

Liberty University

**The Acts Model Designed to Make Disciples**

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by

**Phillip Stevens**

Lynchburg, Virginia

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**Thesis Approval Sheet**

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Joel Breidenbaugh, PhD  
Mentor

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Dwayne Milioni, PhD  
Faculty Reader

## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Phillip Stevens

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020

Mentor: Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh

Churches are in decline. Every relevant statistic reveals the church has a major problem, and if it is to continue to survive it must make changes. The church is not evangelizing, not making disciples, and not making an impact in our communities. Every year it is estimated that over 4,000 churches close each year. The organism founded by Jesus is being overcome. Winfall Baptist Church, located in Gladys, VA, was arguably a church on the decline. Members of the Winfall community believed the church building would one day end up becoming a hay barn.

Based on Scripture, surveys of current ministry leaders, various books/articles, and personal observation this paper will create a biblical model, the Acts Model, proven to resurrect the power and influence of the church. This work will also show how WBC used this biblical model to resurrect a congregation. This project set out to prove that if WBC would apply the principles found in Acts 2:42-47 then this church could be revitalized and experience spiritual growth and make a difference in the Kingdom of God.

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## Introduction

A majority of American churches are in decline. Statistics reveal the American church has a major problem, and if these churches are to thrive, be influential in our communities, foster spiritual transformation, they must make changes. Many churches are not evangelizing, not making disciples, not baptizing converts,<sup>1</sup> and not making a visible, spiritual impact in our communities. Barna states, “that by 2025, the local church will be rendered irrelevant, as millions of born-again Christians sever their institutional and denominational ties in favor of ‘alternative faith-based communities’ and ministries focusing on media, arts, and culture.”<sup>2</sup> Every year it is estimated that over 4,000 churches permanently close each year (an average of 76 churches closing every week).<sup>3</sup> Based on Scripture, surveys of current ministries, various books/articles, and personal observation this project will provide a detailed model of the church in Acts 2:42-47. This research will also show how a small church near Rustburg, VA revived a congregation through implementing this model within our context.

Almost 2,000 years ago a man named Jesus was crucified by Romans on a cross and three days later, this same Jesus, was seen by over 500 witnesses (1 Cor. 15:6), resurrected from the dead. Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus’ last words to His followers would be the “marching orders” for this new establishment called the Church. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sbclife.net/article/1089/finding-new-life-for-struggling-churches> accessed March 12, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 48.

<sup>3</sup> The estimate of 4,000 was given by Thom Rainer and quoted Cassidy in the article, “Wait, How many Churches Close per Year?” *Roll to Disbelieve*, November 2018.

obey all that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19, 20a). In Acts 5 we see the first of many occurrences of the term “church” (*ekklēsia*). Jeon, observes, “While the uses of the word are not identical, here the word communicates that a distinct community has emerged. Such a community has heard the gospel through the apostles, has responded in faith, and is united by a common fear and awe of the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

The book of Acts is the story of the first-century believers and how they obeyed Christ’s command of reaching their world with the gospel, through the Church, the Body of Christ. This first-century group of believers accomplished this goal within their lifetime. It has and is now, incumbent upon each generation of believers to continue reaching their world with the gospel through the means of the Church, the organism in which Jesus died (Eph. 5:25).

Theoretically, if the members of the Body of Christ around the world decided not to evangelize and live our lives in disobedience to God than the influence of the gospel would be greatly diminished. Though there could be any number of ways God could have chosen to build His Church He ultimately chose to use people, who placed their faith in God’s Word, and the power of the Spirit, to build the Church. Placing the most powerful message, the gospel, in the hands of people may seem like a mistake, but God in His infinite wisdom and power have used followers of “The Way” to communicate the gospel message from one generation to the next. Dr. Caner in his book, *Why Churches Die?* notes, “in the references to ‘church’ in the Bible, we find an empowered people of God, left as ambassadors to the world and family to one another.”<sup>5</sup> The Church is called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. The Church’s disobedience has

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<sup>4</sup> P. Jeon, *Collectivism and/or Christianity: An Exegetical Study of Acts 2:42-47 & 4:32—5:11*, (Institute for Faith, Works, and Economics, 2013), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Mac Brunson and Ergun Mehmet. Caner, *Why Churches Die: Diagnosing Lethal Poisons in the Body of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 8.

high consequences since the message of the gospel is the only message that leads to salvation (Acts 4:12).

## **Ministry Context**

### History of Winfall Baptist Church

Winfall Baptist Church (WBC) was organized in 1905 when 22 men and women who had been meeting as a class on Sunday mornings believed God was calling them to form a church. R.F. Hopkins became the first pastor and in 1906 a building was erected in the very place it stands today. Throughout the years, 31 different pastors<sup>6</sup> have served at this church and the membership has never grown over 108. In 1956, WBC joined the Baptist General Assembly of Virginia and then became a member of the Staunton River Baptist Association. In 2017, it came to the church's attention that the values and theological beliefs of the BGAV do not reflect the values of the church and in November of 2017, and within two short weeks, WBC became a member of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV).<sup>7</sup>

For the majority life of the church, the membership has remained very steady with around 30 active members and many times going far below this number. Many of the local neighbors to the church believed the church building would someday become a "hay barn." In December of 2014, the pastor who served for almost five years moved to another state. In the time between finding another pastor, many in the congregation wondered if the church was going to survive. At the lowest point, the church was averaging 15 in attendance. A long-time deacon noted this church had only seen 1 baptism within the past 4 years (2014). The current trend would have

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<sup>6</sup> Until 2016, and the hiring of Reverend Phil Stevens, WBC had never hired a full time Pastor. All of the previous pastors were either volunteer or considered part time.

<sup>7</sup> Details of the change from the BGAV to the SBCV will be developed later in this research.

seen this church close its doors within a very short period of time. WBC would have certainly met the qualifications of being a declining church.

In 2014, there was a split within the church which caused several families to leave, the church as a whole didn't recover from it for many years. At the end of 2014, the pastor who had served for almost four years resigned (under good circumstances).<sup>8</sup> The church went from January 2015 to August 2016 without any pastor. They "survived" through this period by asking area preachers to speak each week.

Below are statistics taken from the Annual Profiles submitted for the past 10 years. Some of the notable years are 2011 when Rev. Webster was installed as the Sr. Pastor. In 2014, the church split became "final" and "irreconcilable" as they left the congregation. Pastor Stevens was installed in 2016.

#### **Winfall Baptist's Church Annual Profile from 2010-2019<sup>9</sup>**

	Baptisms Ages 11 Under	Baptisms Ages 12 to 17	Baptisms Ages 18 to 29	Baptisms Ages 30+	Baptisms Total	Receipts Total	Weekly Avg. Attendance
2010						70,100	40
2011	4	1	0	0	5	75,400	45
2012	0	0	0	0	0	75,200	45
2013	0	0	0	0	0	75,200	30
2014	0	0	0	0	0	54,269	33
2015	0	0	0	0	0	51,300	22
2016	0	0	0	0	0	61,000	25
2017	0	1	1	3	5	62,000	60
2018	0	3	0	7	10	74,000	80
2019	2	2	4	0	8	93,000	70

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<sup>8</sup> Pastor Webster left for North Carolina in December 2014. In August 2016 he passed away in a bike accident.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics taken from the Annual Profile for SBC churches on [sbcworkspace.com](http://sbcworkspace.com) accessed on May 2, 2020.

## Pastoral Information

Phil Stevens has been the pastor of Winfall since August 1, 2016 when the church unanimously voted to bring him on as the part-time Senior Pastor. Pastor Stevens was ordained in a Southern Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA called Hope of David Messianic Congregation.<sup>10</sup> Hope of David was an SBC church plant in Atlanta whose mission was to reach Jewish people with the gospel of Jesus using Jewish customs and Jewish feast practiced in the Old Testament. Pastor Stevens spent three years in Atlanta before going to Nashville, TN to become a youth pastor. After the pastor left, he was then voted in as the pastor of West Meade Fellowship.<sup>11</sup>

After three years at West Meade Fellowship, a small group of people began a new church plant called True Life Church. The initial group of 17 planted the congregation and before Pastor Stevens moved on, he installed a pastor to continue the ministry. From there, the pastor felt God leading him to be a pastor in Lynch Station, VA called Lynch Station Baptist Church (LSBC)<sup>12</sup>. At LSBC, there was initial success. When the pastor arrived, there was only 65 in regular attendance and within three years the church was averaging around 140. Unfortunately, the pastor wanted to take a stand by leaving the BGAV because of their lack of fidelity to the inerrant Scriptures. The leadership (deacons) didn't want to leave the association, and due to the impasse, Pastor Stevens resigned in April of 2012.

There was a time of necessary healing. Diamond Hill Presbyterian Church (DHPC) in Gladys, VA called Pastor Phil to become an interim preacher while they began their search for a

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<sup>10</sup> Hope of David, <http://www.geocities.ws/realjewsforjesus/hopeofdavid.html> accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.westmeadefellowship.com/> accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.lynchstationbaptistchurch.com/> accessed on June 27, 2020.

new pastor. Though the initial call was only meant to be for six months he ministered there for over three years. Through his time there he built healthy relationships and God healed the heart that had been broken. Less than six months after leaving DHPC, Pastor Stevens connected with Winfall Baptist Church.

The academic background of the pastor began in 1998 where he received a Bachelor of Science in Religion from Liberty University. Later in 2009, he earned a Master of Arts in Religion and in 2015, his Master of Divinity, also from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. Currently, he is working on a Doctor of Ministry in Evangelism and Church planting.

#### Finances of WBC

Financially, the church is doing well. WBC owns their buildings and has no debt. In 2016, they hired the pastor on a part-time basis. In May of 2017, they began to contemplate making the pastor the first full-time pastor the church had ever hired and essentially doubling his salary. They hired him in faith God would provide the remaining half of the salary. At the end of 2017, God not only covered the other half of his salary but provided an additional \$4,000 which the church graciously added to his salary in 2018.

Our congregation is primarily caucasian and here is a breakdown of the age demographic for the average worship attendance as of 2019.

Ages	Average <sup>13</sup>
0-12	6
13-18	11
19-30	14
31-50	25
51+	19

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<sup>13</sup> Numbers based on the active role of WBC for 2019.

## Demographics of Gladys and Surrounding Area

WBC is located in Winfall, VA situated between the cities of Rustburg and Gladys. According to City-Data.com (the most recent survey), the population for Rustburg in 2010 was 1,431. The average age of those who live in this community is around 44 years old comprising of 50% men and women. From the information on the City-Data website one of the statistics which stood out was the average income. In Rustburg, the average income is \$33,000 while the rest of the state of Virginia made approximately double the amount at \$66,000 even though the unemployment rate of Rustburg is 4.5%<sup>14</sup> it is only slightly higher than the rest of the state (4.1%).<sup>15</sup>

## Problem Presented

The problem this project will address is how to move a congregation, who has not witnessed much spiritual fruit, through following the Acts model, and revitalize the people to become a spiritually thriving church. There are a number of reasons why the church is not making their priority the goal of making disciples for Jesus. The problem is also not unique to any one church but is a systemic problem throughout churches across the country. Differing statistics put declining or stagnant growth of American churches in at worst 85%<sup>16</sup> and at best, Rainer's research reveals the percent of decline near 65%.<sup>17</sup> In either case, followers of Jesus

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<sup>14</sup> This statistic reflects the economy before the Coronavirus.

<sup>15</sup> All statistics within the Demographics section were found on the [www.city-data.com/city/Rustburg-Virginia.html](http://www.city-data.com/city/Rustburg-Virginia.html) accessed on May 10, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, The Malphurs Group, "State of the American Church" Oct. 2014 <http://malphursgroup.com/state-of-the-american-church-plateaued-declining/> accessed 3/2019.

<sup>17</sup> T. Rainer, Growing Healthy Churches Together, "Dispelling the 80% Myth of Declining Churches" June 28, 2017.

should not be satisfied with these findings. In his book, *The American Church in Crisis* the author David Olson found that only “17.4% of Americans attend church regularly, 23% ‘participate’ in church, and 77% do not actively participate in any church, despite what they claim to believe about Christianity.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the root causes of this decline may be seen in the church’s disobedience to one of our most foundational truths, the command we have been given by Jesus to, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). According to a 2018 Barna study, “47% of Millennials agree that it is *wrong* to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.”<sup>19</sup> Paul’s response in Romans 10:14 seems very appropriate, “But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher?”

