LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE GREAT INVITATION:
A CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Richard Novel Foster

Lynchburg, Virginia

May, 2007

Copyright 2007 Richard Novel Foster
All Rights Reserved

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

_____
GRADE

_____
MENTOR, Dr. Luke Kauffman
Professor, Pastoral Ministries
Liberty University

_____
READER, Dr. David Wheeler
Professor, Evangelism
Liberty University

ABSTRACT

THE GREAT INVITATION: A CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Richard Novel Foster

Liberty Theological Seminary, 2007

Mentor: Dr. Luke Kauffman

Christian and secular sources alike site a recent decline in baptisms in the evangelical church. By receiving one hundred and fifty surveys from pastors, this dissertation project examines the cause for this alarming trend and recommends a solution which entails discipling the pastor within a Christian community. This project proposes a model for Bible colleges and seminaries to train the pastor by facilitating five key relationships that will enhance his fellowship with Christ and encourage his desire to carry out the Great Commission. The objective of this project is to reverse the current decline in baptisms.

Abstract length: 96 words

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am particularly thankful for the love, support, and assistance of my wife Tracy. By conversing with me about the project during the last several months, she has sharpened my ideas and aided my organization. Her skill as an English teacher has been of great help to my weak grammar. Tracy's understanding regarding the time needed to complete this project made the process even more enjoyable.

I am also grateful to Dr. Luke Kauffman for his academic and professional assistance. Without his aid, the project would be much inferior. He guided me through the project diligently and gently. When my ideas were not cohesive or ample, he proposed questions which stirred my thinking. By allowing me to express my ideas related to some controversial topics, the dissertation sharpened and challenged my own spiritual growth. I am thankful to Dr. Kauffman for mentoring me through one of the most advantageous learning experiences of my ministry.

Most significantly, I am thankful to my Savior and friend, the Lord Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, He has been the true light of my thirty five year existence. I have prayed that His thoughts would be mine during this project. If mistakes regarding His

truth have been made, then I with regret take full responsibility. Where truth has been presented well, I give Him thanks for His matchless grace.

CONTENTS

Page

TITLE PAGE i

COPYRIGHT ii

SIGNATURE PAGE iii

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

CONTENTS vi

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 1

Statement of the Problem 2

Statement of Scope and Limitations 3

Description of Methodology 4

Summary 7

2. SURVEY RESPONSES 14

The Ten Questions 15

The Additional Three Questions 24

The Correlations 28

Prayer and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism 29

Scripture Reading and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism 30

Discipleship and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism 31

Other Studies 32

The Pastor's Prayer Life and Scripture Reading 32

The Pastor's Discipleship 33

3. THE PROBLEM..... 34

The Problematic Focus..... 34

The Problematic Methods..... 40

Self-Esteem..... 43

Felt Needs 48

Fun and Games..... 56

Easy Believism..... 59

The Problematic Product..... 63

Uncommitted Christians..... 64

Shallow Community..... 65

The Non-discipled Pastor..... 68

The Problematic Invitation..... 68

4. THE SOLUTION..... 71

Discovering the Church..... 73

The Church's Members: Disciples..... 75

Three Legitimate Questions..... 80

Three Pertinent Applications..... 85

The Church's Mission: Discipleship..... 90

The Lord's Example of Community..... 91

The Early Church's Example of Community..... 93

The Strategy..... 98

A Proposed Model…….. 100

Spiritual Formation Group Relationship……..... 100

Faculty and Staff to Student Relationship…….. 102

Historic Figure to Student Relationship……..... 102

Student to Neighbor Relationship…….. 103

Pastor to Student Relationship…….. 105

A Working Model……... 106

Operational Spiritual Formation Group Relationship…….. 108

Operational Faculty and Staff to Student Relationship……..… 109

Operational Student to Neighbor Relationship…….. 110

Operational Pastor to Student Relationship…….. 110

A Comprehensive Model ……... 111

Summary…….. 112

5. CONCLUSION…..... 113

Appendices

Appendix A – Pastor Survey..... 118

Appendix B – Pastor Follow-up Survey 120

Appendix C – Pastor Survey Results..... 121

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY……..... 123

7. VITA……..……..... 130

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As Pastor Steve sits at his desk on Monday morning, many thoughts race through his mind. He remembers better days in ministry. He recalls that just four years ago, after investing seven years in theological training, he came to his church with enthusiasm and vision. Believing that God would do something great in his community and church, Pastor Steve started Monday mornings in meaningful prayer and Bible reading. Now the vision is fading and the excitement has been gone for several months. The pastor tries to spend time alone with God, but it seems more like a chore than a delight. He questions himself and wonders, "What's the use?" Yesterday, the public invitation was given and no one came forward to profess faith in Christ. Actually, Steve did not expect anyone to receive Christ. Only a hand full of people has been saved during the last three years. He baptized fifteen the first year and expected good things to continue, but they came to a quick halt. Now he thinks that God may be calling him to a new church—a church with more opportunity—a church where people are not so apathetic. He thinks, "Perhaps, I have taken this church as far as it can go." He searches the internet several times a week

for pastor job openings. Pastor Steve does not want to become a drop out statistic, but he is frustrated and does not know where to turn. He has no close friend to come to his aid.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Though Pastor Steve does not represent all people in the ministry, his experience could not be more real to many of America's pastors. Sunday after Sunday, pastors conclude the worship service with an appeal to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This practice called the public invitation or altar call has traditionally been a regular part of the evangelical Christian worship service. However, the altar call is producing fewer and fewer baptisms.

Recent statistics for the Southern Baptist Convention show that baptisms, which rebounded in 2004 after a four-year decline, slumped again in 2005, according to LifeWay Christian Resources President and CEO Thom S. Rainer.[1] This 4.15 percent decline is not isolated to the Southern Baptist Convention, nor has it only been noticed by church leadership.[2] *USA Today* in April of 2006 published a column titled *Rite of Baptism Trickles Away*. Cathy Lynn Grossman reports,

> The baptismal decline has been evident since the 1950s, and the accompanying graph tells the story. With the exception of a bump in the 1970s during the Jesus movement (a phenomena which was frequently opposed in SBC life), baptisms have plateaued or trended slightly downward. The last few years indicate trouble ahead. Though we've had a renewed focus on conversion growth, and availability of evangelism resources and training, we're reaching fewer people. All of this while the population around us is growing -- and growing fast (as the 300 millionth American, who arrived on Nov. 17 at 7:46 a.m., can attest).[3]

---

[1] Russ Rankin, 2006 *FY 2005 Stats: Southern Baptist Experience Drop in Baptisms*, Retrieved February 12, 2007 from http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23070, 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cathy Lynn Grossman, 2006 *Rite of Baptism Trickles Away*, Retrieved February 12, 2007 from http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2006-04-12-baptism-trend x.htm, 1.

Unfortunately, baptisms are not the only troubling statistic in church life. Pastors are leaving the ministry in droves. LifeWay's former President James T. Draper Jr. states that for every twenty men that enter the ministry, only one will still be in the ministry by retirement age.[4] Even though these individuals often spend six or seven years in theological education, they are willing to change occupations at great cost.[5] In *Pastors at Risk*, Dr. James C. Dobson interviews Focus on the Family's ministry expert to pastors and their families, H.B. London. London writes that about forty percent of pastors say they have considered leaving the ministry in the last three months.[6]

While baptisms and pastoral morale decline, millions of Americans remain unconverted. It is impossible to know the exact percentage of those who are and who are not truly saved. Statistics range across the board and church leaders differ in what it means to be a Christian. Nevertheless, it is clear that multitudes of souls hang in the balance. Recognized leading experts discuss possible solutions, but baptisms are still on the decline. This dissertation project aims to provide the church and her leaders with a practical and biblical resource that, when implemented properly, will reverse the decline in baptisms.

STATEMENT OF SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This project will be limited in the following ways: The research primarily involves Baptist life and practice, but is applicable to the entire evangelical community.

---

[4] Tammi Reed Ledbetter, *The Ministry: 'Almost Inevitable Ruin,'* Retrieved February 13, 2007 from http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2018.htm, 1.

[5] Ibid.

[6] H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Risk* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1993), 25.

The author recognizes that some groups of true believers do not practice an altar call that encourages the hearer to a public profession of faith which is followed by baptism. This writer does not make an argument for or against the use of the system. It is well understood that evangelical pastors differ on the benefits and proper use of the altar call. This subject matter is being rightly debated in many circles, but will not be addressed in the following pages.

Though the project gives statistics concerning baptisms, it is known that baptism in itself does not constitute salvation. Baptism possesses no saving grace in itself.[7] Baptism is an outward display that should represent an inward reality of surrender to Christ. It is a sign of one's salvation.[8] Nevertheless, some experience baptism without being converted to follow Christ. This paper does not attempt to distinguish between the unconverted and true believer.

The writer submits to the scripture and its divine author as his final authority. While personal research and statistics are put forth, the Bible serves as the foundation for this project. The statistics never outweigh the Holy scripture, but constitute a secondary source of information. If statistics ever contradict the scripture, then the Christian must disregard them. Statistics alone can mislead, but when they are tested by God's word, they are helpful in research.

---

[7] Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 280.

[8] Harold Willmington, *Willmington's Complete Guide to Bible Knowledge* (Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1993), 541.

DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

A survey has been sent via email to over fourteen hundred pastors within four different groups. These pastors associate with one of the following organizations: the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV), the Liberty Baptist Fellowship (LBF), associated with Liberty University or Doctor of Ministry students at Liberty Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia. One hundred and fifty pastors returned their surveys. These include respectively forty-eight from SBC pastors, forty-eight from LBF, thirty-four from Doctor of Ministry pastors, and twenty from the SBCV. Since there is little or no difference in results among the group, all four have been combined.

The following ten questions were asked:

1. Do you know the last names of your five closest neighbors (yes or no)?
2. Do you know each neighbor's first name (yes or no)?
3. Do you know whether or not they are saved (yes or no)?
4. How many of them have you personally shared the gospel with (provide number)?
5. Approximately how often do you share the gospel outside of the pulpit in any given month (please provide number)?
6. In the past three years, how many people that you have led to the Lord have been baptized (please provide number)?
7. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you give a public invitation less frequently (yes or no)? If you do not usually give a public invitation, please indicate this below.

8. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you cut out the public invitation (yes or no)?

9. Approximately, how many minutes do you spend in prayer per week (give approximate amount)?

10. Not counting study preparation time, approximately how many minutes do you spend reading the scripture per week (give approximate amount)?

The data from the ten questions was collected and studied. It was expected that many pastors would be wearied of the public invitation. This assumption was inaccurate, but a correlation between the pastor's personal fellowship with Christ through prayer and Bible reading and his personal evangelism became unmistakably clear. The total and exact results are discussed later in chapter two. However, the pastors that spend the most time in prayer and Bible reading also share the gospel more frequently.

As a means of clarifying unanswered questions, a follow up survey was emailed to seventy six of the previously surveyed pastors. These represent cross sections of pastors who had baptized many individuals in the last three years, as well as those pastors who had baptized few or none.

The following three additional questions were asked:

1. Did you have a person that discipled you either formally or informally? This would have been a person that invested quality time in your spiritual development (yes or no).

2. Do you have a person that you are still accountable to that you consider a spiritual mentor?

3. How many close friends do you have in the ministry? I know that this is somewhat subjective, but I mean close friends that really know of your weaknesses and strengths—men that you spend quality time with.

This short follow up survey shows a huge disparity between the two groups. The pastors that see the most baptisms from their personal evangelism are not only spending three times longer in prayer and Bible study, but are also men that have been discipled. Furthermore, they still take part in accountability relationships with friends and personal mentors. Location did not play a noticeable factor in the results. Both the pastors who lead to the Lord and baptize larger and fewer numbers come from small, medium, and large communities.

SUMMARY

To accomplish the aim of providing the church and her leaders with a practical and biblical resource to reverse the decline in baptisms, this dissertation includes four additional chapters. Chapter two provides results of the statistics taken from the survey of one hundred and fifty pastors. Chapter three examines the problem related to fewer baptisms. The dissertation then introduces the solution in chapter four. The final chapter concludes the project with a review and closing remarks.

In chapter two, the pastoral statistics are disclosed and graphs are used for the benefit of the reader. These statistics are looked at from three aspects. The chapter first discusses the overall numbers, which shows the percentage of pastors that fall into each category for the ten questions. Second, the correlations between the answers are made known. Third, the research is compared to other applicable studies.

After presenting the research, the third chapter discusses the problem of fewer baptisms. There is no doubt that the people of God need to address this situation sooner than later. Unfortunately, today's church has a problematic focus. Many in the church believe that the way to increase baptisms is to concentrate on baptisms. This seems logical, but this focus will never achieve its goal. Baptisms will never increase by focusing solely on them. The way to increase baptisms is to focus on something more important and foundational. Declining baptisms is not the root problem, but rather the fruit of a much larger difficulty. An issue never gets solved by dealing only with the symptoms. When a church or denomination primarily focuses on the results such as baptisms, it generates the current crisis of even fewer baptisms. When a church's main goal is being like Christ, the desired results of more baptisms will automatically follow.

The chapter continues by examining the church's problematic methods. In a desire for more baptisms and growth, the church has employed some unwise strategies. These strategies include an overemphasis upon the individual's felt wants, sometimes called needs, and worldly marketing techniques. These practices range from subtle to outrageous. A news channel in Houston Texas reports an AP story that explains how far some churches will go to boost attendance,

> A Galveston County man has good reason to be happy. He won a motorcycle at church. The Abundant Life Christian Center in La Marque also gave away a car. It was all part of a plan to increase its congregation. The church gave away a new Chrysler PT Cruiser to a woman and a Harley Davidson Sportster to the man at its New Year's Eve service. Parishioners and visitors have been eligible to enter for the free drawings each time they attended a service in recent weeks. And members who brought visitors could enter twice. The church purchased the vehicles. The winners must be at Wednesday's service to drive them away. 'This is an opportunity to give something to someone that will encourage people to

> come to the house of the Lord,' said Pastor Walter Hallam. 'We want to do something to have a positive effect on people's lives.'"[9]

The problematic focus and methods result in a problematic product, which includes uncommitted "Christians" and shallow community. By focusing on the individual's desires, the church has produced people that no longer take up the cross of Christ, but instead believe that Christianity is a way to better their lifestyle. A.W. Tozer explains the connection between faulty techniques and the unwanted product,

> All unannounced, and mostly undetected, there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. The new cross, if understood aright, is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure.[10]

By implementing some of the world's techniques, the church has produced many worldly church attendees that do not desire to unselfishly invest time in Christian community. Around the middle of the fifth century, the Church Fathers put into the Apostles Creed: "I believe in the communion of saints."[11] However, this communion of the believers shows itself much earlier. Luke describes the practices of the unselfish early church,

> Now all the believers were together and had everything in common. So they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. And every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with gladness

---

[9] 11 News Houston Texas, *Cruiser for Christ: Galveston area church gives away car, motorcycle*, (2004), Retrieved February 24, 2007 from http://www.khou.com/news/local/stories/khou040101_ds_ChurchGiveaway.fd92e569.html, 1.

[10] A.W. Tozer, *Gems from Tozer* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1969), 41.

[11] A.W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1966), 73.

> and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

Unfortunately, the contemporary pastor is also a product of this shallow community that does not foster Christian growth. The average American pastor is not part of true Christian community and has not been discipled. A Fuller Institute of Church Growth survey of pastors shows that seventy percent of pastors do not have a close friend.[12] If they do not possess a close friend, then it is certain that they have not been and are not being discipled.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains that discipleship is simply following Christ.[13] Jesus intends this life to take place in a community of believers. The pastor's lack of time spent in Bible study, prayer, and personal evangelism is evidence of poor discipleship. The average pastor invests less time in prayer and Bible reading than did many of his predecessors. Bill Hull explains the dilemma well,

> It is painfully obvious that we have overlooked the single most important element for fulfilling the Great Commission. It seems we have been so busy trying to reach the world that there has been no time to focus on being like Jesus. So we haven't reached the world, and we aren't very much like Jesus.[14]

Chapter three ends with a close look at the problematic invitation which causes the pastor's dilemma. The pastor publicly invites people to a life that he is not living and has not been trained to live. The great invitation is not a call only to heaven and away from hell, but is a mandate to a life of discipleship. The pastor can not effectively ask

---

[12] London, *Pastors at Risk*, 22.

[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 62.

[14] Bill Hull, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 82.

others to follow Christ when he is not on that journey of discipleship himself. He must live the life of discipleship and then invite others to join him in his journey.

As a younger pastor, Bill Hull struggled with this concept. He writes,

> Most leaders do not start out desiring to be the kind of person others want to follow. Many think, 'It's not about my inner life; it's about what I can do.' Most young leaders start out expecting people to follow them because of their vision and skills—at least that is how I started. But when my skills failed me and it all caught up to me, I felt helpless.
>
> Since my concept of leadership was vision, skills, and effective infrastructure, I underplayed the role of character. Character was nice to have, but it didn't get things done. I saw great people with sterling character who couldn't accomplish what I needed to do. The majority of leadership seminars and books are on competence, skills, and strategy. But there is a better way—to lead by influence.[15]

After revealing the problem in chapter three, the fourth chapter encourages optimism by providing a solution. First, the church must be defined accurately by its members, mission, and methods. The church's members are called disciples in the New Testament. This chapter will begin the discussion with a look at what it means to be a Christian.

Next, the disciple's mission of discipleship is rediscovered. Foremost the disciple is called to follow Christ and imitate His lifestyle. Then, he is to teach others to do likewise. The chapter continues by turning to Christ as the model. The Lord's dynamic prayer life throughout the gospels furnishes a proper perspective on the importance and the role of this discipline in the pastor's ministry. The pastor's mandate to be and become a man of prayer and scripture is not a separate issue, but foundational to his ministry. This much needed conversation concerning the pastor's devotional life ends by looking at pastoral models from previous generations.

---

[15] Hull, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship,* 128.

Additionally, chapter four looks at the method of carrying out discipleship in a Christian community. This biblical method is known as discipling, which involves believers entering into each other's lives and encouraging each other to be Christ-like. This practice is then examined in the life of believers in the New Testament and throughout Church history.

Finally, the chapter ends by proposing some effective ways of implementing the solution. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus appeals,

> All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.[16]

The Great Commission is a circle of going, baptizing, and discipling. A church cannot choose to skip discipleship and keep the circle intact. It is not an option to only focus on going and baptizing, nor is it reasonable to think that discipleship can be carried out by pastors who have never been discipled. It is the church's responsibility and privilege to disciple the pastor. Therefore, chapter four ends with a strategy for discipling current and future pastors in the twenty first century.

This dissertation concludes in chapter five with summary and final thoughts. There is a huge danger ahead if the pastor does not once again begin living the Great Commission. Millions of souls are at stake. Ephesus paid a high price for leaving their priority love. Focusing on their works, they forgot that their relationship with Christ must be first. Our European counterparts likewise traveled to the same disaster America now faces by producing disingenuous disciples. Bonhoeffer warns, "Discipleship

---

[16] All scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

without Jesus Christ is a way of our own choosing. It may be the ideal way. It may even lead to martyrdom, but it is devoid of all promises. Jesus will certainly reject it."[17]

The American church can be saved from spiritual ruin. She does not need to follow the same path to destruction, but change must be made quickly. The hour is certainly late and urgency is in the air. Nevertheless, by teaching and training the pastor that the public invitation is not just a call to heaven, but a call to live the Great Commission—a call to discipleship, the church will experience renewal, baptisms will increase and God's name will be honored.

[17] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 64.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY RESPONSES

Ten questions were emailed to approximately one thousand and four hundred pastors from four different groups. These groups include pastors from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV), the Liberty Baptist Fellowship (LBF) associated with Liberty University, and Doctor of Ministry students from Liberty Theological Seminary.

These pastors received the following email in January 2007:

> Dear Pastor, hi. My name is Rick Foster. I am a pastor in Virginia and am currently working on a Doctor of Ministry writing project for Liberty Seminary. It is my hope that this work will help current and future pastors. My topic is the public invitation. I would like to request your help. Below you will find a brief survey of 10 questions that should take less than five minutes of your time. Many of the questions only require a yes or no answer. Please, understand that your name and/or church will be kept confidential. You do not need to include your name with the survey. To complete the survey, please hit the reply button and type your answers in the body of the email. Then hit the send button. Thanks in advance for your time.
>
> Rick Foster

One hundred and fifty pastors returned the survey (less than eleven percent). The responses were returned by forty eight pastors from the SBC, forty eight from the LBF, thirty four from the Doctor of Ministry students, and twenty from the SBCV. Since there

was not a noticeable difference from one group to another in most aspects, the results were combined. Any major differences are reported later.

A better response was expected, yet the response is understandable since the survey deals with some difficult and personal matters. One pastor may have summed up what many of the unresponsive pastors were thinking. He wrote, "This survey is making me sad!" Another pastor that did not respond by email spoke openly by phone, "This survey is very convicting!" Many others put short side notes to their answers saying that they desire to improve in their spiritual development.

The questions were not intended to bring undue guilt or harm to the many pastors who are attempting to serve the Lord. Many of them minister in difficult places. It is not easy to hold the office of pastor. However, before a solution to the problem that pastors face can be offered, the truth of the situation must be studied. It is natural and common to hide unpleasant truth from others. Nevertheless, a remedy is only likely when the difficult reality is brought to the light. The following is the responses to the ten questions:

THE TEN QUESTIONS

Question One

1. Do you know the last names of your five closest neighbors (yes or no)?

This question was asked to find out whether or not the pastor was interested in knowing a brief amount about his neighbors. In other words, is it part of the pastor's heart to know his neighbors? Knowing the last name does not mean that the pastor knows the individual well, but it does show whether or not the pastor has any

involvement in the lives of those living in close proximity to him. It, also, proves whether or not the pastor has begun a relationship that can later lead to an opportunity to share the gospel.

