christ. Teaching and training both new and old believers in the truth of Christ-centered gospel identity will be life giving and refreshing to weary hearts.

A Theological View of Gospel Identity

The drive of gospel identity can be seen through the theological understanding of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. God created man and gave man his identity

⁷Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

⁸Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 21.

(Gen 1:26-31). Man rebels against God in the garden and loses his identity (Gen 3:1-7). God makes a way for man to gain a new identity through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 3:16; 1 Cor 5:17).

Identity given. From the early pages of Genesis to the last chapters in Revelation, God has pursued people in order to turn them from themselves and give them a new identity. In the first chapter of Genesis, God creates all things by speaking all things into existence. Following the creation of man from the ground (Gen 2:7), God blesses him (Gen 1:28) and assigns him an identity (Gen 1:26-31). Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), and this is the foundation of his identity. Furthermore, God builds on this identity by charging man with what is known as the Cultural Mandate. The Cultural Mandate is the charge by God to man in Genesis 1:28 to multiply on the earth, fill the earth, and exercise dominion over all the earth, including all the animals within it. Man's exercise of dominion over the earth is the very essence of the image of God.⁹ These opening verses of Scripture provide a foundational understanding of where man's identity originally layed, in the perfect image of the Creator God, in perfect fellowship with God, and fulfilling his mandate to steward the earth well.

Adam and Eve's identity was wrapped up in the full image of God. Genesis 2 teaches the depth and detail to which God undertook to create Adam and then Eve. God gives Adam clear directions on what to eat and not to eat (Gen 2:16-27). It teaches the role of marriage in the lives of human beings. God physically puts Adam and Eve together and calls them to holy marriage (Gen 2:24). God is shepherding Adam and Eve's lives and has given them much freedom to live rightly, grow together, multiply upon the earth, and subdue it. This is God's good gift to glorify himself in his creation.

⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 529.

Identity lost. The greatest destruction in all of human history occurs in Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve commit a devastating act of treason upon God, disobeying God's command and allowing sin to enter God's perfect creation (Gen 3:1-7). This is known as the fall. At the fall, sin entered the earth forever. Sin is defined by Wayne Grudem as "any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."¹⁰ The fall is where man lost his identity. The identity of man that once found its full being in God was usurped by the unveiling of self-image. Adam and Eve wanted to be higher than God.¹¹ Since this day, the struggle of self-image has plagued the minds of people. The perversion of self-image led from man finding his primary image in God to seeking his image in his own flesh, including his failures and accomplishments.¹²

While all people are still created in the image of God, showing the traits of God in love, compassion, workmanship, the ability to create, and a host of other ways, mankind no longer shares the fellowship with God it once had. The fellowship Adam and Eve had with God was broken and this brokenness would be handed down throughout all generations to come (Rom 5:12). From this time forward, man sought after his own ways and was prone to evil above all.

The Old Testament sees God choosing for himself a people through Abraham (Gen 12) and shepherding them throughout hundreds of years. He provides a means by which his people, the Israelites, can commune with him and have their sins atoned for through the tabernacle and sacrificial system. Through the tabernacle and the sacrificial system, God rebuilds a sense of fellowship with them.

God works his providential plan in every event and person in the Old Testament in order to bring to the world his perfect son, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

¹⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

¹¹Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 104.

¹²*Ibid.*, 105.

Throughout the Old Testament, God calls key people to follow him, speak for him, and live for him. Jesus is the one who will come to rebuild the broken fellowship between mankind and God.

Identity found. God’s plan to bring the world back into right fellowship with him is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Grudem writes, “To overcome our separation from God, we needed someone to provide reconciliation and thereby bring us back into fellowship with God.”¹³ Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 that God “through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.” Those who are in sin need to be reconciled with God, through Christ. Jesus gives the sinner a new identity in the gospel.

The gospel is the message of the cross, that God loved the world so much that he gave his only son as a sacrifice in order to bring the world back into right fellowship with him (John 3:16). The gospel is the truth that Christians never grow out of. It is the message they awake to and rest in the night with. It is their lifeblood: the blood of the Son covering all sin and shame, and providing forgiveness, grace, and everlasting life. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection as that which was in line with the truth of the Holy Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3-6). The gospel is truth.

The gospel teaches that Christ died for the sins of the world, He was buried and He was raised from the dead (1 Cor 3:3). The word “gospel” means “good news.” This good news is needed because all of mankind has inherited Adam’s guilt, therefore making all sinners by birth.¹⁴ Romans 2:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Mankind sits in sin awaiting the judgment that is to come from God above. God’s great desire to redeem mankind to right fellowship is shown by making Jesus, who was innocent, take upon the punishment of the guilty (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus is the

¹³Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 580.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 494.

hero of the story of redemption. He is perfect and allowed Himself to be profaned. He was sinless and chose to take the burden of the world's sin upon Himself because of His love for his people (John 3:16).

By taking the place of the guilty ones and taking on sin, Jesus also took on death and surrendered His body and soul for the punishment of sinners (Rom 6:23). The core of the Christian faith is the historical fact that Jesus died in the place of sinners and came back from the dead to make a way for them to regain fellowship with God (Rom 6:5). This reality is the hope those who are in Jesus Christ have.

People are redeemed from condemnation to hell and made righteous when they repent of sin and put their faith in Jesus for salvation. Salvation is responding to God's call to accept the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as payment for sin and the sinful nature of all mankind. In salvation, a sinner repents of sin and turns from it to follow Jesus. When a person sacrificially gives their self to the person, work, and will of Jesus, new life begins. They get a new identity (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9). God puts his Spirit in the new believer, renewing him, and making him to renounce sinful pride, which cultivates a heart of true humility.¹⁵

In many heroic adventures, the hero of the story is granted some sort of reward, power, or position. Jesus, the hero of the story, is the Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24) and invites anyone who repents of sin and believes in him to share in his inheritance. Paul says that believers are heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17).

When a person grows to understand all the benefits of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, they learn that the hope He gives are seeds purposed to grow into praise and glory for Him. C. J. Mahaney explains, "We are seldom amazed by the reality of the

¹⁵Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 106.

cross and of the gracious disposition of God toward sinners that the cross reveals.”¹⁶ The new identity one finds in Christ is an identity of forgiveness, redemption, grace, mercy, and heaven. This new identity can never be peeled off or revoked; it is eternal.

A Biblical Foundation for Gospel Identity

John 3 tells a story about a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus had a significant identity—he was a high-ranking Pharisee and leader of the Jews. He was a religious man who kept the rules and kept the law; by all accounts, he was a good person. The story of Nicodemus is interesting because he has an important platform and identity, but he conceals this identity by visiting with Jesus in the dark of the night and seemingly slipping away as to not get caught.

Nicodemus was stirred to curiosity by the miracles Jesus was doing and the words Jesus had been speaking. He believed Jesus had more to offer than his religious beliefs could. Upon meeting Jesus, Nicodemus states his belief that God is with Jesus because of the mighty miracles Jesus performed. Jesus responds with a statement that is confusing for Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Upon Nicodemus’s confusion, Jesus responds,

Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3:3-8)

Nicodemus is faced with the clear reality that mankind is completely depraved. He cannot attain salvation by good works. Unless a radical change happened, a change here called a new birth, Nicodemus would never enter the kingdom of God.¹⁷ Jesus says

¹⁶C. J. Mahaney, *Christ Our Mediator* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 22.

¹⁷Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 153.

that the only way a person is to be born again is by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit brings a person to their new identity in Christ.

After a few moments of back and forth with Nicodemus, Jesus lays out one of the most popular verses in all of Scripture, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” In this verse is found the singular focus of the gospel message, salvation from hell and eternal life with God through his Son.

Jesus calls Nicodemus to identify differently than he has ever known. Nicodemus’s identity had been wrapped up in pharisaical thinking and a pharisaical lifestyle. Nicodemus is to put to death his identity and be born anew; to die to self and be born again to Jesus is the call to salvation; the call to a new identity, instilled by the Spirit of the living God. This identity finds grace and mercy in the eyes of God because of the full life, death, and burial of Jesus Christ in the place of sinners on the cross. This is the gospel for Nicodemus and the gospel for all sinners.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

The first week of training should focus the core team on getting to know one another and laying out the foundation of the Christian faith: the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the team marches toward planting the new work, their ability to communicate clearly the core beliefs of salvation and conversion should be of utmost importance. The lead pastor should consider teaching on the subjects of Christian conversion, the definition of the gospel, and the significance of believer’s baptism. Explanation should be given to what a changed life is to look like.

The gospel. The goal of “Every Member Identified” is for the core team to be grounded in a solid understanding of the gospel so it will be on the forefront of their minds throughout the training. The core team must understand the gospel has changed them into a new person. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a

new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Jesus changes, redeems, and gives his people a new heart and a new life through repentance and faith. It is the reality of the marvelous grace of God that leads his people to a deep devoted walk with the God. Paul reminds the church of this grace, “For while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). God did not have to act on their behalf, but he did. He gave up his only Son so that sinners may come into fellowship with him. It is for this reason Christians are called to spend their whole life focused on making the name of Christ known to all nations on the earth, which is the most important part of core team training.

The meaning of baptism. One of the two identifying markers Jesus gave to His church is baptism. The other marker is known as communion, or the Lord’s Supper. While communion is a regular, corporate act of reminding the community of believers that they have died to their life, been covered by the shed blood of Christ, and now eat fully of him, the Bread of Life, baptism is a personal act of obedience done as a means to show an outward display of an inward change upon salvation.

Millard Erickson defines baptism as “an act of faith and a testimony that one has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, that one has experience spiritual circumcision.”¹⁸ Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of a person’s commitment to Christ by immersing them into water to picture death, and raising them out of water to picture resurrection.¹⁹ It is a picture of what Christ has done for sinners. It is the most important way believers connect with Christ and his death and resurrection. Few doctrines are more central to the life and identity of the people of God than baptism.

¹⁸Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1110.

¹⁹Ken Keathly, “The Work of God: Salvation,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 439.

In the book of Acts, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were baptized immediately following salvation. The New Testament has no category for a believer in Jesus Christ who has not been baptized. At the moment a person is immersed in the water, they proclaim Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism says that this person now stands as a "new creature" in Christ.

Paul provides the church with three key declarations regarding baptism in Romans 6:1-11. First, baptism declares separation from sin (6:1-2). Paul tells his readers that they should no longer continue in sin. It should not be an active part of their life since it has been put to death. Disciples of Christ are to do away with sinful practices and seek after holiness. Second, baptism declares identification with the Savior (6:3-5). In baptism, believers identify with the death of Christ and the life of Christ. Both of these realities bring the ordinance of baptism to life. Third, baptism declares the death of the old self (6:6-11). Paul states that those who have been baptized into Christ are displaying freedom from slavery of sin and alive for slavery to the Savior. Both of these truths are key to walking freely in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is to be central to the local church's mission. When the church has the opportunity to join together for worship, baptism should be a key part of the service. It is a testimony that the church is evangelistic in their context. Since baptism is the first step of obedience following salvation, when a church consistently fails to see people baptized it is an indicator that the church has drifted from her mission.

Conclusion

"Every Member Identified" is to focus on the importance of how the gospel changes a person and gives them a new identity in Christ, as well as the role of baptism in the life of the believer and the life of the church. With a growing understanding of the foundations of Christian salvation, the core team should find their hearts refreshed by these deep truths of God. Many times hearts grow stale or apathetic to these truths. The drive and manner of this session is to be one of joy and worship.

Every Member Devoted

The idea of Christian devotion comes from a clear call in Scripture for the sinner turned Christ-follower to grow in Christlikeness through sanctification. A commitment to truth is a commitment to sanctification. Sanctification is the process by which a Christ-follower grows in devotion to Christ over this life until he meets the Lord in heaven. Wayne Grudem defines sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”²⁰ Theologian J. C. Ryle writes, “Sanctification is the inward spiritual work that the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer.”²¹ Both of these men provide a clear explanation of the role of sanctification in the life of the Christian.

A Theological View of Sanctification

The Greek word for “sanctification” is “holiness.” To sanctify something therefore means to make it holy. There is nothing holy but God alone (Is. 6:3). No human being shares the same essence or holiness that God has. However, throughout Scripture God calls his people to be holy (Lev 11:44; Matt 5:48; 1 Pet 1:15-16).

In the Old Testament, the word “consecrate” is used often when referencing the setting a part of something for God’s glory (Exod 28:41; Lev 20:7-8; Num 11:18; 2 Josh 3:5; 7:13; Chr 15:12-15). God called for Israel to atone for their sins through the sacrificial system in order to purify them. God’s desire for his people to be free from sin and fully dedicated to him is evident throughout the Old Testament.

The Ten Commandments were given to Israel to instruct them on how to live as God’s people. In providing clear instructions on how the people of God were to live differently than the other tribes and people groups in that day, God was walking them

²⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.

²¹J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 47.

toward holy living. God cared about how they lived because all they did were a reflection of his name.

In the New Testament, the word “sanctify” is used as a means through which the people of God are made holy after salvation. Jesus prays that the disciples would be sanctified in truth by the Word of God (John 17:17) and by his own consecration (John 17:19). Paul calls for the believers to present themselves as a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,” which is a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1). He also calls them to sanctification by setting themselves apart from the world and not conforming to it (Rom 12:2).

Because of the gospel of the cross, believers have redemption from sin and the ability to grow in holiness (1 Cor 1:30). Christians do not deserve to be saved in the first place, yet God not only saved believers from hell, he sanctifies them by his grace and gives them a place in the heavenly places (Eph 2:4-5). The will of God is the sanctification of his people on this earth until their death (1 Thess 4:3).

The clear picture in the New Testament is one of great devotion on God’s part to his children. Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he has reconciled sinners, though once enemies of God, now blameless and holy before him (Col 1:21-22). This marvelous truth comes from a gracious, loving, merciful God who longs to be glorified by his creation.

A Biblical Foundation for Sanctification

In the New Testament book of Titus, Paul addresses the young pastor and encourages him in pastoral ministry. In Titus 2, Paul focuses his writing on the importance of teaching sound doctrine. In verses 11-14, Paul addresses clearly the doctrine of sanctification and lines out four truths of sanctification.

First, Paul tells Titus that salvation has come through the grace of God (2:11). Paul’s drive is to affirm the good gift of God’s grace to save sinners and allow them the opportunity to be redeemed. This is good news that Paul rejoices in.

Second, Paul says believers are to renounce the old self and live in the new self (2:12). This is a call to living in the new identity one has after salvation; an identity found in Christ. Specifically, he says that because of the grace of God and the truth of salvation, believers should “train” themselves to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions” and to “live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.” This is a putting off and a putting on, and is the essence of sanctification.

Third, Paul says believers are to let their heavenly home lead them in daily sanctification. Believers are to look forward to, or ahead to, the blessed hope of the appearing of the glory God and Savior Jesus Christ (2:13). This is a beautiful truth of Scripture. This earth is dying and one day will be destroyed. A new heaven and a new earth are coming where no sin and no death exist (Rev 21:1). Paul reminds Titus to keep his eyes on the prize.

Finally, Paul tells Titus that salvation came at the expense of the life of Christ, in order that he might be sanctified (2:14). Paul mentions the role of Christ’s death to “redeem us from all lawlessness” in order to sanctify believers as his “own possession” who are “zealous for good works.” Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of the world should produce in believers a hatred for sin and a desire for holiness that produces good works for the glory of God.