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to inform and reveal the biblical principles which God ordained and that were practiced through the apostles within the 1st-century church. Since the only way to have a relationship with God is through Jesus (John 14:6), in redemption through His blood (Ephesians 1:7), and faith in His completed work (Ephesians 2:8) it is imperative the church gets this work done correctly. It is believed, and the research will prove, the methods and principles found in Acts are to be observed in every church. Human wisdom is no substitute for what God has given to us through His Word. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are

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<sup>18</sup> David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/> accessed on June 27, 2020.



your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

The purpose of followers of Jesus is to be obedient to His commandments. We are to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and strength (Matthew 22:37) and love our neighbor as ourselves" (Matthew 22:38). Our love for Him is reflected in our obedience to Him. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Our purpose as individuals, and as "living stones being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, (is) to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Peter refers to believers as "living stones." One brick on its own may not be very useful, but many bricks who come together can be a significant force and have a significant influence. Barclay noted of a Spartan king who boasted of the walls of Sparta. When a foreign monarch came to visit Sparta, he looked around and saw no walls at all. The monarch asked the Spartan king, "Where are these great walls I have heard about?" The Spartan king looked at the soldiers in his presence and said, "these men are the walls of Sparta."<sup>20</sup> The power and influence of the church isn't in the walls of our church buildings or in their bank accounts, the power of the Body of Christ is when we come together as the true church of God.

The purpose in relation to WBC was to find if a congregation decided to become more like the model given to us in Acts 2 (specifically the Jerusalem church described in Acts 2:42-47), could the church be revitalized? Could a church who had seen little to no spiritual fruit become a church who could change their community and make a difference in the world.

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<sup>20</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1975), 196.

### Basic Assumptions

The first-century church provided more than simply a theoretical model but historically it proved to be a success as the church lived out God's call on their lives. The book of Acts is a detailed report of the church in its successes and failures. The enemies of the Church even proclaimed they "have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Thousands and thousands of people were becoming disciples of Jesus through this model. Lives were being transformed in so much that Saul, a killer of Christians, became a Christ-follower himself.

Through the mission work of Paul, and his application of this model around the world, the church saw new ministries develop and thrive in areas such as Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, and within 10 years a Christian church was founded in Rome itself. The power of the gospel had overcome languages, governments, social statuses, man-made religions and gods.

By the year 64, Christianity had spread and become a predominate "religion" around the world evidenced by the fact that Nero blamed the great Roman fire on these "so-called" Christians.<sup>21</sup> This powerful event (the historical event of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus) took place in a relatively unknown city (Jerusalem) and a relatively unknown country (Israel) and had now spread to the very capital of Rome itself.

Through this backdrop and the historical evidence given to us through Acts, it is believed this model and message have the power to overcome the obstacles which are presented to us today as well. The church model presented to us in this book may not simply be a good model out of many, but a model our modern churches can still use today. As we go through the model

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<sup>21</sup> S. Dando-Collins, Rome, *The Fall of the Emperor Nero and His City*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010), 6.

presented, we will see that every barrier (political, age, affluence, education, race, etc.) can be overcome. There will always be needs to be met throughout our communities. There will always be a need to create relationships. Through every age, the powerful message of the gospel has been the same. Look at the book of Revelation, we see future saints gaining victory as they “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14b).

### **Definitions**

The definitions below are significant to the research of this paper in that the redefining of biblical words has shown significant confusion among, not only the Body of Christ, but those who are in need of a relationship with Christ. If the Church can't even provide a clear, consistent biblical definition of words, then how can our message to the world be clear as well. Models (and churches) are being built on faulty definitions, and therefore, the foundations are sand. Identifying these issues and reclaiming the biblical truth of these words is important.

### **Church Growth**

The term “church growth” is a phrase many may be (inadvertently) using incorrectly. Often when one refers to church growth, they refer to the attendance they witness during their weekly Sunday services. These organizations are growing crowds, but are they truly growing “churches?” Not everyone attending our services “in the church building” is part of the “true church.” Having buildings filled with unsaved people, ready to hear the gospel, is certainly not a negative thing, believers inviting their friends and family to hear the gospel may be an indicator there is “church growth” occurring within the membership of the church.

The incorrect understanding of “church growth” (counting all who attended a weekly service whether saved or unsaved) is the mentality which may have contributed to many false models. The model described in Acts, and throughout the New Testament, is a focus of preaching the

gospel and seeing disciples maturing in the “true church,” not simply gathering a crowd and calling it a “church.”

Maybe the phrase “church growth” should be better articulated. If one is speaking about the “church,” (individuals who have responded to the gift of eternal life and have come together to perform ordinances, worship God, equip the saints to do the work of ministry, and make disciples of Christ to send throughout the world), then the “growth” aspect of that phrase has less to do with attendance numbers and more to do about the maturity of believers. The only time the numerical growth of congregations is specifically mentioned is found in Acts 2:41 (3,000 souls were added), Acts 4:4 (5,000 souls added), and eight other references which speak to how the Lord “added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, 5:14, 6:1, 6:7, 9:31, 11:21, 11:24, 16:5). Getz in his book *The Measure of a Healthy Church*, reminds us there were only three churches mentioned in the New Testament who had a large membership, Antioch (whose entire city population was approximately 500,000), Jerusalem (who at Passover possibly had a city population of over 125,000 people), and Ephesus (a large city in Rome whose population was approximately 300,000) people.<sup>22</sup> Getz’s explanation for the large crowds and numbers who came to Christ was not because the church was bent on having large numbers, but due to the novelty of the gospel and the sheer populations of the cities the gospel entered into. The disciples, through the power of the Spirit, went into the world and preached the gospel and this message was received by many. Limiting “church growth” to simple numerical additions is gross negligence of the true focus of the New Testament.

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<sup>22</sup> Gene Getz and Michael J. Easley, *The Measure of a Healthy Church How God Defines Greatness in a Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 14.

This problem of focusing on numbers in attendance was magnified in 2020 when a pandemic swept through, not only our country but the world, as many suffered due to the COVID-19 virus. Church buildings were vacated due to health concerns. Here in Virginia, Governor Northam enacted Executive Order 53<sup>23</sup> which ordered the closure of all public assemblies, and specifically any gatherings over 10 people. The Executive Order also included social distancing (a mandate for people to stay at least 6 feet apart from others). Members of churches throughout the state believed “church growth” was at the very least, being put on hold. Growing a church is difficult, especially if a church isn’t even legally allowed to meet, right? However, when one truly understands the definition of growing a church, then followers of Jesus understand that even during this difficult time the true church of Jesus can truly “grow” like never before!

This brings us to an interesting question, “Is there anything the numbers can tell us about our churches?” Is there any benefit to large attendance numbers? Hoyt in his book, *Effectiveness of the Numbers* summarized, “The fact that declining numbers do not indicate success does not mean that growing numbers do indicate success. Not all growth is healthy. Not all large churches are successful in accomplishing God’s will on earth. Some large churches do nothing for their communities except take up space and use public services for which they pay no taxes. Gathering a growing crowd does not necessarily define success.”<sup>24</sup> Hoyt does provide some benefits to the numbers we witness in our attendance when he states attendance numbers can measure *trends*

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<sup>23</sup> Executive Order 53, issued by Governor Ralph Northam, [https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-53-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\).pdf](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-53-Temporary-Restrictions-Due-To-Novel-Coronavirus-(COVID-19).pdf) Accessed May 4, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> William R. Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 21.

within our church. However, even trends can be deceiving and often don't tell the full story, but it can show movement within the congregation. Hoyt also mentions that numbers can help measure outward focus. Are members of the congregation inviting others to come to services? "Outward focus means intentionally doing things to attract new people. Outward focus means prioritizing activities and ministries that reach out to new people, touching them where they live, work, and play."<sup>25</sup> Outward focus is certainly one of the main principles displayed in the Acts Church as people looked out for the needs of others and gained favor within their community.

The principle Hoyt states, where attendance can be beneficial and provide a picture of the effectiveness of a church, is the ability to measure the church's influence. One can "use worship attendance to help gauge the extent of your church's influence and cultivate a passion to see your attendance grow so your church can influence an ever-increasing number of people for Kingdom purposes."<sup>26</sup> Influence is one of the great "leveling" numbers for all churches. Hoyt uses the example of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA whose attendance is approximately 22,000. "The population of the adjacent towns and cities (of the church) is 538,508 which means only 4.2% of the community attends."<sup>27</sup> In comparison, Bethel Baptist in Hayes Center, NE averages 62 in attendance, however in an area where the population is a little over 1,000 Bethel is reaching about 5.6% of their population. Numbers and statistics can't be applied as a blanket to all churches as a manner of determining health but can give guidance and direction to church

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 27.

leadership. Placing large importance on numbers is dangerous. As Goodrich noted, “Statistics, likelihoods, and probabilities mean everything to men, nothing to God.”<sup>28</sup>

Luke, the author of Acts, felt it was important to report the multitudes who came to faith but would have never meant to have people base their “church” models on simply accumulating numbers. George Barna aptly gives a biblical focus to the purpose of the church in an article, “Small Churches and Emerging Generations.”

Barna also questioned the value of growth for its own sake. “Jesus did not die on the cross to fill up church auditoriums,” he cautioned. “He died so that people might know God personally and be transformed in all dimensions of their life through their ongoing relationship with Him. Such a personal reformation can happen in a church of any size. After all, the goal of every church should not be numerical growth but spiritual health and vitality.”<sup>29</sup>

Few churches would outwardly, or verbally, state their goal is simply to fill our building with people. However, in practice, it seems the major concern among pastors in 2020 is “watered down gospel teachings.”<sup>30</sup> 72% of the pastors surveyed determined “watered down preaching” to be the greatest danger of our generation. “Watered-down preaching” could signify a couple of problems. One of those problems could be that the preacher is not “rightly dividing the Word” (2 Timothy 2:15). However, this problem could also point to preachers who are “watering down” their sermons so as not to offend others, in order for visitors/members to feel comfortable about returning to the service at the next appointed time.

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<sup>28</sup> R. Goodrich, “Smile Anyway” 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan Macleod, “George Barna on Small Churches and Emerging Generations.” Jan. 2013, PostKiwi Macleod on Faith and Culture.

<sup>30</sup> Data for this study was based on 547 online interviews with Protestant senior pastors from Barna’s PastorPanel from November 15 to Dec 17, 2019. Sample error is +/- 4.1% of the 95% confidence level. [www.barnaresearch.com](http://www.barnaresearch.com).

To take this a step further, it is difficult to imagine Luke was allowing (or even suggesting) for differing models in the first place. “There are all kinds of labels for these new models, such as emerging churches, megachurches, seeker churches, Purpose-Driven churches, cell churches, connecting churches, contemporary churches, house churches, new-paradigm churches, postmodern churches, and so on.”<sup>31</sup> Nowhere in Acts does Luke provide “options” for pastors to choose what church model you want to use moving forward. As though starting a church is a smorgasbord of options God allows you to consider while starting “His” church. Acts is not a “church growth” book, but the accurate historical record of the acts of the 1st-century church. In fact, throughout the Pauline epistles, there are no other models other than the reinforcement of what began in Acts.

#### Come to Church

An attitude WBC had to overcome was a “Come to Church” mentality. Inviting others to church is not a negative thing, in fact, most pastors and leaders encourage, and are uplifted, when members invite their lost friends, but depending on a Sunday gathering to do the witnessing for you can be an excuse for disobedience. The command by Jesus given to us through His Great Commission is not “come and see” but “go and tell.”

- “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...” (Matthew 28:19)
- “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).
- “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21)
- “You will be my witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, all Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

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<sup>31</sup> A. Malphurs, “A New Kind of Church” (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2007), 9.



- “How shall they preach; except they be sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things’ (Romans 10:15).