Some of the responders questioned the fairness of this first inquiry. They wanted to know why it was an all or nothing question. Surely there is a difference between people that know four out of five compared with the ones that do not know any of their neighbors. While this argument contains validity, the answers given show the groundwork for the invitational lifestyle of the pastor. A pastor who does not desire to invest enough time to know his five closest neighbors by last name lacks needed concern. These neighbors are not merely visitors in the neighborhood for a brief period, but people whom the pastor can see regularly and who over time the pastor can wield a great influence.

The expectation of knowing one's five closest neighbors is not a lofty goal. Subsequently, it is unnecessary to distinguish between the pastors who know three neighbors compared to the one that knows none. Witnessing on a night where the Church has scheduled visitation is quite another matter from witnessing out of the desire of the heart. It is more than fair to think that the pastor that shares Christ as a regular part of his lifestyle will know at least the last names of his five closest neighbors.

Fifty one percent of pastors know the last names of their five closest neighbors. Almost half do not. Some people remember names better than others. Moreover, some people claim that they are terrible with names. Nonetheless, this question is not about knowing trivia, but rather is a question that intends to determine whether or not a pastor

is in the process of developing a relationship with those around him. It is difficult to win someone for Christ when this very basic knowledge concerning a name is wanting.

Question Two

2. Do you know each neighbor's first name (yes or no)?

The second question is similar to the first, but involves a little more knowledge. The results were almost identical. Fifty percent of pastors know each neighbor's first name. Of course, this means that half do not know their neighbor on a first name basis. If the pastor ever decides to witness to his neighbor, then the neighbor may question the sincerity. He or she may understandably wonder, "If he does not care to know my name, why does he care about my soul?"

Question Three

3. Do you know whether or not they are saved (yes or no)?

Question three was put forth in order to examine the pastor's personal evangelism, but the results are surprising in one aspect. Sixty one percent testify to knowing whether or not their neighbors are saved. It should not surprise anyone that thirty nine percent do not know whether or not their neighbor is saved, when the results for questions one and two are taken into consideration. However, it is astonishing that many pastors who do not know their neighbor by first or last name think they know their neighbor's spiritual state. It is unlikely that an *unknown* neighbor will share his true spiritual condition with a pastor or anyone else. The reader is free to draw his own

conclusions from the results, but t appears to the writer that there is an inconsistency between what the pastor thinks he knows and what is actually true.

Question Four

4. How many of them have you personally shared the gospel with (provide number)?

The fourth question requires the pastor to move from his perceived knowledge of his neighbor's spiritual state to his measurable actions. The average pastor shared the good news of Jesus Christ with about two of his five neighbors. Over half of people living in close proximity to a pastor have not had a presentation of the gospel by him. Question four, more than any other, demonstrates that the average pastor is not evangelistic in lifestyle.

Question Five

5. Approximately how often do you share the gospel outside of the pulpit in any given month (please provide number)?

After asking the pastor about his personal evangelism to his neighbors, question five reviews his evangelism involving the whole community. Many pastors made it known that their responses were only estimates. Some said that it varies from month to month. The average pastor shared the gospel approximately seven and half times per month. The top five pastors communicated the gospel forty five, thirty five, thirty, and twenty five times per month. Four pastors did not witness with anyone in a given month. One pastor explained the gospel to one person a month.

SBCV pastors shared their faith eleven times per month, which represents three and half more attempts than their colleagues. Again this can be interpreted by the reader in various ways, but a little knowledge of the SBCV is helpful.[1] This state convention is only ten years old. A good percentage of its churches are new church plants. These works would quickly go out of existence if evangelism was not practiced, which may explain the reason for the higher numbers.

Most pastors did not reply with additional comments, but Pastor Lowell Howard wanted to make sure that I knew the connection between witnessing and seeing results. He writes,

> Rick, this may not be useful to your project, but, after earning my D. Min. and being in evangelism, I served as Assistant Pastor in Evangelism with Dr. Joel Gregory at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The reason that I mention this follows. The invitation time is impacted by the presentations made of the gospel. My job description was, 'make 70 soul winning presentations a week, win six people to the Lord each week, and bring two for baptism each week.' It was a grueling task and, to accomplish this, I went door to door to find people, went on the streets and talked with people, and made every appeal possible. I kept records of each encounter. I used the same presentation each time using a tract from the, then, Home Mission Board. For every 70 presentations there were 6 positive decisions (they would pray the sinner's prayer and I would leave them encouragements, the tract, and make an appointment to contact them about making this decision publicly at Travis Avenue Baptist. I had pastored for 27 years before coming to this task and found it daunting but doable. I completed the first few weeks (before I went back on the road) one short of the

---

1 The SBCV's website at http://www.sbcv.org explains, "Born in 1996, the SBCV's conception occurred in a 1993 meeting of about 600 theological conservatives from across Virginia who founded the SBCV fellowship. The Fellowship remained in its former State Convention as a force for positive change, but labored in vain for a return to the convention's conservative theological moorings. On October 1, 1996, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee recognized the SBCV as a fully cooperating, official state Baptist convention. Since that time, God has richly blessed the SBC of Virginia. Scores of churches have been planted, thousands of people have trusted in Jesus Christ, dozens of mission's trips in the U.S. and abroad have applied God's ministry globally, and laypersons of all ages and both genders have been equipped for His service. Our history is brief, but our heritage harks back to Virginia Baptist history and beyond - back to when the world's greatest leader said, "Go." Our Lord Jesus Christ's Great Commission is the mandate that motivates us to take a grateful glance back, and then turn a confident gaze into the future as He has ordained."

baptisms and upon further weeks of work did not do quiet as well in the numbers I was to produce.[2]

Question Six

6. In the past three years, how many people that you have led to the Lord have been baptized (please provide number)?

The sixth question is worded precisely to examine the pastor's personal witness and not his church's influence. Pastors serve in different size churches. It is not beneficial for this project to just look at the number of people that the pastor has baptized. It is possible that a man in a rural setting may be carrying out the Great Commission with greater success, but not seeing as many baptisms as the pastor in the urban setting. The Lord surely takes the place of ministry into consideration.

The average pastor surveyed had led to the Lord and baptized fourteen people during the last three year period. This represents between four and five converts per year. The top five pastors led to the Lord and baptized one hundred and fifty, one hundred and thirty seven, one hundred, forty six, and forty five individuals. Thirteen pastors did not baptize a single person that they had personally led to the Lord.

Question Seven

7. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you give a public invitation less frequently (yes or no)? If you do not usually give a public invitation, please indicate this below.

It was believed by this writer that many pastors would admit that they would like to give the public invitation less frequently. Twenty seven percent did want to do the

[2] Pastor Lowell Howard agreed to be quoted for this project.

invitation less frequently. One pastor responded, "Yes, I fear that the traditional 'Finney' invitation has caused many to believe they are saved but yet are not." Another states simply, "I do not give a public invitation." The overwhelming majority of seventy three percent are very committed to the public invitation for every service. Many inserted additional comments for this question. One pastor wondered, "What does the invitation have to with tradition?" Another wrote, "I may not know the heart of every person in the room, and I am not going to go without giving the opportunity for salvation." He added that one can call him a traditionalist, but his main focus is to see people get saved. Still another is more adamant, "If you don't invite people to respond, why preach?" A more lengthy explanation was given by another,

> I don't give a public invitation for the sake of tradition. I do it because our Lord often called people publicly. I also know that baptism is our public profession of faith, and would not be opposed to going without a public invitation if I was convinced that was the way the Lord wanted us to go. I also like the invitation to be a time for prayer and other commitments by believers.

A few pastors had a hard time just answering yes or no because they wanted to explain their techniques. The method seemed to be as important as the system to them. A Doctor of Ministry pastor that witnessed to all his neighbors clarified,

> Yes, however, based on the leadership of the Holy Spirit I sometimes do not give a 'come forward' invitation because every Sunday we offer spiritual counseling for those that have never given their life to Christ or who are struggling spiritually. Along with guest, people who would like to speak to a pastor are invited to our guest reception as people leave. We share this opportunity at the end of every service. The area is easily accessible on the way out of the auditorium. It has been a very productive method to not just pray and discuss with people but also to set a platform for follow-up. We do this after both AM services.

An SBCV pastor that witnessed to all his neighbors wanted to point out that the modern day invitation is much more than just a call to salvation. He wrote,

> No. I do not give invitations because I feel the pressure of tradition. I give invitations because I want to give people an opportunity to respond to the gospel when it is preached and believe that it is still an effective and useful tool for bringing in the harvest. Invitations are also useful to give people an opportunity to respond in other ways. Not everyone who responds during an invitation is coming for salvation. They are often responding to something that God is doing in their life and use the invitation time for dealing with spiritual problems.

While there is a wide view of opinion concerning several aspects of the altar call, the research showed that pastors have strong feelings about the practice. No question stirred more pastors to add comments than this one. Though a few pastors want to use it differently and still a small minority wants to do away with it, most are committed to the practice of inviting people to the front of the church at the end of a service to profess faith in Christ. At least among Baptists, it appears that the altar call is an important part of the service which will not be discontinued any time soon.

Question Eight

8. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you cut out the public invitation (yes or no)?

An overwhelming eighty nine percent of pastors answered no. Many added comments like, "Absolutely not," "Never," and "No—people need to hear the gospel—even church-goers." While some said that they would like to do things a little differently with the altar call, few pastors from this research group want to abandon the practice. Again this data surprised the writer in view of recent criticisms regarding the public invitation system.[3] It was assumed that many more pastors would be ready to dismiss the public invitation. This belief was proven inaccurate by the research.

---

[3] In his book, *The Invitation System*, Iain H. Murray sums up the thoughts of many that oppose the altar call. He writes on page 3, "Yet despite the publicity which has been given in recent years we think it

Question Nine

9. Approximately, how many minutes do you spend in prayer per week (give approximate amount)?

The last two questions relate to the pastor's devotional time with Christ. The questions were asked to find correlations between the pastor's personal relationship with Christ and his evangelism. One pastor wrote that he could not see any connection between the public invitation and the pastor's prayer life.

The average pastor devoted two hundred and sixteen minutes a week or thirty one minutes a day in prayer. The top two pastors invested fifteen hundred and eight hundred minutes a week. Three additional pastors spent six hundred minutes a week in the discipline. The pastors with the least amount of time put in spent twenty, thirty, thirty, forty five, and forty five minutes per week.

Question Ten

10. Not counting study preparation time, approximately how many minutes do you spend reading the scripture per week (give approximate amount)?

Pastors who invested great amounts of time in prayer, likewise, spent quality time in the scripture. There was not a single pastor that broke this pattern. Prayer time and time spent in the Bible go together. While other disciplines like fasting, solitude, and meditation are important, prayer and scripture reading are basic to Christian growth. Hence, the answers given by the pastor represent the amount of time he actually devotes

---

may be fairly questioned, whether even now it is clear just what is being required of those who come forward. Is the walk forward an outward declaration of an inner saving decision already made by the hearer in the seat, just an 'act of witness'? Why then are they told to 'come forward to receive Christ'? How is 'receiving Christ' related to coming forward? Is there any relation?"

to his relationship with Christ. No pastor responded that other disciplines should be included.

The average pastor surveyed spent one hundred and ninety minutes a week or twenty seven minutes per day in scripture reading. Three pastors spent eight hundred and forty minutes a week or two hours a day in his personal Bible time, while another pastor tallied six hundred minutes a week or approximately eighty six minutes a day. A fifth pastor used four hundred and eighty minutes a week or sixty eight minutes a day for scripture time. Two pastors confessed that they do not spend any time in the scripture other than for sermon preparation and three others spent a half an hour.

THE ADDITIONAL THREE QUESTIONS

After evaluating the ten questions above, the connection between the pastor's devotional life and his personal evangelism was unmistakably clear. Hence, this writer wanted to know if any additional reasons for the disparity existed. Why were some pastors falling short of Christian discipleship while others were doing well? In particular, the issue of whether or not the pastor himself had been discipled was of chief importance to the study. If there were no additional differences between the men that had baptized many compared to those that had baptized few, then the conclusion would follow that it does not matter whether a pastor is discipled or not. All that would matter would be his devotional life. The church's responsibility would be to simply encourage personal spiritual formation in the life of the pastor. However, if the pastor's evangelism is affected by whether or not someone entered his life and discipled him, then an additional solution would need to be proposed.

Seven pastors that had won to the Lord and baptized more than forty people were sent the following email:

> Hi. I want to thank you for answering my pastoral survey that was sent to you a few days ago. I have chosen you and six other pastors to respond to three simple follow up questions. I have chosen you because your results in evangelism were very above the norm. I believe that pastors could learn a lot from your evangelistic lifestyle. If you will answer the three questions below and send them back to me, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you in advance.
>
> Rick

Later this number was increased by nineteen and included all pastors that had led to the Lord and baptized more than twenty five people. Eleven pastors in this group returned the survey. The average pastor in this group had fifty baptisms.[4]

A similar email was sent to the fifty pastors that had led to the Lord and baptized the fewest amount of people in the same three year period. Most of these pastors had baptized less than six people. The email read,

> I would like to thank you for returning my survey a few days ago. You have helped me a great deal. I would like to ask for your help with three additional questions. I appreciate your time and thank you again in advance. Take care and the Lord bless.
>
> Rick Foster

Twenty surveys were returned by pastors with six or fewer. The average pastor in this group led to the Lord and baptized three and a half people. There were three that baptized six and three that baptized one or less.[5]

The three additional questions that both groups received are as follows:

---

[4] The pastors in this group had the following number of baptisms: 150, 143, 75, 46, 45, 41, 30, 30, 30, 25, and 25.

[5] The pastors in this group had the following number of baptism: 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, and 0.

Question One

1. Did you have a person that discipled you either formally or informally? This would have been a person that invested quality time in your spiritual development (yes or no).

Only forty five percent of the pastors who baptized fewer than six people testified to having been discipled. In contrast eighty two percent (nine out of eleven) from those who baptized twenty five and above have been discipled. To fully understand how important this number is to this project, the two pastors that had not been discipled need to be mentioned. One of them that baptized thirty wrote, "No. However, I did choose people that I tried to use as models." He also invests in a community of friends that know of his strengths and weaknesses. He is not a pastor trying to do ministry alone. He devotes six hundred minutes to prayer and three hundred and sixty minutes to scripture reading per week. The other pastor that did not have a mentor has a community of five friends that know him well. Hence, all eleven pastors are committed to Christian relationships that keep them accountable and challenge them to grow.

A pastor that saw one hundred and forty three baptisms and spends seven hundred minutes a week in prayer and three hundred minutes in scripture emailed, "Yes! Several." Then he goes on to passionately list these relationships. He concluded, "The men that I admire most are men of prayer and deep commitment and understanding to who God is and what was done for them at the cross. I must stress, that I was not a student of wealth or privilege, nor did I have known relatives or even the best grades. I have no idea why these men poured into my life and shaped me as they did!"

Question Two

2. Do you have a person that you are still accountable to that you consider a spiritual mentor?

The results for question two are similar to question one. Forty five percent of pastors from the six and lower group are still accountable to a personal mentor, while seventy three percent of the above twenty five group possess a mentor. Many of the men in the higher group that did not have someone they called a mentor have close friends that hold them accountable.

The pastor that baptized one hundred and fifty individuals relayed, "Yes 6-10 of them. I wanted to surround myself with men who could mentor/train me in the Christian walk." Another from this group testified, "Absolutely." This man had seen seventy five saved and spends about an hour a day in prayer and four hours a day in personal Bible time.

The comments from the men in the six and fewer group were less optimistic. A pastor that baptized four people stated, "No, but I am looking for one." Another pastor from the low group wrote, "No. I am in some pastoral relationships that we use to share problems and concerns, but I am not really accountable to them." This pastor spent twenty minutes a day in prayer and twenty three minutes in the scripture. Another pastor showed the dilemma, "My spiritual mentor went home to be with the Lord last year and I currently have no spiritual mentor. They are really hard to come by. Pray for me."

Question Three

3. How many close friends do you have in the ministry? I know that this is somewhat subjective, but I mean close friends that really know of your weaknesses and strengths—men that you spend quality time with.

The pastors in the above twenty five grouping had almost twice as many people that they considered close friends. However, some of the responses from the pastors in the less than six group caused the writer to question whether or not these pastors have a similar definition of close friend. One responded, "One. Maybe one. It's a stretch, but I'd say one." It is unknown what these men consider to be a close friend and if these relationships constitute true Christian community.

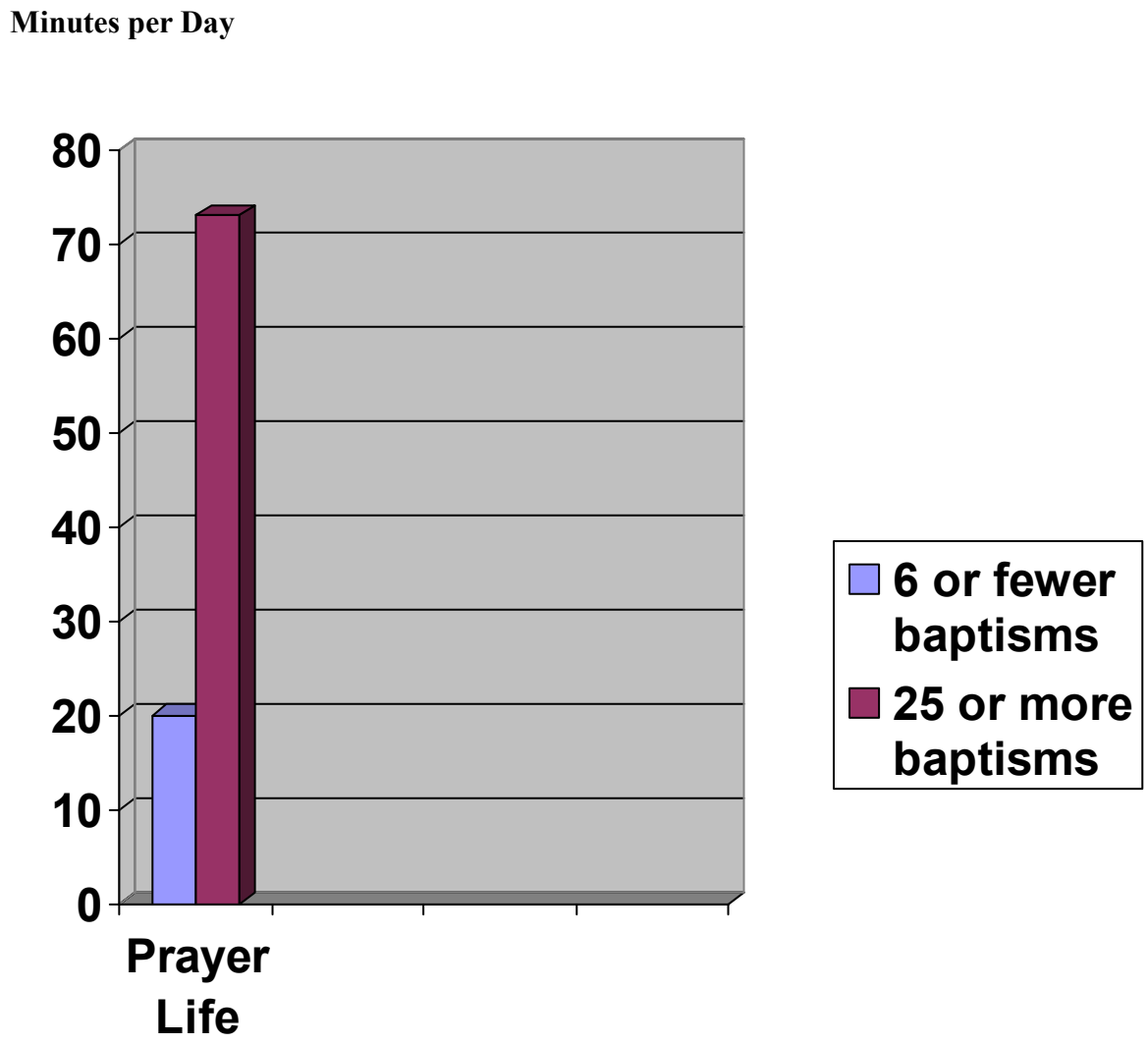
THE CORRELATIONS

The value of the survey is seen when one compares the pastor's devotional activities of prayer, scripture reading, and evangelism with his involvement in a Christian community. These Christian relationships include that of disciple to mentor and friend to friend.