The role of sanctification in the life of the believer is central to the New Testament church. It should be central to the lives of every Christ-followers today and forever. Sanctification is a constant theme in Paul’s letter and should be a constant focus of every believer.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

This specific topic for core team training focuses on the core team’s personal walk with God and commitment to the gathering of God’s people. The goal of this section is for the pastor to lead the core team into a faithful understanding of the necessity of spiritual devotion and sanctification. There are three areas to focus on (1) a daily time in

God's Word, (2) a commitment to weekly worship, and (3) sacrificial giving to the local church. All of these areas work together to grow a Christian spiritually. They also work as a defense against Satan and his tactics as the new work is in the planning process.

The spiritual practices of Christian's often come as a surprise to those who have never met Christ. The core team will set the standard for the new work among the people they are called to reach. The core team's devotion to God and the church will be an example to the new people who may join in one of the Sunday gatherings after the launch.

There are many areas on which the lead pastor may choose to focus the personal spiritual lives of the core team. The three prominent areas outlined in this session are foundational for being dedicated to Christ and his church. Keeping watch over each of these areas is vital for the believer's heart to be committed to following Christ. To walk away from one of these areas is to declare to God that there is no need for his work in the Christian's life.

Daily time with God in His Word. Jesus says it is by the Word of God that his disciples are sanctified (John 17:17). In order to be sanctified by the Word of God, Christians must know the Word of God. The Bible is to be the Christian's guide for all of life. In the Bible is God's plan to redeem the world and bring sinners to faith in Him. In salvation, believers gain a real relationship with the God of creation, the Sovereign One. What negligence it is to avoid time with him. The Bible says that blessed is the man who walks in and meditates on the Word of God daily and nightly (Ps 1:1-3).

A Christian's primary need is daily, consistent time with God through meeting with him by reading his Word. Personal time with the Lord is the Christian's lifeline—without it, the Christian will die spiritually. Time alone each day with God is vital to long-term spiritual health as a Christian.

The lead pastor should seek to teach the core team an effective means through which they are to engage in God's Word. Everyone has his or her own developed habits,

but a strategy is needed. Many different strategies or reading plans are available and will aid in navigating the reading of Scripture. Some may choose to read through the Bible in a year while others prefer a more focused track of Scripture reading that walks the reader through the Word more slowly. Regardless of the plan, there is a need for consistency. If a consistent habit is not developed, the believer will have a hard time keeping on track. The pastor should help the core team to understand the importance of not substituting a book for the Bible. Only the Bible is divinely inspired by God and fully contains his words.

Personal and corporate worship. The lead pastor's primary drive in worship is to lead the core team to see that worship goes far beyond a one hour a week gathering on Sundays. The balance of commitment to Sunday worship and commitment to daily worship must both be priority. Romans 12:1 is a helpful description of what it means for God's people to worship God: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Worship is the Christian's daily practice of offering his life as a "living sacrifice" to God. J. I. Packer defines worship:

Worship in the Bible is the due response of rational creatures to the self-revelation of their Creator. It is an honoring and glorifying of God by gratefully offering back to him all the good gifts, and all the knowledge of his greatness and graciousness, that he has given. It involved praising him for what he is, thanking him for what he has done, desiring him to get himself more glory by further acts of mercy, judgment and power, and trusting him with our concern for our own and others future well-being.²²

Worship is lived out in a community of believers and is expressed by coming together regularly in a local church for encouragement and service to God. When worshipping God, Christians are called to practice daily and gather weekly. Christians are to choose each day to bring their thoughts, actions, and words under the Lordship of

²²J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 98.

Christ; this is the essence of honoring God daily.

Leading the core team to understand the importance of Christians gathering together weekly with the body of Christ is crucial to the spiritual life of the believer. Commitment to the Sunday gathering is waning in today's church. The core team must be called to a strong commitment to Sunday services. In doing so, they will set the tone for new people who join the church.

Biblical giving. Teaching the core team that biblical stewardship is a critical component of spiritual devotion is one of the most important truths to cover. Giving is a heart issue. The reason Christians give back to God out of all they have been given is to keep their heart in check. God has given everything the Christian is in possession of. Everything comes from God. The fact that God has given everything the Christian has is foundational for having a healthy understanding of giving.

The lead pastor's role is to teach that giving is a character issue. Giving is deeply tied to the character of God. He is a generous giver and he expects his people to be a generous giver as well. However, this is not as easy for people. Despite the reality of God's call to be generous, there is a pull inside of every person that says, "Don't give away too much." People cling to money like it is their lifeline. Man's inability to let go of his wallet and be obedient to what the Word of God teaches regarding giving can be the biggest deterrent from walking by faith in Christ.

The lead pastor should teach about the Old Testament tithe and New Testament generosity. While the Old Testament tithe and New Testament giving are different, both have application to today's time. There is much confusion on how much a person should give to their church. Leading the people to a healthy understanding of biblical generosity will bear much fruit among the core team and the future of the church.

The subject of giving can be a sore topic to teach in some circles. The lead pastor must navigate the subject of giving carefully, always relying on biblical content. Answering two questions for the core team help provide good discussion: "why should

Christian's give?" and "what should a Christian's attitude be when giving?" The lead pastor's role in shepherding this conversation is critical for a healthy attitude and obedience from the core team.

Conclusion

A devoted Christian is dedicated to meeting with God daily in his Word, a commitment to daily worship and weekly corporate worship, and biblical giving. A person involved in these ministry areas is indicative of someone growing in their spiritual devotion to God's truth. Many people are living what appears to be a Christian life, yet they do so without any private devotional time with God and a lackadaisical commitment to the local church. The lead pastor must work to instill strong commitment in the early days of the new community from the core team. The pastor needs faithful disciples that can make more faithful disciples. Faithfulness begins by being in the Word of God each day.

Every Member Praying

The focus of this session of core team training is prayer. For a person to be saved, they must believe upon God for salvation by faith. God longs for his people to pray. His desire is for the hearts of his people to cry out to him. Yet, how much does a Christian actually pray? One of the greatest sins in the church is prayerlessness. Ronnie Floyd writes, "Prayer occurs when you depend on God. Prayerlessness occurs when you depend on self."²³

The relationship of prayer and faith are closely connected in the Bible. Faith is a central characteristic of those who walk with God in both the Old and New Testaments. It is through the believing in God by faith that many Bible characters are able to pray boldly for God to move and work. E. M. Bounds states, "When faith ceases to pray, it

²³Ronnie Floyd, *How to Pray* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 19.

ceases to live.”²⁴ Bounds paired prayer with faith. Where there is a lack of prayer, there is a lack of faith. Prayer is essential for the Christian because faith is foundational to what it means to be a Christian.²⁵ The sad reality is far too many of God’s people simply do not pray.

Prayer is petition, it is “the offering of our requests to God.”²⁶ Prayer is foundational in the life of the believer. One who desires to grow in truth will understand the necessity of prayer and its role in the life of the believer. The pastor should lead the core team into a healthy understanding of the significance prayer plays in the personal lives of God’s people, but also in the corporate work of the church. This is a vital session in the core team training and will have direct implications on the posture of the core team going forward as they seek to petition to God to do great things in their city through the new work.

A Theological View of Prayer

Prayer is foundational to God’s Word; God’s Word is a record of prayer.²⁷ The very idea of prayer is faith in action. When Christians come bring their requests to God through prayer, they declare that God is able to take care of their needs. They trust God with their requests because God is trustworthy and his Word is trustworthy (2 Sam 7:28; Ps 19:7; 33:4; 111:7). Those who commune with God walk by his Word. Prayer is anchored in the trustworthiness of the Word of God. Bounds writes,

The Word of God is the fulcrum upon which the lever of prayer is placed and by which things are mightily moved. God has committed himself, his purpose, and his promise to prayer. His Word becomes the basis, the inspiration of our praying, and

²⁴E. M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 16.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 1991), 95.

²⁷Bounds, *The Complete Works*, 66.

there are circumstances under which, by importunate prayer, we may obtain an addition, or an enlargement of his promises.²⁸

The Old Testament. Men and women petitioning with God through prayer is seen from beginning to end in the Bible. Adam and Eve are in perfect fellowship with God, communing with him regularly. After the Fall, God spoke with Noah, who was a man of great faith and was righteous, blameless, and walked with God (Gen 6:9). Often when the words “walked with God” were used to describe someone in the Old Testament that meant they were living in fellowship with God. This is an indication that a deep relationship that flowed from talking with God regularly happened.

God chose Abraham in Genesis 12 to be the one whom God would bless the world. Abraham trusted God’s Word by faith because of the deep walk he had with God. Countless times Abraham trusted God’s Word because of his walk with God. Even by his willingness to sacrifice his own son Isaac at the request of the Lord (Gen 22).

Moses is an example of a man who had a physical ailment (Exod 4:10), but trusted God despite his imperfections and God used him greatly. Through Moses’s faith, God led the people out of captivity from the Egyptians (Exod 12:31). The book of Exodus finds Moses leading the people of Israel in the wilderness. Throughout the book, Moses continues to pray to God to provide water and food and also to not punish the people when they complained, begging God at times to stunt his anger and have mercy.

The book of Psalms is a collection of prayers and praises to God. The prophets in the Old Testament are in constant communion with God about what they are to do and say. Throughout the Old Testament are prayers from men of God to their God seeking wisdom and insight into living life to his glory.

The New Testament. In the New Testament the Lord said that his house is to be a house of prayer (Matt 21:13). God desires for his temple, his church, to be a place of

²⁸Bounds, *The Complete Works*, 66.

prayer for God's people. Jesus models prayer with the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 and the high priestly prayer in John 17. Prayer is central to the New Testament church and its flourishing across the cities and towns in Asia. In Acts 1:14, the disciples return to Jerusalem after seeing Jesus ascend to heaven to join with the small church in prayer for God to move among them, and he does. Following this, the church explodes and the believers gather for prayer daily (Acts 2:42-47)

The New Testament is clear that God longs to answer the prayers of his people (John 15:4-5; Luke 18:1-8; Matt 7:7-8; Jas 5:13-18). Revelation teaches that the prayers of God's people are incense to God (Rev 8:4). This same truth is stated in Psalm 141:2. The foundation of prayer is a foundation of faith. God is most glorified when his people are fully satisfied in coming to him for their needs.²⁹

A Biblical Foundation for Prayer

Prayer is pivotal to God's movement in life. Lives, countries, and history can all be changed because of God acting on the prayer of a faithful saint or saints. In Acts 2, one of these historical moments is seen. First, in Acts 1:12-14, following Jesus' ascension into Heaven, the disciples return to Jerusalem to gather with other followers of Christ. The disciples and a host of others, including Mary, Jesus's mother, gathered for the purpose of devoting themselves to prayer. Acts 1:14 says "All these were continually united in prayer." The first thing the disciples did after returning home from seeing Jesus ascend to heaven was gather people to pray. The text said they prayed continually.

Soon after, the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost and over 3,000 people were converted to Christianity. The implication is that this historical moment is a result of the faithful praying of God's people. Following Pentecost and the massive expanse of the church, in Acts 2:42-47, the believers regularly gathered together in homes

²⁹John Piper, "Christian Hedonism: Forgive the Label, But Don't Miss the Truth," accessed February 5, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christian-hedonism>.

fellowshipping, teaching, and hearing God’s Word, eating together, and praying. Prayer was a normal part of their daily Christian lifestyle as believers.

Acts 4 tells a story of Peter and John being arrested for healing a crippled man and preaching Christ. God had been working marvelously through them but they were seen as a nuisance to the religious elite. They were brought before the High Priest, the rulers, elders, and scribes and were ordered to stop speaking about Jesus. Following their release, instead of praying for protection, they prayed for boldness to continue to speak the Word of God. A constant stream of communication with their Heavenly Father through prayer surrounded the events of each day. Praying constantly throughout the day in each situation and circumstance is described in 1 Thessalonians as “praying without ceasing”

Prayer was foundational to the early church. Prayer has been foundational to churches throughout all of history. Prayer should be foundational to the lives of the church today. The biblical precedent is that God’s people pray. That praying must be consistent and persistent. R. Kent Hughes explains, “The cultivation of persistence was a recurring motif in Jesus’ teaching on prayer.”³⁰

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

Prayer will be one of the most common struggles among the core team. It is crucial in this session to lead the core team to understand the importance of prayer, but also how to pray. Often times the longer that time passes between devotional times the farther a Christian grows from the Lord. Likewise, the more time a person spends with God, the closer the person grows with God in intimacy.

There are three primary focuses to teach the core team in regard to prayer. First, a biblical theology of prayer should be taught. It is a good thing when a person grasps the deeper realities of prayer through a deeper understanding of prayer. This is what a healthy, biblical theology of prayer does. Second, the core team must be equipped

³⁰Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 100.

with an easy to replicate method of praying. Teaching the core team a clear way to pray focused prayers helps the Christian in their personal and public life. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul challenges believers to “pray without ceasing” (5:17). Leading the core team to deepen their walk with Paul’s challenge can yield fruit in the Christian’s daily life more than ever before. Finally, teach the core team the habit of prayer walking. It is important that the core team learns the spiritual habit of prayer walking and how to effectively do it. The lead pastor may organize a time for the core team to divide into groups and prayer walk the neighborhood of the new work.

Conclusion

While the subject of prayer may seem be elementary, one would be surprised at how many people simply do not pray. If God desires for his people to commune with him, then to not do so is to be disobedient. The task of leading the core team into a deeply committed life of prayer is vital for the spiritual foundation of the church now and for her future. Core team training is a great place to model, teach, and lead healthy prayer for the people. Following this session, the lead pastor should plan a time for the core team to prayer-walk their community.

Conclusion

Today’s culture is one of spiritual confusion. Chaos abounds in the hearts and minds of man. The Christian is to hold the truth of the gospel in one hand and the love of God in the other. The three sessions in this chapter, “Every Member Identified”, “Every Member Devoted”, and “Every Member Praying,” seek to conform the core team to a deep commitment to the truth of God’s Word. Coming to a knowledge of the truths of salvation and spiritual devotion are vital for the days ahead as a new community of faith.

The three lessons covered in *Truth* guide the core team toward understanding the gospel, having a healthy devotion to the truth they claim, and a deeper commitment to prayer in their lives. It is vital for the core team to have a strong grasp on these topics in

order to progress in this life as healthy, godly, devoted, local church members who strive to live on mission. These members will be the future disciple makers of the new community and must be prepared to model faithfulness to Christ and his commands.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 4-6

The truth of the gospel promises forgiveness of all sin, a relationship with the God of heaven, and eternal life following this life to all who would lay down their life and follow Jesus. However, following Jesus does not happen unaccompanied. Following Jesus is not a personal thing. In today's Christian climate, many claim the freedom to live a Christian life apart from biblical community inside the local church. Is that a real possibility? John MacArthur explains,

The contemporary emphasis in evangelicalism is a believer's *personal* relationship to Christ. Individual faith is the pervasive theme, and rarely is there any discussion of how believers are supposed to fit into the church. When was the last time you read a tract or heard a gospel presentation that ends with a discussion of the believer's relationship to the church? At best there is a very low emphasis on church involvement, church membership, and being a part of the family of God in the visible, gathered household of saints.