The clear command of Jesus is to “Go.” Jesus sent out his disciples “two by two” (Luke 10:1, Mark 6:7). “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). The command is to carry the gospel to the lost, and train followers of Jesus to full spiritual maturity. Willhoit explains,

Spiritual formation is the task of the church. Period. It represents neither an interesting, optional pursuit by the church nor an insignificant category in the job description of the body. Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form. Our charge, given by Jesus himself, is to make disciples, baptize them, and teach these new disciples to obey his commands. The witness, worship, teaching, and compassion that the church is to practice all require that Christians be spiritually formed. . . . the fact remains that spiritual formation has not been the priority in the North American church that it should be.<sup>32</sup>

One of the models Hornsby writes about is intrinsic within the title the “Attractional Church.” This model is based on a “come and see” attitude. Towns cited moments in church history where incentives were given to people to attend church services. Towns notes, “The attractional church is not new but fits into a continuous historical stream. Even so, just because others have done it, and done it for a long time, doesn’t make it right.”<sup>33</sup> According to their research, attractional may get people in the door, but the real danger is not being able to connect people to the community needs and more importantly connecting them to the gospel. Alan Hirsch in his book, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, comments, “We

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<sup>32</sup> James C. Willhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future*, 16.

can intuit that in America the current ‘market appeal’ of the contemporary church growth model might be up to 35 percent. But even if it is at this level of appeal, it is decreasing. It’s time for a radical rethink taking into account both the strategic and missional implications.”<sup>34</sup>

The example of Paul was to *go* through the known world planting congregations of men and women bringing them together to continue the work of the ministry in their “Jerusalem.” “The Christian movement... in 35 A.D... would have appeared to a superficial observer to be a Jewish sect. Thirty years later it was plainly a world religion... This establishment of Christianity as a world religion, to almost as great an extent as any great historical movement can be ascribed to one man, the work of Paul.”<sup>35</sup> Paul’s aim was to plant congregations around the world, if you were “unchurched” to Paul then he would first, not invite you to a gathering, but invite you into a relationship with Christ. We now call those people who simply don’t attend our weekly gatherings the “unchurched.” (More about the “unchurched” to follow.) The word “unchurched” should look like a very strange term when one sees it through a biblical lens. Strictly speaking, it would mean you are *not in the church* and therefore there must not be any relationship with God, you stand condemned before Him, and this “not part of the church” individual needs to respond to the free gift of the gospel. However, this is not always the case. There are followers of Jesus who are not actively involved in a local congregation (not always due to sin) and yet, they do have a personal relationship with Jesus.

In contrast, can you imagine Paul staying in Jerusalem and telling the world to come to him? Instead of going into the world to preach the gospel, we have told the world, “Come to

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<sup>34</sup> A. Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazon Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> R. E. Picirilli, *Paul the Apostle, Missionary, Martyr, Theologian*, (Randall House, Nashville, TN 1986), 31.

church.” Come to church, where a pastor has been hired by us and he will share the gospel with you. Many models are now based on this principle of having a Sunday morning “worship” service which appeals to non-believers. The idea is to make non-believers feel as comfortable as possible and make the gospel as non-threatening and non-offensive as possible. Do this effectively enough and your “church” will grow.

Is this just being technical? Is it acceptable to take biblical words and redefine them for our current cultural norms? If it is, how far is one willing to go with that philosophy? What will the consequences be if one holds to definitions contrary to the Bible?

### Underchurched

Hornsby in his book, “The Attractional Church” creates a new word “underchurched” to define people who are “the lost, the absent, and the unfulfilled.”<sup>36</sup> Though the author may be appealing to a cultural reference, he only continues to blur the lines of who the church truly is. Critics may cite this as simply semantics, but the term “underchurched” has two major issues. First of all, the biblical term for the church, or *ekklesia*, is clearly defined in the New Testament. Elmer Towns provides clarity to the technical word of church. Towns brings about five different, yet specific, affirmations of what, or specifically *who*, the church is.

1. The church is built upon divine revelation (Matthew 16:17)
2. The church was initiated by Jesus Christ
3. The church when introduced was predicated as future (Jesus stated, “I will build my church”) Matthew 16:18
4. The church belongs to Christ.

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<sup>36</sup> Billy Hornsby, *The Attractional Church: Growth through a Refreshing, Relational, and Relational Church Experience* (London: FaithWords, 2011), 1.

5. The church is a group of “called out ones.”<sup>37</sup>

In Article VI of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), the nature of the church is described:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.<sup>38</sup>

Within the biblical definition of the church, there is no room or reference to the emotional state of those who are a part of it. The emotional state of people has nothing to do with their position within the Body of Christ. Jesus, and the New Testament writers, provide explicate, and a very descriptive, definition of the church. New definitions, and nuances, of the church have real consequences. When Hornsby creates words like “underchurched” are we also to believe there is a group of “overchurched”? In contrast, is Hornsby’s definition of the “overchurched” the “found, the present, and fulfilled?” How far down this road are we willing to go before we completely (as Hornsby has done) change definitions of other biblical, even salvific, words. Hull points out in his book, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* how people have already changed the meanings of “Discipleship” and “Christian.”

The common teaching is that a Christian is someone who by faith accepts Jesus as Savior, receives eternal life, and is safe and secure in the family of God; a disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others. But I must be blunt: I find no biblical evidence for the separation of Christian from disciple.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 627.

<sup>38</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “*Baptist Faith and Message, 2000*” Article VI. Statement of Faith, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/default.asp>, accessed July 5, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 33.

No one can be “overchurched,” as though someone has more “church” than someone else. One may argue there may be different levels of surrender to Christ, but every member of Christ’s Church has all of the Spirit of God within them (Romans 8:9).

### UnChurched

An even more common word we use unbiblically is the word “unchurched.” The definition given by George Gallup (a leader in researching “unchurched” people in America) defines “unchurched as those who are not members of a church or have not attended services in the previous six months other than for special religious holidays, weddings, funerals or the like.”<sup>40</sup> Once again, the biblical definition of “church,” and ones identity within the Church, has absolutely nothing to do with whether they have attended a church building within the past six months. When the Messiah comes back for His Church, He will not be checking the membership of churches and their attendance record, He will come for those who placed their faith and trust in Him for salvation. Telling people who may have gone to church when they were children, then left the church for over “six months” and then calling them “unchurched” helps no one, and at best, causes confusion. Biblically, one is either in the Church or they are not.

As George Whitfield was preaching through New England in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, he preached faith in the gospel and separation from political control. Enemies of Whitfield wrote a letter denouncing him and his ministry. In one of their blistering attacks against Whitfield they claimed, “it was *against* the will of God to separate *converts* form the *unconverted*.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> R. Chandler, “More Americans Believe in God, but Fewer Belong to Churches: Surveys Find a Gain in Faith, a Drop in Giving,” (Los Angeles Times, LA, CA, 1988), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-08-20-me-651-story.html>, Accessed May, 13, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Virginia Beach, VA, VA: Academx, 2005), 64.

Identifying people as “unchurched” is nothing new. There will be those who seek to blur the lines, who seek not to offend, and want for others to feel good about their (spiritual) lives. The Church needs a revival in holy boldness, and to speak the truth in love.

### Social Gospel

One of the most damaging beliefs found within WBC was the confusion of the true biblical gospel and differentiating the popular social gospel. In the early 1900’s Rauschenbusch wrote a book entitled, *A Theology of the Social Gospel*. In his work he “postulated that when Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, this meant not the community of the redeemed, but the transformation of society on Earth. To Rauschenbusch, the gospel meant social reform and political action.”<sup>42</sup> Within a few decades this new “social gospel” began to infiltrate practical theology and even the meaning of the word “evangelism” became to mean, “anything for the betterment of society except proclaiming the need to repent of sin and turn to Jesus. The social gospel has, time and again, pushed away the gospel of conversion.”<sup>43</sup> “Mission” trips today are often groups of people who go to areas around the world. They do wonderful work for the communities they visit. They often dig wells, build schools, and provide other community relief, but if the gospel of Jesus is not being proclaimed in those cities then one should balk at calling it a “mission” trip. The “social gospel” slowly made its way into our church practically speaking, and we never even said the words!

It is not to say those activities aren’t good, but the gospel must be proclaimed, the same gospel proclaimed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3 through 5. “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He

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<sup>42</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2011), 139.

<sup>43</sup> Towns and Porter, 140.

was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...” Sin had separated mankind from God. Death had Hell, without Divine intervention, was our future. “But God demonstrated His love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). When men and women place their faith and trust in Him God not only removes the penalty of sin but credits them with His own righteousness. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Salvation is by His grace through faith (which is a gift, Ephesians 2:8), and this work is not by even the good works of men, “but His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

The “social gospel” provides no relief from sin. This “new” gospel may help people in poor economic situations or even provide relief for those who are physically in need, but it provides no spiritual relief. Stetzer notes, “It is important that Jesus started His earthly ministry talking about ‘jubilee,’ an economic practice where the poor were restored (see Lev. 25:10; Luke 4:18-19). It was part of His message, but that was not His whole message. Helping set the poor free spiritually in Christ is the beginning of the gospel message. Serving them through acts of mercy is the rest of the message. It is important we keep things in that order.”<sup>44</sup>

This is not semantics anymore. We have chosen new goals for our churches, foreign to the Bible. We have redefined biblical words and terms to fit what is comfortable. Many people, even “experts,” redefine biblical terms and though there may be speculation as to why this happens, undoubtedly one reason is to be less offensive and divisive and appeal to those who are unsaved. The cross and the gospel are offensive and foolish (Gal. 5:11; 1 Cor. 1:18). Jesus

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<sup>44</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present*, 140.

proved with His life you can love others and tell the truth, even when it may be offensive to the individual. The Church must return to its biblical foundations, love God with all our heart and love others if the church is to experience success and victory again.

Our dilemma, as Erickson states, is complex, but very real. “The church is an institution of society, the church can be observed and studied by the methods of social science. We may be tempted to define the church by what is found to be empirically. Such an approach, however, would confuse the actual with the ideal and thus, interesting though it may be, must be bypassed.”<sup>45</sup> For far too long authors (like Hornsby) have drifted from the true church described in Scripture. “The church is the chosen people of God; they belong to Him and He belongs to them.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Limitations**

This research set out to prove that implementing the disciplines provided in the Acts church (described in chapter 2) would help revitalize WBC. This paper did not set out to make an exhaustive list of all the disciplines that could be, and are, available to congregations to create healthy churches. The pastor believed God was calling him to lead a church where very little spiritual fruit was being produced. WBC is a small church, and by faith, we believed the model described would turn our congregation around. Many of the disciplines in Acts 2 are mandates throughout the New Testament. Adhering to the apostles’ teachings is reiterated throughout Paul’s letters. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were commanded by Jesus Himself and given as ordinances to His church. Meeting together in public worship is commanded in Hebrews 10:25,

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<sup>45</sup> Millard J. Erickson and L. Arnold. Hustad, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 340.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.



and seems to be understood throughout Paul's letters to churches. Believers meeting in homes, in small groups, is also a practice which is mentioned throughout the book of Acts. Prayer and worship also describe believers who are maturing in their faith, and commands given to us (Luke 18:1, 1 Thess. 5:17). With little resources, both financially and available people, we set out to obey these commands. Churches who have more people and more financial resources would be able to more creative in finding ways to connect these disciplines to the life of their church.

One of the limitations specific to WBC is our inability to find talent giving us the ability to perform worshipful music and engage the congregation more fully. Other churches may have the talent and resources to worship on different levels. For example, the worship set at Thomas Road Baptist Church led by Charles Billingsley is different than our piano player singing a couple hymns. The ultimate goal of our congregation is to do the best with what we have been given, worship is the goal for our congregation.

WBC is located in a small town, but we are ultimately only limited by our continued obedience to God to provide for our needs. The leadership has continually stated that our limited resources will not keep us from pursuing His call on our lives. For a church that had no model to follow, the model provided in Acts was the launching point we used, and needed, to move forward.

Rodney Mills published an article in *The Journal of Applied Leadership* claiming good pastoral leadership was not essential in seeing "church growth." Mills called his theory the Natural Church Development (NCD).<sup>47</sup> Mills' theory (and research) revealed that God will provide in the absence of resources or even gifts. His biblical basis was found in 1 Cor. 3:6, "I

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<sup>47</sup> Rodney Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (2016), 68-76.

(Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” Though there is something to be said for not trusting in the gifts of men to build God’s church, any gifts leaders have and use for the building of God’s Kingdom are from Him as well. The gifts and natural abilities leaders possess are no substitute for prayer and the power of God.