Prayer and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism

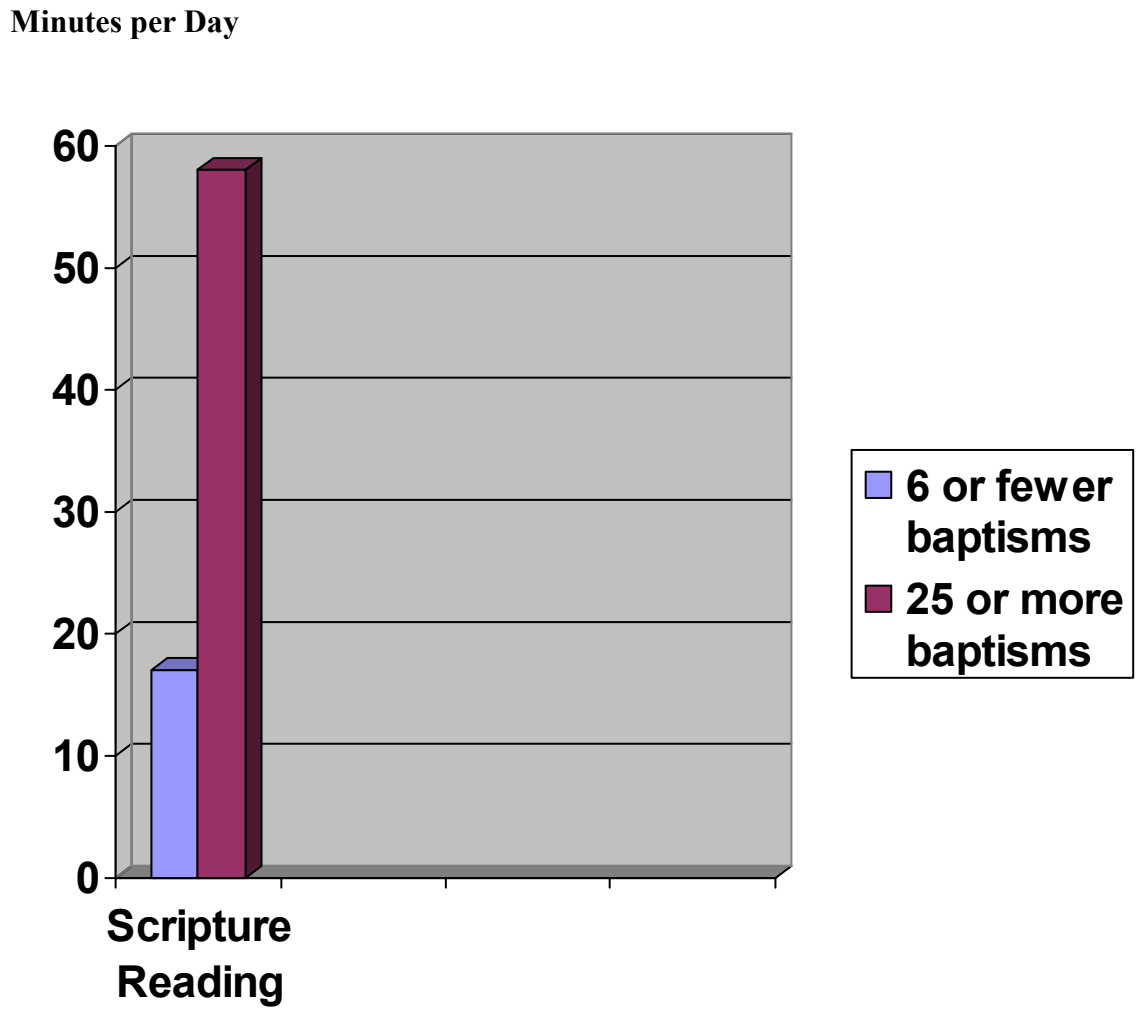
Pastors that invested the most time in prayer see more success in personal evangelism. The men that make up the twenty five or more baptisms group average seventy three minutes a day in prayer compared to only twenty minutes for the pastors in

the less than six group. The following graph shows the difference that prayer makes in the life of a pastor as it relates to evangelism:



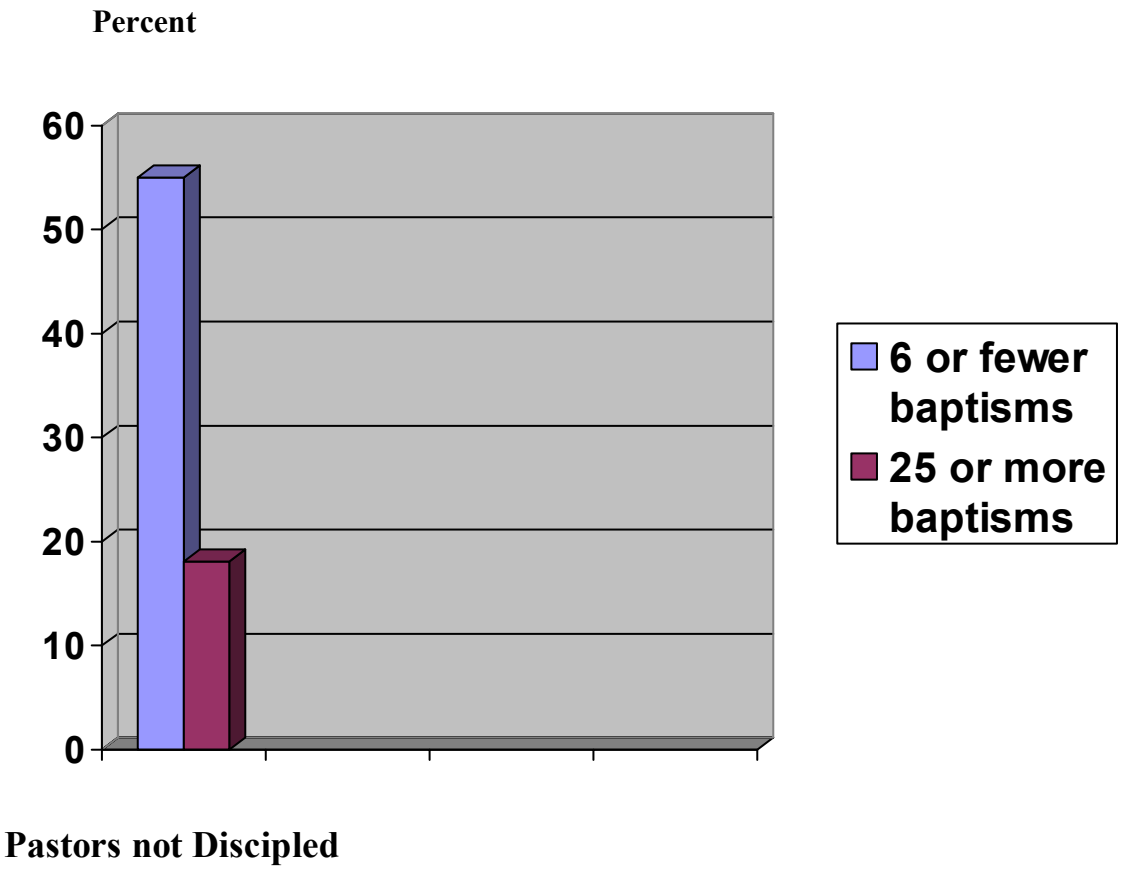
Scripture Reading and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism

Scripture reading also makes a vast difference in the personal evangelism of the pastor. The pastors who devoted the most time to reading the scripture for personal devotion won to the Lord and baptized many more people. The graph below illustrates this important factor:

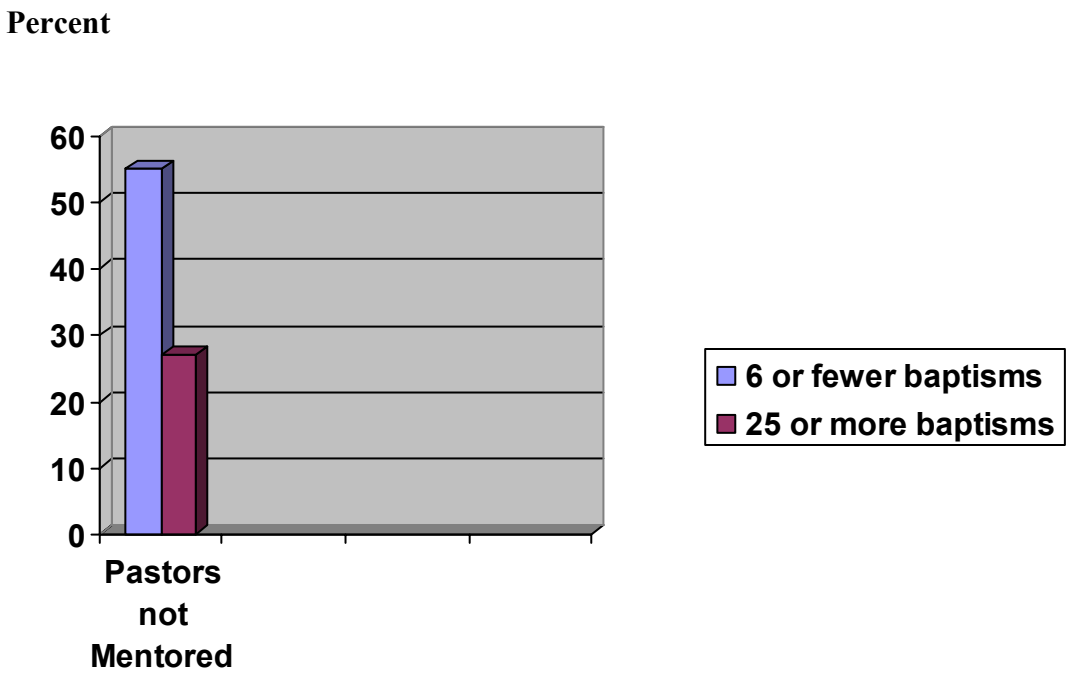


Discipleship and the Pastor's Personal Evangelism

Whether or not the pastor was discipled also influences his personal evangelism. Those who had won the most people to the Lord were men that been discipled. Eighty two percent of pastors from the twenty five and above group testified to having been in a disciple/mentor relationship in the past. Only forty five percent from the six and fewer group said the same thing. This huge disparity is shown below:



Furthermore, there exists a noticeable difference between pastors that are currently being mentored and those that have no such accountability relationship. The following graph demonstrates this factor:



OTHER STUDIES

While statistics and data concerning the pastor's prayer life, time spent in scripture reading, and spiritual relationships are not numerous, the following research conducted by others is similar to that found by this writer.

The Pastor's Prayer Life and Scripture Reading

A recent study conducted for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention by Ellison Research of Phoenix found that very few protestant

ministers are satisfied with their personal prayer lives.[6] Only sixteen percent are very satisfied and thirty seven percent are either somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.[7] Eight hundred and sixty ministers were asked how long they spend in prayer each day. The median amount was thirty minutes, while the mean was thirty nine minutes.[8] Southern Baptist ministers were very similar to the average in most every area.[9] Unfortunately, not much verifiable research has been conducted concerning the pastor's scripture reading practices.

The Pastor's Discipleship

While little research exists that answers what percentage of pastors have been discipled, H.B. London provides help by giving information from a 1991 survey of pastors at Fuller Institute of Church Growth. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the report shows that seventy percent of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend.[10] If the pastor does not have someone that he considers a close friend, then it is certain that he does not have a disciple mentor relationship. Hence, most of America's pastors probably have not been discipled.

---

[6] Baptist Press News, *Most pastors unsatisfied with their personal prayer lives* (2005), Retrieved February 22, 2007 from http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=20918, 1.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Risk* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1993), 25.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM

Before the writer offers a solution to the downward trend in baptisms, the dilemma must be thoroughly examined. Unfortunately, any attempt to help resolve a problem automatically brings controversy. A successful change in action must of necessity spring from a different point of view. It is not the plan of this writer to disregard the impact of certain Christian leaders, nor is it his desire to cause division in the body of Christ. He takes seriously the instruction from scripture "If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18). Though the next several pages include an examination of the popular teachings of some contemporary authors, their person is not under review. With this spirit, the chapter assesses the problematic focus upon baptisms, some troubling methods that lead to unwanted results, and the application for the pastor who is likewise a product of his time period.

THE PROBLEMATIC FOCUS

One cannot overstate the seriousness of the decline in baptisms. When one follows the Lord in believer's Baptism, he publicly testifies to his faith in Christ. The

ordinance does not save an individual, but it does represent his new life. Since no examples exist in the New Testament of a Christian who possesses the ability to be baptized and yet refuses, there is no reason to believe that there are scores of *un-baptized* converts in America. The authors of scripture always connect baptism closely to salvation. After Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, all three thousand new believers were baptized (Acts 2:41). It is not fathomable that a true convert would disobey Christ by not following Him in baptism. A decline in this ordinance should cause the church to examine the root causes with the hope of reversing the current trend. Nonetheless, the main focus of the church should not be on baptisms or any other fruit of ministry.

A spiritually healthy Christian focuses upon his relationship with Christ as the foundation of life. As a result of this fellowship with his creator, the believer automatically bears fruit. The Christian life is not properly lived by trying to focus primarily upon the end results. Christ commands His followers to carry out the Great Commission, but He does not teach that this commission is the pursuit of life. Ministry should never overshadow a person's relationship with God. An individual's God appointed service needs to flow from his fellowship with God. Danger occurs when a person, church, or denomination conversely tries to make the fellowship with God flow from the ministry.

Steve Meeks, the author of *The Last Great Revival*, writes about the importance of a single focus upon God. He correctly reasons that the believer who desires to walk in intimate companionship with God must stop giving his heart to less important matters.[1]

---

[1] Steve Meeks, *Relational Christianity* (Houston: Calvary Publications, 1991), 129.

Meeks states that this concept of not centering one's main attention on lesser things is obvious when it comes to focusing on sin, money, or possessions, but is not so obvious when the focal point relates to ministry, church growth, self-improvement, or meeting other people's needs."[2] He adds, "These are all good things, but they must not be our focus. If these things are to be blessings and not curses, we must come to see them as by-products of our relationship with him."[3]

Earlier in his writing, Meeks teaches how easy one mistakenly substitutes ministry success for a close relationship with Christ. He reveals his own failures, "For many years the focus of my ministry was to be a success for God. Of course, success was measured by the number of people who came to church."[4] This false measurement of success brings unhealthy emotional patterns to his life. He clarifies further, "When things were going well I felt good about my relationship with God. When things weren't going well my relationship with God was also on the rocks."[5] God teaches him a valuable lesson that many of today's pastors need to apply to themselves. He learns that his personal relationship with Christ depends upon obedience and love, not on perceived success or lack of it.[6]

From these setbacks, Pastor Meeks becomes an example to others about the correct connection between ministry results and devotion to Christ. He now testifies that

---

[2] Meeks, *Relational Christianity*, 130.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

his relationship with God is based upon his love for God.[7] Furthermore, this love results in obedience, which always yields fruit.[8] This correct order of priorities brings peace and freedom to serve Christ out of liberty and not from legalism.[9] As one focuses upon his relationship with the Lord, he may then leave the results to God.

The Lord's foundation for His life and ministry also revolves around an intimate relationship with His Father. On one occurrence the Pharisees question the ministry of the Messiah. Jesus then explains, "I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the One who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him—these things I tell the world" (John 8:26). The religious leaders do not understand that Christ is speaking of His heavenly Father. To explain this concept, Jesus continues, "But just as the Father taught Me, I say these things. The One who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, because I always do what pleases Him" (John 8:29).

The goal of Jesus' ministry involves doing only those things which please His Father. He learns the will of God by taking time for communion with God. Hence, the relationship that Christ has with His Father forms the deep foundation to His earthly ministry. This relationship provides strength and endurance for His vocation. Jesus' main focus was upon the Father and the fruit then is produced from this specific relationship. Christ never makes the mistake of seeking fruit as a means of growing in His relationship with the Father, nor does He find His identity in works alone.

Jesus teaches His disciples to follow this same pattern by declaring: "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much

---

[7] Meeks, *Relational Christianity*, 12.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

fruit, because you can do nothing without Me" (John 15:5). The abiding in Christ provides the key element to the disciple's fruit bearing ministry. Christ does not encourage them to bear fruit in order to remain in the Vine, but exhorts them to first concentrate on a close union with Him. When the disciples acquire a vibrant fellowship with the Lord, then fruit comes automatically. The person who abides in Christ receives His Spirit of love toward sinners, which causes a deep concern for their eternal good. [10] The same heart that takes Christ to Calvary stirs the believer to devote his life to wining souls for the kingdom.[11]

The most important commandment is another way Christ shows this healthy concept of placing God as the priority. When a scribe asks the Lord which commandment is first in importance, Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). The scribe agrees by saying that God is most important and that this truth is more valuable than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. Then, Jesus emphasizes that this scribe is not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:32-34). The scribe further acknowledges the correlation between the first commandment and a person's love for his neighbor (Mark 12:31). It is impossible for an individual to only obey one of these commandments, because the second one is the fruit of the first. A person, who loves God with all his being, automatically acts kindly to his fellow man.

Deuteronomy also connects this great commandment with fruit by promising, "The Lord your God will make you prosper abundantly in all the work of your hands with

---

[10] Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1979), 159.

[11] Ibid.

children, the offspring of your livestock, and your soil's produce" (Deuteronomy 30:9). When a person or nation obeys the greatest commandment, God gladly rewards the act of obedience with fruit. Though He owes no man anything, God establishes this process of sowing and reaping.

The church at Ephesus does not learn from this great example. Though Paul prays that this church might be filled with the fullness of God, later these believers leave their first love.[12] Many popular commentators see this *first love* as first in time.[13] Notwithstanding, it is likely that the Lord again means first in importance. The church's great need at Ephesus is not to return to an earlier love, but to repent by placing Christ as the priority instead of concentrating on dead works. The Ephesians put the works of the ministry ahead of the main work of keeping Christ as the center piece. This mistake leads to the doom of the congregation.

An additional danger exists when one tries to make the results of ministry the chief end. No person possesses the capability to examine fruit perfectly. There is an undeniable pattern in scripture of God's people looking unsuccessful in the eyes of the world, but eventually being found true and just. For many years, Noah appears unsuccessful. His account accumulates little or no fruit. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and many others experience the same difficulty. The Apostle Paul lacks accolades from society. Even the Lord Himself looks like an utter failure to most on the day that gains victory for the world. The crowds do not remain faithful--only a small hand full of followers gathers around to see Him crucified. If one judges Christ's fruit immediately

---

[12] Ephesians 3:19, Revelation 2:4

[13] J. Vernon McGee, *Revelation Volume I* (Pasadena: Thru the Bible Books, 1979), 67.

after His death, then one makes a huge miscalculation. Numbers do, at times, give the pastor a worthwhile measuring stick, but one must take caution realizing the inability to fully understand the work and mind of God.

The church must not overemphasize baptisms or any other ministry results. It must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and trust the Father that He will add the fruit in His own timing (Matthew 6:33). Some people still believe that the way to increase baptisms is by focusing on them, instead of concentrating on the primary objective of knowing and loving Christ. As a result of trying to correct the situation by only focusing on the problem, these well meaning leaders err in using problematic methods to accomplish the church's Great Commission. While God uses proper methods to fulfill His mission, unhealthy techniques only create more troubles.

THE PROBLEMATIC METHODS

Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul emphasizes that while he experiences freedom in Christ, he becomes a slave to all in order to further the gospel (I Corinthians 9:19). He explains:

> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. To those who are outside the law, like one outside the law—not being outside God's law, but under the law of Christ—to win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, that I may become a partner in its benefits" (I Corinthians 9:20-23).

Many people take the Apostle Paul's teaching to indicate that he uses any method in order to reach the lost. This implies that God permits and encourages any approach that leads to the desired goal. However, Paul is not speaking of using a method in order

to bring people to Christ. The Apostle clearly explains his willingness to surrender his rights in order for the gospel to advance.[14] He shows the necessity of putting the need of another person's salvation above the unnecessary want of the one who preaches the gospel. Matthew Henry comments, "The Apostle takes occasion from what he had before discoursed to mention some other instances of his self-denial and parting with his liberty for the benefit of others."[15]

A little earlier in his dialogue with the confused Corinthians, Paul explains, "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should earn their living by the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:14). Paul decides to give up this right in order for the gospel to advance, "But I have used none of these rights and I have not written this to make it happen that way for me" (I Corinthians 9:15). He further testifies that he does this in order to make himself a slave to all people in order to win them. Paul simply acknowledges his willingness to lay aside his liberty so others might experience the freedom of coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul lives his teaching. He instructs the church at Rome not to judge others by what they eat or drink (Romans 14:2, 3); nor should any Christian criticize others for observing certain days (Romans 14:5, 6). He exhorts: "Now we that are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not to please ourselves. Each one of us must please his neighbor for his good, in order to build him up" (Romans 15:1, 2). Paul deepens his explanation by giving a reason: "For even the Messiah did not

---

[14] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary Volume VI* (Mclean: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 551.

[15] Ibid.

please Himself. On the contrary, as it is written, the insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me" (Romans 15:3).

Paul follows this same principle in order not to offend the Jewish brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Timothy's circumcision brings him no additional merit, but Paul desires to remove any stumbling block with the Jews. For the sake of the gospel, Timothy follows the Jewish custom; he becomes like a Jew to win the Jews. This sacrifice seems to benefit those trapped by the law for "the churches were strengthened in the faith and were increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). Again Paul follows this model concerning the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. He passionately testifies, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I won't cause my brother to fall" (I Corinthians 8:13).

While Paul becomes all things to all people in the sense of sacrificing for the gospel of his Lord, he does not use crafty techniques in order to promote Christ. He shares: "Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, *by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit"* (Ephesians 4:14).[16] Regrettably, some church leaders knowingly or not use unscriptural techniques in hopes of gaining success. In particular there exist an unbiblical focus on self-esteem, felt needs, and fun and games. Additionally, the good news of Christ is over simplified by many preachers to the point that key elements are missing from many presentations.

[16] This writer's emphasis added.