And in the massive effort to make salvation personal, the church has been left behind and overlooked to the detriment of many souls. Too many people today tend to be ecclesiastical consumers. They're only interested in what they can get out of their church, and they bounce from congregation to congregation as their whims and interests change. They don't have any particular commitment or loyalty to a specific assembly of saints. In fact, they have little to no attachment to the church at all, and are under no obligation for regular attendance—if they make it, they make it; if not, it's no big deal.

For people like that, their faith is completely anchored in their personal relationships with Christ—there is no corporate commitment or responsibility to the people of God. Their Christianity exists completely outside and apart from the church.¹

In light of this problem, advocacy for biblical community is needed. Biblical community finds its place inside the local church, which is central to the New Testament. Ecclesiology refers to the doctrine of the church. The church is a group of persons

¹John MacArthur, "The Local Church and Why It Matters," accessed January 20, 2016. <https://www.gty.org/Resources/Print/Blog/B130111>.

professing trust in Jesus Christ, meeting together to worship Him, partaking in baptism and the Lord's Supper together, and seeking to enlist others to become Christ followers. Pastor and theologian Mark Dever, who has studied and written extensively on the church, writes regarding defining what makes a church a church:

Christians in the past thought about this. They developed the idea of "the marks of the church," that is, the characteristics that distinguish truly Christian churches. The Protestant Reformers concluded that there are two of these: the right preaching of God's Word and the right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper.²

The church is central to New Testament teachings and synonymous with God's people, Israel, in the Old Testament. Throughout the New Testament are key descriptions of who the church of Christ is. First and foremost, the church is Christ's bride (Eph 5:22-31). She is also God's new creation (2 Cor 5:17), new persons (Eph 2:14-15), fighters against Satan (Eph 6:10-20), and bearers of light (Eph. 5:7-9). The members of this fellowship of faith are described as saints (1 Cor 1:2), the faithful (Col 1:2), the witnesses (John 15:26-27), or the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). Jesus Christ established the church under His authority (Matt 16:13-20), making the church devoted to Him as Lord. The foundation for the church's existence is found in the redeeming death and demonstration of God's power in Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Regarding the church, *The Baptist Faith and Message* states,

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42, 47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23, 27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17;

²Mark Dever, *The Marks of the Church*," accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/marks-church/>.

9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 2:19-22; 3:8-11, 21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; Hebrews 11:39-20; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:-2-3.³

The church of the apostles' time was alive with urgency created by the awareness Christ was going to return (1 Thess 1:9-10) to judge unbelievers (1 Thess 5:1-10), making witnessing to them an urgent concern. The Lord's Supper was seen as proclaiming "the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The return of Christ was to result in glorious joy and a hope that sustained them in difficult times (3 Thess 1:5-12). Today's church needs to live like those of yesterdays.

Understanding who the church is in the New Testament is critical for a core team and for future church members to grasp. In their significant church planting book, *Global Church Planting*, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson write,

A biblical study of the nature of the church should be included in the early teaching of any church plant, allowing local believers to help determine what forms the church should take to fulfill biblical purposes in the local context. While there is no substitute for turning directly to the Scriptures for our understanding of the church, there is also much value in becoming familiar with historical teachings on the church and learning how the church has taken shape in other context.⁴

Understanding who the church is to be in the world allows her members to align their lives with Scripture. Believers reflect Christ when they live together in biblical community. Ray Ortland writes,

The way we live together in our churches grows out of what we believe together. So the gospel must land on each of us personally. You and I must believe the gospel for ourselves, first and foremost. But the gospel also creates a new kind of community—gospel culture called a church.⁵

Building the case for biblical community is absolutely necessary in developing a healthy church from the launch date on. The core team must understand that the

³Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message, article VI," accessed January 22, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

⁴Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 4.

⁵Ray Ortland, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 34.

Christian life is not to be lived alone. Equipping them to have a healthy biblical theology of the church helps solidify their commitment to the church over the long haul. It also equips them to defend the necessity of church membership and devotion to those who may question the need for church attendance. Leading people to a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a church member is the number one way a church gains commitment from its members.

The three sessions of core team training that fall under the category of “community” focus specifically on topics revolving around the role and need of biblical community in the local church. These topics include (1) uniting the core team around the gospel, the mission and values of the church, and the expectations of its members, (2) the role of small groups in the member’s life, and (3) identifying spiritual gifts and helping members find a place to serve. Each of these lessons may be molded to fit the context and needs of the church in training.

Every Member United

As time gets closer to the launching of the new work, Satan will seek to bring division to the core team through any means necessary. As the worship team begins practicing, someone might hear the type of music and not like it. Someone might say something the wrong way and cause another to be harmed emotionally. Opportunities for division will arise in the weeks prior to launch. Holding the vision for mission and unity high will help alleviate the focus on preference and drive toward honoring Christ in his mission.

Session 4 reinforces the need for unity among the core team. Not only does the core team unite around gospel truth, but they also unite around mission. The core team is to go forward holding the mission of the church high, that is, planting a gospel-centered, mission church in a community. This session focuses on key factors that help unify the church around her mission. In this session, the lead pastor will teach the core team the importance of unifying around the mission, vision and values of the new church, as well

as expectations of a member. It is also important to unveil the mission statement and core values of the new work. This lesson is used in partnership with the mission statement and core values of the church being launched. The goal of this session is to teach the church's mission and values to the core team and help them grasp who they will be as a new church, which is important to the future membership of the new work.

A Theological View of Unity

God is the ultimate picture of unity. From the beginning of the Bible, God shows himself to be a unifying God.

The Trinitarian unity of God. God himself is made up of three distinct people, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, all functioning in unity as one God. God gives the reader glimpses of his inner, triune life throughout the pages of Scripture.⁶ The pages of the Old Testament provide much evidence of God's oneness. In the creation account in Genesis, God is working as three in one to create the world and all things within it. Each of the days of Creation are spoken by a singular God: "And God said, let there be . . ." (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). God speaks as one while at the same time referencing his Trinitarian nature in the creation of man: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26).

In Deuteronomy 6, God declares his lordship by saying, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (vv. 4-5). In Deuteronomy 32, God declares, "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me" (v. 39). Isaiah 44 states, "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. . . . Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any" (vv. 44:6-8).

In the New Testament, the Unity of God is shown in many of the key discourses. The unifying nature of God is seen in the fact that he is the God of both Jews and Gentiles,

⁶John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 619.

the only Savior of men, and the only one who can truly bless all the nations, as he promised Abraham (Rom 3:29-30; Gal 3:20; 1 Tim 2:5; Isa 37:16).⁷ Jesus affirms the singular nature of God in John 10, when he says, “I and my Father are one” (v. 30). In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul relates the oneness of the Trinitarian God with the unity that should be manifest in the church’s gifts and labors.⁸ There is no other God besides the God of the Bible. The church is to be united because God is one.⁹

Unity in the gospel. The truth of the gospel is the single most unifying truth ever to be brought about. Nothing unifies people across gender, racial, and socio-economic classes like the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church of Christ transcends under the umbrella of the gospel: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

In the gospel, all sinners are placed on equal footing, under the pure shed blood of Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:11 says, “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” Christ is the one who unites all people under his name. In Ephesians 2-3, Paul describes the unity that now exists between Jew and Gentile in Christ as “one new humanity.”¹⁰ Bobby Jamieson writes,

Right standing before God and membership in God’s people are available to all who come to Christ in faith, regardless of ethnicity, social status, gender, or anything else. In other words, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the foundation of the church’s unity. All those who have come to Christ and confessed their faith through baptism have “Put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27) and are heirs of all the promises of

⁷Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 624,

⁸Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 182.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 528.

God (Gal. 3:29). And since we are in the church have “put on Christ,” we are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28).¹¹

One of the key terms God uses to describe his church is the *body of Christ* (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12; Eph 3:6, 4:12, 5:23, Col 1:24). The nature of the term *body of Christ* indicates that all are working together in unison to form a full body. The word *body* gives the image of a human body with many limbs and various features, all forming one unified structure. This is the point of the term; the body is unified in the gospel.

The gospel has the power to bring together the worst of enemies. Paul is an example of this. At one time he was an enemy of God, breathing out murderous threats against the church of Christ and Christian’s alike. Everything changed when he met Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9). Believers were hesitant to trust him at first (Gal 1:23), but once they saw heard his heart, they knew the gospel had taken hold of him. Only the gospel can bring this unity.

Paul speaks to the church at Ephesus regarding the role of unity in the body in of Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the church to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they had been called (v. 1), doing so with humility, gentleness, and patience (v. 2a), bearing with one another in love (v. 2b), eagerly maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). He reminds the church that there is only one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (vv. 4-6). These verses are further evidence that the gospel is the single most unifying factor of the Christian community.

Unity around Christ’s mission. The church of Jesus Christ is to be unified in the gospel of Christ, but also in the mission of Christ. The Great Commission calls all disciples of Christ to be focused on disciple-making (Matt 28:18-20). The church is to advance this mission Christ gives in their local community, the cities in the surrounding

¹¹Bobby Jamieson, *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows in the Love And Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 77.

areas, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The charge to reach the nations is given to the church.

In Romans, Paul walks through a theology of conversion, declaring how one is to come to faith in Christ. In chapter 10 he declares the need for the gospel to go out verbally from among them in order for the lost to be saved. Throughout the book of Acts, new churches are planted by the gospel being planted in new communities. All of these things happen as a result of the church being united in mission.

A Biblical Foundation for Unity

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul is addressing the church in Corinth who is having unity problems. It is often easy to read the pages of the Bible and overlook key moments and words. Paul here is addressing a real church, with real people, who have a real problem.

Every now and then I hear people say the church needs to get back to the early church days, as if it the early church were a perfect group of people. However, the early church had numerous problems, including sexual sin, lawsuits between members, idolatry, arrogance in the church, issues regarding spiritual gifts, and they too had preference about how a church service should be run. Churches have had a history of fighting, which is a direct result of sin. Every church is made up of people who are sinful by nature, and all have preferences. If the church takes her eyes off of Jesus, then the mission drifts.

Taking an overall look at 1 Corinthians shows that chapters 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 14 all deal with division and unity. In chapter 1, Paul addresses the division caused by two different issues, quarreling over preferences and the church losing site of the mission at hand.

Quarreling over preferences. Sadly, many churches are known for divisions. Stories of churches fighting and bickering over carpet color or whether or not a church needs a new copy machine are far too familiar. These stories often define a churches

reputation in its community. What is meant to be a unifying light for God's gospel ends up being a marker for strife and evil.

Division is easy for any church to fall into. In 1 Corinthians 1, church members have given their loyalty to different apostles. Some were seeking to be like Apollos, some Peter, some Paul, and some Jesus. The church members' preferences were beginning to overshadow what was importance and was causing division among the people.

Today's church is not much different. Preferences create division in all sorts of ways. Music style, the types of programs a church offers, loyalty to a particular pastor, or classroom assignments are all issues where preferences arise. When preference becomes an issue, division is sure to follow. Division can occur easily when the church begins to lose focus and begins to drift from her mission. The church must keep her mission high.

Keep the mission high. Paul simply cannot understand the division over the various personalities in the church at Corinth. He exclaims, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul" (1:13)? He is highly confused about why they would follow after any other man but Christ. He then shifts to what their focus should be: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1:17)

Paul says his aim is to preach the gospel. The gospel proclaimed is the driving force behind all Paul does. Getting the gospel to the nations is the mission. It is the duty of all Christ-followers to be gospel proclaimers. The church is to be focused on proclaiming the gospel in their community and to the ends of the earth. Some may read 1 Corinthians 1:15 and think Paul dismisses baptism. He is not disregarding baptism; he is saying it is secondary to preaching the gospel, which brings salvation. A church should make reaching the lost in their community a priority. This is why Jesus commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations. Famed preacher and missionary C. T. Studd is quoted as saying, "Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel

bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell!”¹² The soul of the core team must be awakened to the need for gospel unity around the mission of Jesus.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

Unity is a core necessity for a church. However, many churches are marked by years of fussing and fighting. Sadly, many Baptist churches are known for church business meetings getting out of control and ending with clear division. This should not be the case for a church who has the right priorities in place.

Clearly articulating the vision and mission of the new community should be an exciting step in the launching process. The core team should be able to grasp and understand the mission and values of the new community. It is Also important for them to know what is expected of them as members of the local church. The mission, vision, and clear expectations are vital to this stage of the training meetings.

Mission statement and core values. Every local church should have a mission statement and/or core values to live by. Nothing discourages a church more than not knowing why it exists.¹³ Having a clear focus and vision unites the hearts and minds of the core team. Without a clear vision statement, people will leave the church. In Proverbs 29:18 the Bible teaches, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” In *Purpose-Driven Church*, Rick Warren describes five benefits that come with a clearly defined purpose statement:

1. A Clear Purpose Builds Moral
2. A Clear Purpose Reduces Frustration
3. A Clear Purpose Allows Concentration

¹²Owen Strachan, “Run a Rescue Shop within a Yard of Hell,” accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thoughtlife/2012/03/run-a-rescue-shop-within-a-yard-of-hell/>.

¹³Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 87.

4. A Clear Purpose Attracts Cooperation
5. A Clear Purpose Assists Evaluation¹⁴

Teaching core values is vital for the core team to grasp what will define them and be priorities for the new community. These values should be based on biblical principles. Warren warns, “Unless the driving force behind a church is biblical, the health and growth of the church will never be what God intended. Strong churches are not built on programs, personalities, or gimmicks. They are built on the eternal purposes of God.”¹⁵ Leading the core team to align in belief and mission develops a healthy culture of membership in the new church.

Expectations of membership. Understanding the expectations of membership is important for new members. There are four overarching expectations to highlight. First, church members are to protect the unity of the church. Unity is vital to a healthy, growing church. When unity is lost and division arises, the priorities of the church shift, growth wanes, and the mission drifts, leading the core team to understand the importance of guarding unity and being watchful is a helpful way to curb these issues. God demands that church members be a unifying presence in the local church.¹⁶

Second, members should share in the vision of the church. Church members should own the vision of the church, seeking to do their part to accomplish it in their city. Leading the church members to see themselves as “the” church, not just someone who drives to a building they call a church, is highly important in teaching people to have a biblical view of church. When they grasp the truth that they are “the” church, then it becomes easier to live out the vision of the church in their workplace, neighborhood, grocery store, or school.

¹⁴Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, 86-93.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶Thom Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude That Makes the Difference* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 22.

Third, members should serve in the ministry of the church. Every person who God calls to follow Him, He equips to be used by Him in the local church. God gives gifts to his people and calls them to serve the church. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul gives a detailed look at the way God has gifted each person specifically for serving,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Fourth, members should support the mission of the church both financially and physically. Financially, the church is funded by the faithful giving of God’s people. Members need to learn the importance of tithing. The vision statement for the church should be so compelling that her members do everything possible to give as much as possible in order to keep the ministry going and growing. When finances struggle, then vision wanes and members drop.

Physically, church members are to support the mission of the church by living on mission where they are. Being a good neighbor, sharing about Christ, and serving others are all ways member can live out the mission. One also supports the mission of the church by encouraging the pastors of the church in their roles and direction. Affirmation

is a key way members support their pastors, which lets the pastor know they are behind the direction and mission the church is after.