### **Thesis Statement**

For many years WBC was a church on the decline. There was no spiritual fruit and the congregation who were attending in 2016 believed they were probably going to be closing the church, forever. They lacked leadership. The church lacked vision and purpose. They were not maximizing the resources at their disposal and attendance was most certainly on the downward trend. Unfortunately, this story is not unique for WBC.

Churches are in decline. Malphurs observes,

Churches may be changing but not necessarily for the better. If the typical church were to go to a hospital’s emergency room, the attending physician would likely admit it to the hospital and put it on life support. Churches all across America are struggling. Some are plateaued and in decline, while others are in the last stages of dying.”<sup>48</sup>

The research within this project set out to prove that a church, even a struggling church, could become a congregation that can make a difference in the community and produce spiritual fruit again by following the disciplines and activities provided in the church described in Acts 2:42-47. The idea that churches who have “died” are not redeemable and should close their doors is not always the case. Jesus Himself declared the church of Sardis to be dead (Revelation 3:1), but still gave them grace and time to repent.

A goal in the research of this topic is to encourage churches and leaders to return to a biblical model. It was not only important to articulate the biblical model, but to identify models

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<sup>48</sup> A. Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI) 2007, 17.

that could be detrimental to the spiritual growth of WBC. Barna points out, and rightly so, “that local churches are not achieving stellar results in transforming the lives and worldviews of their members. He (Barna) endorses a self-serving discipleship processing which believers piece ‘together spiritual elements they deem worthwhile, constituting millions of personalized ‘church’ models.”<sup>49</sup> We have turned the church into our personal “Do it yourself model.” Rainer warns pastors “have blended a bunch of models into one schizophrenic plan. In this case, neither the pastor nor the people within the church are sure what your church is all about.”<sup>50</sup> We encourage the activities we are comfortable with and do away with those things which may cause us to sacrifice. There should not be any reason to believe we have a better model than the one given to us by God Himself. The idea we could somehow improve on what God has given should be abominable to us, but yet, model after model is substituted in the name of ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In trying to become wise, we became fools.

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<sup>49</sup> George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 64.

<sup>50</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to Gods Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2006), 3.

## Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

### Review of Literature

Based on the distinctives of this thesis, books and websites were chosen and divided into three major topics: Church Health, Evangelism, having a Missional mindset. The themes provide the basis and the framework in which the research is being conducted.

#### Church Health

Gene A. Getz's, *The Measures of a Healthy Church*, provides multiple principles to assist churches to assess their health. The strength of this book is the amount of focus placed not on numerical figures, but spiritual disciplines. "When measuring a church, we must determine the degree to which God's people have a correct view of God's holiness."<sup>1</sup> Other questions to be asked in determining success are whether the church is living in hope in light of the resurrection of Jesus. Is the church growing in their love for God, love for one another, and love for their communities?

Mark Dever, the author of *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* outlines the nine most important character traits of healthy churches. Among the nine traits, he mentions biblical theology, the gospel, a biblical understanding of conversion, biblical church discipline, and expositional preaching. Expositional preaching "is so important that if you were to miss this one and happen to get all the other eight marks right, in a sense they would be accidents."<sup>2</sup> "We... will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3,4). Obedience is the ultimate mark of healthy churches.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Getz and Michael J. Easley, *The Measure of a Healthy Church How God Defines Greatness in a Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 43.

Thom Rainer in *Breakout Churches* outlines key factors in churches that reveal exceptional growth within their ministries. Rainer summarizes, “It is a sin to be good if God has called us to be great.”<sup>3</sup> One of the focusses of *Breakout Churches* is leadership. Though there are different aspects of good leadership, the research found when leaders are operating at a high level, they 1) take leaps of faith to fulfill the mission. 2) They are unconcerned with who gets the credit so long as the ultimate goal is accomplished and 3) the best of leaders makes decisions that not only affect the present but improve the church overall, long after his ministry there is complete.

Randy Pope brings over 25 years of pastoral experience into his book *The Intentional Church* and reveals seven factors that define transformational churches. Biblical theology was deemed foundational which led to the presence and practice of spiritual disciplines that bring renewal in the body.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, a church leadership who are discerning, gifted, and practice what they preach. Exceptional leadership will lead to a spiritual and ministry-oriented laity.<sup>5</sup> Oddly, and what may seem out of place, Pope emphasizes the facilities of the church as a factor of growing churches. He also mentions that there must be exceptional finances within the church. Finally, and what Pope deems most important, is an effective ministry plan. The author mentions that a good plan can even neutralize the failure of the previous six factors mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Though it

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<sup>3</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Pope and John Maxwell, *The Intentional Church Moving from Church Success to Community Transformation* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

may seem these seven factors lack spiritual power; Pope does spend the rest of the book providing the spiritual guidance behind these factors.

### Evangelism

*Evangelism*, by John MacArthur, focuses on the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit reflected through its message. The author reveals one of the great errors of pastors in ministry today appealing through the culture believing the gospel will then be more effective. “The false assumption is that a pastor can manufacture true conversions by looking or acting a certain way. The bottom line is that only God is in control of whether or not sinners are saved as a result of any preaching.”<sup>7</sup> To believe we are wiser than God, or to believe WE have the power to convert anyone with our wit and wisdom is a grave mistake.

*Effective Evangelistic Church*, by Thom Rainer, outlines many of the different models used and what aspects of each model brought the best results. This book is especially pertinent to the overall research for this thesis as many of the disciplines and activities are given correspond to what I believe to be the success of the Acts model. Rainer interviewed almost 600 pastors of evangelistic churches and they outline the models and activities they have seen and used to see people follow Christ and be discipled. One of the common activities given in the books in this review reveal strong biblical preaching to be the most influential discipline to bring people to Christ and to grow an effective evangelical church. Rainer found the three biggest methodologies were preaching, prayer ministries, and Sunday School.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works, and What Doesn't* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 26.

*Unashamed of the Gospel* which includes multiple authors from a T4G Conference outlines the different aspects, and concepts to consider, as you move forward in spreading the gospel. Mohler highlights one of the more overlooked, and underestimated, principles that affect the way we communicate the gospel. Our country has “shifted to a post-Christian worldview. This, of course, doesn’t mean that Christianity has disappeared. It means that Christianity, as a worldview, no longer sets the agenda for society at large.”<sup>9</sup> The post-Christian worldview represents an ever-widening belief that absolute truth, specifically the exclusivity of the gospel, is “out of step” with society. This by no means changes the message itself but may help us find new ways to present the never-changing truth of the gospel.

Eric Mason emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the area of evangelism in his book *Unleashed*. Our culture often rewards those who accomplish outstanding feats on their own. Many of the awards we hand out are based on these individual accomplishments. However, Mason emphasized the extreme need for believers to rely on the Holy Spirit to empower them for the work of ministry. Throughout the Bible, God uses men and women who failed miserably on their strength only to accomplish amazing, supernatural acts. “In God’s economy, God seems to reward the needy who respond to Him and become diligent because of Him.”<sup>10</sup> Even Jesus did not work through His power but relied on the Spirit to speak and work through Him.

*Simple Church* by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger claim to have not created a new church model, but a “simple” process of making and moving people further to spiritual maturity. The church may have largely ignored the disciple-making process because they have made the

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Unashamed of the Gospel: The Conference Messages of T4G 2014* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Eric Mason, *Unleashed: Being Conformed to the Image of Christ* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 33.

process too complicated. Rainer's process begins with providing clarity and reminding the congregation of the priority God has given to His Church. The author then steps into "Movement" where you remove congestion (programs that keep the church from accomplishing the goals). "Alignment" maximizes all the energy and programs of the church into a streamlined process of disciple-making. Finally, "focus" is the continuous review of making sure the discipleship making process remains simple.

*Starting New Church on Purpose* by Ron Sylvia is practically a textbook for church planters looking to start churches based on the purpose-driven model. Sylvia begins with the "dream" of the planter and learning how to focus and hear from God as to how, and what, the new church should look like. The author leads the planter into the actual "launch" of the church and sustaining the results. We look to answer questions such as, "What kind of worship will we lead here?" "What will our leadership structure look like?" One of the great benefits of new churches is the attitude they often carry with them. Sylvia represents that attitude in this statement, "New churches think externally. They are more focused on reaching new people because evangelism is their primary purpose."<sup>11</sup>

### Missions

In *Planting Missional Churches* Stetzer and Kim, seek to clarify the emphasis of a church that is obedient to the Great Commission is a church that is also committed to planting churches. The focus of these churches should always be the gospel and "the most biblical church is the one in which the cross is the only stumbling block for the unchurched."<sup>12</sup> There is to be a balance

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<sup>11</sup> Ron Sylvia, *Starting New Churches on Purpose: Strategies for the 21st Century* (Lake Forest, CA: Purpose Driven, 2006), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2016), 33.



between Stetzer and MacArthur's comments. Churches need to provide clear messages of the unadulterated gospel given in a culturally relevant way to be fully understood by the hearer.

Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, authors of *Global Church Planting* provide biblical principles for church planting and multiplication of congregations. The authors uncover the biblical foundations of church planting and the necessity of churches to focus on this work. Church planting is born right out of the book of Acts and the practice of 1st-century believers. A church is never closer to the activity of the 1<sup>st</sup> century than when they are planting new churches. "The church planter can be assured that to engage in the task of church planting is to obey the expressed will of Christ."<sup>13</sup>

In *Cross* by John Piper and David Mathis, he states, "The goal of missions is to establish the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is that sphere where the true God of heaven is adored, loved, served, and obeyed from joyful hearts that relish the God they have come to know."<sup>14</sup> The author describes this new kingdom as the "death of death" through the Lord of life. Each converted believer is another soul who passes from death to life and His kingdom expands again. As followers of Christ, we have the "opportunity" to be a part of such a plan. The critique within this book is the strong emphasis on Calvinism. Practically speaking, Calvinism and missions appear to be opposing points of view. What is the point of missions if God has already "elected" them to be saved?

*Visioneering* by Andy Stanley is reviewed under this section specifically as it relates to the topic of this research. Churches need to have a vision of reaching their communities.

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<sup>13</sup> Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 21.

<sup>14</sup> John Piper and David Mathis, *Cross: Unrivaled Christ, Unstoppable Gospel, Unreached Peoples, Unending Joy* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 69.

“Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be.”<sup>15</sup> The call and commandment of God upon every believer is to be a part of the kingdom building organization. An organization that requires every person to exercise the spiritual gifts God has given. Every believer should envision themselves to be a part of a ministry within their local church. The vision of churches is “ For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

Barna: State of the Church,<sup>16</sup> is a website that provides information, insight, as well as practical surveys to assist pastors to provide leadership for their churches.

In its 30-year history, Barna Group has conducted more than one million interviews over the course of hundreds of studies and has become a go-to source for insights about faith and culture, leadership and vocation, and generations. Barna Group has carefully and strategically tracked the role of faith in America, developing one of the nation’s most comprehensive databases of spiritual indicators.<sup>17</sup>

This site provides helpful articles of encouragement, but also provides surveys to help leaders maintain a “pulse” on opinions of major issues facing our country. They are located in Ventura, CA and are considered one of the foremost research companies in the world.

### **Theological Foundation**

The basis of this project relies upon the inerrancy of Scripture and the authority of the apostles. “The New Testament itself speaks of the importance of maintaining orthodox doctrine

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<sup>15</sup> Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2005), 17.

<sup>16</sup> www.Barna.com, accessed on May 23, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., accessed on May 23, 2020.

and refuting heresies, showing the antiquity of the concern.”<sup>18</sup> If the Bible contains errors, then this book can be reduced to an ancient history book filled with myth and lore. You would not consider a book with error to reflect a Holy God, especially a book which specifically claims, “God, who cannot lie” (Titus 1:2b).

### Inspiration of Scripture

The orthodox view of Scripture holds that “the Bible alone is the illuminated, inspired revelation of God and is, therefore, the sole ground of authority for believers. According to this view, whenever there is a clear contradiction between the Bible and any assumed ‘fact’ of history or science, it is that ‘fact’ which must give way to the Bible, and not the reverse.”<sup>19</sup> Erickson defines inspiration as the “supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God.”<sup>20</sup> For clarity concerning inspiration, it is the author’s view that the recognized 66 books of the Bible to be plenary and verbally inspired. Positively speaking, this doctrine speaks “to a Bible where every (plenary) word (verbal) is inspired by God”<sup>21</sup> (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:13; John 17:8; John 6:63). Early scholar and theologian Origen had a high view of Scripture. He stated:

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<sup>18</sup> M. McIntosh, “The History of Christianity from Its Emergence in the First Century CE” March 15, 2020 from <https://brewminate.com/the-history-of-christianity-from-its-emergence-in-the-first-century-ce/> accessed on May 21, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> H. L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984), 795.