Self-Esteem

Webster's Dictionary defines self-esteem as: "belief in oneself; self-respect or undue pride in oneself"[17] Macquarie Dictionary explains: "a favourable opinion of oneself."[18] A Christian counselor adds his revealing definition:

> What do you think when you look in a mirror? How do you feel about the person you see? Are you satisfied with yourself? If you are, you have a healthy self-image . . . Our self-image is the 'map' that we consult about our self. It is the mental picture of our self-identity. It is the 'I am' feeling of a person. We either feel good about or we dislike or even hate and despise ourselves.[19]

With all of the discussion and promotion regarding self esteem, it almost seems out of place and strange to question: "Is self-esteem a biblical concept?" Many leaders of the church and their congregations may quickly reply "yes!" Nevertheless, scripture clearly contradicts this popular and dangerous teaching. Before examining the words of one of the church's leading proponents of self-esteem and comparing those words to scripture, A.W. Tozer's comment provides a biblical perspective:

> The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ and he is not willing either to praise or deprecate such a man.[20]

Tozer's scriptural voice is being replaced by those who boldly teach that self-esteem promotion should be used to build God's church. Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral in California is a leading teacher of the importance of self esteem in the church. He says, "Self-esteem then, or 'pride in being a human being,' is the single greatest need

---

[17] *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language,* Unabridged (New York: Harper Collins World, 1977), 1646.

[18] A. Belridge, J. R. L. Bernard, D. Blair, S. Butler, P. Peters & C. Yallop (Eds.), *The Macquarie Dictionary,* 3rd ed. (Australia: The Macquarie Library, 1997), 1927.

[19] H. Norman Wright, *Improving Your Self Image* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1977), 7.

[20] A.W. Tozer, Man: *The Dwelling Place of God* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1966), 72.

facing the human race today."[21] He adds, "Do not fear pride: the easiest job God has is to humble us. God's almost impossible task is to keep us believing every hour of every day how great we are as his sons and daughters on planet earth."[22]

Dr. Schuller's conviction concerning self-esteem affects the way he practices and teaches ministry. According to Schuller, the only way to reach the lost today is by a self-esteem reformation.[23] Man, in Schuller's thinking, is basically good. He is fearful, but not bad.[24] Schuller explains what he thinks man really wants, "I strongly suggest that self-love is the ultimate will of man that what you really want more than anything else in the world is the awareness that you are a worthy person."[25] Moreover, Schuller teaches, the modern preacher must appeal to the individual's self-esteem. God's man must show each person how important he is as God's child. If the preacher meets this need, the possibilities become great in Schuller's perspective. He even sees self-esteem as the key to a different and more beneficial presentation of the gospel, "If the gospel of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed as a theology of self-esteem, imagine the health this could generate in society!"[26]

Salvation and its key related components are similarly defined by using self-esteem in Schuller's theology: "To be born again means that we must be changed from a

---

[21] Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 12.

[22] Ibid., 57.

[23] Ibid., 64.

[24] Ibid., 67.

[25] Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Love: The Dynamic Force of Success* (New York: Hawthorn Books Incorporation, 1969), 21.

[26] Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, 47.

negative to a positive self-image--from inferiority to self-esteem, from fear to love, from doubt to trust."[27] Sin also loses its historic place in Schuller's system:

> What do I mean by sin? Answer: Any human condition or act that robs God of glory by stripping one of his children of their right to divine dignity. ... I can offer still another answer: `Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self-esteem.'[28]

Schuller thinks, "The classical error of historical Christianity is that we have never started with the value of the person. Rather, we have started from the `unworthiness of the sinner...."[29] He adds a unique description of divine punishment by using his favorite topic of self-esteem,

> And what is `hell'? It is the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God -- the ultimate and unfailing source of our soul's sense of self-respect. `My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' was Christ's encounter with hell. In that `hellish' death our Lord experienced the ultimate horror -- humiliation, shame, and loss of pride as a human being. A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem. Can you imagine any condition more tragic than to live life and eternity in shame?"[30]

Dr. Schuller envisions a reformation in the church based upon self-esteem. It may be debated whether or not he is the chief cause for it, but it is impossible to deny that self-esteem teaching is a huge part of modern evangelicalism. Sometimes the teaching is subtle and at other times very blunt. Nevertheless true Christian ministry always exhibits the self-denying character of the cross.[31] If it does not, then it is only ministry in letter,

---

[27] Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, 68.

[28] Ibid., 14.

[29] Ibid, 162.

[30] Ibid., 14, 15.

[31] Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 127.

not in spirit.[32] The scripture always contradicts the promotion of self and warns of a day when men will be lovers of self and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (II Timothy 3:2-4).

According to Jesus, the Christian's life quest involves self-denial, not self-esteem. These two concepts could not be more opposite. Jesus clarifies, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me (Luke 9:23). He adds, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but who ever loses his life because of Me will save it" (Luke 9:24). The difference in these two views is not a merely a trivial matter; for all who promote self lose their life. The stakes could not be higher!

Later, in the same gospel of Luke, Jesus uses stronger words that contradict popular self-esteem teaching. He boldly proclaims using hyperbole, "If any one comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—*yes, and even his own life*—he cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26).[33] Some may debate the full meaning of this text, but whether or not Jesus is promoting self-esteem is clear. Unmistakably, the Lord sees a connection between self-denial and true discipleship. One never gains approval from his God by improving his self-esteem, but by realizing the worth of Jesus Christ.

When a Centurion confesses to Jesus, "I am not worthy to have You come under my roof, But only say the word, and my servant will be cured" (Matthew 8:8), the Lord does not rebuke his lack of self-esteem. He does not encourage him to look deep within and start loving himself. To the contrary, he states, "I assure you: I have not found

---

[32] Bridges, *The Christian Ministry,* 127.

[33] This writer's emphasis added.

anyone in Israel with so great a faith" (Matthew 8:10). Jesus also instructs his disciples about the importance of self-denial by giving them a parable about a servant. He concludes the teaching with an important note, "In the same way, when you have done all that you were commanded, you should say, 'We are good-for-nothing slaves; we've only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10).

Contrary to popular teaching, the way to true joy is not through self-esteem, but through humility and self-denial. John Piper explains,

> Our fatal error is believing that wanting to be happy means wanting to be made much of. It feels so good to be affirmed. But the good feeling is finally rooted in the worth of self, not the worth of God. This path to happiness is an illusion. And there are clues. There are clues in every human heart even before conversion to Christ. One of those clues is that no one goes to the Grand Canyon or to the Alps to increase his self-esteem. That is not what happens in front of massive deeps and majestic heights. But we do go there, and we go for joy. How can that be, if being made much of is the center of our health and happiness? The answer is that it is not the center. In wonderful moments of illumination there is a witness in our hearts; soul-health and great happiness come not from beholding a great self but a great splendor.[34]

Seekers of true happiness, therefore, must ask: "How does one grow closer to God?" Isaiah prophesies, "For the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy says this: 'I live in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the oppressed" (Isaiah 57:15). God dwells in two places—the high and lofty place and with the lowly in spirit. To walk humbly with God is joy in the Holy Spirit. Isaiah learns this lesson early in his ministry (Isaiah 6). As soon as he sees God's glory and majesty, he feels lowly and undone. Nonetheless, his self realization of lowliness does not cause decline, but personal revival. The path to his closer walk with God comes through self-denial, not

---

[34] John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Cross Way Books, 2005), 13.

self-esteem. Hence, self-esteem teaching only moves the organized church further from God and makes revival difficult.

Felt Needs

Another dangerous and often underestimated modern technique entails an overemphasis on the individual's felt needs. This teaching has many similarities to self-esteem promotion, but it is also unique in itself. It goes a step further by seeking to provide the self with what it wants or needs. Perhaps, the most popular and influential teacher of this strategy is Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California. Warren explains his thinking in his highly regarded book *The Purpose Driven Church*. He writes about his philosophy of ministry in a chapter titled *How Jesus Attracted Crowds:*

> People crowded around Jesus because he met their needs—physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, and financial. He did not judge some needs as being 'more legitimate' than others and he certainly did not make people feel guilty for their needs. He treated each person with dignity and respect.
>
> Jesus often met a felt need in order to establish a beachhead for evangelism in a person's life. I pointed out earlier that Jesus frequently asked people, 'what do you want me to do for you?' God uses all kinds of human needs to get people's attention. Who are we to judge whether a person's interest in Christ is for the right reason or the wrong reason? It doesn't matter why people initially come to Jesus what matters is that they come. He can work on their motives, values, and priorities once they enter his presence.
>
> I doubt that any of us had absolutely unselfish, unmixed motivations when we asked Christ to save us. We came when we sensed a need that he could meet. We should not expect unbelievers to have Christ like motives and values.
>
> It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart. That key to each person's heart is unique so it is sometimes difficult to discover. It may take some time to identify it. But the

> most likely place to start is with the person's felt needs. As I pointed out earlier, this was the approach Jesus used.[35]

Pastor Warren certainly teaches correctly that Jesus meets people's needs. Warren is no doubt right in believing that Christians should be involved in providing for the less fortunate. Jesus explains the importance of sharing with the needy in his explanation of the coming judgment (Matthew 25:35-40). He shows his disciples that the way to give food to Him is by supplying food to the hungry. The way to clothe Him is by giving clothes to the one in need. By giving a thirsty man a glass of water, the believer gives to Christ. By visiting the prisoner, Jesus is visited. Jesus reminds the listener: "'I assure you; whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." (Matthew 25: 40).

While Jesus encourages the Christian to supply needs for others, some additional questions must be explored. Are believers to meet the needs of others as a technique to win them to Christ or do the acts of kindness spring from a compassionate Christ-like heart? In other words, did Jesus provide an example that teaches and encourages the Christian to use meeting felt needs as a method of reaching the lost? Are Warren and others correct in saying, "Jesus often met a felt need in order to establish a beachhead for evangelism in a person's life."[36] Since Pastor Warren does not supply any examples for evaluation, it is impossible to know the event to which he is referring in the life of Christ. However, the scripture furnishes plenty of examples showing how Christ witnesses to the lost.

---

[35] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 219.

[36] Ibid.

The Lord Jesus always witnesses to the lost by appealing to one basic need—man's need for reconciliation with God. This need includes forgiveness of sins and a relationship with Christ. Warren indicates that there is a unique key to each person's heart. It is his deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ by purely finding the key to the person's heart.[37] Christ looks at man much differently because He already knows the key to man's heart. He understands well that the deceptive heart away from God is corrupt and in need of a new birth. Jesus comprehends that no person ever comes to Him without the Father's drawing power being present, not through the influence of meeting a felt need (John 6:44). Christ, therefore, always witnesses to this one fundamental necessity.

Since the gospel is good news, it automatically meets many of man's basic needs. People in isolation find community with fellow believers and intimacy with Christ. Individuals who lack purpose now find a reason to live in God's great plan. Some, who waste finances on sin, prosper by using biblical principles. Anxious people find a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Addicts discover freedom and the helpless find a blessed hope. However, these results of salvation are not used as allurements to sweeten the appearance of salvation. The issue of salvation is not loneliness, happiness, or purpose, but Jesus Christ Himself. Salvation is not merely a utilitarian plan, but a person—it is an attachment to the crucified Savior. On a few occasions a felt need is identifiable, but it is never the primary issue, nor is it a method to obtain the goal. Those who come for reasons other than Christ often return to their old life after they realize that Christianity is not all about them. At times the gracious Lord

---

[37] Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 219.

works in spite of less than good methods, but this is no reason to forsake the ideal. Christ speaks to the person's urgent need of the new birth.

In the evening hours, Jesus meets an inquisitive Pharisee named Nicodemus. Already knowing his most important need, Christ states early in the dialogue, "I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nowhere does the reader hear Jesus make an appeal to Nicodemus on the grounds of a felt need other than this one most basic need of reconciliation with God. Nicodemus' need is not unique to himself—it is the same urgent need that all mankind possesses.

Later Jesus encounters a desperate and sinful Samaritan woman. Again, the appeal relates to the one basic need of salvation. The first words of the conversation are: "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would ask Him, and He would give you living water" (John 4:10). Jesus does use the physical water to illustrate the one basic need of reconciliation with God, but He is not meeting her physical need in order to win her to Himself. Jesus starts with the spiritual need and ends with the same basic need.

When the Rich Young Ruler inquires about eternal life, Jesus does not attempt to find the key to his heart in order to meet his distinctive felt need; nor does he act like the motive of the young man's heart is not applicable (Mark 10:17). The Lord takes a totally different approach than the modern preacher. Realizing that the rich ruler's heart is deceitful, Christ challenges his desire for eternal life and proves that this man cares more about his own felt needs then the one basic need of reconciliation with God. The man goes away sorrowful.

While dying, Christ hangs between two thieves. Initially both of them mock Him. Jesus does not try to win these men by looking at their felt needs. The one and only issue is salvation. After the repentant thief asks for the Lord to remember Him, Jesus promises, "I assure you: today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The issue was the one fundamental need of a relationship with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, in the gospel accounts, Jesus never attempts to draw a crowd, for the sake of a crowd, as Warren indicates. People are drawn to Christ because he met their needs, but Jesus did not encourage them to follow because of this impure motive. He shows this by stating,

> I assure you: You are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Don't work for the food that perishes but for the food that last for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him (John 6:26, 27).

Later with the same large group Jesus does not appeal to their felt needs, but to the contrary, offends them with a hard message about eating his body and drinking his blood (John 6:53-57). Many who hear these things turn away and stop following the Messiah, but Jesus does not change His message or method in order to gain souls for His heavenly kingdom.

Not only did Jesus not seek the crowd, He often challenges the crowd in a way that might surprise the average evangelical: "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it" (Luke 14:29)? This seems strange today in a generation where many leaders attempt to beg people into the kingdom of Heaven, but Christ concerns Himself with the end product not just the initial response.

Jesus comes to Nazareth and teaches the Jews in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16-27). After his teaching many are uncharacteristically pleased by his words. Many contemporary preachers would love to have been in Christ's position. Surely, this would be a great time to speak to a need in the lives of the people. Instead Christ offends them and Luke records: "When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They got up, drove Him out of town, and brought Him to the edge of the hill their town was built on, intending to hurl Him over the cliff" (Luke 4:28-29). He then passes through the crowd and went on His way (Luke 4:30).

The Apostles of the Lord preach with the same spirit and to the one basic need of salvation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter addresses the crowd with the main sermon (Acts 2:14-36). Peter does not attempt to focus on the many unique needs of the audience. Instead he quickly gets to the main point—the one ultimate need—reconciliation with a holy and offended God. The message is not pleasant, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36)! Nevertheless, three thousand people repent and turn to Christ, when they see their need for forgiveness of sins.

If Jesus does not use meeting felt needs as His method of evangelism, then why did He meet the crowd's needs? Several scriptures provide help. Jesus rests in a remote place just before he feeds the five thousand (Matthew 14:13). When the crowd hears of His location they follow after Him. Then "as he stepped ashore, He saw a huge crowd, *felt compassion for them*, and healed the sick" (Matthew 14:14).[38] There is no reason to believe that Christ links their physical healing with their salvation. Jesus sees the crowd and has compassion for them. He meets their needs because of his loving and kind heart.

[38] This writer's emphasis added.

Later he feeds this same crowd for the same reason. Feeding and healing is not an evangelistic technique, but a reaction from a God who cares about His creation.

A similar occurrence takes place when Jesus feeds four thousand. Jesus uses the same motivation. Mark states, "In those days there was again a large crowd, and they had nothing to eat. He summoned the disciples and said to them, *I have compassion on the crowd, because they've already stayed with Me three days and have nothing to eat*.[39] If I send them home famished, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a long distance" (Mark 8:1-3). Jesus takes care of their need out of a genuine concern for their physical well being, not as an evangelistic tactic. Jesus did not initiate *fellowship* meals to draw the crowds. He drew a crowd while speaking of reconciliation with a merciful God and His merciful and compassionate heart compelled Him to then meet the physical needs they had while they were with Him.

A man with a serious skin disease approaches the Lord and begs for healing. As far as one can tell, the leprous man does not approach Christ for salvation; nor does Christ use the man's illness to draw him to eternal life. Mark records, "*Moved with compassion*, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. 'I am willing,' He told him. 'Be made clean'" (Mark 1:41).[40] Jesus seems only motivated by his concern for this sick man.

Sometimes people who receive healing from Jesus later receive Him. At other times, they remain lost. When Jesus heals the ten lepers only one shows any evidence of salvation (Luke 17:18). The one who returns to give thanks hears the Lord's response: "Get up and go on your way. Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19). The Lord

---

[39] This writer's emphasis added.

[40] This writer's emphasis added.

loves people out of the character of his heart regardless of whether or not they possess salvation. There is a huge difference between a person that supplies needs as a technique to accomplish a goal and a person that meets needs out of the compassion of his heart and then later sees that compassion bring forth the fruit of salvation. The first possesses manipulative compassion and only ministers in order to receive a response, while the second possesses altruistic compassion and ministers regardless of the response.

After reading the examples above, one might admit that these passages seem to prove the author's point of view, but still wonder about other passages that seem to indicate the alternative position. An inquiring person may ask: "Does not Christ at times seek to draw people by meeting their felt needs?" The following passage may bring up such a question:

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28).

Though some do not, this author accepts this as a salvation passage. Therefore, the question must be asked: "Is not Christ appealing to the basic need of rest in order to call people to salvation?"

At first this may seem like a legitimate argument, but a closer inspection of the passage reveals the main issue is still this basic need for reconciliation with God. Christ invites the religious crowd who are burdened down with legalism to find true salvation in Himself. His first words in the invitation are: "Come to me…" (Matthew 11:28a). The burden relates to trying to keep regulations that cannot produce a relationship with God.

The rest that Jesus speaks of is a synonym for salvation.[41] The need spoken to is not a separate need, but the one fundamental need of redemption.

The felt needs technique is accepted well in a society of capitalist which prides itself in gaining material wealth and confuses needs and wants. This consumerism mentality greatly influences the American church of the twenty first century. Churches offer the customer a product and hope that when the customer's need or want is met, then they will follow Christ. Contemporary preaching says, "Come to Christ and profit—receive Him and you will gain wealth, health, friends, and whatever else your heart desires." True Christianity teaches, "Come to Christ and it will cost you the world, but be of good cheer because you will gain God and His value far outweighs temporary pleasures."

Fun and Games

While the felt needs approach tries to draw people by giving them what they most desire, another technique goes still further into error by providing the listener with entertainment and pleasure. The writer calls this the fun and games method, which is more than willing to draw a crowd by using entertainment. A.W. Tozer sees the problem alive in his day. He laments:

> It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with Him, for they must be wooed to meetings with a stick of striped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments.[42]

---

[41] The writer of Hebrews uses *rest* to refer to salvation (Hebrews 4).

[42] A.W. Tozer, Man: *The Dwelling Place of God* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1966), 136.

This technique seeks to spruce up Christianity and make the Lord's message seem more relevant to the culture. The real issue is not whether or not Christianity is relevant in this postmodern society, but rather how should the church achieve this relevance?[43] Since Americans are addicted to entertainment and leisure, many leaders seek to give the crowd fun and games with the hope that the multitude will follow Christ in return.[44] Instead of showing the relevance of Christ, many change the Lord's message to speak to what a person perceives as important.

The scripture does not place a high priority on the style of worship. God concerns Himself with substance, not style. He looks at the heart and seeks people of character to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Christians throughout church history honor the Lord using different expressions of worship that relate to their personality and preference. Some people use loud music, while others like a calm meditative experience. Other people prefer a more up beat message, while others respond better to a more conversational dialogue. While one should never measure the quality of worship by using these differences, it is dangerous to attempt to draw people by entertaining them. It is easy for the music, skits, and excitement to become more important than the person of God.

Unfortunately, this entertaining of the crowd is not a new method. Charles Spurgeon faces the same dilemma:

> The heaving of the masses under newly invented excitements we are too apt to identify with the power of God. This age of novelties would seem to have discovered spiritual power in brass bands and tambourines...The tendency of the

---

[43] Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 14.

[44] A 2000 Nielson Media research report shows that the average American spends over four hours a day or two full months a year watching television.

> time is towards bigness, parade, and show of power, as if these would surely accomplish what more regular agencies have failed to achieve.[45]

Six years later, Spurgeon warns his flock of the danger of using questionable practices to promote the gospel:

> Jesus said, 'Preach the gospel to every creature.' But men are getting tired of the divine plan; they are going to be saved by a priest, going to be saved by the music, going to be saved by theatricals, and nobody knows what! Well, they may try these things as long as ever they like; but nothing can ever come of the whole thing but utter disappointment and confusion, God dishonored, the gospel travestied, hypocrites manufactured by the thousands, and the church dragged down to the level of the world.[46]

The New Testament saints would not recognize the modern church of entertainment as Christian. For the Apostles, following Christ lacks fun and games. To the contrary, being a follower of Christ means living a life of tribulation and difficulty. God's people throughout the Old Testament clearly establish this pattern with their lives.[47] When the writer of Hebrews gives the role call of faith, he concludes by reminding,

> And others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in the deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground. All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us. (Hebrews 11:36-40)

Paul explains his sufferings for Christ to the church at Corinth: "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the depths of the sea" (II Corinthians 11:25). Then, Paul adds a few

---

[45] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 28, 1882, 377.

[46] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 40, 1888, 199.

[47] John 16:33, Acts 14:22, James 1:12

words about the dangers of following Christ: "On frequent journeys, [I faced] dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the open country, dangers on the sea, and dangers among false brothers" (II Corinthians 11:26). None of this suffering comes as a surprise to Paul for this was the will God for him. The Lord tells Ananias about Paul, "Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel. I will certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name" (Acts 9:15)!

Today many American churches act as if Christianity is all about having a good time. They focus on the good news and do not mention the bad.[48] One will surely be ridiculed for questioning the modern practices of entertaining the masses. Times are different some conclude. Some people ask, "What's wrong with a little fun?" Others think that no one can rightly expect young people to respond to just preaching, but Tozer answers these arguments extremely well,

> Any objection to the carryings on of our present golden-calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, 'But we are winning them!' And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross-carrying? To self-denial? To separation form the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To a despising of the world's treasures? To hard self-discipline? To love for God? To total Committal to Christ? Of course the answer to all these questions is *no*.[49]

Easy Believism

The next troubling technique used by the church involves easy believism. A Philippian Jailer asks one of the most important questions of history; "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)? Paul's answer seems simple enough, "Believe on the Lord Jesus

---

[48] John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 17.