Desire for church members. Every pastor has a desire to see church members thrive in their role in the local church. Some may ask, “What is it the pastor desires for his church members?” The answer to that question most likely fits with the following list of eight desires a pastor wants out of church members. Leading the core team toward grasping these truths will provide a healthy base of strong commitment as the church heads toward the launch date.

First, one must know Christ. This element is absolutely foundational for anyone who desires to be a Christian and join a local church. Having a relationship with the God of the universe is the number one desire of a God-called pastor. One cannot progress in church membership or in the Christian life without knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Second, believers are to be obedient with baptism. Baptism is a step of obedience that happens after salvation. Baptism identifies the believer publicly as a Christ follower. In *Church Membership*, Jonathan Leeman writes, “Baptism does not save a person, but Jesus means for his saved individuals to publicly identify with him and his people. It’s one piece of how his citizens become official. It’s how they wave the flag.”¹⁷ Baptism is an identifiable public marker that causes a person to be laid underwater in front of others to display a dying to self that happened upon salvation. The act of baptism is an act of worship. It calls believers out of their comfort zones and into faith at an early age. The Christian life builds off of this moment of faith.

A third desire a pastor has for his church is for them to have a growing spiritual relationship with Christ. This is different than knowing Christ. It is one thing to

¹⁷Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 89.

know Christ and another thing to pick up the Bible and carve out daily time to read it and pray asking the Lord's provision in life. Far too many people claim the Christian faith with a Christian persona, but are void of a Christian daily walk with the Lord. Church living is being done without any commitment to Christian devotion; meaning it is not unusual for one to champion Christian values because they align with Christ, but never spend time alone with the Lord in prayer and the Word of God. Real Christ-followers walk with the real Christ.

A pastor desires for the members of the church to gather with God's people on Sundays. Gathering for worship with God's people should be a Christian's priority. In today's culture, church attendance and commitment is pathetic. Often, people wait till the last minute to decide if they are going to come to church, and sometimes base their decision on what other opportunities come up for the weekend. If nothing else, then they will go to church. Pastors want committed church men and church women.

A fifth desire a pastor has for the body of believers he shepherds is for them to be generous givers. Generosity should be a distinguishing mark of a Christian. Pastors want members who are going to give generously to their church and community. The ministry budget of the church is funded by the gifts God's people give each Sunday. To be a faithful Christian is to be a faithful giver. Growing in the discipline of tithing is vital to the long-term financial health of the church member. Thom Rainer recently noted that members in a group, such as a small group or Sunday school class, give as much as six times more than those attending worship services alone.¹⁸ This leads to the sixth desire a pastor has for new church members.

Sixth, a pastor longs for his church to connect in community. Small groups are vital to every local church. A small group is a gathering of Christians from the church

¹⁸Thom Rainer, "Seven Traits of Churches with Increasing per Member Giving," accessed January 22, 2016, <http://thomrainer.com/2016/01/seven-traits-of-churches-with-increasing-per-member-giving/>.

where deeper study is done in God's Word together. Small groups offer accountability, fellowship, and friendship inside the church. It is vital for members to engage in community in the local church.

Seventh, a pastor longs for his membership to find a place in the church to serve or volunteer. Every church has members who have committed to the church, yet make no attempt to use their God-given gifts to serve the body. The Bible is clear on the subject of gifts in the body. People have skills that God has equipped them with to use to serve the church. A good church member seeks out how they can best be used to help the church.

The final desire a pastor has is for the membership to live on mission. The church gathers on Sundays and then scatters throughout their city to live for Christ during the week. Within the hours between Sunday and Sunday are a host of opportunities to point people to the resurrected Savior who takes away the sins of the world and promises life everlasting to all who would repent and believe. This is the mission every Christian and every church member is called to. A church member should seek to live out this mission as one of the greatest ways to honor the Lord.

These eight actions are a clear path for every church member to walk down. In doing so, the core team will grow into healthy Christians who desire to bring glory to God in this life. They will become a help to the pastor and the church's overall purpose; they will fulfill what God has called them to on earth.

Conclusion

Bringing the core team together through an understanding of the mission statement, core values, expectations of membership, and desires of the pastor will help align them in the overall vision of the church. Then, the membership has a clear understanding of the church's drive and the church members responsibilities. Aligning together makes the team strong, where division brings weakness.

Every Member Connected

In this session, the core team will learn the role biblical community will play in the life of the new work. There is much difference in the social world of today's culture and the social world of Christians in the Bible. People were made for more than twitter likes, Facebook friends, and Instagram followers. God has called his people to live together in community inside the local church. Christians are to be connected together beyond emoji faces and quick handshakes on Sunday mornings. Andy Stanley writes,

The kind of connections we need are more than casual. Casual connections aren't life-giving. They can't provide what Jesus dreams for and what He died for. They can't provide the kind of oneness with God or oneness with each other that makes the world take notice. The kind that God uses in the hearts of people. The kind that transforms lives. Only the church in community can display that kind of relational oneness. Only God's Spirit unleashed through His Body can make that kind of difference.¹⁹

Believers need other believers to walk with them toward Christ-likeness in this world. The world needs to see Christians living together in healthy relationships. True life-on-life relationships take place in the context of biblical fellowship, which often happens in small groups. A small group is a small gathering of God's people who meet together regularly at a designated location, usually a home or a church building. In a small group, the big church becomes small and allows an environment for Christians to challenge, encourage, and connect with one another. The lead pastor will lead the core team in a healthy understanding of what Christian fellowship is to look like.

A Theological View of Christian Fellowship

The Bible has much to say about the value of Christians living together in close fellowship. For many Christians, the word "fellowship" is often associated with a church family potluck dinner. Though fellowship is a lot more important than just eating together; it is a partnership. Fellowship means sharing and exchanging with each other. Regarding the fellowship, or partnership, Paul has with the Philippians, he says, "I have

¹⁹Andy Stanley, *Creating Community* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 45.

you in my heart” (Phil 1:7). In Philippians 3:10, Paul says “My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” Fellowship runs deep in Paul’s heart. He speaks both to the fellowship he has with other believers and the fellowship he shares with Christ. Francis Schaeffer writes, “Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful—Christian community is the final apologetic.”²⁰

Five ways the church grows in fellowship together. The church’s greatest partnership is first and foremost with Christ. The fellowship with Jesus allows the church to exchange sin for forgiveness, fear for boldness, and low self-esteem for confidence. The Bible teaches that the church is a family: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). And also has common beliefs: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Because of this truth, there are specific ways in which the church is to intentionally grow together in fellowship. First, the church is to share spiritual gifts and experiences. This is what it means to do life together. If God has gifted us then we are to use them to serve one another and share with one another.

Second, the church is to comfort one another: “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:18). Encouragement matters to the hearts and lives of people. All people need to be encouraged and comforted. The people of God will have moments of strength and moments of weakness; they go through good times and hard times. However, in all seasons, the church is to be a comforter to one another.

The third way the church grows in fellowship is by bearing one another’s burdens. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). God never intended for the Christian life to be lived alone. Burdens in life will come. Hardship

²⁰Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 14-15.

will come knocking on the door of the homes of every person. The church is to come alongside of each other in hard times to bear the burden together.

Fourth, the church should seek one another's good: "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone" (1 Thess 5:15). The church should not be known for tearing down or dividing. She should be known for building up and blessing. Seeking the good of another and building one another up is, in essence, what it means to live like Christ.

Finally, the Scriptures compel the church to love one another: "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10). Unconditional love means loving someone without any conditions applied. The church will always love no matter how they are treated. God modeled unconditional love for all to see when he placed his only Son on the cross to die for the sins of mankind.

A Biblical Foundation for Christian Fellowship

The call for fellowship is clear in Scripture. Acts 2 and Hebrews 10 are two of many passages that teach the importance of biblical fellowship.

Acts 2:42-47. In Acts 2, an estimated five thousand people have gathered to hear from the disciples. The Holy Spirit falls on the crowd and then Peter stands up to deliver a fiery sermon to the crowd. As Peter finishes, over three thousand people repent of their sins and believe upon Christ for salvation. The text says these people were added to the church and began meeting together daily and weekly in homes across the city.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (vv. 42-47)

Based on the first verse of this text (Acts 2:42), the first-century church devoted

themselves to four actions: (1) the Word of God, (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) prayers. Out of this list, fellowship is the one that includes all of the other three. For instance, when the church has gathered in fellowship, they can open the Word of God, enjoy food together, and prayer together. It is the only one of the four that cannot be done alone. Act 2 shows that fellowship in the early church took devotion. Being devoted to relationships, partnerships, companionship, and stewardship all depend on devotion to Scripture. Healthy biblical fellowship flows from a healthy spiritual walk with the Lord.

The natural outcome of a Christian, who walks with the Lord in His Word, will grow to be devoted to God's Word and biblical community in the local church. Priority, energy, and endurance are all words that can be used to describe devotion. Biblical fellowship takes energy, endurance, and the willingness to prioritize it over other opportunities that arise.

The King James Version of this text uses the words "continue steadfastly" rather than devoted, which means to be constantly diligent. Devotion to the early-church Christians did not mean casual or an afterthought, but a conscience effort. They were determined in their mind to be devoted to the church. With constant devotion came constant fruit.

As a result of the believers devoting themselves to the Word of God, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer began to take place naturally. The people in the city, maybe their neighbors, coworkers, and family, were in "awe" of what was taking place (2:43). They had all things in common and helped those who were in need (2:44-45). They cared for and shared with each other. They did not let distractions get in the way, but lived together in gospel unity. Jesus Christ had changed their lives and it showed in the way they lived together in fellowship. When Jesus saves a person, he or she becomes a part of his family, which is why there is no such thing as a "lone ranger Christian."

Hebrews 10:23-25. The subject of Hebrews 10 is the assurance of faith in Jesus Christ. Regarding Christians living together in biblical fellowship, the author

writes,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (vv. 23-25)

The role biblical fellowship in community plays here is clear. First one sees the call to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.” Part of what the church does is to hold on to gospel truth and walk together faithfully. The church members keep each other from drifting off onto the path of the wicked. This idea of holding fast means to cement together, stick like glue, attach, or fasten to. The community of Christ is united together around the gospel and they keep each other attached there.

The text goes on to challenge the church to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” When others are being considered, “self” gets put on the backburner. Considering others puts self aside. The text says to stir one another up to love and good works. The church is called to push one another toward godliness. Godliness cannot come through lackadaisical church commitment. The church will not grow with this type of commitment to biblical fellowship. Small groups must be seen as a vital part of the church’s health and growth.

The body of Christ is to be responsible for the brothers and sisters they see in fellowship with them week in and week out. Seeking to reach, encourage, rebuke, grow, and keep each other is a healthy outworking of the faith shared in Christ. The ESV Study Bible says, “Christian perseverance is thus also a community endeavor.” Christians grow and persevere in the faith by encouragement from the community of faith; the believers in a local church. In order for this to happen, to consider others, the church has to assemble.

Paul writes, “Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Clearly, there were those who neglected the fellowship of God’s people. The author calls the people to assemble together regularly and not neglect it. The Greek word for assembling is *episunagogen*. The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is in 2

Thessalonians, regarding the return of Christ.²¹ It says that all Christians will be gathered together upon the Christ's return.

In secular Greek, the word is used of collecting money showing how the money is accumulated into one pot. The point of all of this is that believers are to assemble together in one place. This truth once again teaches that the lone ranger Christian is a disobedient Christian. Not only that, the person who habitually misses church is a disobedient Christian, and the Christian who does not have a strong commitment to attendance and involvement in a local body of believers is a disobedient Christian.

Scripture is clear: the person who leaves the faith or leaves the community of believers to never return, was never truly saved. First John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." This verse is a warning to all who would neglect the fellowship of God's people. It is a slippery slope to begin neglecting the fellowship of God's people. A person who has been saved by Christ should love the bride of Christ and build his Christian life around the bride, the local body of believers.

The final drive of Hebrews 10 calls believers to encourage or exhort one another. Believers are to carry the banner of local church involvement because they understand it is God's plan for the believer's life, for making disciples, and for reaching the world. Because of this truth, believers are to continually and consistently encourage others to stay faithfully engaged in the church. Small group leaders are an important part of encouraging the body as a whole. These leaders help shepherd their groups to faithfulness, they make phone calls, write notes, send emails, and keep prayer lists; and they do all of these things to encourage and keep believers on the correct path. While the tendency for some is to slack off and become lazy in their involvement with the local

²¹David L. Allen, *Hebrews*. The New American Commentary, vol. 35 (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 518.

church, believers are charged to fight against this current, encouraging people to stay committed.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

This session focuses on the need for the core team to value biblical fellowship in small groups. This session lays a biblical foundation for Christian community and fellowship, using two key passages from the New Testament, Acts 2:42-47 and Hebrews 10:23-25. Using these verses and others as necessary, the pastor should lay out for the core team the role and reason biblical community is important in their life. During this meeting the lead pastor should be prepared to introduce the plans for small groups once the church has officially launched. He should be highly engaged in selecting faithful couples that can lead these groups. The goal for this session is to drive the core team to a commitment to healthy connectivity with other Christians.

Conclusion

The subject of connecting together in fellowship should be theological, yet practical. The core team should understand the biblical foundation of Christian community and know how to practically employ it in the small group meetings. Biblical fellowship will be a strong way the gospel is lived out in the lives of the church outside of the Sunday morning gathering.

Every Member Serving

The topic of serving is key to the launch of the new work. In this session, the leader must provide a clear understanding of why the core team members must find a place to serve in these early stages of planning. At this point in the training, the core team will be closely knit together in theology and have a high understanding of the mission and values of the new church. At this time, the core team needs a deeper understanding of how God has uniquely gifted them. A theological and biblical understanding of spiritual gifts and the role of members in serving the body of Christ will be discussed. God has

uniquely gifted each one of his people with a spiritual gift that is to be used in the service of a local church. Biblical unity and biblical service run closely together. The idea of the church as the body of Christ has already been discussed, but it finds its application in the area of Christian service.

A Theological View of Christian Service

God employs Christians to service throughout the Bible. People are the means through which his glory is shown and spoken. Ken Hemphill defines a spiritual gift as “an individual manifestation of grace from the Father that enables you to serve Him and thus play a vital role in His plan for the redemption of the world.”²²

Old Testament. God calls Noah (Gen 7), Abraham (Gen 12), Isaac (Gen 26), Jacob (Gen 28), Joseph (Gen 39; 21), Moses (Exod 6), Aaron (Exod 7), and Joshua (Josh 1) to service. All of these people are found in the first five books of the Old Testament.

The great prophets of the Old Testament are called by God to deliver his Word to other nations. These prophets include Abel, Amos, Anna, Daniel, Daid, Deborah, Elijah, Elisha, Enoch, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Haggai, Hosea, Hulda, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Jonah, Malachi, Micah, Miriam, Nahum, Nathan, Obadiah, Samuel, Zechariah, and Zephaniah. All of these prophets were enlisted by God in the Old Testament and used in his service to be messengers, many of which have whole books dedicated to their prophecy.

The Israelites were also employed in the making of the tabernacle and the temple. In regard to the tabernacle, God gave specific skills to men in order for them to complete the detailed materials for the tabernacle. Bezalel (Exod 31:2-5) and Oholiab (Exod 31:6-11) are two specific men mentioned in Exodus. Both of these men had been filled with “wisdom, understanding, and ability in every craft” (Exod 31:3). Not only does God do this here in the Old Testament, but he also gifts the church to serve him in

²²Ken Hemphill, *Serving God: Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts Workbook* (Dallas: Sampson, 1995), 22.

the New Testament.