<sup>20</sup> Millard J. Erickson and L. Arnold. Hustad, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 61.

<sup>21</sup> H. L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984), 790.

For my part, I believe that not one jot or tittle of the Divine instruction is in vain. We are never to say that there is anything impertinent or superfluous in the Scriptures of the Holy Spirit, though to some they may seem obscure. But we are to turn the eyes of our mind to him who commanded these things to be written and seek of Him the interpretation of them. The sacred Scriptures come from the fulness of the Spirit; so that there is nothing in the Prophets, or the Law, or the Gospel, or the Apostles, which descends not from the fulness of the Divine Majesty.<sup>22</sup>

B.B. Warfield believed “the weight of evidence for the inspiration and consequent inerrancy of the Bible is so great that no amount of data of this type can overthrow it.”<sup>23</sup> 2

Timothy 3:16 is one of the greatest texts in support of the doctrine of inspiration. “All Scripture is God-breathed.” “The adjective *theopneustos* (only here in the NT) is compounded with *theos*, ‘God,’ and the verb *pneo* ‘breath.’”<sup>24</sup> The Apostle Peter provides more details into the workings of the writings of Scripture.

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:16, 20-21).

There is a special and intricate connection between the Bible and the God of the Bible. Clark Pinnock observes, “Scripture exists because of the will of God and is a result of his ultimate causality. Even so, it comes into existence through many gifts of prophecy, insight, imagination,

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<sup>22</sup> Pache René, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 47.

<sup>23</sup> B.B. Warfield, “The Real Problem of Inspiration,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951), 256.

<sup>24</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Ephesians – Philemon: with the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 409.

and wisdom that the Spirit has chosen to give. The most important point is that everything taught in the Scriptures is meant to be heard and heeded because it is divinely intended.”<sup>25</sup>

There is also an important note of clarity concerning inspiration as McArthur states, “inspiration applies only to the original autographs of Scripture, not the Bible writers; there are no inspired Scripture writers, only inspired Scripture.”<sup>26</sup> The practical outcome from this statement is to realize everything David, Moses, or the apostles wrote was not necessarily inspired by God as we are defining “inspiration.” Not everything the Apostle Paul wrote was inspired, but the letters within our 66 books are inspired. “Sometimes God told the Bible writers the exact words to say (Jeremiah 1:9), but more often He used their minds, vocabularies, and experiences to produce His own perfect infallible, inerrant Word.”<sup>27</sup> An extreme example of this doctrine is found in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul is commenting on married and single living. In verse 40 Paul writes, “I think that I also have the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 7:40). It is possible Paul was being sarcastic in this statement, but it could also mean his thoughts and actions were so “in-tune” with the Spirit in that particular moment his writing reflected God’s thoughts.

The unparalleled unity of the Bible is one of the magnificent attributes within its pages and the guidance the Spirit of God had over the writers is a testament to His inspiration. “Among its writers were judges, kings, priests, prophets, patriarchs, prime ministers, herdsmen, scribes, soldiers, physicians, and fishermen. Yet, despite these varying circumstances, conditions, and workmen, the Bible is one Book; behind its many parts, there is an unmistakable organic unity. It

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<sup>25</sup> Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 90.

<sup>26</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 1849.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

contains one system of doctrine, one code of ethics, one plan of salvation, and one rule of faith.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Inerrancy of Scripture**

Inerrancy defined is the belief there is no error or fault. When referring to the Bible, it is the opinion of this author, and the basis of this project, to believe as Erickson states, “the Bible is completely true and while the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such as scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true.”<sup>29</sup> Erickson stated from his book *Christian Theology* that “the inerrancy of Scripture is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all of its teachings.”<sup>30</sup> There is great theological significance in the doctrine of inerrancy since inspiration and inerrancy not only speak to the responsibility of the world to God but also a reflection of God to mankind. “If God is omniscient, He must know all things. He cannot be ignorant of or in error on any matter. Further, if He is omnipotent, He can so affect the biblical author’s writing that nothing erroneous enters into the final product.”<sup>31</sup>

Inerrancy is not a modern belief. Inerrancy was believed by some of the greatest minds early in the history of the church. Augustine (A.D. 354 to 430), wrote,

I have learned to yield this respected and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (New York City, NY: Prisbrary Publisher, 2007), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2007), 248.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Letter 8*.

Augustine portrayed, though brilliant in his own right, an attitude of humility when confronted with the teaching of God's Word. Instead of changing the Word to reflect his own beliefs, he allowed the Word to transform his thoughts and beliefs.

Going a step further one notices even Jesus held to a belief in inerrancy concerning the Word of God. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17, 18). Jesus placed high importance and priority on Scripture. When confronted by Satan in the wilderness Jesus responded with Scripture, and in doing so, revealed its authority and power. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but by *every Word* that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Through a couple of verses in his book, John shows an even yet closer relationship between Jesus and the Word. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). John 1:1 is an allusion to Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Verse 14 is an allusion to God "dwelling" with Israel as He guided them through the wilderness. The full picture is that of the Word of God who dwelt with men, specifically through the person of Jesus. Barclay writes, "the Word is not one of the created things; the Word was there before creation. The Word is part of eternity and was there with God before time and the world began."<sup>33</sup>

The apostles, too, held a high view of Scripture. Paul's second letter to Timothy is believed by many to be the last letter Paul wrote before his death. Paul was sentenced to die by

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<sup>33</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 37.

the hands of the Romans for preaching the gospel and for proclaiming Christ to be the true King, a King greater than even Caesar. Paul was writing this epistle to Timothy, whom he described as his “beloved son” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:2). In this epistle Paul warns Timothy the world will become more sinful (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 3:1-6), they will not want to hear the truth (2 Tim. 3:7-13), and persecution will continue to grow particularly to those who hold to the truth of the gospel. Even in the face of all of these overwhelming circumstances, Paul exhorted Timothy to stay close to and proclaim, the Word of God. “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:1, 2).

To place this command in perspective one must understand what Paul is asking his “beloved son” Timothy to do. Paul was about to die for preaching the Word and he is now asking Timothy to preach the Word even though Paul realizes if Timothy is faithful in preaching the Word, he too could suffer persecution, even death. As Barclay paraphrased Paul, “Timothy, my end is near: and I know that I go to my reward. If you follow in my steps, you will feel the same confidence and the same joy when the end comes to you.”<sup>34</sup> Preaching, obedience, and faithfulness to the Word of God, in Paul’s opinion, was even more valuable than his very life.

#### Preservation of God’s Word

An important, and practical, issue is that of preservation. Since the original handwritten letters of Paul (or any of the original letters of the New Testament) are not available, can we be sure the Bible in our hands today represents the original? William Lane in his book *Reasonable*

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<sup>34</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 212.



*Faith* writes an amazing chapter on the reliability of Scripture and the testimony of the apostles.

At one point he states...

The writing of Scripture must have been copied many times, which increases the chances of preserving the original text. In fact, no other ancient work is available in so many copies and languages, and yet all these various versions agree in content. The text has also remained unmarred by heretical additions. The abundance of manuscripts over a wide geographical distribution demonstrates that the text has been transmitted with only trifling discrepancies. The differences that do exist are quite minor and are the result of unintentional mistakes.<sup>35</sup>

### **Implication of the Doctrine: Authority**

The foundation for inspiration and inerrancy leads to this all-important question, “Does the Bible have authority over *how* we live our lives, define our marriages (not limited to only marriages, but every institution in our lives), and yes, even run *His* Church?” When we define authority “we mean the right to command belief and /or action.”<sup>36</sup> On biblical authority “we mean that the Bible, as the expression of God’s will to us, possesses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves.”<sup>37</sup>

Biblically speaking the Apostle Paul stated it well, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). William Barclay reiterated, “The Scriptures are of use for correction. The real meaning of this is that all theories, all theologies, all ethics, are to be tested against the Bible. If they contradict the teaching of the Bible, they are to be refused. We must use our minds and set them

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<sup>35</sup> William Lane. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 337.

<sup>36</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2007), 268.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

adventuring, but the test must ever be in agreement with the teaching of Jesus Christ as the Scriptures present it to us.”<sup>38</sup> There is no institution, no discipline, no exception which supersedes the authority of God’s Word.

The book of Acts reveals a church committed to reaching the world with the gospel, but the author of Acts also reveals the “model” they used in order to accomplish this goal.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42, 45-47)

It is the opinion of this author that this passage is not only a description of the activity taking place in the first church but prescriptive for every church in every generation. Morelee agrees, “In Acts 2:42–47 we find a model that most would agree contains the essential functions of the church. The practices outlined in this passage include evangelism, teaching, fellowship, ministry, and worship.”<sup>39</sup> It is predominantly from this passage (Acts 2:42, 45-47) the “Acts Model” will be developed in this paper. Other predominant church models will also be reviewed and though some churches may see “success” through their use, many times, the success is short-lived.

Some of the fundamental activities of the Acts Model (to be fully developed later) are seen in the church’s devotion to the apostles’ teaching, fellowshiping and living life together, they were sacrificial in their giving as they provided for the needs of their community, praising and worshipping God, and they had favor with others within their communities. “The Acts 2:42-47 church presents a model with principles that exhibit a people of God who were living the

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<sup>38</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 201.

<sup>39</sup> Morlee Maynard, *We’re Here for the Churches: The Southern Baptist Convention Entities Working Together* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001), 9-14.

Word of God in a way that was accomplishing what God intended it to achieve.”<sup>40</sup> Through the primary practice of these activities the church experienced tremendous growth as the “Lord added to their number day by day.” This group of believers had received no formal training, no theories for church growth, in fact, they didn’t even have a complete Bible. This church as a whole, and each one individually, simply wanted to represent their Savior with their lives. The activities listed above were the natural responses of people being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Believers today who are living out the Great Commission would also be displaying these activities naturally as they mature in their faith.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Pastors, church leaders, and members of His Body must take heed to what God is calling followers of Jesus to be. Jesus is the founder of His Church (Matthew 16:18). He states He will build His Church. At His ascension, Jesus boldly proclaimed, “All authority is given to Me in heaven and earth...” (Matthew 28: 19a). Since we are His servants we are created ultimately for His glory and our responsibility is to be obedient to Him. Since the Bible is God’s Word, authoritative, and applicable to any period (whether 1<sup>st</sup> century or 21<sup>st</sup> century) and we are commanded by the King of kings to be obedient to Him. According to Ephesians 1, as members of His Body, we are...

1. Blessed with every spiritual blessing (vs. 3)
2. Holy and blameless (vs. 4)
3. Adopted into His Family (vs. 5)
4. Redeemed and Forgiven (vs. 7)

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<sup>40</sup> A. Foster, “Declining Inner- City Church Membership: Creating Spiritually Healthy Inner-City Churches through Acts 2:42-47” Doctoral Dissertation for Liberty University, April, 2019 from <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2019/> accessed on May 7, 2020.

5. Sealed by the Spirit of God (vs. 13)
6. Given the spirit of wisdom (vs. 17)
7. Given His Great power (vs. 19)

As followers of Christ, members of His Body, strengthened by His Spirit through spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12, 13) we have been divinely empowered to follow through in living out the Great Commission.

Through Church history, we have witnessed the power of God through the gospel and the obedience of men and women to overcome vast odds. Through the power of the Spirit of God, we have witnessed Him change hearts, regenerate lives, and convert entire communities to Him. Personal experience may not be the empirical data many use to convince others to follow a particular path, but thousands of years and a countless number of changed lives must account for something. Elmer Towns in his book, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever* records amazing moves of God all over the world where millions upon millions of people accepted the gospel given to us by the disciples. One of the revivals mentioned by Towns was led by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).<sup>41</sup> Edwards was concerned by the nominal living of those in his community and he was determined to preach the truth of God and His wrath. He describes one of the revivals in this way.