[49] Tozer, *The Dwelling Place of God*, 136.

Christ and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31). However, even among evangelicals, scores of opinions remain on how a man enters the kingdom of heaven. The issue of what it means to be a Christian is examined in the next chapter, but it is needful to now address some problematic issues concerning how men are invited to Christ.

Some church leaders attack the value of the public invitation system saying that it causes confusion in the body of Christ.[50] Others note that the modern invitation lacks biblical support.[51] The New Testament certainly does not have a traditional alter call in front of a church. However, many do see the value of the invitation system.[52] Those in support of it point out that though one does not find an exact example of the modern evangelistic invitation in the Scriptures, this does not condemn it as unscriptural.[53] Many Christian practices like Sunday school, bus ministry, and Wednesday prayer meetings are now common place in many evangelical churches, but are not mentioned in the Scriptures.[54] Nonetheless, one does not usually consider these practices as unscriptural.[55]

This dissertation does not wish to enter the debate on whether it is best to use the system or not. This author, who uses the practice, sees no danger in the alter call itself, but knows that whether the invitation is given publicly or privately, the important matter is *what is said not where it is said*. In other words, the content contains much more

---

[50] Iain Murray, *The Invitation System (*Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 3.

[51] Iain Murray, *Pentecost Today* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1998), 51.

[52] Roy Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1974), 9.

[53] Faris Whitesell, *Sixty-Five Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), 12.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

significance than the location. Some key elements, unfortunately, are missing from many private and public invitations to Christ.

First, many who proclaim the gospel offer salvation before a person possesses conviction of sin. Contrary to popular teaching, it is not enough for a person to just recognize intellectually that he is a sinner. Almost anyone can be persuaded, if one speaks kindly enough and admits to also having a few unwanted faults. However, the Holy Spirit must convict the individual of his or her lost condition. While this nonnegotiable work of the Spirit looks different in the lives of various people, the repentant sinner recognizes that he has offended a holy God. This grief causes him to run to Christ and flee the wrath to come, but today this "step" looks very different. It is not uncommon to hear the seriousness of sin reduced to: "Do you recognize that you have sinned—everyone has done wrong—this even includes me." If the potential convert simply admits that he is not perfect, the Christian worker often races on to the next step in the Romans Road. While no one can judge with certainty where God is doing a work, the one presenting the gospel must not try to make conviction of sin easy for the sinner. The counselor must understand that one must believe with the heart. It is not enough to merely affirm a truth of sinfulness.

Next, many offer an invitation to heaven instead of Christ and do not realize the danger. Some assume that a call to salvation is primarily an invitation to heaven, but this is not true. Salvation is not mainly an invitation to a plan or place, but to a relationship with a person named Jesus: "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3).

Many desire heaven, but few want to follow Jesus. Though popular preachers and evangelists give the sinner the choice between heaven and hell, this choice does not actually represent the main choice of salvation. Though the decision can be deduced from connecting biblical passages, no where does Christ or the apostles ever present the gospel in this manner. The real choice for eternal life is not ultimately between heaven and hell, but between the triune God and the world.

If the choice is only between heaven and hell, then the rich young ruler does not need to go away sorrowful. He most assuredly would pick heaven over hell and would no doubt pray a prayer to get it, but this is not an option, nor is it ever. Anyone in their right mind would choose heaven over hell. The choice between Christ and the world is much more difficult. Demas stumbles by choosing this present world over Christ. Judas fails not by choosing hell over heaven, but by following after money instead of the Lord. Years earlier Esau picks the earthly affairs over the spiritual and suffers the consequences. The Lord's brother explains, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy" (James 4:4).

Historically, only the seed that fell into the good ground represents true salvation (Matthew 13). The one sown among thorns represents those that hear the word, "but the worries of this age and the seduction of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). These professors of religion certainly desire heaven, but it is their choice for the world and its enticements that eventually ruin them. Therefore, the clear choice which the pastor presents must be between the world and Jesus. If this is not the choice with which potential converts are presented, then many preachers will give

people a false sense of security. People will actually believe that because they want to go to heaven, they are safe for eternity.

Finally, some offer a divided Christ. This author does not espouse to a lordship or non-lordship teaching. He sees some problems with both approaches, but recognizes that when Christ gives the call to receive Himself, He does not divide His offices for random choosing. Tozer sees this problem in his day:

> Therefore, I must be frank in my feeling that a notable heresy has come into being throughout our evangelical Christian circles—the widely-accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to![56]

While it is true that no one can *make Him Lord* or will always be in complete surrender, salvation is connected to obedience in the Holy Scripture.[57] Obedience is not the means to salvation, but assuredly is the fruit. Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but [only] the one who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

THE PROBLEMATIC PRODUCT

It should not be surprising that problematic methods lead to an undesirable result. This is true with other areas of life. "What ever a man sows he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). This principle that applies to the individual also applies to the group. Evangelicalism sows carnal methods and produces nominal Christians. When a church draws people with a self-esteem message, the members esteem self better than God and

---

[56] Waren Wiersbe, ed., *The Best of A.W. Tozer* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1980), 179.

[57] Ibid., 180.

others. If a ministry seeks to draw a crowd by meeting felt needs, then the members will no doubt seek a God that is created in their own image to meet these needs. If the church tries to draw people with fun and games, then the cross of Christ which demands sacrifice and diligence will be abandoned and the true gospel will be hidden. If a church gives a call to salvation that is void of repentance and commitment, then tares will multiply faster than the wheat.

Uncommitted Christians

A recent report finds that there are one hundred and one million born again Christians in the United States.[58] This number represents forty five percent of the population.[59] If these numbers alone tell the story, then the American church is in great shape and there is no real need for concern. However, the same research group finds the following facts about these born again believers:

* Over half agree that Satan is not a living being, but a symbol of evil.[60]

* Thirty Three percent believe that a person can get to heaven by good deeds.[61]

* Twenty eighty percent believe that Jesus committed sins like other men.[62]

* Only thirty two percent believe in moral absolutes[63]

* They have the same divorce rate at non-believers[64]

---

[58] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Born Again Christians* (September, 2004), Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org, 1.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

The same research group reports some additional shocking information about the Christian community:

* Only half of Protestant Pastors have a biblical worldview[65]

* Only fifty one percent of evangelicals place faith in God as top priority.[66]

* Only six percent of born again adults tithe.[67]

While the quantity of professing believers is great, the quality is poor. Jesus warns that in the last days the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12). Paul tells of difficult days where men will love self and money (2 Timothy 3:3:1, 2). They will be boastful, proud, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, and unholy (2 Timothy 3:2). It is not surprising that these characteristics describe unbelievers, but when they describe church members, a huge problem is present. In particular these non-committed "Christians" do not look or act like New Testament church, nor do they enter into real Christian community. To the contrary, these nominal Christians are individualistic and driven to please self.

Shallow Community

When a professing believer lacks obedience to God, he finds fellowship in a community of other Christians impossible, but solid fellowship with Christ leads to solid

---

[64] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Born Again Christians just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians*, (September, 2004), Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org, 1.

[65] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Only half of Protestant Pastors have a biblical worldview*, (January 12, 2004), Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org, 1.

[66] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Surveys Show Pastors Claim Congregants Are Deeply Committed to God But Congregants Deny It!,* (January 10, 2006), Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org, 1.

[67] Ibid.

fellowship with others.[68] The Apostle John shows this important connection between communion with God and community with man in his first epistle. After John tells about experiencing Christ Jesus in person, he gives his purpose for writing: "what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Christian fellowship is practiced by those who live in unity with God the Father and Christ Jesus. No one truly loves his neighbor without loving God first and no one who experiences the love of God lacks care for others.

If an individual closely analyzes the book of Acts, he will notice a major difference between the fellowship of the early believers and today's individualistic American church. The early New Testament church experiences life in Christ through a close knit community. They meet corporately (Acts 2:42), visit in each other's homes (Acts 5:42), and travel together (Acts 10:7, 23; 9:27; 11:12). Furthermore, these believers quickly incorporate new converts into the fellowship (Acts 2:46, 47; 4:32) and see the importance of training leaders.[69] Paul diligently spends himself investing in others. He mentions sixty individuals in the epistles who he knows well.[70] He tells the Elders at Ephesus, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears" (Acts 20:31). When Paul shares with these men that he will never see them again they weep and grieve over the loss

---

[68] Bill Hull, *New Century Disciplemaking* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 119.

[69] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids; Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 71-73.

[70] Ibid., 73.

because of the closeness they feel to him (Acts 20:36-38). The early church is a family which learns and grows together in their pursuit to become like Christ.

The modern church lacks this most basic foundation of spiritual community. Though there are some exceptions, the contemporary church and its training centers emphasize head knowledge over relationships. Christian gatherings mostly focus upon teaching biblical facts, but lack a facilitation of community. Both knowledge and community are needed, but when knowledge is the main focus**,** the practical application of living these truths out in a community suffers. It is impossible to fully experience God's truths outside of a relationship with Him and others.

Many Bible colleges and seminaries concentrate on educating the mind instead of transforming the heart. This is seen clearly by looking at the required courses for a degree program. Though institutions of learning do not say it, the degree format gives the impression that learning knowledge is to be done in a group, but spiritual formation is a private matter. If the student does not leave his particular school having developed a strong fellowship with Christ, the book knowledge will not profit.

Usually, Christian colleges require few courses related to spiritual formation. Schools teach future pastors about prayer, but do not show them how to pray. Students are shown the importance of reading the Bible, but it is taken for granted that they comprehend how to read the scriptures. Today's pastors enter and exit Bible schools and seminaries without a strong devotional life to Christ. They enter the pastorate with plenty of knowledge about God, but with little knowledge of God, but a little knowledge of God far outweighs a great deal of knowledge about Him.[71] The church assumes the pastor

---

[71] J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 26.

will develop spiritually by himself, but the heart is only trained by entering into true community.

The Non-discipled Pastor

Today's pastors are a product of shallow community. As a result, most of them have never been discipled. In contrast the early church knew the importance of developing its leaders. Robert E. Coleman explains,

> The community of disciples became the primary means by which disciples were trained. Just as Jesus had lived closely with His followers, so now the gathered community of believers formed ongoing communion with His Spirit.[72]

Out of this dynamic discipleship element comes forth exceptional leaders.

Certainly the non-discipled pastor dilemma helps explain why so many drop out of the ministry. Furthermore, this lack of discipleship gives insight into pastor burn-out, depression, and a host of other difficulties. The pastor's problems influence more than just himself or his family. He leads the local church, which the Lord commissions to reach the lost. When the pastor is not well, the church suffers and the communities remain in spiritual decline.

THE PROBLEMATIC INVITATION

Many evangelical pastors, like Steve who is mentioned in the introduction, often appeal for sinners to receive Christ at the end of the worship service. With Bible in hand, they call people to repent and begin a life of following Christ—a life of discipleship. The pastor realizes that this invitation comes on the authority of Christ's Great Commission:

---

[72] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 59.

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19:20). Ironically, many pastors and perhaps the great majority, if the author's personal research contains validity, invite others to a life that they do not live themselves.

These pastors encourage the people to a life of discipleship, yet they spend small amounts of time in prayer and scripture. They call the crowd to a life of making disciples, yet these pastors are not invitational in lifestyle. Many pastors do not even know their next door neighbors by name or their neighbor's true spiritual condition. They ask the lonely to come with them on a journey within the community of Christ, but they possess very few friends and are not accountable to mentors. They attempt to teach others the faith, but have never been taught or discipled. The pastor asks for the disobedient to obey the Lord, but his life directly contradicts the footsteps of Jesus.

It is of little wonder that the average pastor is frustrated with life and ministry. He preaches self-esteem, but knows that ministry humbles the best of men. He must take ridicule after ridicule. He preaches fun and games with a smile on his face, but privately he understands that pastoring fallen people is draining work. He teaches felt needs, but his needs remain unmet. His disappointment is not really caused by the ministry; he is aggravated because of his faulty concept of ministry. The pastor, seeking for the ideal ministry built on self-esteem and self-promotion, fun and games, and felt needs, often runs to and fro looking for something that does not exist nor will ever come to pass.

While the pastor must take responsibility for not living the Great Commission, it is also equally true that he is a product of his times. He attends seminars where the focus

is upon numbers instead of a relationship with the Lord. His local bookstore is populated by books about self-esteem instead of self-denial. Popular preachers of his day encourage him to meet felt needs instead of meeting the one basic need of reconciliation with God. He grew up in a time of fun and games and does not pause to consider that following Christ is not entertainment but sacrifice. He himself responded to an invitation that lacked the basic elements of salvation and believes that this is the way Christ invites men to Himself in scripture. The pastor did not have many models of Christian discipleship, nor did he have many men trying to enter his life for the purpose of discipleship.

His accountability before God does not change merely because of his lack of knowledge, but the church also must take responsibility for the failure of not discipling the modern pastor. The church must solve the problem sooner than later. Blame shifting will not lead to a solution. Looking at the problem is painful, but a solution must be implemented and followed. This writer sees no alternative strategy to turn the tide of fruitless ministry which does not involve a clear mandate to disciple the pastor of the twenty first century. While the solution will not come easily, choosing to continue on the same path will cost a higher price. Baptisms will continue to fall, the American church will grow colder, and pragmatism will gain strength. If the church returns to her roots and places the pastor firmly in a community where he is discipled, then God's Spirit will revive the church and true fruit will be produced.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOLUTION

The current decline in baptisms causes much concern for American Christianity. As a result of this setback, some church leaders try to solve the issue by using faulty methods, but this strategy only complicates the problem. While numbers and excitement may first increase, eventually the church's stagnation remains. The solution will not be easy and it will cost individuals much. Nothing of spiritual value comes effortless, so men must be willing to risk all for the kingdom's sake. The answer to the current dilemma is not impossible to comprehend, but since it calls men to a new way of life—a life of community—controversy and misunderstanding are inevitable.

Jesus understood that controversy and spiritual renewal often coincide together. During a time of spiritual deadness, Jesus starts His ministry in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). His preaching in the synagogue immediately brings a forceful debate.[1] The religious leaders see His message as new and in error. These influential men take for granted that their way of seeking God and ministering to others is proper. When Christ challenges the established spiritual norms, He encounters trouble. The Lord does not seek to irritate, but

[1] John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2002), 1.

His message confronts the religious tradition. Because Jesus chooses to live for others, He willingly delivers difficult words for the sake of leading people to abundant life.

Prominent Christian leaders from the past also experienced controversy. In his book, *Contending for Our All*, John Piper lists several individuals who were willing to pay the consequences for going against the norm.[2] J. Gresham Machen, who battled liberalism in the twentieth century, said, "Controversy of the right sort is good; for out of such controversy, as Church history and Scripture alike teach, there comes the salvation of souls."[3] Athanasius, who struggled with the Arians over the deity of Christ, wrote, "Considering that this struggle is for our all…let us also make it our earnest care and aim to guard what we have received."[4] Martin Luther, who leads the Great Reformation, witnessed friction between the Protestants and Roman Catholics, but also among the Reformers themselves.[5] The First and Second Great Awakenings also included their share of dispute.[6]

If Jesus and generations of His followers experienced adversity from the religious establishment, then today's leaders can expect no less. All attempts to consider personal change necessarily involve some level of confusion and disappointment.[7] Larry Crabb notes, "Every Christian effort to actually change, especially with the help of people, is at

---

[2] John Piper, *Contending for Our All* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 17.

[3] J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (1925; reprint: Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 42, 43; quoted in John Piper, *Contending for Our All* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 20.

[4] Philip Shaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1892; reprint: Peabody: Hendricksen, 1999), 4:234; quoted in John Piper, *Contending for Our All* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 20.

[5] Piper, *Contending for Our All*, 23.

[6] Ibid., 24, 27.

[7] Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1999), 3.

times confusing and disappointing."[8] He adds: "The journey toward Christ is not easily mapped. Whatever map we come up with will be less than precise, and sincere attempts to follow it will not lead to a bump-free existence."[9]

This writer understands that there is not a simple resolution to the decline in baptisms. The church's perfect situation is easy to state, but returning to the ideal from the current confusion is full of difficulty. Disagreement and discouragement are unavoidable. Nonetheless, the church must begin the journey toward a solution. To accomplish the purpose of aiding the church in fulfilling the Great Commission, this writer sets forth a two part proposal. First, the church must discover the true nature of its being. After once again realizing its identity, the church must strive to return to its roots by discipling the pastor through the local church and theological training institutions. When the pastor is discipled, then, and only then, will the church disciple its members. The discipled pastor will no longer call people to a life he is not living. He will once again stand in the pulpit and invite individuals to a life of following Christ at all cost. This reformation will not be based on a new idea or method, but on a return to biblical Christianity—a call to discipleship.

DISCOVERING THE CHURCH

James warns of the deception caused by being a hearer of the word of God but not a doer (James 1:22). While it is dangerous for the church to only focus on knowledge, it is equally hazardous to lack it altogether. Both foundational truth and its application are

---

[8] Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1999), 3.

[9] Ibid.

necessities for the twenty first century. The organized church tries to carry out its mission without first discovering its true identity. It attempts to produce New Testament works without being a New Testament fellowship. It strives for the fruit without first gaining the root. James asks: "Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine [produce] figs? Neither can a salt water spring yield fresh water" (James 3:11-12).

The evangelical church cannot produce New Testament results without first returning to a form of its early discipleship within a community. As it undertakes the goal of reaching the world for Christ with its current methods, it will only manufacture superficial results that will move the church yet further from true spiritual renewal. The first step in resolving the problem is discovering the personality of God's true church. It is paramount to identify all of Christ's people as disciples and then discover the aspects of their community.

Identifying some believers as less than followers of Christ, frustrates true fellowship and produces fewer baptisms. Even if it were possible to secure salvation for an individual that lacks desire to be a disciple, conversions and baptisms, whether true or false, will still eventually come to a halt. *Believers* who only want heaven do not make good evangelists. *Believers* who only have a purpose to escape hell do not fervently invite the lost to Jesus. The message of good news most effectively comes from the mouths of disciples who love the Lord with all of their heart and their neighbor as themselves. Therefore, by teaching that many Christians are not disciples, the modern church produces its exact philosophy. Uncommitted members who lead few to Christ and witness even fewer baptisms populate many churches.

The Church's Members: Disciples

Jesus teaches plainly that one must pay a high price to be His disciple. Preaching to a large crowd, He commands: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). By speaking with challenging words, the Lord proves that a disciple must value Him above all other relationships and pursuits.[10] The Lord demonstrates this price for discipleship in Mark's Gospel: "For whosoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me and the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). The one who is not a disciple loses his life—he is separated from Christ for eternity, while the disciple gains eternal life. Since the contrast could not be greater, how the Christian leader defines *disciple* contains utmost significance.

Some pastors and their following mistakenly preach that one may be a Christian and not a disciple.[11] They believe one can be guaranteed of heaven without continuing to pursue obedience to Christ. Dallas Willard opposes this modern belief and shows its popularity:

> It is now generally acknowledged, as we have noted, that one can be a professing Christian and a church member in good standing without being a disciple. There is, apparently, no real connection between being a Christian and being a disciple of Jesus.[12]

Bob Wilkin, the Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society speaks for many who earnestly contend that there is a difference between a disciple and a Christian.[13]

---

[10] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 293.

[11] Ibid., 282.

[12] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 291.

[13] Bob Wilkin, *Are All Believers Disciples?* (March, 1990), Retrieved March 12, 2007 from http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1990/90march1.html, 1.

Wilkin tries to prove his conviction by using two simple syllogisms. The major premise for those he disagrees with is: "All saved people are disciples." The minor premise states: "Discipleship is costly." The conclusion follows "Salvation is costly." After outlining this syllogism, he agrees: "The minor premise is surely true. Discipleship is costly. See Luke 14:25-33."[14] He assumes, "The conclusion is obviously false. Salvation is absolutely free. There is no cost to the recipient. Salvation is the gift of God (John 4:10; Eph. 2:9; Rev. 22:17)."[15] Since salvation does not have a price, Wilken deduces the major premise must have a flaw. Many saved people, he supposes, are not truly disciples.[16] Based upon this reasoning, he provides what he considers a more accurate syllogism: "major premise: salvation is free; minor premise: discipleship is costly; conclusion: salvation and discipleship are not the same thing."[17]

In his popular book, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, Bill Hull discusses the church's dilemma concerning the definition of a disciple: "Understanding what a disciple is and what a disciple does are top priority for the church."[18] He asks the reader:

> Is a disciple a convert, one who has simply trusted in Christ alone for his salvation? Is it more, a fruit bearing, reproducing believer described by Jesus in other passages? Or is it only for the totally committed person whom Jesus described in Luke 14:25-35, who puts Christ before possessions, self, and family?[19]

---

[14] Bob Wilkin, *Are All Believers Disciples?*, 1.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1988; Fleming H.Revell, 2003) 54.

[19] Ibid.

Hull, then, concludes: "If disciples are born and not made, non-Christians dominate the evangelical church."[20] Before teaching his reader that all believers will not become disciples, he agonizes:

> If one takes the 'disciples are born and not made' theology and joins it to the definition of a disciple given by Jesus and then adds the objective facts concerning today's evangelical church, the results are alarming. At least 75 percent of evangelicals are not Christians, because they just don't measure up to Christ's standards of what it means to be a disciple.[21]

Hull sees the *disciples are born and not made* teaching as harmful because, in his opinion, it creates a gospel of works by adding to the requirements for salvation.[22] To believe that the organized church includes more unbelievers than believers, is more than he can fathom.