New Testament. The New Testament also has prophets that speak on behalf of God. These prophets include Jesus, John the Baptist, the apostle John, and Saul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1). The New Testament sees the birth and rise of the local church. The body of Christ is to be united together in worship, fellowship, and service.

First Corinthians 12 is a foundational text for spiritual gifts. Paul mentions many different gifts that one may have resting within them, including discernment, wisdom and knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the gift of miracles, prophecy, and others. The subject of spiritual gifts is highly debated among theologians with some believing some gifts have ceased, while others believe all gifts are still active. Regardless of which is true, the truth remains; each Christian has a gift they are to use to serve the body.

Peter writes, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet 4:10). God is glorified when his people use the gifts he has given them to faithfully serve his body. A wide diversity of gifts exist inside the local church and this should be celebrated because God is the one who granted them.

A Biblical Foundation for Christian Service

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes to the church at Corinth addressing an issue relating to spiritual gifts. Some of the Christians in the church were elevating one spiritual gift above another (12:17). In doing so, they were seeking to suggest that one gifting was greater than another.

Paul writes to tell his readers that whatever gift one has, they need to steward it faithfully. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the church is the body of Christ (12:12). Paul draws a comparison to the human body. The human body is a single unit made up of many members. The parts of the human body work together as one, with a dependent mutuality as each part fulfills an important function. Likewise, the body of Christ has a diversity of

parts (people) functioning together in unity. This is the image Paul paints for the Corinthian Church.

Paul discourages the pride that is taking place by highlighting the Holy Spirit's role (12:13). Since the Spirit is one, he unites people across all ethnic and social lines that would otherwise divide them. The word "baptized" used in verse 13 is the same Greek construction as in six other passages in the New Testament referring to being "baptized into the Holy Spirit."²³ Here it seems clearly to refer to the cleaning and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in a new convert at the point of conversion. Therefore, baptism is used metaphorically to refer to the Spirit's work within the believer to unite him or her to the body of Christ, which is also the corporate body of believers. A key verse in his letter, Paul continues,

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (v. 14)

Paul stresses the importance of every role in the church. People are equal to use whatever gift God has given them to his glory, unashamedly. There is no divide in Christ's body. In verse 17 he makes the point that an unbalanced emphasis on any particular spiritual gift at any time or place in the church is wrong.

Paul emphasizes the role God's beautiful arrangement of his church's gifts in verse 18: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." This is the result of a sovereign God who works all things to his glory. God has made it so the people coming in the doors of the church already have a role to play in a spot the church has to fill.

One of the key themes in chapter 12 is unity amidst diversity. Christ-followers are unified in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, despite their diversity. In verse 21, it seems

²³Mark Taylor, *I Corinthians*. The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 297.

as though Paul is detailing how those Corinthians with the more “showy” gifts were treating those with other gifts. Verses 25-26 show that the purpose of the gifts is to build one another up and to care for one another, not to flaunt one’s own spirituality.

The overall focus of the chapter is that all gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to whomever he wills for the purpose of serving and building up the body in Christ. This is to be the purpose and intention of the spiritual gifts inside the local church. Navigating calling and gifting is a helpful conversation for each core team member.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team

This particular lesson is highly dependent on the lead pastor and the needs of the church being launched. Leaders must be chosen for the various ministries within the church, including first impressions, children or student ministry, worship, or other logistical groups, such as the parking team, baptism team, or decision counselor team.

Two important moments happen in this session. First, a time will be offered for the core team to sign up and select in which ministry they would prefer to serve.²⁴ Second, the lead pastor will provide a spiritual gifts test for each of the core team members to fill out. The lead pastor must have already decided what serve teams will need to be ready to place people in, and each must already have a leader chosen to lead that team. The goal of this session is to build a team of healthy servants who will excel in their gifts for the church’s future.

Spiritual gifts test. A spiritual gifts test is a resource that asks the reader a series of questions around multiple topics that is meant to corroborate the reader’s highest spiritual gifts. These types of tests are not always the most accurate, but often provide a helpful direction for the Christian looking to discern his or her gifts.

This type of test is helpful because people often assume they have a gift that

²⁴See appendix 2 for an example volunteer sign-up document.

they do not really have. These tests will bring out strengths and weaknesses in the core team and point to areas of service that may best fit them. Overall, this test can be highly valuable to determine the best place to serve. The goal of this test is for each member to identify an area to serve in the church that fits his or her gifting.

A spiritual gifts test should be administered during this session of the training. Upon review of the tests and the areas people marked as preference to serve, the lead pastor will make assignments to the various ministry areas based on need and gifting. The ministry areas should be broken down into “serve teams.”

Serve teams. Serve teams are the particular ministry teams that will need to be in place in order for the church to launch effectively. As noted, these teams include the first impressions team, children or student ministry teams, worship team, or other logistical teams, such as the parking team, baptism team, or decision counselor team. These teams will vary depending on the capacity and size of the core team and needs of the new church.

Each team must have a leader that has already been selected and equipped to lead. The task of identifying and equipping these leaders should be done by the lead pastor prior to this meeting. The lead pastor and the leader of each serve team will work to fill the number of spots on the team with qualified core team members.

Conclusion

The primary tasks that must be completed are the spiritual gifts test and the introduction of the serve teams and the leaders of each. This time is highly practical and should occur approximately six weeks before the launch of the new community. Building healthy serve teams with gifted members will increase the effectiveness of the local church and accomplish Ephesians 4:12: “Equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.”

Conclusion

The three sessions covered in this chapter are placed in the middle of the training program intentionally. These weeks must be devoted to growing together as a team and focusing forward on the mission of the plant together. Uniting the core team around fellowship and service in the local church is highly important for the following three weeks focused on mission.

The core team must head into the mission section knowing they are walking together toward enemy territory. Spiritual warfare will begin to rise in each one of the lives of the core team and their families. Unity around the mission matters because without it preferences will begin to rise up and vision will sway. In the next weeks the truths learned in the first four weeks will begin to become challenged in every day conversations and opportunities.

CHAPTER 4

MISSION: CORE TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS 7-9

God has chosen to use His people as a means through which those far from God may be brought into right relationship with him through the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The task of getting the gospel to the nations is called missions. Christopher Wright defines missions as “our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”¹ O.G. Myklebust clarifies, “Missions is, not only a department of the church, but the church itself in its complete expression, that is, in its identification of itself with the world.”² Many verses in Scripture speak to God’s view on missions, but two often elevate to the top, John 3:16 and Matthew 28:18-20. These two verses clearly speak God’s intent to reach people with the gospel.

Both John 3:16 and Matthew 28:18-20 provide a glimpse of God’s heart for the world. John 3:16 is a foundational verse for a Christian’s life. God sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world so that through Him, people may come to a personal relationship with the one true and living God. Matthew 28:18-20 is known as the Great Commission. John Piper is famous for saying, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”³ Missions is God’s heartbeat and God has ordained the church to be the means through which people come into a covenant

¹Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 23.

²O. G. Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education* (Oslo, Norway: Egede Instituttet, 1957), 27.

³John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17.

community together to worship the one true and living God. The local church must be the proponent pushing the Great Commission across the world.

It should be the priority of every lead pastor to help his local church, or soon-to-be church, understand the significance of the Great Commission. Understanding the significance of the Great Commission should lead to the development and implementation of an effective missions strategy through which the people of God may be given the proper training, education, and abilities to successfully live on mission, fulfilling the Great Commission where they are. Aaron Coe and Dustin Willis explain,

The mission of God requires that believers leverage their lives for His glory. The Great Commission is not for a select few; it is for the entirety of the church. The movement of God's mission sweeps across everyday, ordinary lives to draw in businesspeople, soccer moms, grandmothers, neighbors, students, lawyers, teachers, baristas, contractors, white collar, blue collar, or no collar at all."⁴

If Christians make the transition to living intentionally on mission, then it will lead to effective evangelism and church growth in the church.

Mission is key to advancing the gospel across a community, state, nation, and the world. Often when believers approach the Bible, they come to it knowing it talks about Jesus. A proper way to read Scripture is both messianically and missionally.⁵ Understanding that missions is foundational to who God is aids the core team in understanding the weight of their calling. A healthy church keeps the mission of God as their primary focus.

The third section of training spends three weeks focused specifically on topics regarding living a life on mission for God. Understanding the biblical and theological foundation of missions is vital to the purpose of these topics. The topics covered in these three weeks include (1) a clear understanding of biblical conversion and learning how to engage others with the gospel, (2) helping the core team leverage their influence for gospel

⁴Aaron Coe and Dustin Willis, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 25.

⁵Wright, *The Mission of God*, 30.

opportunities, and (3) living on guard against spiritual warfare that will come in this season. Each of these lessons may be molded to fit the context and needs of the church in training.

Every Member Equipped

The core team must be trained in evangelism and led to evangelize. As members of Christ's church, Christians are to be devoted to evangelism. Jesus charges his disciples to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:18-20. This calling extends to the church throughout history.

The Great Commission records a specific mandate from Jesus calling on those who follow him to be focused on evangelizing the world. While the primary imperative in the Great Commission is to make disciples, one cannot be a disciple without first being converted. And one cannot be converted unless one has heard the message that provides the truth of God that requires a person either reject or believe in Christ (Rom 10).

Paul emphasizes the need for Christians to go and tell the gospel message. Evangelism is not an option for the Christian; it is foundational to what it means to be Christian. Wayne Grudem writes, "The evangelistic work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world."⁶ Donald Whitney defines evangelism as "the presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."⁷ J. Mack Stiles provides a clear definition in *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*: "teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade."⁸ The consistent theme in each definition

⁶Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Leicester: Zondervan, 1994), 373.

⁷Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 98.

⁸J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 26.

is teaching the life-changing message of the gospel to the lost. The goal of evangelism is to persuade unbelievers to repent of sin and turn to Christ for salvation. In doing so, they will be added to the local church. John MacArthur writes,

New Testament evangelism issued from the local church and resulted in converts added to the local church. The measure of results was not the number of professions but the numbers added to the church, and later the number of churches formed through the churches' evangelistic outreach.⁹

A person who genuinely believes the gospel can change lives, will become passionate about evangelism because of the reality of heaven and hell. If Christians were to hold to the gospel with greater truth and faithfulness, then how much more would they live with the gospel on the tip of their tongue? The church needs to understand the reality of lostness across the world, the nation, the city and the neighborhood. Living with a passion for God's truth means seeing a lost neighbor as someone in desperate need of the life giving truth of the gospel.

A Theological Understanding of Christian Conversion

When it comes to evangelism, a clear theology of conversion must be developed in order to articulate the gospel message. There are necessary, theological truths one must articulate in an effective gospel presentation. A clear theology of what leads to conversion and the ability to communicate it effectively will aid in the sharing of the gospel message. There are eight specific areas to understand when it comes to sharing the gospel. All of them are pertinent for a person to come to faith in Christ.

God's love. When God created the world and everything herein, he established man as the pinnacle of his creation (Gen 1:26). God made man different than vegetation and all animals. Mankind was made special. God found great favor in his creation of man. Man had reign and dominion over all of God's creation in the Garden of Eden. Man had

⁹John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 250.

free will to live under God's sovereign rule and reign, which was God's good gift to those whom he loved.

God's love is also seen in Psalm 139, in God's specific knitting of each and every person together in the womb. The Psalmist describes in detail how God has intricately and meticulously formed each person from conception to birth. The hands of God have shaped the frame and attributes of each person. According to the Bible, the God of this world is not distant, but deeply involved in his creation.

God's love extends beyond the creation of mankind. He loves man so much that he did not leave man in his sin. From Genesis 3:15 to John 3:16 the Bible teaches there will come a man who will defeat the evil one once and for all. This man is Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). What great love is this exemplified in the Creator? He sent his very own son, his one and only son, to die for the sins of mankind in order to make a way for them to come to the Father eternally.

Man's sin. Sin runs rampant in the life of man. Jesus says no one is good but God alone (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). In Romans 3, the apostle Paul says not one person on earth is righteous, nor one who understands or seeks God on his own. In other words, all are sinners: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 2:23). People are not sinners simply because they commit evil acts; they commit evil acts because they are, by nature, sinners, and can do no different¹⁰ The only way for someone to come to saving faith in Christ is by having the eyes of their heart opened to the reality of sin. Lifting high the holiness of God and the evil of man brings to light the stark difference in who God is and who man is. Without guilt for sin, there can be no conversion. Salvation cannot come without a deep understanding of the reality of sin first.

¹⁰Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 596.

Sin is a failure to live up to what God expects in act, thought, and being.¹¹ Listing out sinful actions, thoughts, and attitudes is a good starting place when having a gospel conversation. People sin with their words through lies, slander, malice, hateful or crude speech, or gossip. Sin ruins the thought life through hatred, anger, lust, covetousness, and jealousy. People sin with their actions through sexual immorality, murder, theft, greed, and a host of other issues. Sinful words, thoughts, and actions can only be redeemed through salvation in Christ.

When walking with someone through a conversation regarding sin, it is helpful to use the Law to show him his sin. Using the Ten Commandments is a good method to reveal sin. One may assume he is good by his own merits, but when faced with the Ten Commandments, one quickly sees he is not as safe as he may have once thought.

Man's accountability. Once sin has been discussed and revealed, guilt is bound to creep in. The third element is to share about the accountability all of mankind will face before God one day. The drive here is to teach the reality of eternity. Everyone will live eternally in one of two places: heaven or hell. These are real places where real people go; they are not fairy tales or made up dreams. Help the one listening to understand that all unrighteous people, all sinners, will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment.

Jesus talks about hell and describes it in Matthew 25:41 as “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” and in Mark 9:43, 48 as “the unquenchable fire . . . where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” Jesus says hell is unquenchable; an eternal fire all day long, for all eternity; the idea of being on fire for 60 minutes, an hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, every year for all eternity. That is an awful consequence for remaining in sin. Mankind is deserving of all of it, yet God's love is so good to allow a way for man to escape judgment. Romans 6:23 says, “For the

¹¹Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 596.

wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God’s provision for forgiveness and restoration. God’s plan for forgiveness and restoration is where the bad news turns to good news. It is right and just of God to condemn all of mankind to hell based on the sinful hearts they bear, yet God, in his perfect plan, made possible a way mankind could be forgiven for their sin. This is done through God’s son Jesus Christ.

God’s plan for forgiveness and restoration can be explained in detail by discussing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The necessary points of God’s plan includes the truth about the divinity of Jesus, fully God and fully man, born of a virgin, and physically walking the earth. God’s plan also included the death of Jesus on the cross, whereby he took sin upon himself and died for the sins of the world. After three days, God raised him from death, defeating sin and death once and for all. Romans 5:8 says, “But God shows his love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus goes through the cross, bearing the punishment and shame for those who would trust in him by faith alone, doing exactly what he promised to do. God has made forgiveness and redemption available through Christ.

God’s free offer. Repenting of sin and believing by faith in Christ can save anyone who desires to be saved. This is God’s free offer. One cannot earn salvation through being a good person or serving others. Salvation only comes through repentance and faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” God will have mercy and show grace to anyone who lays down his life, repents of his sin, and believes by faith in Christ.