There was an extraordinary sense of the awful majesty, greatness and holiness of God, so as sometimes to overwhelm soul and body, a sense of the piercing, all seeing eye of God so as to sometimes take away bodily strength. Many experienced an extraordinary view of the infinite misery of sinners exposed to this wrath.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Virginia Beach, VA: Academx, 2005), 63.

<sup>42</sup> Towns and Porter, 63.

In “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards believed that the “imagery and language of his sermon would awaken audiences to the horrific reality of hell that awaits them should they continue living without calling on Christ to be saved.”<sup>43</sup> Through Edwards’ ministry the town of Northampton experienced an amazing revival which spread all over New England. In fact, the revival here began what would eventually be known as the “The Great Awakening.”<sup>44</sup> The ministry of Jonathan Edwards was purposefully singled out from Towns’ book for the research here. Edwards was someone who did not compromise his beliefs, who didn’t worry about offending others and believed God’s Spirit would work through the truth of His Word.

Oddly enough “every church is a model, whether it likes it or not. Church models are all about how we do church, and every church does ‘church’ some way.”<sup>45</sup> Though we should also remember everything one calls a church is not a church. “Some may refer to a pub as a church because a church sponsors a discussion group in the bar. But this is not a church--it might be the evangelistic outreach of a church or maybe a preaching location, but it’s not an actual church.”<sup>46</sup> Understanding the makeup of a true church is important, “Jesus says that when two or three are gathered, He is there. He doesn’t say, however, that *those gathered are automatically a church*. We are not a church simply because we are in fellowship with other brothers and sisters in

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<sup>43</sup> Marsden, George M. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Towns and Porter, 63.

<sup>45</sup> A. Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI) 2007, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future*, 18.

Christ.”<sup>47</sup> The “minimal” activity of a church given by Towns is “an assembly of professing believers, uniquely indwelt by Jesus Christ, under the discipline of the Word of God, administering the ordinances is an irreducible minimum.”<sup>48</sup> The New Testament provides the answers of how church is to function, specifically, “this ‘Way of Christ and His Apostles’ is set forth in Acts and the Apostles’ letters to the churches that make up much of the New Testament.”<sup>49</sup>

### **The Acts Model**

The Church is not an invention of man, but a living organism created by God, Jesus being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Jesus purchased the Church with His own blood (1 Peter 1:19). The Church is to submit to the authority of Christ. “Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ...” (Ephesians 5:23b-24a). Christ determines the mission of the church (Matthew 28:19, 20), He determines the offices within the Church (1 Timothy 3, Titus 2), and provides the necessary power needed through the Spirit to accomplish the work (Romans 8:11). Christ is also intimately knowledgeable concerning every church that belongs to Him and removes His presence from those who aren’t obedient to His command (Revelation 2:5). Scripture is clear, Christ is sovereign over every aspect of His Church. As members of His body (Ephesians 5:30) one might wonder where members of *Christ’s* Church ever assumed *they* could determine what the activities of His church should be.

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<sup>47</sup> E. Stetzer, “Marks of a Biblical Church Part 2: Biblical Churches in Different Contexts” September 21, 2015 accessed on May 20, 2020 from [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/september/marks-of-biblical-church-part-2-biblical-churches-are-simil.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/september/marks-of-biblical-church-part-2-biblical-churches-are-simil.html).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>49</sup> J. Reed, “The Churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century from Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” (BILD Intl., Ames, IA 2015), 3.

Since it is the conclusion of this research to duplicate the “Acts model” in Winfall, one of the obvious questions might be, “Which church mentioned in the book of Acts has the model we are looking for today?” This is a good question, especially since there are possibly 22 different churches mentioned in the book of Acts alone (not counting at least 10 other churches mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, i.e. churches at Cenchrea [Rom 16:1], Colossae [Col. 1:2], Laodicea [Rev. 1:11], and others). Certainly, no one is looking at the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) and proposing our churches need to be modeled after it. However, when we look at churches like the church at Corinth (a church who abused spiritual gifts, the Lord’s Supper, etc) or Laodicea, a church Jesus Himself had very harsh words for when describing their activity and attitude (Rev. 3:17), we can compare these “ineffective” churches (at least at the time the admonition was written to them), to the model described of the Jerusalem church in Acts 2:42-47. For example, the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira were churches who “held the teaching of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14) and the teaching and practices of Jezebel (Revelation 2:20) instead of holding to the teaching of the apostles. The church at Laodicea kept their Savior at “arm’s length.” They wanted to identify with the name of the Messiah but not to fulfill the responsibilities of that relationship. The Acts model identifies a heart of praise and worship before God which is the prescription and the fuel for our passion and service to Him.

The question of the foundation is extremely important. Warren in his book “Purpose Driven Church” revealed that the “foundation” of a church is directly related to the purpose and “a clear purpose not only defines what we do, but it also defines what we don’t do.”<sup>50</sup> A clear

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<sup>50</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 87.

and strong foundation is important for growth, not only in churches, but in business, families, and any other endeavor one takes.

In the early 1500s a clear definition of the church began to take form and by the end of the century, through the combined statements from the Augsburg Confession, Thomas Cramner, John Calvin, and finally, in the Belgic Confession of 1561, Article 29, stated:

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

#### First-Century Church Growth

In the book of Acts, the Church grew everywhere the Word of God “grew.” “Acts 19:20 speaks of the Word growing in power, as if the Word of God, the gospel of Christ, has a life and power of its own. Paul speaks of the gospel continually ‘bearing fruit and growing’ (Col. 1:6).<sup>52</sup> It may be easy to forget (living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) the resources we take for granted today that were not available to them in the first-century. There were no computers, internet, planes, trains, or automobiles, but maybe we overlook the fact they didn’t even have a completed New Testament. Even the Old Testament was not as available in print as it is today. The early disciples had no “church models,” no formal training, and no University professors to glean information from. “The Holy Spirit may be regarded as the executing Subject of the story – more

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<sup>51</sup> A.C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 210.

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 344.



or less similar to a director calling the shots.”<sup>53</sup> The church of Jesus grew exponentially, not through human wisdom, but the power of God.

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. They (the Jews) dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities shouting, ‘These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.’ (Acts 17:2-4, 6)

Is it so impossible to believe the Church could grow (both in number and spiritual maturity) without our human wisdom and models? In Acts, the Church grew in numbers, not because of laser light shows, not with fancy buildings or programs, but through the empowerment of the Word of God through the Spirit of God. “The church increases in numbers because the Word of God grows when it reaches listeners in the power of the Spirit. In Acts, we see it working essentially on its own, with little institutional support or embodiment—without strategic plans or the command and control of managers and other leaders.”<sup>54</sup> Church strategists have become “wise in their own eyes” (Isaiah 5:21). Instead, in humility, church leaders should bow in submission to Scripture and the Spirit of God. “Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise men glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth...” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24a).

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<sup>53</sup> J. Plessis, “Models for Missional Churches in Acts,” *Scriptura* 103, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 344.

Authentic and genuine church growth is when followers of Jesus are being led in the Spirit and obedient to His Word. When disciples are led through by the Spirit, they are actively working through His Church to purposefully make disciples. Shirley notes, “Raising up successive generations of committed disciples is the responsibility of the local church. While this maxim may be obvious, the reality is that far too many churches have abandoned intentional discipleship. Instead, the church must reclaim her role as disciple-maker.”<sup>55</sup> The goal of WBC is to be a church who follows the model presented in Acts 2, not simply because it is simple or does not require as much resources, but because we seek to be obedient to the Master.

#### Devotion to the Apostles’ Teaching

After His resurrection and subsequent ascension, Jesus left the Church in very capable hands, His apostles. These new disciples are said to have “devoted” their lives to the apostles’ teaching. “The expression ‘devoting themselves’ has the idea of persistence or persevering in something. The imperfect periphrastic construction speaks of the ongoing devotion that they have. Of its ten NT occurrences the verb appears six times in Acts (1:14; 2:42; 2:46; 6:4; 8:13; 10:7). It echoes the unity of mind Luke describes in Acts 1:14.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus had lived with these “apostles,” He trained them, and finally commissioned them, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Jesus was the chief cornerstone, but the apostles would now build upon His foundation. Paul summarizes this well, “God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). “The Apostles and prophets themselves constitute the foundation as being closely associated with

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<sup>55</sup> Chris Shirley, “It takes a church to make a disciple: an integrative model of discipleship for the church” *Southwest Journal of Theology*, Volume 50, Number 2, Spring 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 149.

Christ in the establishment of the church.”<sup>57</sup> With a truly emerging church, a council formed in Jerusalem with the responsibility of assisting churches in areas of doctrine and practice.

The apostles’ teaching refers to a body of material considered authoritative because it was the message about Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed by accredited apostles. It undoubtedly included a compilation of the words of Jesus, some account of his earthly ministry, passion, and resurrection, and a declaration of what all this meant for man’s redemption, all of which was thought of in terms of a Christian ‘tradition’ that could be passed on to others.<sup>58</sup>

An example of the apostles’ authority is demonstrated in a question that was posed to them from believing Pharisees, “It is needful to circumcise them (believing Gentiles) and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter” (Acts 15:5b, 6). Their response was simple, but most importantly (specifically for the purpose of this research), authoritative. “Abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:29, 30). With the decision of the council in hand, Judas and Silas then reported back to their church, and when the rest of the church heard the news, they received it with joy (Acts 15:31).

There are two principles found here that are relevant to the current research. First of all, the council (largely made of apostles, although there is an argument against James, the brother of Jesus, being an apostle, and elders) made a clear theological declaration concerning the essence of salvation and daily living. The council concluded Gentiles were not bound to the Mosaic Law, especially as it related to the acceptance and power of the gospel which is dependent on grace

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<sup>57</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon: with the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 42.

<sup>58</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: John-Acts: with the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 288.

alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Without arguing all of the theological ramifications, the principle is clear, the apostles had the authority to make theological pronouncements and it was expected of churches to adhere to them (the apostles as well as their decrees) if churches wanted to be considered pure and holding to orthodoxy. There is no biblical reference from Jesus Himself where He spoke concerning this particular issue. We, therefore, conclude the Council came together, debated the matter, and disseminated their decision to the rest of the church.

The second principle we focus on for this research is the conclusion the apostles reached was not only a theological teaching but was practical. Gentiles were not required by law or practice to be circumcised to gain favor with God or men. This was extremely important as the purity of the gospel was truly at stake, not only for the first-century church but for future generations as well. The authority the Jerusalem council wielded was not only applicable to their current situation and time but today as well. “The Church rests on the total unique event of which Christ is the center, but in which the apostles and prophets, filled and guided by the Spirit and doing their work in unique closeness to Christ, had an indispensable and untransmissible part.”<sup>59</sup>

The word translated “devotion” is the Greek word *proskartere* which “is a common word that connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action.”<sup>60</sup> Though there doesn’t seem to be a biblical reference commanding members within the church to obey the decision of the apostles, their position, as well as authority, is certainly assumed. After the decision was made by the council there is no record of dissent or argument, not even by the Judaizers who brought up the question in the first place. Only enemies of Christ believe that the apostles’ teaching somehow would have changed or made null simply because of time or a

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<sup>59</sup> John Allan, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. S.C.M., 88.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Ely Gaebelein et al., *The Expositors Bible Commentary. Vol. 9* (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 289.

change in culture. The doctrine concerning the inspiration of Scripture is a further example of the apostles' teaching which we continue to hold as authoritative in teaching and practice even though the document was written almost 2,000 years ago. Though culture may have changed drastically, and science has made tremendous strides, the people of God who seek to live right before Him will learn and be obedient to the teaching of the apostles.