Later, in another of his books, Hull changes his view on this crucial issue. He admits: "The idea that only mature people are disciples and all other Christians are immature converts appears nowhere in the New Testament."[23] He clarifies, "Technically, from the moment of spiritual birth, every Christian is a disciple. Disciples are born by the Spirit to be made into mature reproducers, as described in John 15:7-17."[24] Recently, Hull also reverses his earlier words about the spiritual state of the organized church in *Choose the Life.* He now believes many *professing* Christians lack true conversion:

> If millions of professing Christians think they are regenerate because of a doctrinal test alone, this would explain why many Christians don't witness and give a meager 2 percent to God's work. It would explain why many who profess

---

[20] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 55.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 54.

[23] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990; Fleming H. Revell, 2002), 20.

[24] Ibid.

> Christianity drive expensive cars; live in large, elaborate homes; and are financially leveraged to the max. It would explain why missionaries can't raise their support and churches struggle financially. It would explain why there are so many divorces in the church. It would explain the vast accommodation to culture in churches and why our most talented members look elsewhere for investment of their time and energy.
>
> What if 30 to 50 percent of our evangelical congregations are populated and being led by the unsaved? That is a frightening thought, but I suggest that the heart of the weakness is our teaching. We have taught a non-discipleship Christianity, so why should it be any surprise that over 50 percent of professing Christians opted out? We have taught faith as agreement, instead of commitment to follow Jesus.[25]

Church leaders like Bob Wilkin deny that Hull's change of opinion is based on biblical truth. Ultimately, the scripture itself must answer the question: "Are disciples born or made?" In other words, "Are all Christians, likewise, disciples?" This writer takes the words of Christ to indicate that disciples are both born and made. Just as salvation is both an event (justification) and a process (sanctification), a person becomes a disciple by the new birth, but continues to become a disciple by a disciplined process of spiritual growth.

The Book of Acts unmistakably labels every believer a disciple: "…and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). While the modern church sees a person becoming a Christian first and then possibly developing into a disciple, Luke states that all believers were called disciples and then later came to be known as Christians.[26] The Gospels and Acts use the term *disciple* over two hundred and fifty times and ninety percent of the occurrences speak of believers in general.[27] Nowhere

---

[25] Bill Hull, *Choose the Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2004), 28, 29.

[26] The term Christian occurs three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16).

[27] G. Douglas Young, ed., *Young's Compact Bible Dictionary* (Masada Press, 1984; Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers Incorporated, 1989), 172.

does the New Testament indicate the possibility of a Christian not being a disciple.[28] *Smith's Bible Dictionary* defines disciple as: "Believer. Member of the Church of Christ."[29] A disciple (*mathetes*) is a learner; it denotes one who follows another's teaching.[30]

When the early church chooses the first seven deacons, the church grows rapidly. Speaking of these additions, Luke writes, "So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the *disciples* in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).[31] These new converts immediately take on the name of disciples. While they will continue to grow in the faith, the New Testament acknowledges that they are already followers of the Lord. Later in the Book of Acts, Saul (later Paul) persecutes the church. Describing this event, Luke shares, "Meanwhile, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the *disciples* of the Lord, went to the high priest" (Acts 9:1).[32] Again, the New Testament does not distinguish between disciples and other believers. It uses the terms interchangeably. While not every one called a disciple possesses true salvation, every believer is known as a disciple.

---

[28] Sometimes a person in the New Testament is called a disciple, but is not a true Christian. Judas and others who are called disciples later prove that they are false converts.

[29] William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Company, n.d.), 77.

[30] W.E. Vine, Merill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 171.

[31] This writer's emphasis added.

[32] This writer's emphasis added.

Three Legitimate Questions

Because the characterization of the church's members is vitally important in reversing the current trend in baptisms, one should take the time to answer three legitimate, but opposing questions. First, how can being a Christian cost someone everything if salvation is a free gift? Second, does not this teaching constitute a salvation of works? Finally, why does the scripture command the believer to surrender his life to Christ if all believers are already disciples?

The Apostle Paul proclaims, "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves it is God's gift" (Ephesians 2:8). Bob Wilken and others use this verse as proof that being a Christian cannot cost a person anything.[33] He reasons since salvation is a gift, then it cannot have a price.[34] Wilken statement seems logical, but even simple matters of life show his thinking problematic. This writer recently became the father of his third child. The new baby represents a gift from God, but the child also will cost a high price. This writer knew before his son was ever born that diapers, food, and a college education would need to be provided. Clothes and extra time would need to be invested. This does not take away from God's gift, but the receiving of the gift brings natural effects.

Being a Christian is a gift from God, but it costs the believer a huge price. Paul pays the price of great suffering (Acts 9:15). John is exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). The Jews stone Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). James experiences a martyr's death at the hands of Herod (Acts 12:1, 2). While these men and others receive the free gift of salvation, it eventually cost them much. They do not pay in order to receive, but

---

[33] Wilken, *Are All Believers Disciples?,* 1.

[34] Ibid.

when they receive Christ, they also obtain the gift of His Spirit. His presence stirs a desire of sacrifice and devotion guiding the convert to pay whatever price necessary to follow the Giver of life.

The second question deals with the accusation of a works based salvation. Some people think: "If a Christian must pay the disciple's high price in order to be saved, then how is salvation truly of grace and not of works?" However, a person is not a Christian because he works; he gladly labors for the Lord because he is God's child. The possession of true faith always accompanies obedience and a love for God. It is impossible to have one without the others. Three particular passages, when examined together, show the character of true faith; Acts 16:30-31, Luke 10:25-28, and Luke 18:18-23.

After God delivers Paul and Silas from prison, the jailer asks: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)?" Paul provides a straightforward answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Paul does not mention works or discipleship. He never discusses, as far as one can tell, the price of following Christ.

The Lord Jesus receives the same important inquiry from a lawyer who desires eternal life (Luke 10:25). After receiving the question, Jesus asks the man about what the law teaches. The lawyer then states, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Today's church member may feel the need to answer the lawyer differently than Christ. He or she may remind the man that salvation is by grace and not by works. An individual may reason that no one is saved by loving God with all his

heart, strength, and mind, but Christ informs: "You've answered correctly" (Luke 10:28). He assures, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Obviously Christ connects love to salvation.

The rich young ruler poses the same question to Jesus: "what must I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 18:18)? Jesus calls him to sell all that he has and distribute it to the poor (Luke 18:22). When he does this and follows Christ, then he will have treasure in Heaven (Luke 18:22). The words of Christ to this desperate man are often neglected by the church and puzzle the modern reader. The twenty first century evangelical wants to rush and baptize the young man and discuss issues such as discipleship and lordship at a later time. Today's pastor certainly answers the *seeker* differently and accuses those who possess Jesus' patience and strong words of trying to add to salvation. In order to avoid the Lord's demands, many church leaders scramble for an alternative interpretation. The Lord often speaks in parables that are hard to understand, but this is not one of those occasions. The rich man must be willing to obey even if it leads to giving up everything—he must be a disciple!

Three different men ask the same question and all receive what seems like conflicting responses. Paul tells the jailer to believe, while the Lord agrees with the lawyer that love is the key to eternal life and the rich man hears a message on surrender and obedience. There is a way to understand these passages as complimentary instead of contradictory toward each other. While it appears these three men receive incompatible messages, actually, all hear the identical command—a call to discipleship. The Lord challenges all three to live the life of faith; all three hear a message of being a disciple. By understanding that true faith always accompanies love and obedience, one correctly

understands the true nature of salvation. Faith without works is impossible (James 2:17) and when the scripture speaks of those who love God, it always references true believers (James 2:5).

Since true faith obeys, the young ruler demonstrates his unbelief by refusing to follow Christ. Since true faith always accompanies love, the lawyer who possesses a love for God likewise gives proof for his faith. All Christians obey and love God; this is the essence of God's gift of faith. When a man obtains saving faith, the Lord promises that He will complete the work He started in him (Philippians 1:6). Faith and the works that it causes are both gifts from God.

The final question inquires about why the scripture commands the believer to surrender his life to Christ, if all believers are automatically disciples. In other words, if following Christ is not optional, then why does God demand the believer to do it? Paul instructs the church at Rome: "I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). He continues, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind…" (Romans 12:2). However, Paul's urging of the believers to commit or surrender to Christ is no reason to assume that the act of surrender is in question for the true believer. As God works to accomplish His will in one's life, He uses his own commandments in order to bring about the goal. The commanding does not necessarily put the end result in jeopardy. At the beginning of Genesis, God commands let there be light and let the earth produces vegetation, but the end result is sure (Genesis 1). Jesus commands Lazarus to come forth, but whether or not Lazarus is going to rise from the dead is not a question (John 11:43).

Early in the epistle to the Romans, Paul commands believers: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires" (Romans 6:12). One might gather that sin may dominate a believer, but Paul later states:

> For those whose lives are in the flesh are unable to please God. You however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God lives in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit who lives in you. So then, brothers, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, *for if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die.* But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Romans 8:5-13).[35]

While the command goes out to all, Paul knows that sin cannot control a true believer. If this transpires, the one who professes faith will perish. The Apostle instructs the Christian to do what all Christian's will accomplish by the Spirit's direction.

John commands believers not to love the world or the things of the world, but then he tells them that if they do love the world, the love of the Father is not in them (John 2:15). In the same epistle, John instructs the Lord's followers to remain in Christ, but he already knows that they will since they are true believers (I John 2:28). He commands further for the Christians to love one another, but then quickly tells them that if they do not, then they are not really God's children (I John 3:10-15). God instructs His people, throughout both Testaments, to obey, but realizes that the life of obedience is not in question for His true children. While none of them will obtain perfection until they reach glory, they are motivated by love for the One who perfectly completed their redemption.

---

[35] This writer's emphasis added.

Three Pertinent Applications

One's definition of a Christian is not an inconsequential matter. Whether or not pastors and their congregations see all believers as disciples shapes three parts of their ministry. One's definition of a believer influences how he invites others to Christ. Next, this foundational conviction determines the church discipleship emphases toward those who make a profession of faith. Finally, this belief affects the character of those responding to the invitation. In other words, the fisherman usually catches and keeps the type of fish he baits.

How a pastor and his people describe a Christian affects the public invitation system. The preacher's appeal to the lost is always intertwined to this fundamental conviction, whether he realizes it or not. When a preacher understands that his plea to sinners is a call for them to follow Christ at all cost, the hearer rightly understands that salvation is all about Jesus. Since by definition a disciple learns from and becomes like his Master, the church that identifies the believer as a disciple teaches the unsaved that salvation equals a relationship with the triune God which leads to radical transformation. Receiving Christ may result in the convert obtaining many of his wants and needs, but the pastor who sees all Christians as disciples does not confuse these possible benefits with redemption. The pastor does not try to bait the unbeliever with the blessings of Christ before he receives the Blessing Himself.

The church that promotes an optional discipleship changes the meaning of the Great Commission invitation. Instead of the primary focus being on the person of Christ, the new purpose becomes merely getting people to heaven and involving them in church activities. Instead of one's personal relationship with His creator taking priority, the

sinner only wants to escape hell and be assured of future bliss. The pastor who believes that a person first becomes a Christian and later becomes a disciple focuses upon God's benefits instead of God's son. The invitation only becomes a selfish way for the unbeliever to have his needs met. If the unbeliever is not interested in heaven, then the pastor simply offers Christ as a remedy for whatever problem exists. If the problem consists of loneliness, then the focus becomes the friendship of Jesus. When the desire is finances, the pastor invites people to see the bountiful supply of Jesus. If one desires a big purpose, then the pastor encourages him to transact with a success-making Jesus.

The definition of a Christian also influences the church's emphasis on discipling those who profess faith in Christ. The pastor and ministry that sees Christians and disciples as one in the same is motivated to immediately enter the new convert's life. Knowing that only those who grow and continue in Christ inherit the kingdom of heaven, the pastor desires to be used by God to accomplish God's work of sanctification. He clearly understands that all people who are truly justified end up glorified. He also comprehends that God uses the community of other disciples to accomplish the work. Hence, discipling the convert is not optional, but is a matter of spiritual life and death.

To the contrary, the one who teaches a difference between Christians and disciples unknowingly removes the seriousness of discipleship. Today, many pastors see discipling as optional. The pastor might teach that it is a good idea and maybe even state that it is desirable to strive to be like Christ, but he fails to connect discipleship with salvation. For fear of legalism, the minister totally separates justification from sanctification, but the scripture never makes this mistake. Paul instructs, "So then, my

dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Any doctrine, when taken to an extreme, becomes harmful. Justification by faith is both biblical and remarkable. A person becomes right with God for no other reason than God's grace! God stirs the heart of the individual to look to Christ in faith and live. This great truth is foundational to understanding God's word. Unfortunately, some people make justification a trite matter involving a mere formula. The scripture warns against such oversimplification. While justification by faith is both instant and sure, a huge danger exists if one does not understand that justification always leads to the process of sanctification.

By faith Paul lives this concept out in his own life by connecting his discipleship with his future salvation. He testifies, "I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (I Corinthians 9:27). The English word *disqualified* comes from the Greek *adokimos* and means castaway, reprobate, or rejected.[36] Paul uses the same word to speak of one in an unsaved condition, when he tells the Corinthian church to examine their faith unless they find out that they are reprobates (II Corinthians 13:5).

The writer of Hebrews also unites a person's discipleship that takes place within community to eternal life. Not wanting the Jewish converts to experience apostasy, he writes:

> Watch out, brothers, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that departs from the living God. But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. For we have

[36] James Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 96.

> become companions of the Messiah if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start (Hebrews 3:12-14).

While the New Testament authors state that salvation comes by grace alone, they do not wrongly separate it from discipleship in every aspect. No one should make discipleship the means to grace, but if believers do not recognize it as a natural part of the saved life, the church will never take it seriously—God's people will never fully be motivated to disciple others. They will not comprehend that a person who is not involved in discipleship eventually perishes, regardless of a past profession.

This foundational belief also shapes the character of those who respond to the invitation. The preacher who does not differentiate between different types of believers realizes that all true converts immediately begin the process to Christ-likeness. As he joins the new convert in his journey, spiritual growth occurs. The responders take on the character of their Master. They look and act like disciples and later reproduce this Christ-likeness in others.

The one who mistakenly distinguishes between converts sees his philosophy come to pass through the lives of uncommitted church attendees. A recent study supports this statement. In two thousand and five, the Barna Group conducted two phone surveys. The first survey included over six hundred pastors, while the second involved over a thousand adults. The report showed that church members are not as committed to God as pastors think.[37] While seventy percent of pastors believe their congregant's top priority is faith in God, less than twenty three percent of church members actually have this

---

[37] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Surveys Show Pastors Claim Congregants Are Deeply Committed to God But Congregants Deny It!,* (January, 2006), Retrieved February 15, 2007 from www.barna.org, 1.

commitment.[38] With further study, the researchers discover the reason for the huge disparity between the pastor's opinion and the actual congregant's lack of spirituality. The pastor's measurement for spiritual health is faulty. He produces his non-disciple model and does not even realize it. Barna explains:

> The only way to explain the enormous gap between the perceptions of pastors and the reality of people's lives is to understand that pastors evaluate spiritual health from an institutional perspective—that is, are people involved in keeping the system going—while people are aware of their unmet need to have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God.[39]

The report also declares: "When pastors describe their notion of significant, faith-driven change, the vast majority (more than four out five) focused on salvation but ignored issues related to lifestyle or spiritual maturity."[40] Most churches are not concerned by statistics showing no difference between the morality of the churched and the un-churched.[41] The question of whether or not someone has been saved is the sole indicator of life transformation.[42] Issues such as stewardship, service and evangelism are seldom used as measurements of faith.[43] The optional discipleship church is experiencing the fruit of its faulty premise.

The church must, therefore, recognize the believer's true identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Then, discipleship takes on a biblical perspective. The goal for the community becomes Christ Himself and transformation to His image. The invitation to

---

[38] The Barna Group, *The Barna Group Update: Surveys Show Pastors Claim Congregants Are Deeply Committed to God But Congregants Deny It!,* 1.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

the lost is a call to know Christ and grow in His grace. If the organized church continues to mistakenly identify some believers as less than disciples, it will unintentionally bring about an undesirable product. By promoting the possibility of believers not being disciples, contemporary Christianity creates the epitome of its own teaching. Members become uncommitted to the Great Commission, community becomes shallow, and baptisms decline.

The Church's Mission: Discipleship

After the church once again discovers its member as disciples, then the Lord's call to discipleship takes on a biblical perspective. As believers act upon the knowledge that discipleship is not optional, the community from which baptisms come forth can be developed. The Christian disciple understands that his calling is a life long process of discipleship and comes to realize that he can not live the life alone. He then seeks community. Others sharpen him spiritually and he grows in his desire to share Christ with unbelievers. His witness brings fruit when others gladly receive Christ.

God's church looks different in various cultures and times. The Christian community, today, will never look exactly like the church in the Book of Acts. It is, therefore, impossible to provide a dogmatic guidebook to follow in order to possess true community. Art Katz gives a helpful reminder:

> In community, the vicissitudes of life are compounded more furiously and over a shorter period of time. There is no how-to manual for community living, and God intends that no such manual should exist. If we could prescribe a way of doing it, then it would no longer be the Kingdom of God but our kingdom. It is His Kingdom, and therefore the expression of it has to be given in the locality where we are, according to the design of God Himself, distinctive and appropriate to the

situation we are in. We do not have to be governed or ruled by earthly factors like employment or location.[44]

Not only does spiritual community take on diverse appearances in different places, but ultimately only God authors true fellowship. Man may and should promote Christian practices; nonetheless, God must convince the man of his need for dependence on others. In his work, *The Safest Place on Earth*, Larry Crabb offers some convictions about community. He writes, "Forming spiritual community is the Spirit's work. It is not ours. Our contribution is limited. Most of what we do is give up control, get out of the way, and let the Spirit take over. More than anything else, we pray."[45]

True community is not willed into existence and it may take various forms. Nevertheless, by examining the various elements of the early church's fellowship, today's church will observe the soil from which New Testament fruit grows. The Apostles learn and experience this vibrant fellowship from Christ Himself. They later put in place on a large scale the same principals which Christ teaches them in the small group. When the day of Pentecost arrives, the disciples quickly assemble the new converts into a Christian community that prays, witnesses, suffers, learns, listens, shares, battles sin, and worships together.

The Lord's Example of Community

The disciples observe and learn the various components of community from the dynamic life of Christ. Above all things, the Lord's communication with His heavenly Father is the foundation to His life and ministry. Even a casual reading of the Gospels

---

[44] Art Katz, *True Fellowship*, (n.d.) Retrieved March 12, 2007 from http://www.benisrael.org, 1.

[45] Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth,* 125.

reveals Christ as a man of constant and passionate prayer. The Lord teaches the disciples, by his example, the importance of getting alone with God. Before traveling to the nearby villages to preach, Christ seeks communion with His Father. Mark records, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place. And He was praying there" (Mark 1:35). Later the disciples experience a busy time of ministry and the Lord encourages them to seek solitude with the heavenly Father: "Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). The Lord's life of prayer influences the disciples so much that one petitions: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus then provides a model and challenges them keep searching, asking, and knocking (Luke 11:9).

As the disciples observe their Master, they see the significance of prayer to His work. The scripture often records the Lord's practice of prayer concerning events in his ministry. After John baptizes Him and before His ministry in Galilee, Jesus journeys to the wilderness to spend forty days alone with His Father in prayer and fasting (Matthew 4:1, 2). Before feeding the five thousand, Christ spends time alone with His Father (Matthew 14:13). In Gethsemane He prays, "Father if You are willing, take this cup away from Me—nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). On Calvary the Lord ends his life in prayer: "Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Still, today, Christ intercedes for His People (Hebrews 7:25)

In this community of prayer, Christ teaches the twelve disciples the various components of the Christian life. He shows them how to fast, give, and trust (Matthew 6). The Lord explains the necessity of ministering under persecution (Matthew 10:16-20) and warns against the yeast of the Pharisees (Matthew 16). Furthermore, he models

service by laying down His own life (Matthew 20:28) and encourages them to endure in the last days (Matthew 24).

The Early Church's Example of Community

Following the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, he entrusts the Apostles with the church's mission of making disciples. Immediately following Pentecost, they assemble together to carry out the Great Commission. Robert Coleman explains:

> The community of disciples became the primary means by which disciples were trained. Just as Jesus had lived closely with His followers, so now the gathered community of believers formed ongoing communion with His Spirit"[46]

Coleman further notes; "It shouldn't seem strange that the Master Teacher places such a high priority on discipling. After all, Jesus was simply asking His followers to do what He had done with them."[47] Through this early Christian community the church multiplies.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost, three thousand people receive Christ and follow Him in baptism (Acts 2:41). Peter and John continue in their Great Commission task and two thousand additional people profess faith in the Lord (Acts 4:1-4). Luke explains, "And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them" (Acts 4:33). God continues to add converts to the assembly and when the church works together to solve a conflict, even a large group of priests becomes obedient to the gospel (Acts 6:7).

Later the church battles a severe persecution in Jerusalem and all except the Apostles scatter throughout the land of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Instead of

---

[46] Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 59.