Benefits of the gospel. When someone repents and believes in Christ, they are rewarded with great benefits. Biblically, there are three primary benefits in believing the gospel. The first is that the believer receives forgiveness of sin (Matt 26:28; Mark 1:4;

Acts 2:38; Eph 1:7). The weight and effects of sin are heavy on the hearts of man. Loosing this burden, knowing it has been paid for and dealt with at the cross of Christ, is an amazing benefit of salvation.

The second benefit of the gospel is gaining a real relationship with the God of heaven (Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18-19). The creator of all of creation listens and speaks to his children. Through the Word of God and his Holy Spirit, God moves, leads, speaks, and convicts. The new believer gains a new relationship with his Savior. Without Christ, one is lost and hopeless; with Christ, one is forgiven and finds purpose.

The third benefit of the gospel is eternal life in heaven (Eph 1:3-6; Col 1:5). Upon death, the believer is immediately in the Lord's presence. In Luke 23:43, Jesus tells the dying robber on the cross: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." This promise is made to him and others who are believers. All three of these great benefits are the result of a person giving up their way of doing life and surrendering all to follow Christ.

Man's response to the gospel. Man must respond to the gospel in repentance and faith. Repentance is to willfully turn from sin and walk contrary to sinful words, thoughts, and actions. Then, believing in the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by faith is the action the New Testament calls the sinner to. Once one repents and believes, his heart and life will begin to change, and he will be filled with new desires and motives that come with new life in Christ.

Prayer. A person comes to salvation by verbally repenting of their sin and trusting in Christ by faith. Therefore, a prayer of some sort must be voiced from the one needing salvation to God. The Bible is clear: in order for a person to be saved, they must call out to God for salvation (Rom 10:9-10; 13). In order to help the person praying to receive Christ, consider reviewing his guilt before Christ because of sin, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus on the Cross for sinners, and ask if repenting and believing by

faith expresses the desire of his heart. If so, have him share those simple truths from his heart to God on his own.

If the listener desires help in praying, then simply act as a coach to the one seeking salvation. There is nothing magical about the prayer of the one leading, but sincerity will come out of the one praying. It is important for the one sharing the gospel to have a prayer prepared that is capable of leading someone in effectively communicating the essential tenants of salvation.

A Biblical Foundation for Christian Conversion

The story of Paul and Silas and their encounter with one of their jailers is found in Acts 16. After time in prayer and singing to God, a violent earthquake opened the cell doors and loosened their chains. The story accounts how Paul spoke up and let the jailer know they had not runaway despite the opportunity. Shaken up by the events and amazed at God's power, the jailer escorts them out of the cell and asks, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (v. 30). Paul and Silas answer the jailer with a clear call to believing in Christ for salvation. The Word says they "spoke the message of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house" (v. 32). The jailer and his whole household came to faith in Christ and were baptized that night (v. 33). He provided a meal for them and rejoiced in his new salvation.

This is a powerful story of the gospel changing a whole family. God's sovereign plan in this story is clearly seen. God uses daily activities in the lives of his people to stir the hearts of those around them. Salvation comes from seeing the movement of God in a person's life, and hearing the truth of the gospel in their hearts. A person is saved when they hear the gospel verbally spoken to them and are called to believe in Christ. The story of Paul and Silas is one example of several clear biblical texts that show the way a person is converted from death to life.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

It is important to establish fundamentals of sharing the gospel message with those who need it. It is one thing to know the gospel and another to share it. Helping the core team understand the nature of sharing the gospel and the truths that accompany a gospel presentation not only help with their sharing of the faith, but also their grounding in it. This session seeks to inform and educate the core team on fundamentals of a gospel presentation that lead to confidence in sharing it publically with others.

The lead pastor will want to decide on an evangelism strategy to teach the core team. Accompanying this session, the lead pastor may choose to select a date and time to designate as an evangelism practice day. Sending the core team out to practice sharing their faith allows the team to gain practice toward a healthy evangelistic lifestyle.

Sharing a testimony. A benefit that every Christ follower has is a testimony of a changed life in Christ. A testimony describes what life was like before meeting Christ, how someone came to meet Christ, and how their life has changed since meeting Christ. A testimony is a powerful resource Christians have in sharing their faith, because it is personal. No one can tell the Christian salvation never happened to him or her, because they know the change that took place.

In Acts 21-22, Paul models what it is to share his testimony. After teaching in the temple, he causes a stir with some local Asian Jews and finds himself in front of one of the Asian Commanders. The Commander puts him in front of the people to share his story. Paul takes this opportunity to share his testimony. He shares with the crowd what life was like before meeting Jesus (22:3-5), how he came to meet Jesus on the Damascus Road (22:6-11), and how his life was different after meeting Jesus (22:12-16).

Leading the core team in effectively communicating their testimony is critical for a gospel conversation. During this core team training session the core team may be guided in writing out their testimony in a simple paragraph form.¹²

Engaging in a gospel conversation. It can be incredibly difficult for a Christian to share his faith. All sorts of emotions come into play when one seeks to evangelize. Whether it is fear, nervousness, sweaty palms, quivery voices, or a frozen countenance, almost everyone has certain obstacles to overcome. Overcoming these obstacles will come with successful evangelism training. There exists a multitude of evangelism resources, including F.A.I.T.H, Evangelism Explosion (E.E.), and the Three Circles Gospel Conversation Starter created by the North American Mission Board.

In order to overcome the nerves that come with presenting the gospel, one must develop a means to which a gospel conversation can even begin. Using a simple three-question system will accomplish this. First, after spending time getting to know someone, ask, “In your personal opinion, do you think it is possible to know God?” This question may seem a little intimidating, but it is a very logical question that nearly everyone has had in his or her life. The response will be one of four different answers. The person may give a faith answer that goes something like, “Yes I do, give your life to Christ and you will begin to have a relationship with God.” A works answer may be given that says, “Yes I do, be a good person and do good things and then you will get to know God.” The third answer is the mixed answer, which will take some discernment on the part of the person that asks. The mixed answer says, “Yes I do, give your life to Jesus and keep all of the Ten Commandments, then you will know God.” Finally, the agnostic or atheist answer says, “No, I don’t think you can know there is a God” or “No, there is no such thing as God.”

¹²See appendix 1 for a structured testimony document.

The second question one should ask is “Really? What has led you to believe this to be true?” This question puts pressure on the one being engaged with the gospel to respond with his clear position. Often people hold beliefs that they have not actually had to think through and defend.

Next, one should ask for permission to share his position on God, which is where the gospel comes out. An easy way of saying this is, “A lot of people answer that question that way. Do you mind if I share with you from the Bible what it says about that?” This question sets up the sharer with an opportunity to go into the gospel message. The one sharing has already done the work of cultivating a relationship with the listener and has prepared his mind for thinking and processing what he believes. The question gives the advantage to the evangelist and allows an open door for the gospel.

Conclusion

Leading the core team to think through these points of gospel effectiveness helps put them in a position to excel in the task of evangelism. Also, these points ground the core team in gospel truth and drive them to deeper appreciation and worship for what they have in Christ. Living a life of gospel advancement through intentionally befriending lost people is vital to the mission of the church. Without a focus on evangelism, the church’s growth will be stunted and mission will be misdirected.

Every Member on Mission

Christians are missionaries. Perhaps some Christians would be confused by the previous statement and think it should say, “Missionaries are Christians.” To many people, a missionary is someone who crosses cultures and goes to the other side of the world to live among a people group and seek to reach them with the gospel. While this is an accurate description of some missionaries, it should not be the only definition. One

misunderstanding of the view of a missionary is that they always go overseas.¹³ One can and should be a missionary right where they live. Many in American culture have a hard time viewing themselves as missionaries for various reasons.

The reality is every Christian is a missionary. Every Christian has been given the task of fulfilling the Great Commission right where God has placed them, in the job God has placed them, and in the neighborhood God has put them. The Christian is to live the whole of his life on mission for the glory of God and the spread of his kingdom.

Aaron Coe and Dustin Willis help clarify:

Many people believe that mission and ministry are carried out by a select few professional clergy or an elite number of mission agencies and nonprofit organizations. But here's the reality: God's mission was given to every member of His church. We're called to be everyday missionaries. Everyday missionaries are those who practice life on mission where God has placed them, whether that be at an office complex, a developing country, or a college campus. It is incumbent on every believer to have an "all hands on deck" mentality in order for the mission to reach its fullest potential.¹⁴

Life on mission; that is what every person who has surrendered his or her life at the foot of the cross has been called to. The Christ-follower is to follow Christ and seek to gather others from walking head first into hell and lead them to faith in Christ by their words. Leading others to Christ is done through building a relationship with a lost person that is strong enough to bear the weight of the truth of the gospel they need to hear. Believers are called to live exemplary lives that are set apart from secular culture. They are to live in such a way people will ask why they live like they do. This intentional missional living and is at the center of the heart of God.

¹³A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 21.

¹⁴Coe and Willis, *Life on Mission*, 26.

A Theological Understanding of Missions

From beginning to end, the Bible tells the story of God’s work for and among all the peoples of the world.¹⁵ Throughout the pages of Scripture, God is intentionally wielding his sovereign hands in relentless pursuit of the salvation of the nations for his glory.¹⁶ Christopher Wright writes, “The whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.”¹⁷

Mission in the Old Testament. The authors of *Introducing World Missions* speak to the subject of God’s missionary heart in the Old Testament by providing four acts they call a “divine drama”: (1) the creation and the fall, (2) God’s calling and setting apart a people for himself, (3) God’s work in rescuing his people, and (4) God’s work in sending his people into exile.¹⁸ These four “acts” point to the certainty that God is a missionary God.

God has always pursued people. God creates, blesses, and lovingly gives responsibility to man (Gen 1). In spite of Adam and Eve's disobedience (Gen 3), God kills an animal in order to cover their shame (Gen 3:21). The very image of the Lord God slaying an animal, scrapping off its skin in order to clothe Adam and Eve, shows an incredible love and intimacy with his creation.

God’s concern for the unraveling of evil throughout his creation was shown when he judged the world through a flood (Gen 6-9). Although evil advanced, Noah and his family found favor in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord pursued Noah and enlisted him

¹⁵Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 25.

¹⁶Ed Stetzer and Jerry Rankin, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions: The Battle for God’s Glory Among the Nations* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 5.

¹⁷Wright, *The Mission of God*, 51.

¹⁸Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 27.

to build an ark. Through the waters of judgment on the face of the earth, Noah and his family found salvation by faith in the ark built with his own hands. God's missionary heart is on display for his glory in that story.

God's desire to bless the nations for his glory is seen in his election of Abraham (Gen 12) to be the Father of God's people, Israel. Through Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3) and God will bring salvation to the nations.¹⁹ In the setting apart of Abraham for his glory, God adopted a people to love, care for, and lead. It is through this people that God would reveal his grace, mercy, judgment, and glory. While God did not have to take anyone for his own possession, he does. God pursues his people and blesses them with everything they need.

God's missionary heart is seen in the story of the Israelites in captivity in Egypt under Pharaoh (Exod 1-12). It is seen through the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The beauty of God's grace is seen in the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman, being brought into the family of God. God's heart for the world is seen through the prophecy and foreshadowing of Jesus Christ throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

Mission in the New Testament. The most impactful way God demonstrates his mission is through delivering on his promise of the Messiah coming to redeem the world from sin (Matt 1-2). Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, mankind can be redeemed, renewed, and revived into right fellowship with God as it was before the Garden of Eden.

While on earth, Jesus lived intentionally focused on the mission his Father had assigned to him. Jesus is the ultimate example of an obedient missionary. His life testified to what only God could do and his words resonated with the hearts of those looking for

¹⁹Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: B & H, 2005), 105.

something greater than what the world could give them. Christians should seek to live a life like Christ. Robert Garrett explains,

If Christians desire to live like the Christ who redeemed them and who inspires their service, they will find they must imitate his commitment to the salvation of all peoples and seek to complete in their own lives the task of global evangelization, which he himself began and commissioned him to continue.²⁰

Living on mission is the example the disciples set following the ascension of Christ to heaven. They immediately gather together to pray for the advancement of the gospel and the growth of the Church (Acts 1:14). They boldly proclaimed the gospel (Acts 2:14-41) and people were converted as they lived on mission together (Acts 2:42-47).

Following the salvation of Paul (Acts 9) and a few years in training, the gospel exploded through the multiplication of the gospel going forth, churches being planted, and believers being sent out. The gospel continues to advance in the world today through the faithful pastors and laypeople who make up the local church.

A Biblical Foundation for Living on Mission

In a specific moment in Jesus' ministry, he teaches his disciples an incredibly clear truth about their role in the world now that they have decided to follow him:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:14-16)

In this text, Jesus calls those who desire to follow him to intentional living in three specific ways. First, Jesus says his followers are the light of the world. In order for light to be seen, there must be darkness. Jesus is saying the world is dark. The light and dark contrast of Christ and the world is also seen in the opening chapter of the gospel of John. While sin has dominated the world, and the world sits in condemnation, under

²⁰Robert Garrett, "The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 63.

darkness, Jesus brings light and life to all who would turn from sin and believe. Believers should know their role as light givers.

Second, Christians should not hide the hope they have in Christ, but put it on display for all to see. The temptation in life is to shy away from confrontation or to be insecure about the delivery of the gospel. The Christian's first response should be to love his neighbors as himself and treat everyone with kindness. When asked why one lives the way he does, the answer should simply be, "because of Jesus." This answer is a great bridge to the gospel. The point is to not be embarrassed of salvation in Christ, but to hold it high for the world to see.

The fourth truth Jesus speaks to is that the life of the Christian should bring glory to God when the Christian lives on mission. The aim of the Christian is not to please self or hide out in order to protect self. The aim is to glorify God. When a believer lives intently on letting his or her light shine, then God is glorified. The glorification of God is what matters above all.

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

Throughout core team training, the member should have a healthy grasp on the overall purpose to which the new work is being launched. The mission of God should be the central purpose for the launching of the new work. Core team members should come to understand that God has them influence in this life that they are to use it for his glory. It is the job of the lead pastor to help the core team see their areas of gospel influence and learn to engage people with the gospel in their environments, which can be done through a focused strategy.

Identify areas of influence. Living on mission is a shift in thinking for most people. Helping the core team to identify the specific areas of influence God has given them will open their eyes to the opportunities to advance the gospel around them. The quicker they are able to see themselves as God's mission agents, the quicker gospel

growth will take place in the new work. Most people's key areas of influence revolve around four main categories: their workplace, school, neighborhood, and community (places people might frequently visit, including grocery, banks, restaurants, the gym, local sports, etc).

Intentionally befriend lost people. To intentionally focus on sharing the gospel, one has to intentionally focus on making friends with people who need the gospel. Befriending someone means to simply make friends with others. There is a real need for Christians to grow in their ability to get around lost people.

Christians can be tempted to keep to their own group of Christian friends and not be around lost people. However, Christians should run to lost people. If the nations are going to be reached for the gospel, then Christians need to be better at shaking hands with sinners. Becoming a friend and intentionally showing interest in a lost person's life will extend a level of influence in their life that will surpass the more shallow friendships they already share. People pay attention to those who treat them with kindness, love, and respect. Kindness, love and respect open doors for the gospel.