The authority of the apostles' teaching, including their practices, is one of, if not the most important aspect of this research. The authority to teach, lead, and equip the first generation of believers to replicate themselves into the next generation fell on the apostles. "The phrase 'the teaching of the apostles, then, communicates not only the priority of teaching and learning among the first believers but also the authority of the apostles. In short, the first mark of the first Christian community is a commitment to Jesus' revelation uniquely entrusted to the apostles.'"<sup>61</sup> Paul modeled this to Timothy and encouraged him to do the same, "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The model the apostles provided through their teaching, example, and practices proved to be successful regardless of how one defines or measures success. The book of Acts is often seen as *just* the historical record of the first-century church, the doctrines believed as well as their activities, but why do some "churches" take the liberty to believe they can change the model provided in Acts to suit their situation? Even good conservative, Bible-believing followers have exchanged the "Acts model" for more relevant, cultural models they believe will connect with the people they seek to reach. Unfortunately, in his book *Starting New Churches on Purpose* Sylvia adopts this idea:

The many church planting models available to church planters today can present a daunting decision amid all the choices. The downside of so many options is the temptation to use

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<sup>61</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 73.

the ‘smorgasbord approach’ when church planting, that is, combing several models. The results are typically unfavorable, as the many models sometimes contradict one another, leaving the church planter dissatisfied and hungry for a healthy new church. For that reason, find a model that resonates with you, study and pray through it, then commit to it and stand by your choice. You can adapt the model once you have a growing healthy church, but to get off the launch pad without a misfire, follow the model.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, when they speak of “follow the model” the author is referring to the model explained within their book and the conferences they hold across the country. Throughout the book, *Starting New Churches on Purpose* there is an overwhelming sense that success for a church is based on the attendance. “Ed Stetzer reports that church planters who used the Purpose Driven Model saw the greatest impact on mean attendance, over the ‘other’ models.”<sup>63</sup> Again, in chapter 10 the author conveys reasons why “launching large” is ideal, even preferred. The author’s reasons, “A church launch breaks through growth barriers more quickly. A church that launches ‘big’ creates credibility (within the community) and launching large allows a church to become self-supporting faster.”<sup>64</sup> Searcy and Thomas, authors of *Launch*, also hold to the “Launching Large” philosophy. “Launching large is the ability of a new church to reach as many people as possible within the first six to eight months of existence.”<sup>65</sup> Oddly enough the author later states, “Don’t get too caught up in the numbers. Instead, focus on the potential of your area as you allow the concept to sink in.”<sup>66</sup> If the pastor of a small church were to read this book they may wonder if there is any hope of success.

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<sup>62</sup> Ron Sylvia, *Starting New Churches on Purpose: Strategies for the 21st Century* (Lake Forest, CA: PurposeDriven, 2006), 27.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>65</sup> Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006), 28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

There should be a cause for concern when the supposed benefits of “launching large” (breaking attendance barriers and financial stability) are NOT mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. Read the Pauline epistles and try to imagine Paul asking at the outset of another church plant, “If I want this church to succeed here in Ephesus, I need to make sure we begin with at least 100.” Instead, Paul’s attitude and belief are well stated in Ephesians 3:20, “Now to him who can do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” God is not limited by our resources, attendance, or anything men deem as valuable but He will accomplish His work. God works through the obedience (and sometimes our disobedience) to accomplish the only possible “New Testament” benefit of launching large mentioned by the author is, “Launching large is congruent with the best of missionary theology and with the methods of Jesus. Everywhere Jesus went, he attracted large crowds of people, all potential converts for his redemptive plan for their lives. We are called to do the same in our generation.”<sup>67</sup>

Sylvia writes the truth when he comments on the large crowds which were attracted to Jesus, unfortunately, he only gave half the truth. The truth the author does not mention is how the large crowds constantly left Jesus as well. Many of the “crowds” who gathered around Jesus were there for the amazement of the miracles Jesus performed, but to call any of those crowds a “Church” is to not fully understand how a church is to be biblically defined. In John chapter 6 we read about one of the “crowds” Sylvia speaks about. In this chapter, John describes a crowd of over 5,000 people whom Jesus fed with the donation by a young boy who gave five loaves of bread and two fish. After the meal, Jesus spoke to the masses and proclaimed a “hard saying” (John 6:60) where He proclaimed, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 108.

of Man and drinks his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). After this difficult teaching, those who followed Jesus “*turned their back and no longer walked with him*” (John 6:66). Is this the “crowd” Sylvia refers to as a church? Another question worthy of asking is, “Are these the kind of ‘churches’ being planted under Sylvia’s model? A church that attracts crowds, but does not truly create disciples?” MacArthur explains his perspective on churches Sylvia describes. “Those churches have little hope of ever prompting people past the moment of salvation into a life of sanctification. They are far more likely to lead men and women to shallow faith, stunted spiritual growth, and, sadly, false conversion.”<sup>68</sup>

#### Eating with One Another

Chan observes, “The first disciples devoted themselves to the breaking of bread, which in the New Testament refers to a shared meal in which they celebrated the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>69</sup> For many in our modern churches, the Lord’s Supper has become nothing more than a box to check off or an event that keeps us in the church building a little longer. Imagine the first-century believers taking in the magnificent meal which is a depiction of the sacrifice of Jesus and the picture of what it costs to have sin forgiven. It may be difficult for the believer of 2019 to fully appreciate the horrible nature of crucifixion, but the first-century believer knew it all too well. Reed further explains, “The meal was at the heart of these small, simple meetings that fed the spontaneous expansion of the Early Church—a concept that began in Acts 2:42 with fellowship and breaking bread from house to house. The concept of the meal was fully developed in Paul’s

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<sup>68</sup> J. MacArthur, *Your Local Church and Why It Matters* (Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2019), 21.

<sup>69</sup> Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2018), 60.



instruction about the ‘Lord’s Supper’ to all the churches—an ingenious branding of churches worldwide.”<sup>70</sup>

### Prayer

Prayer was the primary practice of the believers in the book of Acts. “But we (the apostles) will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess. 5:17). Through prayer, Satan is defeated (James 4:7). Prayer leads the lost to salvation (Luke 18:13). The apostles believed the prayer of faith could save those who were sick (James 5:13-17). Prayer is how Saints are strengthened (Matthew 26:41) and how workers are sent to the mission field (Matthew 9:38).

There is no doubt the value of prayer was instilled into these disciples through Jesus who not only taught them the importance of prayer (John 17) but also the power of prayer (Matthew 7:7-11, Matthew 18:19-20, John 14:16; 11:22). He showed them how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13), and even modeled a life of prayer to them through His life (Luke 5:16, Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46). “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1). “Pray or quit. That’s the choice Jesus knew his disciples would face. He knew that the relentless rigors of high-octane ministry would wear or burn them out if they did not develop a prayer life.”<sup>71</sup> There should then be no surprise then why the apostles made prayer foundational in their model. There should also be no surprise why every church who claims Jesus as Savior and Lord ought to also make prayer a foundational practice within their model.

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<sup>70</sup> J. Reed, “The Churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century from Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” (BILD Intl., Ames, IA 2015), 11.

<sup>71</sup> Dave Earley, *Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders* (Chattanooga, TN: Living Ink Books, 2008), 13.

The importance of prayer was so significant, the office of deacon was created to “free up” time for the apostles in order to devote time to prayer. In Acts 6, with the rising number of disciples, and their growing needs, tremendous amounts of the apostles’ time was being devoted to meet those needs. So much time was being taken from the apostles that their ministry of prayer and to the Word was being hindered. To remedy this problem “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) were appointed for this duty of service to those in need. Due to the obedience of this newly formed office of deacons, “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem...” (Acts 6:7a).

Throughout Scripture the importance, and power, of prayer are inescapable. Prayer is the connection made with God who then opens our eyes, “that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalms 119:18). Only through prayer do we truly understand the living Word of God. Though anyone can receive intellectual knowledge of Scripture, it is only through prayer the Holy Spirit makes alive the Word of God for us to understand Him. Through prayer, believers connect themselves to “bring the Holy Spirit in all His blessed power and manifold gracious operations into our hearts and lives.”<sup>72</sup> James understood the power of prayer as it provided wisdom (James 1:5). “Prayer has power to bring the Holy Spirit in all His blessed power and manifold gracious operations into our hearts and lives.”<sup>73</sup> “We have not because we ask not” (James 4:2b). We have little power in our ministries, and little influence, and see little life transformation, not because we don’t have talent or resources, but because we have such little power in prayer. God’s power only comes through prayer. One could say it is impossible to receive His power without seeking Him in prayer.

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<sup>72</sup> R.A. Torrey, *How to Obtain Fullness of Power* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1897), 63.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

### Believers Had All thing in Common

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others” (Phil 2:3, 4). James identifies pure religion as “visiting orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). Throughout the story of Acts, we are constantly seeing believers look for the needs in others, and just as importantly, meeting those needs. In Acts 5 we read, “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold” (Acts 5:34).

One may find it particularly hard to believe this activity (or attitude) is largely overlooked in our modern churches, especially when a story in Acts 5 connected to this activity, costs the lives of two individuals. Though for full disclosure the death sentence pronounced against Ananias and Sapphira’s ultimately was due to lying to the Holy Spirit, if they had given away everything (like they said) then we would be reading an entirely different story about this couple. There is a principle we can gain from this story in that it was so common for people to be generous with their property and help those in need, that when someone withheld their resources, God treated it very seriously. “What is truly extraordinary was the freedom and gladness with which the wealthy believers gave of their possessions. Although their motivation is not detailed for us, the context up to now makes clear that it was both the proclamation of salvation and the outpouring of the Spirit that resulted in both a conviction and a desire to give what they had to build up God’s own household.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> P. Jeon, *Collectivism and/or Christianity: An Exegetical Study of Acts 2:42-47 & 4:32—5:11*, (Institute for Faith, Works, and Economics, 2013), 8.

Reaching out to those in need was not a new concept created by the apostles, but a discipline given to them, and modeled, by Jesus as well. Meeting the physical and spiritual needs of those He encountered was a clear passion of His. Whether healing the sick, raising the dead, or feeding thousands of people at a time, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Jesus also inspired His disciples to do the same. “When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:38, 39). Jesus goes a step further by stating there is a punishment for those who do not help those who are in need, “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matthew 25:41).

The Apostle Paul not only encouraged hospitality but modeled it as well. In the many church plants, he encouraged them to “count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3b, 4). In his missionary journeys, Paul would encourage churches to take up offerings to meet the needs of other congregations. To the Romans he exhorted, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Romans 12:13). To the church at Corinth...

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.” (1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

“Fellowship’ (koinonia) is a term found in Greco-Roman literature to express the mutuality and commitment characteristic of marriage.<sup>75</sup> More than simply being an acquaintance

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<sup>75</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meyer Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 171-73.

or a casual friendship the fellowship enjoyed by the first-century church was based on intimacy and a genuine love for one another.

The story that begins in Acts 5 doesn't seem like it would be the place to show the generosity and attitude where people gave of their belongings, but it does tell us so much more. The story of Ananias and Saphira is to the book of Acts as the story of Achan (Joshua 5) is to the book of Joshua. Acts and Joshua are stories filled with victory the people experienced as they were obedient to God. However, they both include a story of disobedience to God which costs them their lives.

Ananias and Saphira had lied to Peter but ultimately, they lied to the Holy Spirit (5:4). "The implicit malefaction was not that the couple decided to keep a portion of the sale (see 5:4) but that they sought to appear more generous than they were, by laying before the apostles the supposed full amount."<sup>76</sup> The word "kept back" is in close association with "fraud." This couple was being deceptive, but God was not fooled. Their punishment was instant. They fell at the apostle's feet, dead. It seems at this event fear not only came to the *ekklesia*, but to all who heard and witnessed the story. "Fear came upon every soul" as the apostles performed many signs and wonders. In both cases, there was a sense of awe in response to apostolic authority and the tangible manifestations of God's power."<sup>77</sup>

There were a couple of principles defined in this story. First of all, the authority of the apostles is not only evidenced through their powerful teachings, the miracles they performed, and so much more, but now we see how God visibly verified their authority to the entire city. The second principle Jeon noted, "The imperative aspect of the Christian life, which includes the

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<sup>76</sup> P. Jeon, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2011), 64-65.

generous giving of one's possessions for the sake of those who have less, is to be understood as a joyful response to God's good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, a life lived before and empowered by the Spirit of Christ."<sup>78</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Tertullian wrote a summary of the Christians way of life, and how followers of Jesus not only looked out for their own families, but also for others.

Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are . . . not spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines or banished to the islands or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. **See, they say, how they love one another**, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred. See, they say about us, how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves would sooner kill.<sup>79</sup>

#### Met Together Publicly in the Temple and Privately in Homes

Believers worshiped publicly together in the Temple area (as they probably had done their entire lives) as well as in individual homes. "It appears that gathering together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7) was the practice of all the churches for the first 300 years."<sup>80</sup> Throughout the book of Acts, we see the disciples continuing to return to the Temple area as was their custom. Through Jesus' atonement on the cross; He made perfect the sacrifices offered by priests on the altar, however, the disciples did not abandon meeting at that location. Even the apostle Paul, when he returned to Jerusalem from a missionary journey, offered

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<sup>78</sup> P. Jeon, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Tertullian, "Fathers of the Church, Tertullian's Apology" New Apostle Bible Covenant, 2017.