[47] Ibid., 10.

annihilating the new church, the assault causes the disciples to scatter and proclaim the message of good news in other regions (Acts 8:4). After Paul's conversion the church continues to witness together and: "the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers" (Acts 9:31). Even the Gentiles welcome God's message (Acts 11:1) and those scattered because of the persecution make their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19). The church at Antioch listens to the Holy Spirit and together sends out Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. By the end of the Book of Acts, Christianity is firmly planted in the capital of the world and is beginning its spread throughout other regions.[48]

After the disciples win someone to the Lord, they instantly take responsibility for their well being.[49] Coleman explains this important dimension in the body of Christ: "In the Book of Acts, those who responded to the Gospel invitation were brought immediately into association with other persons of like faith."[50] He adds:

> We can observe that all the way through there was a special effort to bring new Christians, without delay, into close relationship with other believers, both on the corporate and personal level. This way their growth was sustained. The three thousand converts at Pentecost were immediately amalgamated into church life, and this pattern continued daily with others as they were being saved (2:46, 47; 4:32).[51]

Peter and John continue this pattern of incorporating new believers into God's family. The lame man healed at the temple gate is not left by himself. The two disciples

---

[48] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 38.

[49] Ibid., 71.

[50] Ibid., 59.

[51] Ibid., 71, 72.

keep him with them as they continue their ministry (3:8; 4:14).[52] Coleman shows: "with the same astuteness, the apostles in Jerusalem quickly dispatched Peter and John to the Samaritan believers when they heard that 'Samaria had received the word of God'" (8:14-25).[53] Peter gives similar care to Cornelius's household, after their reception of the Holy Spirit (10:48).[54]

As the early Christians assemble together, they worship the Lord. Before Christ, the Jews focus on the place of worship, but the first believers concentrate on worshipping the person of God's Son. Luke describes this focus: "They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, *praising God* and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). These disciples praise God when others are saved (Acts 11:18). They also rejoice in the midst of extreme difficulty (Act 16:25). Their unity comes from a cohesive desire to please their Savior. When the church at Corinth loses its focus upon worshiping Christ, the result is division. Paul redirects their attention: "When I came to you, brothers, announcing the testimony of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2: 1, 2).

This gathering for *church* is not superficial and goes way beyond a Sunday morning hand shake or Baptist picnic. A spiritual family emerges as the members open up their homes to one another and invests time developing close relationships. The multitude of disciples devotes hours building community. Cole writes about the importance of these relationships:

---

[52] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 72.

[53] Ibid., 72.

[54] Ibid.

> The fellowship fostered in the church meetings was even more obvious in the daily relationships of Christians on the personal level. Reading the Acts one gets the impression that the Christians just enjoyed doing things together. In these casual relationships, probably more than in their gathered meetings, they learned what it meant to follow Christ in the daily routine of life.[55]

These relationships go way beyond the mere congenial, cooperative, or consoling interactions of today's church.[56] The goal is not just peace and conflict avoidance, but care and cure for the soul.[57] In today's unscriptural community cliques and divisions exist, but in true fellowship the church seeks the good of all without partiality.

This closely knit group of believers follows the Lord's example and prays together. While today's *self-sufficient* church member finds prayer difficult and unnecessary, prayer flows naturally from the early Christians. Just as the Lord emphasizes communication with the Father to the Twelve, the early church sees the importance of the discipline. The book of Acts opens with the disciples and a few women united in prayer (Acts 1:14). They stay faithful to the practice after Pentecost (Acts 2:42) and it produces power for witnessing (Acts 4:31). Early Christians pray to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15), for healing power (Acts 9:40), and for wisdom (Acts 13:3). While the Book of the Acts may focus on many issues, it is clearly a book of prayer.[58]

While this spiritual community prays together, God unifies their hearts. Just as naturally as earthly families meet one another's needs, this spiritual family living in the character of the great commandment willingly shares its assets to meet physical needs

---

[55] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 69.

[56] Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 41.

[57] Ibid.

[58] In the book of Acts, prayer is mentioned in more than half the chapters.

(Acts 2:44, 45). Luke states, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common" (Acts 4:32). Barnabas demonstrates this generosity by selling his property for the good of the church (Acts 4:36, 37). This charity continues throughout the book of Acts.

The love from this community also brings about accountability. Believers confess their sins to each other and corporately battle the old nature. When men involved in the occult come to Christ at Ephesus, they openly confess and disclose their practices (Acts 19:18). Evidently this openness is an integral part of the early church, for James connects it to other aspects of spiritual life: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James5:16).

Unfortunately, it is rare to see modern Christians transparent about their struggles. Open brokenness over personal transgressions is not popular in this day of self-promotion. Surface living renders community impossible. Larry Crabb asks the tough question: "Why is spiritual community so rare?"[59] He answers, "I suspect it has to do with the requirement of brokenness. We'd much rather be impressively intact than broken. But only broken people share spiritual community."[60] Often an individual must come to the place of failure before he considers his need for others. After he tries and fails in the solo life, true Christianity may blossom.

The Apostles become great leaders by closely examining and learning from the Master's life. From Him the disciples learn how to pray, share, worship, and keep one another accountable. They learn about the Christian life by entering into a small

---

[59] Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 27.

[60] Ibid., 27.

community with Christ. Later, within a larger fellowship, the Apostles effectively teach others how to follow the Lord. Through this discipling model, church pastors, teachers, and evangelists develop Christian character. Then, these leaders disciple others who continue the Great Commission. By following Christ's pattern of discipleship inside a community, baptisms increase and God's Spirit changes a society.

THE STRATEGY

By defining all Christians as disciples and emphasizing the need for discipleship within community, the church reestablishes the groundwork for change. However, comprehension of the problem alone will not solve the issue of fewer baptisms; neither will change occur from understanding the early church's practices.

The body of Christ must return to the Great Commission of making disciples within a community. The task is complicated by past failures; *non-discipled* pastors lead *non-discipled* churches. Pastors who do not experience community lead churches that practice shallow community. The church cannot anticipate the pastor bringing about what he has not first experienced. If the church does not enter into some form of New Testament fellowship, then biblical fruit, such as baptisms, will not spring forth.

The situation is not hopeless; for "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). However, God brings a harvest from the fertile ground of Christian community.

As shown from the writer's personal research, whether or not a pastor has been discipled and mentored is a factor in the frequency of baptisms. Pastors who lead to the Lord and baptize the most people are almost twice as likely to have experienced community through discipleship relationships as those who administered few baptisms.

Pastors who see the most baptisms also possess twice as many peer relationships. This writer, therefore, sees the need for improving the evangelical pastor's spiritual relationships in order to affect baptisms. He proposes a method which disciples the pastor through a community of peers and mentors. When a pastor enters into true community spiritual growth occurs more frequently. As the pastor grows in his fellowship with Christ, he obeys the Great Commission and teaches his church to do likewise. As a result, baptisms will once again multiply.

Ideally, the local church should develop its leaders, but this is highly unlikely without first bringing spiritual health to the churches' pastors. Since ninety four percent of pastors attend a Bible college or seminary, these theological institutions have a great opportunity to change the course of American Christianity.[61]
Christ devotes approximately three years in developing the Disciples. Theological schools usually have at least the same amount of time for intense training. If the Bible Colleges and Seminaries, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, will focus upon discipling the pastor and connecting him to mentors and friends, the American church will experience a renewal.

In the following pages, this writer proposes a strategy for increasing baptisms in the evangelical church by encouraging Christian training institutions to facilitate discipleship for the pastor of the twenty first century. To accomplish this task, this author outlines a proposed model which includes placing the pastor in Christian community. Then, since some schools are already focusing on discipling leaders, their working models are provided for assistance.

---

[61] John C. Larue, Jr., "Profile of Today's Pastor: Ministry Preparation," *Your Church*, March/April 1995. Retrieved March 30, 2007 from http://www.christianitytoday.com/cbg/features/report/5y2056.html, 1.

A Proposed Model

This writer understands that discipling within a Christian community will take place in various forms and in different settings. A strictly structured program that one school implements with success may not work as well at another institution. Ultimately, God is the author of true discipleship within a community. However, the following proposed model calls for Bible colleges and seminaries to facilitate five crucial relationships from which true discipleship can occur and continue. Through these relationships, the future church leader will develop a strong life-time communion with Christ and others. He will be better equipped to endure the challenges of ministry by having a support group in place. These relationships formed in a Bible college or seminary will also assist the student in his future interactions with deacons, committee members, and lay leaders.

Spiritual Formation Group Relationship

The first important relationship which must be developed involves student with other students. Ideally, upon enrollment in the school, each individual joins a Spiritual Formation Group (SFG) of five to seven additional students of the same gender. The school will give academic credit for each semester of involvement as it deems appropriate. By including the program in the curriculum, the school teaches the student the centrality of his relationship with Christ. One gains the understanding that discipleship is not just an optional activity, but the foundation to all future Christian service.

The SFG is made up of an equal amount of students from each academic class. A Bible college group will include two members from the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes respectively. A seminary grouping will include two members from first year, second year, and third year graduate students. This combination of peers will remain intact by only bringing in new members from the freshman class to replace those who graduate. As a result, students gain long-term discipleship relationships and the older students naturally become mentors to the younger.

The students are required to meet together for at least one hour per week which takes place with the supervision of a professor or staff member, but they are encouraged to meet as often as they wish. During these times, they will practice such disciplines as prayer and scripture reading. They will share struggles, confess burdens, and keep each other accountable. The student relationships formed during these years will often continue throughout the future Christian leader's lifetime of ministry. Since the cohort is chosen by the school, the student will learn how to develop friendships with peers from different backgrounds and theological persuasions. This will aid the future pastor in developing similar relationships within his congregation and neighborhood.

Faculty and Staff to Student Relationship

The next relationship joins the student to a faculty or staff member who meets weekly with the cohort. To resemble a true community, the SFG may meet in various places such as a classroom, restaurant, or home. This dynamic relationship is advantageous to both students and their supervisors. The student benefits from experiencing a mentor relationship which guides him through his spiritual development.

The faculty or staff member profits from being involved in the disciple-making mandate of the Great Commission. Instead of only teaching head knowledge, now the instructor enters into the spiritual realm of the heart. As a result, growth takes place in both the student and mentor.

The faculty and staff will also practice the previously mentioned disciplines with the SFG, but also is responsible for keeping the student accountable for spiritual development. The mentor will guide each member of the group through five learning experiences which will all be put into a spiritual journal. This document will allow the professor a means of evaluating the individual and provide the student with a testimony of his experiences. First, the student will keep a record involving his practice of the spiritual disciplines. Second, each member of the group will explore different forms of personal assessment, evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses, and develop a plan of improvement. Next, the future leader will develop his unique vision for future ministry. Then, the mentor will assist the student into gaining a historical relationship with a great leader from the past. Finally, the SFG and the mentor will serve their neighbors together through charitable projects.

Historic Figure to Student Relationship

With the help of his mentor, the student chooses to learn from one specific Christian leader from the past. Each member of the SFG will be required to read two books per semester pertaining to the historic figure and then orally report findings to the group during the weekly meetings. By examining the life, ministry, and struggles of

those who have finished the Christian life with excellence, the student will gain valuable insights.

The writer of Hebrews encourages the Jews to endure in their faith. He knows that the race set before them is difficult, but reminds them of the great cloud of witness who have already finished with distinction (Hebrews 12:1,2). By looking to past examples of individuals like Abraham, Joseph, and David, the reader knows that the God-ward life is possible. While many do drop out of ministry, the student needs to know that a host of individuals have experienced similar trials and continued in their journey toward Christ-likeness. A continual examination of spiritual heroes will encourage the pastor to likewise forsake the allurements of the world for future gain.

As one enters into this informal relationship with a past follower of Christ, he will gain a better understanding of his own times. Often the modern student only reads contemporary works and therefore sees everything from the lenses of the twenty first century. The student will of a necessity examine current trends and teachings as he discovers the doctrines of previous generations. This will enable him not to be "tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit" (Ephesians 4:14). He will likewise evaluate his own life and ministry more thoroughly.

Student to Neighbor Relationship

The fourth relationship invites the student to serve his neighbor. The faculty mentor will assist the SFG in conducting a minimum of one charitable project per semester. The group may choose a wide variety of tasks, such as ministering to people at

a nursing home, mowing a widow's yard, or painting an elderly couples garage. Through these activities, the student benefits in multiple ways.

As this writer's research shows, approximately half of the current pastors surveyed do not know all of their neighbors by first or last name. Some of them are not comfortable striking up a conversation. Since they lack personal interaction with neighbors in other matters of life, the pastor's gospel presentation is awkward. Even if the pastor gains enough courage to explain the good new of Christ, the neighbor lacks interest in hearing from a stranger. The SFG's personal involvement with others will lay the ground work for future relationships once the student is in his ministry setting.

The relationship involving service will also expose the SFG to those who are less fortunate. This will teach future ministers to be proactive in finding needs, rather than passively responding once requests for help are made. By learning to observe the needs of others, the student obtains the heart of Christ for those who may not have experienced an advantageous life. Furthermore, the student learns that true Christianity does not just meet the needs of others as a technique for evangelism and results. To the contrary, by being exposed to the hurting in society, God develops the student's proper motive of love.

The program's emphasis upon meeting the needs of others demonstrates to the student the spirit of true ministry. Jesus explains, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:26b, 27). The Lord reminds: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Later, Jesus shows that the Christian conducts true ministry to Him by serving others:

"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Matthew 25:35). This helpful lesson will aid the SFG in widening their philosophy of full time Christian service.

Pastor to Student Relationship

The final relationship connects the student to a local pastor or Christian leader. The school recruits practitioners who are qualified both academically and spiritually to assist in the institutions practical application of knowledge. Some students experience culture shock as they enter the ministry. They find a world exceedingly different from their academic setting.[62] They complain that seminary did not prepare them for real life situations.[63] This tool enhances the student's ability to solve potential future problems by allowing him observe one who successfully overcomes ministerial difficulties.

The local pastor or Christian leader enters the student's life by participating in the SFG and practicing disciplines such as prayer, fasting, scripture reading and worship. He keeps the future leader accountable by asking him the tough spiritual questions concerning his prayer life, his struggle with particular sins, and his motives for his actions. As a result, the mentor provides the student with an additional contact which will be needed as the future leader enters ministry on his own. When problems arise, the new pastor will know that a seasoned minister will be available for encouragement and direction.

---

[62] The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Review of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest (1994), 19, 24.

[63] Ibid.

The personal contact with the student also helps the pastor or local leader. A bond grows which is based upon spiritual dynamics instead of ministerial styles. As the relationship continues, the pastor may also gain a spiritual friend who serves as a fellow helper in his own discipleship. Both mentor and student see how "two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). The possibility that the two may partner together in the future is imaginable and even if they do not, a network has been put in place.

Finally, this vital union teaches the future leader the importance of ministry through the local church. Some Bible College and seminary students only consider Para church ministries. Those who have been jaded from the local church for various reasons will once again see God's plan through this foundational structure. Though they will no doubt see the difficulties up close, they will witness the necessity of the body of Christ through the local pastor's eyes.

A Working Model

This writer understands that obstacles exist for discipling the pastor within Bible colleges and seminaries. *The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Review of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest* provided the church with a thorough study concerning the pastor's educational experience. This applicable research shows some alarming facts about America's theological education training. Only forty eight percent of graduate students believe that seminary education positively impacted their life and values.[64] The training did not facilitate spiritual growth and frequently lacks a

---

[64] *The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Review of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest* (1994), 23.

spiritual base.[65] Since fifty percent of graduates leave professional ministry, the report believes that seminaries are not doing a good job of training.[66] The research explains,

> Seminaries fail to train pastors to seek fellowship with other pastors before they leave the school and accept church assignments. When no one is available to 'pastor the pastor' and no support network has been cultivated, the stresses and frustrations of the pastorate can erode enthusiasm and effectiveness in ministry.[67]

Some church leaders do not see reform as even a possibility. Edward Farley who sees the problem as relating to the need to please accrediting agencies writes, "I am not sure that even a threat to institutional survival is powerful enough to offset a school's structural resistance to reform."[68] He adds, "Given the way educational institutions conserve themselves, rapid and self-critical reform, accompanied within and by the faculty in cooperation with students and administration, does not seem possible."[69]

Obstacles exist, but this writer believes that seminaries and Bible colleges can adjust their curriculums and change the course of American Christianity. While this writer is unaware of any educational institution which uses the same complete and continuing methods as outlined, some theological schools are already effectively practicing particular rudiments of the proposed model. The following is a review of how some schools are employing aforementioned elements to disciple the student in a Christian community.

---

[65] *The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Review of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest* (1994), 23.

[66] Ibid., 19.

[67] Ibid., 8.

[68] Edward Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization," *Christian Century*, February 1997, 133.

[69] Farley, "Why Seminaries Don't Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization," 133.

Operational Spiritual Formation Group Relationship

In a March 2007 *Christianity Today* article, Randal Frame discusses various methods which Christian schools are using to develop the student's character.[70] Union University in Jackson, Tennessee utilizes peer groups for spiritual formation. Though this program is not as comprehensive or long-term as the SFG's previously suggested, they have initiated the development of spiritual formation groups. Frame explains the program's dynamics stating that "upperclassmen at Union lead a ministry called LIFE Groups. This enables new students to form lasting relationships in a small group setting that is relaxed and comfortable."[71] The activities cover an entire semester instead of just a few days during orientation.[72]

Washington Bible College & Capital Bible Seminary also constructs small groups for students which meet throughout the semester. Since today's culture is very relational, the school designs these groups in order to allow the students to learn from each other in online forums and personal interactions.[73] This provides the student with a venue to discuss classroom instruction. Dallas Theological Seminary has a similar program which encourages group members to grow in character and spiritual maturity.[74] These relationships produce significant friendships and ministry partnerships which often last a lifetime.

---

[70] Randall Frame, "Developing Character and Values through Co-Curricular Activities," *Christianity Today*, March 2007, 96.

[71] Ibid., 106.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Information retrieved on April 05, 2007 from http://www.bible.edu/index.cfm?PAGE_ID=1408&EXPAND=1404.

[74] Information retrieved on April 4, 2007 from http://www.dts.edu/departments/academic/sfl/sf/.

Operational Faculty and Staff to Student Relationship

Denver Seminary has developed a faculty led mentorship program, which combines academic excellence with spiritual growth.[75] Both adjuncts and full time faculty members advise the student by using a series of self-directed learning contracts. This involved approach to learning gives the future Christian leader the opportunity to access his unique gifts and abilities before he enters full time ministry.

Last year, Elisabeth H. Selzer evaluated Denver's program in her Ph.D. theses. She begins her work by commenting about what she perceives as a current problem in many seminaries:

> The emphasis has been on practical professional skills, predominantly those of theological and biblical study. While these skills are important for pastors and other professional ministry workers to possess, many have reached their ministry posts with a great amount of intellectual knowledge, and yet little practical understanding of how to lead and administer the church population."[76]

To help solve the problem, Selzer surveyed the graduates who had gone through the Training and Mentoring Program at Denver Seminary. They were asked to identify the impact of the program on the perceived performance and the satisfaction they currently feel in ministry work.[77] After finding that the involvement of faculty members constituted the most important aspect of the entire program, she recommends, "Seminaries should consider mentoring as a mode of promoting growth and long-term support systems for their students."[78]

---

[75] Information retrieved on April 4, 2007 from http://www.denverseminary.edu/tm.

[76] Elisabeth Selzer, "Effectiveness of a Seminary's Training and Mentoring Program of its Graduates" (Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2006), 13.

[77] Ibid., 16.

[78] Ibid., 104.

Operational Student to Neighbor Relationship

California Baptist University challenges the student to serve others. Frame reports,

> At CBU, local service begins in the students' backyard with community ministries that include mentoring at-risk youth, adopting senior adults near campus as surrogate grandparents, and raising awareness of social issues by, for example participating in activities associated with World AIDS Day.[79]

The student body of Gordon College of Wenham, Massachusetts also met the needs of the less fortunate by giving their time in service-learning opportunities to the city and people of Lynn, Massachusetts. This unique program integrates students into urban community organizations and helps in addressing inner-city issues faced by this economically challenged and ethnically diverse area.[80]

Operational Pastor to Student Relationship

Gordon Cromwell Theological Seminary, which is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, utilizes full-time pastors in the student's field experience.[81] The seminary explains, "The primary objective of Mentored Ministry is to provide a context for integration of theory with practical field-based experience."[82] The mentors who are already involved in ministry contribute to the student's formation in four significant ways.[83] First, the field pastor guides the student into an ample experience of ministry

---

[79] Frame, "Developing Character and Values through Co-Curricular Activities," 96.

[80] Ibid., 98.

[81] Information retrieved on April 6, 2007 from http://www.gcts.edu/Hamilton/mentoredministry/description.php.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

practice. Second, he encourages the future leader to continue the practice of study. Third, the student is pointed toward the reality of a fuller life in journey with Christ and the people of God. Finally, the field-mentor models the ministry of biblical preaching, teaching, pastoral care, theological reflection, evangelism, missions, Christian education and conflict resolution.[84]

A Comprehensive Model

Bethel Seminary of the East possesses a comprehensive discipleship program for the ministry student, which resembles this writer's proposed model in several aspects. In the last nineteen years, one hundred and ninety students have graduated. Unlike many other institutions, most of Bethel Seminary of the East's students remains in active ministry. As of March 2007, an astonishing seventy five percent are still serving in full time positions.[85] When one considers that many alumni are lay leaders in their church, work in secular positions, or never intended to take a full-time ministry position, the retention rate is an example of what can be accomplished.