Prioritize the mission. Today's world is fast paced. The demands of work, sports, family, church, and everything else seem to make it nearly impossible to grab quiet time alone. However, the individual always decides his or her priorities. When living missionally becomes a priority in a believer's life, their eyes begin to turn away from themselves and onto where the need is, on others. This refocus helps the Christian to make time to invest in those who need the gospel. When the mission is prioritized in the life of the believer, they tend to slow down and be more aware of opportunities to share the gospel.

When a believer reprioritizes their life around living on mission, they tend to be more aware of the opportunities God gives them to be used by him in the lives of the people around them. Opportunities to share the gospel will become more evident and

opportunities to bless others will be more clearly seen. A change in priority can literally mean the eternal life or death of an individual.

Live out the gospel. Attitudes, actions, and words reveal much about a person. The core team's understanding about living out the gospel should grow in clarity and understanding. The Bible is very clear that the distinguishing characteristic of God's people should be their love for God and for one another (Matt 22:36-38). However, many in America do not find this to be true of Christians.

A 2008 survey carried out by Lifeway Research among 1,402 "unchurched" adults showed that 72 percent say the church is full of hypocrites.²¹ With this reality in mind, new churches must set a new standard for living on mission and loving their neighbors. Seeking to honor Christ in all the spheres of life is the number one way a believer can serve the kingdom of Christ.

Share the gospel. Living out the gospel and sharing the gospel are two separate things. Living out the gospel provokes others to ask questions on why a believer lives a particular way. When this happens, an opportunity to share the gospel will present itself, and sharing the gospel is how the mission of God advances (Rom 10:14-17). Lovingly sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ will always yield results and glorify God.

Conclusion

Living a life focused on the mission of God is the way God brings light to a dark world. When the hearts and minds of God's people are focused on the lost around them and they are praying for the opportunity to share the gospel, much more evangelism and intentionality takes place. Fear is the culprit that often keeps believers from sharing their faith. Paul reminds Timothy that God has not given a Spirit of fear, but a spirit of

²¹Mark Kelly, "Study: Unchurched Americans Turned Off by Church, Open to Christians," accessed February 11, 2016, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-unchurched-Americans-turned-off-by-church-open-to-Christians>.

power, love, and self-control (2 Tim 1:7).

Challenging the core team to take God at his word and to live out their faith is a game changer. Momentum shifts when the core team rallies together around mission. The calling on the believer's life is to share the gospel. Salvation belongs to God; He does all the saving work in a person's life. Many will reject the gospel, but some will believe. And when they believe, the Christian who was faithful in sharing will find great joy and a deeper appreciation for sharing.

Every Member at War

As core team training nears the end, the impending launch of the new work will become a greater focus. The various serve teams will be working overtime to prepare for all the needs of their ministry. The leaders will begin to stress over tasks that still need to be done. Even the lead pastor will be concerned over whether or not people will show or if all the details will be completed. All of these issues provide room for distraction, frustration, fear, anxiety, worry, and division. It is a ripe condition for Satan to pounce.

Satan wants nothing more than to lead Christ-followers away from the truth of Scriptures and into a self-focused way of life. In *Spiritual Warfare and Missions*, Ed Stetzer writes,

Too often the average Christ follower in North America does not want to live with the knowledge of the great battle raging about them. We have lost our collective stomach for direct confrontation with the forces of darkness living in denial, the Western church remakes the images of spiritual warfare into cartoons and caricatures. Could it be possible that someone would really be at work to send people to hell? Satan would prefer us to be ashamed at his existence and put him in the category of mythology. We underestimate our enemy and accuser when God's Word is sadly embraced as a book of anecdotal, sweet stories with solid advice on how to make good decisions. Although on a macro level the Bible assures us we win, we skip the details of the gruesome confrontations along the way to victory.²²

Spiritual warfare is a spiritual reality that the core team must be awakened to. There is a cosmic battle raging in this world for the hearts and souls of mankind. Satan

²²Ed Stetzer and Jerry Rankin, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions: The Battle for God's Glory among the Nations* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 33.

and his demons are at work every day seeking to lead people away from the truth of the gospel. Stetzer continues, “Satan does not have to tempt us to embrace sinful living; all he has to do is divert our focus.”²³ As launch day approaches, the core team must be fervently focused on the mission in order to be on guard against the evils of this world.

A Theological Understanding of Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare finds its theological grounding in the opening pages of the Bible and carries on throughout to the final pages of Revelation. Stetzer writes, “The war that began in a beautiful garden (Genesis) concludes on a bloody battlefield (Revelation).”²⁴ In those early pages of Genesis the reader quickly finds out that there is another supernatural person involved outside of God, Satan.

The serpent in Genesis 3 is described as “crafty” or “cunning.” Satan slyly creeps in and leads God’s created being away to disobedience, and ultimately judgment. This is an act of treason against God and his kingdom. Satan uses Eve’s natural desires against her and leads her away first, by mere appetite and a misplaced beauty, then by the possibility of being like God in knowledge. Eve disobeys God’s only command in order to gain something she ultimately could not have, and this is how Satan works. He plays off of the desires of man and leads him to destruction.

Paul gives one of the clearest understandings of the spiritual world that exists around what is perceived in the New Testament. Writing to the Church at Ephesus, he says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

Paul states that a spiritual evil is ruling over the dark world and this is who the

²³Stetzer and Rankin, *Spiritual Warfare and Missions*, 36.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

Christian wages war with. Paul states nearly the same thing in his second letter to the Corinthians: “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4). These forces exist and seek to destroy or lead astray those who are in-Christ.

The stories in the Gospels tell of demons possessing people and causing harm to them. Jesus confronts many demons throughout his earthly ministry. Jesus casts multiple demons out of a man and sends them to possess swine (Mark 5:1-20), heals a demon possessed girl (Mark 7:26-30), a mute man (Matt 9:32-34), a demon-possessed man who is blind and mute (12:22-32), and a demon-possessed boy (17:14-20). The power of Christ is a power uncontrolled by any evil spirit.

In the book of Acts, Paul and the disciples were doing miraculous work in the name of Christ, including healing many and casting out demons. The Jewish exorcists, seeking to capitalize on the name of Jesus, tried to cast out demons from a group of people known as the Sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-20). After using the name of Christ, the demons responded, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” Then they proceeded to beat the exorcists. The demons knew that they would have to listen to anyone who truly bore the name of Christ.

Defending against spiritual warfare is only possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ. The power to fight belongs to Christ. In the new life of Christ the flesh is put to death and freedom comes. in *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, Jonathan Dodson writes, “Our spiritual war is a war against the flesh, that lingering vestige of our pre-Christian lives that must be put to death so that we can live in the fullness of life given to us in Jesus (Rom. 8:13).”²⁵ When a person steps from death to life in Christ, his new identity in Christ is the foundation of his fight against the evils of this world. The blood of Christ has cut off the head of Satan and left him powerless over and against his blood.

²⁵Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 120.

A Biblical Foundation for Spiritual Warfare

A foundational text for teaching on the subject of spiritual warfare is Ephesians 6:10-20. These insightful verses speak to the realities of the spiritual realm and provide the Christ follower with a clear path forward in standing against these powers.

Be strong in the Lord (6:10-13). Paul first calls the Christ followers in the church at Ephesus to be strong in the Lord. Paul has much confidence in the conquering King because he has seen Christ do much through his life. The Greek word for “whole armor” refers to the complete equipment of a fully armed soldier, consisting of both shields and weapons like those described in these verses.²⁶ Paul is painting the picture of war.

Paul lists the enemies of God’s people: “the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers” (Eph 6:12). Paul assures the church that the devil’s allies and the spiritual forces of evil are no match for King Jesus. Colossians 2:15 says God has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” Christians serve a King who has authority over all the heavens and the earth (Matt 28:18).

The strength Christians seek is a strength not of their own, but a strength found only in the Lord. Paul’s intentions are to point believers to the One who has already defeated the enemy and say, “Be strong in Him!” Because of all that Christ has done, believers can be strong in Him and not fear what Satan or his demons can do.

Stand firm (14-17). It is important to remember that Jesus has not left his people defenseless. Often times Christians feel defeated and weak when they fall into. Many times, Christian’s fall into sin because they have no defense against sin.

The reason many Christians fall into sin or are enslaved by it is because there is a lack of preparation against it. In order to fight, one has to be prepared! Standing firm

²⁶Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 462.

in the faith, deeply rooted in the Word of God, is key to surviving the temptation Satan brings. All believers have weapons through which they can defend. Each Christ-follower has been given the complete armor of God. One author writes,

God's people have the complete armor of God from head to foot, which consists of the belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword. These are metaphors for the spiritual resources given to them in Christ, namely, the truth, righteousness (v. 14), gospel (v. 15), faith (v. 16), salvation, and the Word of God (v. 17). These are aspects of God's and the Messiah's own character and work (as depicted in Isaiah) with which Christians are now equipped. For example, the Lord saw no one to deliver his oppressed people, so he put on his own "breastplate [of righteousness]" and "helmet of salvation" (Isa. 59:17; cf. Eph. 6:14, 17) before coming in wrath against his enemies.²⁷

Paul provides the church with pictures of real weapons given God. Two of the key points Paul makes are that believers are to be ready to share the gospel (6:15) and live by the Word of God (6:17). Paul makes this specific point that it is only through the message of the gospel that people are saved. Also, a strong reliance on God's Word is crucial for spiritual warfare. Believers are to know God's Word; to read it, love it, pray it, and share it!

Be constant in prayer (18). Prayer is the Christian's most powerful resource. Prayer is to permeate who the church is and what the church does. The church should be a praying church. To not pray is to say to God that the church does not need him. Paul encourages to keep alert and pray for the church. He says, "all the saints." Paul wants others to be on the mind of the church.

Be all about the mission (19-20). When a Christian walks consistently with Christ they will know him more intimately and glorify him more publically. The more a believer walks with God, the less likely he is to walk away from God. When things get difficult and the believer goes through trials, temptations, and persecution, he is less likely to give up and more likely to draw close to God and withstand these things.

²⁷*English Standard Version Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2273.

Paul's new this track all too well. He had walked through the most difficult of days seeking to live a life fully devoted to the mission Christ had called him on. Paul's prayer for all the saints (6:18) is followed by a prayer for himself. He requests that the church pray that the Lord would fill his mouth with the needed words at the right time in order to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel (6:19).

Despite his opposition, Paul was still all about the mission! His desire for the advancement of the gospel propelled him to travel to the next city so they could hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul held the mission of God high in his life. He died to self and lived for Christ. He understood that his preferences should not matter. All that mattered to him was that the gospel went out to the lost, and the lost were saved!

What Should Be Taught to a Core Team?

The drive of this session is to focus on the importance of living a life at war with Satan and his evil forces. The core team's focus should be readiness in the face of opposition. The importance of living a life on guard against the attacks of Satan is a core subject to discuss. Christians must fight to keep their lives on track with Jesus Christ and their focus on the right mission.

The lead pastor should lay out a theological explanation of spiritual warfare that helps the core team understand the reality of what exists in this world. Expositing Ephesians 6:10-20 is a must for this session. In these verses is the truth by which God calls his people to defend and resist Satan. Focusing on the importance of readiness and living on guard are also two key subjects to discuss in this session.

This session should be finalized with a focus on prayer. With the launch within a week or two, spiritual warfare will increase among the team. A specific, intentional prayer time at the end of this session can help the core team become more aware and more prepared to walk forward faithfully, undeterred by Satan and his attacks.

Conclusion

Satan wants to seek to lead God's people away from the faith that is in their hearts and minds. He wants to destroy them. Peter says, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Satan is like a "roaring lion" and he is "seeking someone to devour." These are strong words of warning to those who wish to faithfully follow Christ.

Those that belong to Christ must wake up to the realities of spiritual warfare around them. The war in this world is far greater than that of nation against nation. This war is against God and those who would pursue him. Thankfully, this war has already been one in Christ (Rev 4:1-8). He is our defender and our King.

Conclusion

These sessions focused around the theme of mission are to be a rallying cry for the core team. Each session should help the core team to intentionally focus on getting out of every day habits and to get in to the community for gospel advancement. The core team needs to live, act, walk, and think like missionaries. The lead pastor is multiplying his mission mind to all of the core team members in order to get them engaged in mission. The better equipped and confident the core team becomes at living on mission, the more people will be influenced by them. Mission cannot be downplayed or misplaced. It is foundational for life as a Christ-follower.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Church multiplication in the local church is one of the primary means through which the world can be reached for Christ. Intentionally and effectively training teams of Christ-followers and launching them out to plant new works should become a standard practice in each local church. The mobility and technological advancements throughout the world allow for people to work and live differently than previous generations. A deliberate training method for training new church communities can effectively aid this process in the local church.

The need for new churches across America and the world is great. Studies show that denominations are reaching far less people than previous generations. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) declined this past year by 200,000 members, the biggest decline since 1881.¹ The intentional equipping of teams of Christians for the purpose of church multiplication is one way to curb the decline in the SBC and other evangelical denominations.

In the coming years and decades, more people will turn their attention to bi-vocational church planting. Regardless of American culture, financial markets, or the threat of greater taxation, the church is called to go forth through gospel proclamation and church multiplication. With the lack of available resources on training core teams of laypersons for the task of church multiplication, this project fills a much-needed space that will allow for any church to carry out this endeavor.

¹Carol Pipes, “SBC Reports More Churches, Fewer People,” accessed February 11, 2016, <http://www.bpnews.net/44914/sbc-reports-more-churches-fewer-people>.

Evaluation of the Method

The effectiveness of this particular method of training has been tested in three separate contexts. While writing this project, another Cross Church campus has been launched in the eastern part of Fayetteville, Arkansas. The core team of this campus was trained using a condensed version of this curriculum. The results of the core team's training were a success. This makes three intentional groups of people who were trained using this material.

In preparation for completing this project, I surveyed 100 people who served on the core team of one of the first two campuses that were trained with this curriculum. I asked each of them three yes-or-no questions regarding their training. Each question was targeted for a specific purpose.² The following questions were asked:

1. Do you believe the core team training meetings were a key part of the success of the your campus's launch and initial growth?
2. Do you believe the core team training meetings provided a higher commitment to church membership and the vision and mission of Cross Church?
3. Did the core team training meetings equip you beyond the initial launch of the campus, extending to your Christian walk after the launch as well?

The results of this study came back with an overwhelming yes for each question. For question 1, 86 people said yes, 2 people said no, and 12 did not respond. For question 2, 87 people said yes, 1 person said no, and 12 did not respond. For question 3, 84 people said yes, 4 people said no, and 12 did not respond

The results of my study show clearly that the strategy used for two of these new campuses proved to be extremely beneficial in not only equipping the core team to support their lead pastor in planting the campus, but also bringing them to a greater commitment to church membership. Not only were they equipped for the trek toward planting, but also for their Christian walk. The consistent comments I received pointed to

²See the survey form in appendix 3.

how the training changed the way they view the church and how it has helped them live a life on mission.

Core Team Training Timeline

A lead pastor must consider several factors when planning the times he will meet with the core team. While this curriculum has only nine intentional sessions of biblical content, the lead pastor will want to consider a twelve-week timeline for training. The timeline should consist of an opening week of introductions, the nine sessions, a week focused specifically on prayer, and a week focused specifically on volunteer teams. All weeks can be edited to fit the lead pastor's desires and needs of the church.