Bethel Seminary of the East attributes much of their success to their dynamic mentorship program. They explain, "Mentoring is an essential component of theological education at Bethel Seminary of the East. It is not a replacement for the classroom. Rather mentoring complements, strengthens, enhances, and reinforces the other

---

[84] Information retrieved on April 6, 2007 from http://www.gcts.edu/Hamilton/mentoredministry/description.php

[85] "Report to Bethel Seminary of the East Faculty and Staff Regarding Alumni in Ministry," (2007).

dimensions of the curriculum."[86] The seminary is, therefore, persuaded that fully equipped servant-leaders for the church are best nurtured in the context of quality relationships with other men and women who themselves know and love God and who are already involved in various areas of ministry.[87] Their three-fold approach to mentoring involves faculty mentoring, student peer mentoring, and local ministry mentoring. The mentoring takes place primarily in three different contexts: (1) the interactions with professors and fellow students on class days at Seminary, (2) the Spiritual Formation Discipleship Groups, and (3) the regular mentoring meetings in the student's home ministry context with his or her own local ministry mentors.[88]

Summary

Seminary and Bible colleges unsuccessfully invest much time and resources attempting to achieve the *results* of the Great Commission. By spending the same efforts on the *heart* of the Great Commission—discipleship, America's theological schools can successfully build a community for the pastor who can in return replicate it in a New Testament church. When this is accomplished, pastors and believers alike will be more likely to invite others to join them in a life of following Christ. The proposed model introduces a basic framework that, when implemented properly, will provide the support needed for the pastor to fulfill his calling.

---

[86] Bethel Seminary of the East, "Mentoring Manual: A Guide to Learning through Relationships," (2006-2007), 5.

[87] Bethel Seminary of the East, "Mentoring Manual: A Guide to Learning through Relationships," (2006-2007), 3.

[88] Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Pastor Steve's dilemma mentioned in the opening paragraph is not an isolated case.[1] As this writer sits at his desk on Saturday morning and begins to conclude his dissertation, many American pastors approach tomorrow morning with dread.[2] Some of these men once had a passion for God's work, but now are abandoning their post in frustration. They may testify to past successes, but currently they experience an evangelistic drought. Christian leaders who are troubled by the decline in baptisms are beginning to recommend strategies for solving the problem. A solution, however, to the decline in baptisms will not come by providing the pastor with new or enhanced methods. Steve does not need a revolutionary idea. He only requires discipleship in a Christian community. Before the church can properly reach the lost multitude, it must first reach

---

[1] H.B. London reports to James Dobson in *Pastor's at Risk*, on page 25, that surveys indicate that 40 % of pastors say they have considered leaving their pastorates in the last three months. London continues the conversation by telling Dobson that this tragedy shows an agonizing dissatisfaction that is largely unrecognized by those outside the profession.

[2] A 1991 Survey of Pastor by Fuller Institute of Church Growth reports: 80% of pastors believed that pastoral ministry affected their families negatively; 33% said that being in ministry was an outright hazard to their family; 75% reported a significant stress-related crises at least once in their ministry; 50% felt unable to meet the needs of the job; 90% felt they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands; 37% confessed having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.

out to its pastors. American Christianity will ascend or collapse according to the pastor's devotional life with Christ. Hence, the church's reaction to Pastor Steve's situation will steer the course for twenty first century evangelicalism.

Various outcomes for Steve and many of America's pastors are possible. Perhaps, as he sits at his desk and contemplates his next course of action, he tries to think of someone whom he can call for assistance. He considers a Bible college professor, but Steve never really got below the surface with him. He considers other pastors in his association, but they always seem so chipper and ever ready to give a praise report about many successes. Surely they would not understand his disappointment. After six months of trying to get over his internal struggles and feelings of apathy, Steve decides that ministry must not be right for him. He doubts his calling and reasons: "God does not want anyone to experience this much misery." Believing that a secular job and a life outside of the pastorate will ease the stress and bring more comfort, Steve drafts his resignation letter.

On what begins like a normal Sunday morning for the congregation, Steve opens his Bible to preach for the last time. While speaking from the text, "And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7), he knows that his heart contains no rest. As the invitation concludes quickly with no one coming forward, Steve pulls out a folded piece of paper and asks the people to be seated. The church is filled with tension for the people feel like they know what is coming next. Other pastors have come and gone, but their last words have all been similar. Steve slowly reads:

> Dear church family, after much prayer and counsel, I have come to believe that God wants me to resign as pastor of First Baptist Church. Together we have seen

> God do some great works. Some souls have been saved and I trust that my ministry for the previous four years has benefited you in some way. I thank you for your hospitality and kindness toward my entire family. I covet your prayers in the coming weeks as we pursue God's will for our lives. I believe that God will send you the right pastor in His timing. This morning I give my month notice for my departure and ask you to provide the last two weeks for a transition vacation time. Thank you and the Lord bless.
>
> Pastor Steve

First Baptist Church will no doubt locate another pastor. A pulpit committee will collect resumes and pray for God to send the right person. When the new pastor arrives, some excitement may return. In time Steve will be almost forgotten by the congregation. Occasionally, someone may wonder, "Whatever happened to Steve?" The church goes on Sunday after Sunday, but the new pastor does not realize that many other men have started just like him. Steve's problem will most likely become his if something is not changed for this pattern of excitement to gloom has continued for the last one hundred years.

The pastor's difficulties influence far more than just *his* ministry. While Pastor Steve struggled to get out of bed for the past several months, many people in his neighborhood remained lost. As he dealt with daily depression and what some people call pastor burnout, Steve did not have the desire or energy to tell others about the *good news* of Jesus Christ. During the churches eighteen month search for their new leader, no new converts entered the baptistery. The Great Commission was replaced with the labor of finding a new leader. The investment made by his Bible college and seminary faculty seems like a waste of time. All the resources spent by the denomination to educate Steve can not be recovered.

Though the scenario provided above is the grim reality for many former pastors, this writer sees a better alternative. As Steve sits at his desk, he decides to call his friend Jim who he met in seminary. They built a close relationship by praying together in their Spiritual Formation Group. By confessing their real struggles, the two bonded in their desire to become like Christ. The two have kept in touch through weekly emails and monthly phone conversations, but they have not spoken for six weeks. Steve calms down immediately after Jim answers the phone. Sensing that something is wrong, Jim is more than willing to listen for the hour. He does not say much, but his few words and his listening stirs hope in Steve's spirit. It comforts this pastor to realize that others have faced the same trials.

Later in the week, Pastor Steve sends two emails. First, he contacts his faculty mentor from four years ago. Professor Jones had become almost like a father figure to him. Steve knew that the professor was very busy, but never felt like a burden on his schedule. Steve explains his situation and pending decision and is confident that he will receive a reply. Then, he sends a short email message to his former pastor who he met during his time in seminary. They had also connected well through weekly times of prayer, ministry, and personal accountability. Steve recollects that his pastoral mentor warned him that times like this would transpire. He had already given permission for Steve to call upon him regardless of the details. Both men respond to Pastor Steve within twelve hours. Along with Jim, a strong alliance of three men begins to pray for the distressed young Pastor. They call him often and once Jim makes the six hour drive to comfort his peer.

As the men pray and speak words of encouragement and correction into Steve's life, the troubled pastor also recalls the life of Charles Simeon who he diligently studied in school. Remembering that Simeon endured a difficult pastorate for fifty four years, Steve's resolve strengthens.[3] He reasons, "If Simeon could serve God in such opposition, then surely God could provide strength for him at First Baptist Church." Using Simeon as his guide, Steve turns back to God through prayer and Bible reading. While practicing the disciplines, he once again experiences a burden for the lost and begins to evangelize his neighbors. A few months later, baptisms begin to occur with frequency once again. The focus of the church changes to the Great Commission and disciples multiply.

At certain times in history, the church approaches an urgent decision. Often the people of God do not realize that their response will bring major consequences for future generations. If the evangelical church continues on its current path of optional discipleship and shallow community, baptisms will decline further and spiritual poverty will be exposed. However, if the church's training institutions will siege the opportunity to disciple the pastor of the twenty first century by facilitating New Testament relationships, American Christianity will experience renewal. As the discipled pastor publicly invites individuals to the Great Commission—a life of discipleship, many of them will join him by entering New Testament fellowships.

---

[3] John Piper, *Charles Simeon: His Trials and Patience in the Ministry*, 1990. Retrieved April 7, 2007 from http://www.puritansermons.com/banner/simeon.htm, 1.

Appendix A

PASTOR SURVEY

An email survey was sent in January 2007 to approximately one thousand and four hundred pastors from four different groups. These groups include pastors from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV), the Liberty Baptist Fellowship (LBF) associated with Liberty University, and Doctor of Ministry students from Liberty Theological Seminary. One hundred and fifty pastors responded to the following email request:

> Dear Pastor, hi. My name is Rick Foster. I am a pastor in Virginia and am currently working on a Doctor of Ministry writing project for Liberty Seminary. It is my hope that this work will help current and future pastors. My topic is the public invitation. I would like to request your help. Below you will find a brief survey of 10 questions that should take less than five minutes of your time. Many of the questions only require a yes or no answer. Please, understand that your name and/or church will be kept confidential. You do not need to include your name with the survey. To complete the survey, please hit the reply button and type your answers in the body of the email. Then hit the send button. Thanks in advance for your time.
>
> Rick Foster

1. Do you know the last names of your five closest neighbors (yes or no)?
2. Do you know each neighbor's first name (yes or no)?
3. Do you know whether or not they are saved (yes or no)?
4. How many of them have you personally shared the gospel with (provide number)?
5. Approximately how often do you share the gospel outside of the pulpit in any given month (please provide number)?

6. In the past three years, how many people that you have led to the Lord have been baptized (please provide number)?

7. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you give a public invitation less frequently (yes or no)? If you do not usually give a public invitation, please indicate this below.

8. If you did not feel the need to keep tradition, then would you cut out the public invitation (yes or no)?

9. Approximately, how many minutes do you spend in prayer per week (give approximate amount)?

10. Not counting study preparation time, approximately how many minutes do you spend reading the scripture per week (give approximate amount)?

Appendix B

PASTOR FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

Pastors that had won to the Lord and baptized more than twenty five people were sent the following email:

> Hi. I want to thank you for answering my pastoral survey that was sent to you a few days ago. I have chosen you and six other pastors to respond to three simple follow up questions. I have chosen you because your results in evangelism were very above the norm. I believe that pastors could learn a lot from your evangelistic lifestyle. If you will answer the three questions below and send them back to me, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you in advance.
>
> Rick

1. Did you have a person that discipled you either formally or informally? This would have been a person that invested quality time in your spiritual development (yes or no).
2. Do you have a person that you are still accountable to that you consider a spiritual mentor?
3. How many close friends do you have in the ministry? I know that this is somewhat subjective, but I mean close friends that really know of your weaknesses and strengths—men that you spend quality time with.

Another email with the same questions was sent to the fifty pastors that had led to the Lord and baptized the fewest amount of people in the same three year period. The email read,

> I would like to thank you for returning my survey a few days ago. You have helped me a great deal. I would like to ask for your help with three additional questions. I appreciate your time and thank you again in advance. Take care and the Lord bless.
>
> Rick Foster

Appendix C

PASTOR SURVEY RESULTS

The following is the results from the one hundred and fifty pastors who returned the survey:

1. Fifty one percent of the pastors know the last name of their five closest neighbors.
2. Fifty percent know each neighbor's first name.
3. Sixty one percent testify to knowing the spiritual state of their five closest neighbors.
4. The average pastor shares the gospel with about half of his neighbors.
5. The pastor witnesses to an unsaved person between seven to eight times per month.
6. In the last three year period, the average pastor leads to the Lord and baptizes fourteen people.
7. Even if they did not feel the need to keep tradition, seventy three percent would not give the public invitation less frequently.
8. Even if they did not feel the need to keep tradition, eighty nine percent would not discontinue the public invitation.
9. The average pastor spends thirty one minutes a day in prayer.
10. The average pastor uses twenty seven minutes a day for personal Bible reading.
11. The pastors who lead to the Lord and baptize twenty five or more people average seventy three minutes a day in prayer.
12. Pastors who lead to the Lord and baptize six or fewer people average twenty minutes a day in prayer.
13. Pastors who lead to the Lord and baptize twenty five or more individuals average fifty eight minutes a day in personal Bible time.

14. Pastors who lead to the Lord and baptized fewer than six people average seventeen minutes a day in the Bible.

15. Eighty two percent of pastors in the twenty five or more group testify to being discipled.

16. Forty five percent of pastors in the six or fewer group have been discipled.

17. Seventy three percent of pastors in the twenty five or more group are currently being mentored.

18. Forty five percent of pastors in the six or fewer group or currently being mentored.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baptist Press News, *Most pastors unsatisfied with their personal prayer lives*, (2005). Retrieved February 22, 2007 from http://www.bpnews.net.

The Barna Group. *The Barna Group Update: Surveys Show Pastors Claim Congregants Are Deeply Committed to God But Congregants Deny It!,* (January , 2004). Retrieved February 15, 2007 from www.barna.org.

_____. *The Barna Group Update: Born Again Christians*, (September 2004). Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org.

_____. The Barna Group Update: *Only half of Protestant Pastors have a biblical worldview*, (January 12, 2004). Retrieved February 28, 2007 from http://www.barna.org.

Belridge, A., JR., L. Bernard, D. Blair, S. Butler, P. Peters & C. Yallop, eds., The *Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition. Australia: The Macquarie Library, 1997.

Bennett, David. *The Altar Call*. Lanham: University Press, 2000.

Bethel Seminary of the East, "Mentoring Manual: A Guide to Learning through Relationships," 2007.

Bettenson, Henry, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford, 1963.

Biederwolf, William E. *Evangelism: Its Justification, Its Operation and Its Value.* New York: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1921.

Bisagano, John R. *The Power of Positive Evangelism*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman 1968.

_____. *Letters to Timothy*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Collier, 1959.

Bridges, Charles. *The Christian Ministry*. Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *True Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1919.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1994.

Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987.

Colton, Calvin. *History and Character of American Revivals*. London: Wesley & Davis, 1832.

Crabb, Larry. *The Safest Place on Earth*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1999.

Criswell, W.A. *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors*. Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 1980.

Cymbala, Jim. *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.

Dorsett, Lyle W. *Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Drummond, Lewis. *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992.

Edwards, Jonathan. *Religious Affections*. ed. John E. Smith, Works of Jonathan Edwards; New Haven: Yale UP, 1959, vol. 2.

Farley, Edward. "Why Seminaries Don't Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization." *Christian Century*, February 1997.

Ferm, Robert O. *The Psychology of Christian Conversion*. Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1959.

Finney, Charles G. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. NY: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1868.

_____. *Revival Fire*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, n.d.

Fish, Roy J. *Giving A Good Invitation*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1974.

Fisk, Samuel. *The Public Invitation: Is it Scriptural? Is it Wise? Is it Necessary?* Brownsburg: Biblical Evangelism, 1970.

Ford, Leighton. *The Christian Persuader*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

Frame, Randall. "Developing Character and Values through Co-Curricular Activities." *Christianity Today*, March 2007.

Green, Michael. *Evangelism through the Local Church*. Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990.

Griffin, Emory A. *The Mind Changers*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1976.

Grindstaff, W.E. *Ways to Win*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1957.

Guinness, O.S. *Dining With the Devil*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1993.

_____. *Prophetic Untimeliness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

Hardman, Keith J. *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1994.

Harvey, Bonnie C. *D.L. Moody: The American Evangelist.* Uhrichsville: Barbour, 2000.

Hawkins, O.S. *Drawing the Net*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary Volume VI*. Mclean: MacDonald Publishing Company, nd.

Hobbs, Herschel H. *New Testament Evangelism*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1960.

Hosier, Helen K. *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakener.* Uhrichsville: Barbour, n.d.

Hull, Bill. *The Disciple-Making Pastor*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1988.

_____. *Choose the Life.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 2004.

_____. *The Disciple-Making Church*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990; Fleming H. Revell, 2002.

_____. *New Century Disciplemaking*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984.

Hulse, Erroll. *The Great Invitation*. Welwn: Evangelical, 1986.

Hutson, Curtis. *Winning Souls and Getting Them Down the Aisle*. Murfreesboro: The Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1978.

Ironside, H.A. *Except Ye Repent*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1937.

Katz, Art. *True Fellowship.* Retrieved March 12, 2007 from http://www.benisrael.org.

Kendall, R.T. *Stand up and Be Counted*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

Kerr, Hugh T. & John M. Mulder. Eds. *Famous Conversions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Laure, John C. Jr. "Profile of Today's Pastor: Ministry Preparation." *Your Church*, March/April 1985. Retrieved March 30, 2007 from http://www.christianitytoday.com/cbg/features/report/5y2056.html.

Leavell, Roland Q. *Evangelism: Christ's Imperative Commission*, revised by Landrum P. Leavell II and Harold T. Bryson. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1979.

Ledbetter, Tammi Reed. *The Ministry: 'Almost Inevitable Ruin,'* Retrieved February 13, 2007 from http://www.jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2018.htm.

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.

London, H.B., Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman. *Pastors at Risk*. Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 1993.

MacArthur, John, Jr. *Saved Without a Doubt*. Wheaton: Victor, 1992.

_____. *Faith Works*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993.

_____. *Fool's Gold?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2005.

_____. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*. Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne, Word Publishing, 1992.

_____. *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*. Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1995.

_____. *Twelve Ordinary Men*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2002.

McGee, J. Vernon. *Revelation Volume I*. Pasadena: Thru the Bible Books, 1979.

Machen, J. Gresham. *What is Faith?* New York: Macmillan, 1925. Reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991.

Meeks, Steve. *Relational Christianity*. Houston: Calvary Publications, 1991.

Mitchell, Curtis. *Those Who Came Forward*. Philadelphia: Chilton, 1966.

Murray, Andrew. *Abide in Christ.* New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1979.

Murray, Iain. *The Invitation System*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987.

_____. *Pentecost Today*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1998.

Packer, J.I. *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1961.

_____. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993.

Peace, Richard V. *Conversion in the New Testament*: Paul and the Twelve. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Perry, Lloyd M., and John R. Strubhar. *Evangelistic Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.

Phillips, Rachel M. *Billy Sunday: Evangelist on the Sawdust Trail.* Uhrichsville: Barbour, 2001.

Piper, John. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1990.

_____. *Contending for Our All*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006.

_____. *God is the Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2005.

_____. *Let the Nations be Glad*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2003.

_____. *Charles Simeon: His Trials and Patience in the Ministry*, 1990. Retrieved April 7, 2007 from http://www.puritansermons.com/banner/simeon.htm.

Pollock, J.C. Moody: *A Biographical Portrait of the Pacesetter in Modern Mass Evangelism.* New York: Macmillan, 1963.

Powell, Ivor. *Don't Lose That Fish*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960.

Prince, Derek. *Repent and Believe*. Fort Lauderdale: Derek Prince, n.d.

Rankin, Russ. *FY 2005 Stats: Southern Baptist Experience Drop in Baptisms* (2006). Retrieved February 12, 2007 from http://www.bpnews.net.

"Report to Bethel Seminary of the East Faculty and Staff Regarding Alumni in Ministry," 2007.

Robinson, Haddon W. and Torrey W. Robinson. *It's All in How You Tell It.* Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2003.

_____. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2001.

Schuller, Robert. *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*. Waco: Word Books, 1982.

_____. *Self-Love: The Dynamic Force of Success*. New York: Hawthorn Books Incorporation, 1969.

Selzer, Elisabeth. "Effectiveness of a Seminary's Training and Mentoring Program of its Graduates." Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2006.

Shaff, Phillip and Henry Wace, eds. *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (NPNF). 1892. Reprint, Peabody: Hendricksen, 1999.

Smith, Bailey E. *Real Evangelism*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1978.

Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, Revised Edition. Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Company, n.d.

Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Soul Winner*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.

_____. *Lectures to My Students*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1977.

_____. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 28, 1882.

_____. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 40, 1888.

_____. *The Soul-Winner*. Pasadena: Pilgrim Publications, 1978.

Street, R. Alan. *The Effective Invitation*. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1984.

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words.* Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1996.

Taylor, Mendell. *Exploring Evangelism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1964.

Thompson, W.O. Jr. "The Public Invitation as a Method of Evangelism: Its Origin and Development." Ph.D. diss., Southewestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979.

Torrey, Reuben A. *How to Bring Men to Christ*. Minneapolis: Dimension, 1977.

Tozer, A.W. *Echoes from Eden*. Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1981.

_____. *The Dwelling Place of God*. Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1969.

_____. *Gems from Tozer*. Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1969.

Vine, W.E., Merill F. Unger and William White, Jr. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002.

_____. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged. New York: Harper Collins World, 1977.

Whitesell, G.D. *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984.

Wiersbe, Warren, ed. *The Best of A.W. Tozer*. Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1980.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy*. NewYork: HarperCollins, 1997.

Willmington, Harold. *Willmington's Complete Guide to Bible Knowledge*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993.

Wilkin, Bob. *Are All Believers Disciples?* (March, 1990), Retrieved March 12, 2007 from http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1990/90march1.html.

Wright, H. Norman. *Improving Your Self Image*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1977.

Young, Douglas G. Ed. *Young's Compact Bible Dictionary*. Masda Press, 1984; Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers Incorporated, 1989.

VITA

RICHARD N. FOSTER

PERSONAL

Born: October 28, 1971, Tell City, IN

Married: Tracy, since 1995

Children: Lauryn, Kathryn, and Samuel

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Liberty University, 2000

M.A.R., Liberty Theological Seminary, 2001

M.Div., Liberty Theological Seminary, 2004

PROFESSIONAL

Pastor, Island Baptist Church, Chincoteague Island, VA, 2002-present

Adjunct Faculty, Liberty University Distance Learning Program, 2006-present

Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, West Liberty, KY, 1996-1999

Ordained: August, 1994, New Hope Baptist Church, West Liberty, KY