- Week 1 – Introduction to Core Team Training: Cast Vision, Introduce Curriculum: Truth, Community, and Mission.
- Week 2 – Every Member Identified
- Week 3 – Every Member Devoted
- Week 4 – Every Praying
- Week 5 – Prayer Focus – Pray for City, Community, and Core Team
- Week 6 – Every Member United
- Week 7 – Every Member Connected
- Week 8 – Every Member Serving
- Week 9 – Meet in Specific Volunteer Teams for Intentional Training
- Week 10 – Every Member Equipped
- Week 11 – Every Member on Mission
- Week 12 – Every Member at War
- Week 13 – Launch the New Church Community

These twelve weeks are specific to the needs of core competencies of a Christ follower.³ On week 13, the new work will launch its first service. The twelve weeks prior to launch provide adequate time and training for a healthy membership base to grow, connect, unify, and be energized. These weeks will be full of excitement and passion.

The early days in the life of a new work allow other new works to easily be developed, trained, and launched because of the memories and word-of-mouth conversations that come from the core team members. In order to keep the passion for

³See appendix 4 for a detailed timeline of the process from beginning of preparation to the launch date.

multiplication going, celebrate the yearly anniversaries of the new church. Keep the future before them and drive toward building a culture of multiplication.

Building, Equipping, and Launching the Core Team from Start to Finish

The process by which the core team is built is much longer than the twelve-week training period. A church should consider a six-month time frame before the launch of the new work. This process is outlined in the following eight steps.

Mission

In order to build a successful launch team, the vision for the new work must be given to the sending church at least six months in advance. Dedicating a specific Sunday at the height of the season to preach on the need to multiply will yield excitement from the soon to be sending church. Casting a strong vision for the new work in the city or around the world will bring great joy to the church.

The sending church pastor must be intentional and clear in his call for people to join the core team of the new work. The temptation for many pastors is to fear that might go. Some may worry that a big giver or a key leader from the sending church would sign up to be launched out. However, this is good news, not bad news. The senior pastor must rejoice in the obedience of every one of his members. Hold the mission high and call the people to go.

Membership

As people begin signing up to be a part of the core team, an intentional interview must be had with each person. This interview must include their salvation story, their previous church involvement, and a testimony of their daily walk with Christ. The core team must be vetted to include only those who have been faithful and dedicated to their church.

The lead pastor must work to secure those who are highly engaged in order to begin the new work on a healthy foundation of leaders. These leaders will be the ones helping lead new Christians and new members after the launch.

The lead pastor will also want to decide what the membership process of the new work will be. Churches need better membership processes in order to develop healthier members. A healthy membership leads to a healthy mission. Thom Rainer writes, “The church will become healthier when one of its members become healthier. And as the church gets healthier, it will have a greater impact on its community and the world.”⁴

The membership process in a local church makes it possible to effectively teach and equip new members who come from different sociological, economical, spiritual, and denominational backgrounds, how what a member of God’s Kingdom looks like. Salvation, baptism, and other core beliefs are taught and strengthened in a healthy membership process.

A healthy membership process will produce church members who are dedicated to the Word of God and the mission of the church. These will in turn lead to biblical obedience in all sorts of areas. Identify members who can invest immediately into others.

Maturity

As the core team of members grows, the lead pastor will want to focus on meeting regularly with key members who will lead the various teams, such as first impressions, parking, children, etc. Identify men and women who are spiritual mature to lead these areas. Leaders must be identified and chosen. This process of discernment takes time.

⁴Thom Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 6.

Throughout the various interviews with those signing up to serve on the core team, the lead pastor can be discerning calling, gifting, history, and preferences. The Lord will bring about the right people to lead the various ministries in his time. He will make it clear who the more mature ones are.

Method

Once the vision has been cast, the core team recruited, and the key leaders have been decided on, then the core team training sessions can begin. These twelve weeks must be highly engaging. It is in these twelve weeks that the new church community will begin to develop her culture.

I recommend opening up the core team sessions with opportunities for the core team to get to know one another through games, interviews, or other methods. These meetings should be fun. The temptation will be for these meetings to float toward more serious items and skip past key culture building opportunities. The core team should enjoy gathering together and worshipping the Lord together. A typical core team meeting may go something like this:

Welcome (2 minutes)
Game (8 minutes)
Q & A with a Core Team Couple (5 minutes)
Prayer (5 minutes)
Session (35 minutes)
Prayer (5 minutes)

This layout allows for fun, healthy interaction with a core team couple, ten minutes of dedicated prayer, and a thirty-five minute session covering a necessary topic in launching the new church community.⁵

Magnify

Throughout the training sessions, lead the core team in magnifying God in worship through their daily lives. Magnifying God is a key identifier of a healthy church

⁵See this layout in printable form in appendix 5.

member. A desire to worship God flows from a heart of gratefulness. A heart that has been redeemed has much to worship. This type of person also understands the life they have is to be lived for God in worship. This produces a desire and willingness to go where the Lord calls and be obedient with resources, gifts, and finances. A core team member that magnifies God through worship will be content serving in whatever capacity needed.

Mobilize

At various points throughout training, the lead pastor should consider mobilizing the core team to participate in training objectives outside of the normal session times. First, the core team should be mobilized to spend at least one defined time outside of the church walls seeking to strike up conversations in order to share the gospel with others. This may be the core team going out following one of the training sessions and then gathering back together afterwards to discuss the results. Regardless of the time frame, the time out together is necessary for accountability and equipping.

A second time the core team should be mobilized is for volunteer team training. There will be various moments throughout the core team training where teams of volunteers will need to meet to discuss details of their role and other various matters. Having at least one of these times on the calendar will help the leaders gather volunteers more efficiently and effectively.

Third, a specific time of worship and prayer should be planned during the week prior to the launch reserved specifically for the core team. Mobilizing the core team to gather for worship and prayer for one last time before the launch will be one of the sweetest times in the training. It will be the last time the core team will ever be together like that again. The team will remember it for years to come.

Mobilizing the core team to key moments outside of the normal training will aid in the planning stages of the new work. It brings unity and builds friendships. These

opportunities stretch the core team and cause them to invest much more of themselves in the work than they expected. This is a good thing.

Multiply

The training prepares the core team for the launch day and beyond. Once the launch day comes, it is officially time to multiply. The core team is sent out from the sending church to create a new community that is focused on reaching people for Christ and building healthy church members who will make disciples. The intentional launching out of a group of people to start a new work brings glory to God and advances his mission to the ends of the earth.

Motivate

From the launch day forward, the themes of mission and membership should carry on in the new community of faith. From day one, the lead pastor should be motivating the core team behind the scenes and publically. Motivation will be key for the first year of the new work.

The lead pastor should also be prepping and preparing the new church community for multiplication again. This happens from the repetition of mission and membership from the stage and into the various ministries in the church. The world needs more churches who plant churches. That is the goal of this new work.

Strengths of the Project

This project had four primary strengths. First, this project is one for which a need will exist because there will always be a need for church planting until the Lord returns. While some books may become dated or unhelpful past a certain season, this resource has a long shelf life due to its specific focus.

Second, as a lead pastor begins preparing for all he will face in church planting, this resource allows him the material to adequately equip the core team without the added focus of having to create something new. The lead pastor is able to focus on preparing his

mind and heart for the first sermon series or whatever else needs his time. This project also allows for others to effectively lead the core team training if for some reason the lead pastor cannot do it.

Third, the resource is both theological and biblical. While it finds its footing on a solid theological foundation, it is not overly difficult to comprehend. It is teachable to the layman. It is also bathed in Scripture. Each session has a biblical foundation on which the session is taught.

Fourth, the project can be molded to fit other areas outside of equipping church launch teams, such as new members classes and small group material. The flexibility of this project allows for pastors and churches to use it apart from planting a new work. It is a reproducible resource that reaches further than its initial target. Crafting it into small group material for discipleship purposes would not be difficult. Both large groups and small groups of various ages can benefit from such a curriculum.

Weaknesses of the Project

While this work has strengths, it also has three specific weaknesses. First, while the scope of each subject is wide, it is not fully comprehensive. Each session leaves room for changes and edits based on the needs of the lead pastor. All of the questions the pastor may have will not be answered in each session. There is a level of which the lead pastor will have to engage with his own material based on the need each week.

Second, this project assumes a church will be training core teams of twenty to three hundred people. Any less or any more and the project may become difficult to implement. However, this material is scalable and can be manipulated to fit the needs of the lead pastor and the core team.

Third, this material is specific to a type of church planting that seeks the opportunity to plant big. “Planting big” is an approach whereby a “launch date” is set and an attempt is made to gather as many people as possible on that day. Another stream of church planting is where the church would grow by individual growth through the

multiplication of “missional communities” or “home groups” and eventually combine together to form one assembly. This project does not attempt to fit in that model, although it could serve that model.

A Warning to Lead Pastors

As the new church grows into a healthy gospel community, keeping the focus on mission may provide difficult if not kept in view. The potential to drift from the mission of the church increases each day the church grows in age. Remaining focused on the mission takes effort on the pastoral staff to hold high the opportunities to advance the gospel throughout the city by way of individual influence and gospel sowing. The focus on mission must be championed from the stage week to week.

Spiritual maturity is a key indicator of a church growing in the gospel. Spiritual maturity comes through spiritual discipline. The discipline of reading the Bible, prayer, journaling, and faithful living produce spiritual maturity in a person. R. Kent Hughes writes, “The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair! No manliness no maturity! No discipline no discipleship! No sweat no sainthood!”⁶

Discipline produces maturity. Discipline says God is first and self is last. The spiritual growth that takes place in a person only happens through a consistent and faithful walk with God. The continual pushing off of preferences and taking up mission will prove to be helpful if championed.

Personal Reflections

Over five years ago I was tasked with creating a curriculum to train a core team of 250 people to plant a new campus in Fayetteville, Arkansas. As I sat down with a friend to work through what would become an outline for this material, I had no clue what God would do with it. It was purely an attempt to simplify some core doctrines and

⁶R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2001), 15.

truths in the Bible and teach them on an understandable level. I praise God this training curriculum was successful.

It is amazing to see how God would use the mind of a mere man to create something that will be used for years to come to train and launch churches. I am grateful for the opportunity to share it and the investment made in me to produce it.

Conclusion

The goal and desire of this project has been to provide a robust resource that may be used to train and equip the people who are called to plant a new church or multisite campus. In most cases, the church planter or lead pastor is invested in and trained in how to effectively launch a church. He may find himself trying to come up with the right materials to teach the core team. This project is a resource for the lead pastor or church looking to equip a core team for gospel effectiveness and advancement.

The success of a church plant will increase if the time is dedicated to training the core team of people. I pray that more churches will adopt an intentional training strategy for the purpose of church multiplication. I pray that this resource and others will become a new standard in church equipping and multiplication for the glory of God throughout the world.

APPENDIX 1
TESTIMONY DOCUMENT

My Life Before Christ:

How I met Christ:

My Life Since I Met Christ:

APPENDIX 2
VOLUNTEER SIGN UP DOCUMENT

Name: _____

Please choose 2 places you would be willing to serve.
Number them (1, 2) in order of preference.

- _____ Preschool & Nursery
- _____ Children Ministry (K-5th Grades)
- _____ Student Ministry
- _____ College Ministry
- _____ Greeter
- _____ Usher
- _____ Security
- _____ Hospitality
- _____ Parking
- _____ Baptism
- _____ Worship: What is your talent? _____
- _____ Media

Other areas of ministry you would be interested serving in:

APPENDIX 3
CORE TEAM SURVEY

WUFOO

Fayetteville Campus Core Team Training Survey

Surveying the effectiveness of training the Core Team for the launch of the Fayetteville Campus.

Name

First Last

1. Do you believe the Core Team Training meetings were a key part of the success of the Fayetteville Campus's launch and initial growth?

Yes
 No

2. Do you believe the Core Team Training meetings provided better commitment to church membership and the vision of the church?

Yes
 No

3. Did the Core Team Training meetings equip you beyond the initial launch of the campus, extending to your Christian walk as well?

Yes
 No

APPENDIX 4

CORE TEAM TRAINING TIMELINE

Six-Eight Months from Launch:

- Cast vision for new work
- Invite church members to consider going with a simple sign up process.

Five Months from Launch:

- Interview all those who signed up to be a part of the new work.
- Listening to testimonies and discerning their call.

Four Months from Launch:

- Recruit volunteer leaders to lead various Serve Teams such as First Impressions, Parking, Children, Baptism, and Small Groups.

Three Months from Launch: Core Team Training Begins

- Week 1 – Introduction to Core Team Training: Cast Vision, Introduce Curriculum: Truth, Community, and Mission.
- Week 2 – Every Member Identified
- Week 3 – Every Member Devoted
- Week 4 – Every Praying
- Week 5 – Prayer Focus – Pray for City, Community, and Core Team
- Week 6 – Every Member United
- Week 7 – Every Member Connected
- Week 8 – Every Member Serving
- Week 9 – Meet in Specific Volunteer Teams for Intentional Training
- Week 10 – Every Member Equipped
- Week 11 – Every Member on Mission
- Week 12 – Every Member at War

APPENDIX 5

CORE TEAM MEETING SCHEDULE

Order of Training Meeting:

Welcome (2 minutes)

Team Building Game (8 minutes)

Q & A with a Core Team Couple (5 minutes)

Prayer (5 minutes)

Session (35 minutes)

Prayer (5 minutes)

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ABSTRACT

LAUNCHING FORWARD: AN EFFECTIVE CORE TEAM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR LAUNCHING A CHURCH PLANT OR MULTISITE CAMPUS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016
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Chapter 1 provides an introduction to this project and argues for the need for churches to not only train church planters in preparedness for church planting, but to also train launch teams that go with the pastor to plant. This chapter provides an understanding of where multisite ministry fits in the church planting model, provides my personal history in regard to training core teams, and sets the foundation for the training strategy outlined in this project.

Chapter 2 outlines three sessions of core team training that contend for the core team to hold God's truth of the gospel high as they begin the march toward launching a new work. The topics covered in these three weeks include (1) the truth of the gospel and the role of baptism in the local church, (2) the Christian's devotion to walking obediently with God in reading God's Word, worship, and biblical giving, and (3) the role of prayer in the Christian's life. If truth is to be central to the way Christians live, then it must be internally rooted deep into their hearts in order for it to come out externally.

Chapter 3 outlines three sessions of core team training that fall under the category of "community," focusing specifically on topics that revolve around the role and need of biblical community in the local church. These topics include (1) uniting the core team around the gospel, the mission and values of the church, and the expectations

of its members, (2) the role of small groups in the member's life, and (3) identifying spiritual gifts and helping members find a place to serve.

Chapter 4 outlines the three final sessions of core team training focused specifically on topics regarding living a life on mission for God. Understanding the biblical and theological foundation of missions is vital to the purpose of these topics. The topics covered in these three weeks include (1) a clear understanding of biblical conversion and learning how to engage others with the gospel, (2) helping the core team leverage their influence for gospel opportunities, and (3) living on guard against spiritual warfare that will come in this season.

Chapter 5 provides a clear timetable for a lead pastor or church in preparation for launching a new church community. It also provides a suggested schedule for each core team training time. This chapter outlines a necessary path for building, equipping, and launching the core team from start to finish. These items will aid the sending church or lead pastor in the process of preparing the team as a whole.

VITA

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