<sup>80</sup> J. Reed, "The Churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century from Simple Churches to Complex Networks," (BILD Intl., Ames, IA 2015), 3.

sacrifices which fulfilled the Nazarite vow (Acts 21:26). Though there is a theological significance as to “Why?” Paul offered sacrifices that may be debated, the purpose of the mention here is to show the importance of worship in the lives of the Apostles and followers of Jesus.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author reiterates the need for disciples to meet together for worship. “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some do, but encouraging one another, and all the more especially as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). There is strength when like-minded people come together (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Even though, by and large, “coming together” brings to the mind the picture of a Sunday morning, in a building, sitting in rows, it appears to be more “normal” in the first-century to gather in homes. Over and over the meeting together in homes is reiterated. One might even argue the first church started with the disciples in a home (upper room) as they awaited the promise of the Spirit (Acts 2).

The practice of meeting in homes did not stop in Acts 2. As one reads further, meeting in homes was practically the only place they could meet. Aquila and Priscilla held meetings in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19). There was a church that met in the home of Philemon (Philemon 1:2). In Romans 16:16 after mentioning many different believers, he asks to “greet the church that is in their house.” Bradley Blue stated, “The gathering of Christian believers in private homes (or homes renovated for the purpose of Christian gatherings) continued to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century when under the tutelage of Constantine, the

Christians began erecting the first basilicas. For almost 300 years the believers met in homes  
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Multiple studies on the importance of small groups within churches have been done. Dan Cook is the Senior Executive Pastor of Spotswood Baptist Church in Fredericksburg, VA. Small groups are his passion and having people involved in a small group is a priority. This priority is not simply to have more physical connections, but they provide significant spiritual growth to those who are involved.<sup>82</sup>

Question, “Do you...?”	Not Attend Group	Attend Group Weekly
Read the Bible	27%	67%
Study the Bible	10%	42%
Pray for spiritual status of unbelievers	35%	60%
Significant relationships at church	57%	89%
Using spiritual gifts to service God & others	42%	73%

Pastor Cook does not simply believe a church should facilitate small groups, but the congregation consists of members, all of whom, are involved in small groups.<sup>83</sup>

Small groups should receive similar care and attention as the worship service. A church member may casually know the people they sit beside during the sermon, but if community is emphasized and practiced, *they will intimately know and love the people beside them in their small group.*<sup>84</sup>

Small groups build community. People within communities understand, and provide for, the needs of one another. Within small groups people celebrate and mourn with one another

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<sup>81</sup> “Acts and the House Church” by Bradley Blue in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting— Volume 2: Greco-Roman Setting*, 124.

<sup>82</sup> Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups Creating a New Scorecard for Groups*: (B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 12.

<sup>83</sup> D. Cook, 2019 Annual Homecoming, <https://www.sbcv.org/vitalchurch/>.

<sup>84</sup> Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups Creating a New Scorecard for Groups*, 9.



because, unlike the typical 11 a.m. worship hour, they get to know each other's struggles and successes. Within groups we have greater opportunities to practice the "one-another" commandments.

- Love one another (John 13:34 - This command occurs at least 16 times)
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)
- Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Without the benefit of small groups these commandments are nearly impossible to fulfill. There is no wonder the first-century church practiced this discipline of small groups.

#### Praising and Worshiping God

The disciples, having known the (Old Testament) Scriptures, understood the weight of worship, especially the worship of the One, True, and Living God. The Torah is filled with commands requiring exclusive worship of God alone. "Thou shalt not have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). In Exodus 34:13 Moses wrote, "for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." The fact we see the disciples worshipping Jesus as God even in a religious culture where worshipping anyone (or anything) other than God could mean your death reveals much of their faith in Him. Even at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the disciples recognized the power and position of Jesus as Deity. In Matthew 14, we read the account of Jesus' disciples who were charged by Jesus to get into a boat and sail to the other side of the lake. Throughout the night, the winds and rain prevented them from being able to get across. As Jesus walked on the water He almost passed by the boat, but the disciples cried out to Him for help. After Peter walked on water with Jesus, "they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat *worshipped him*, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matthew 14:32-33). Later at Christ's ascension, we see "Then the eleven disciples went

to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him” (Matthew 28:16-17).

“Worship is acknowledging God in experiences that deepen a Christian’s faith and strengthen a Christian’s service. This function is a response to God’s presence in adoration, celebration, and praise; in confession of sin and repentance; and in thanksgiving and service.”<sup>85</sup> The disciples continued this practice of worship, and according to Acts 2:47, they passed on the importance of worship to the rest of the followers of Jesus. Praise and worship became central in the book of Revelation, the author John “when he saw Him, fell at His feet as dead” (Revelation 1:17). “The verb “praise” (*aineō*) occurs only a few times in Acts (2:47; 3:8, 9). It appears early in Luke to describe both the angels’ and shepherds’ reaction to God’s manifestation of salvation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, today’s church leaders have determined there should be a new focus, a new foundation for the churches we plant. The author of “Kingdom First” asks planters to consider this question, “If the goal of a new church is to appeal to the spiritual cravings of the lost and in that process introduce them to their heart’s desire in Jesus Christ, then a soul-searching, gut-wrenching discussion on ‘Kingdom’ becomes essential.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, we find the needs of those who are lost and build our church around focusing on meeting said needs. If the church meets those needs, then we will have (hopefully) earned the right to witness to them. Sharing the gospel is the primary goal of the church, is it not? Though it sounds more spiritual

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<sup>85</sup> Morlee Maynard, *We’re Here for the Churches: The Southern Baptist Convention Entities Working Together* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2001), 10.

<sup>86</sup> Jeon, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Jeff Christopherson, Mac Lake, and Ed Stetzer, *Kingdom First: Starting Churches That Shape Movements* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 22.

when the author states it, “The Kingdom-centric new church holds as its highest value the redemptive mission of God.”<sup>88</sup>

John Piper wrote it best, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church, Worship is.”<sup>89</sup>

Piper continues to explain that missions are but a temporary activity of the church. One day missions will cease, but worship will go on into eternity. John Stott reiterates Piper as he states...

The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (as important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God...), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ... Only one imperialism is Christian... and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of His empire.<sup>90</sup>

Throughout the book of Acts, we witness the church in constant praise to God. “Acts 2:47 continues the note of joy shared among the first believers, specifying that they were praising God. The verb “praise” (*aineō*) occurs only a few times in Acts (2:47; 3:8, 9). It appears early in Luke to describe both the angels’ and shepherds’ reaction to God’s manifestation of salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup> The joy the believers are experiencing is similar to the joy others experienced when the message of salvation was brought to them as well.

Singing and music are often synonymous in worship, and first-century worship may have had a little different perspective than our modern worship. “The early churches had a very different type of understanding of the role of music. It was part of a one another ministry causing the Word to richly dwell in their assembly gatherings as part of a one another ministry. It brought

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>89</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: the Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 2.

<sup>90</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, ILL. InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

<sup>91</sup> Jeon, 4.

a high degree of authenticity to their gatherings, reproducible in any assemblage, very attractive to visitors, and therefore ideally suited to the spontaneous expansion of the churches. Again, 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Colossians 3:15-16 along with the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19-21 give us a fairly complete picture.”<sup>92</sup>

### Favor of the People

Within the past several years the church, or even religion in general, has seen much negative publicity. General public trust in the church is also on a downward spiral as well. This was not always the case. The early church saw great success and though the people in leadership who were threatened by the apostles’ message tried to silence them, it appears the general public rallied to their message. “The Jerusalem church enjoyed clear precedence in terms of status and authority in the faith community throughout the Acts narrative. At the same time, they suffered the onset of severe persecution and consequently a loss of leaders, possessions, and numbers.”<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately, in our modern time we haven’t shared had the same reputation the first-century enjoyed. In David Kinnaman’s book *UnChristian* (Research from the Barna Group), he communicates research found based on the perception of the younger population (ages 20 to 40) and their general attitude toward the church.

In our national surveys we found the three most common perceptions of present-day Christianity are anti-homosexual (an image held by 91% of young outsiders), judgmental (87%), and hypocritical (85%). These ‘big three’ are followed by the following negative perceptions, embraced by a majority of young adults: old fashioned, too involved in

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<sup>92</sup> Reed, 28.

<sup>93</sup> J. Plessis, “Models for Missional Churches in Acts,” *Scriptura* 103, 1-15. <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za> accessed on July 5, 2020.

politics, out of touch with reality, insensitive to others, boring, not accepting of other faiths, and confusing. This is what a new generation really thinks about Christianity.<sup>94 95</sup>

Anti-homosexual? Judgmental? Hypocritical? These are certainly not the traits followers of Jesus should be known for in our communities. The words of Jesus remind us what He wanted from his followers, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 10:35).

The research in *UnChristian* doesn't point to a particular time frame when this sentiment against Christianity took place, but it is nevertheless, very real. In May 2007, Dr. Jerry Falwell passed away. Though there were certainly many people who shed no tears for his death, there were a couple of men who surprised us as they reflected on Dr. Falwell's life. One of those Larry Flint, creator of Penthouse magazine. In Flint's memory of Dr. Falwell, he is quoted as saying,

My mother always told me that no matter how much you dislike a person, when you meet them face to face you will find characteristics about them that you like. Jerry Falwell was a perfect example of that. I hated everything he stood for, but after meeting him in person, years after the trial, Jerry Falwell and I became good friends. ... I always appreciated his sincerity even though I knew what he was selling and he knew what I was selling.<sup>96</sup>

The Rev. Al Sharpton was also one to disagree (sharply) with Dr. Falwell on many occasions, but here is statement concerning Dr. Falwell's death.

I am deeply saddened by the passing of Rev. Jerry Falwell. Though he and I debated much and disagreed often, we shared a very cordial and warm friendship. I visited him in Lynchburg, dined with him, and even talked with him during personal crises. Though we were as politically opposite as two people could be, I truly respected his commitment to

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<sup>94</sup> David Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity ... and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 27.

<sup>95</sup> Another very similar list was found on churchleaders.com, “6 Common Perceptions of Christians” from <https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/138865-i-like-jesus-not-the-church.html>, accessed on May 21, 2020.

<sup>96</sup> ABC News, May 15, 2007, “Reactions to Rev. Falwell's Death: *Leaders offer condolences after conservative Christian leader's death.*” <https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=3177424&page=1>, accessed May 21, 2020.

his beliefs and our mutual belief in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As I stated to my nationally syndicated radio show, I pray for the Falwell family and join the nation in mourning the passing of this religious leader.<sup>97</sup>

Dr. Falwell is singled out here as someone who held high biblical and theological beliefs, however, no matter who he spoke with and no matter who he may have disagreed with, he loved them deeply. The Church (in general) has lost this great attribute somewhere along the way. We need to bring it back to have favor within our communities.

#### Missions within the Model

There is no specific mention of world missions within the Acts 2 passage, but missions is the primary focus of the entire second half of the book of Acts. The command of Jesus during His ascension was clear, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Believers were scattered through the world, but not originally due to their sense of missions, but due to the persecution in Jerusalem (Acts 11:19). There is a sense within the first church that salvation was believed to be a gift given to only the Jewish people. It was not until Acts 10 in a scene including the Apostle Peter, and a dream given to Him by God, that clarity was given as to the true extent of the gospel. The gospel was a gift for the entire world. In chapter 13, the church begins to officially send missionaries, namely Paul and Barnabas, to plant churches around the world.

#### Summary of the Acts Model

Ed Stetzer in an article from “The Exchange” called “Marks of a Biblical Church Part 2: Biblical Churches in Different Contexts” he wrote of six essential principles every church should display. Regardless of the methods which are used, regardless who your target “audience” may

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., accessed May 21, 2020.

be, and the resources the ministry has the bottom line, according to Stetzer, these marks need to present. These marks are Scriptural Authority, biblical leadership, preaching and teaching, ordinances, and covenant community.<sup>98</sup> Though Stetzer's attributes are not exactly what I have presented within this research, there are some very close links.

1. Scriptural Authority- Predominately the Apostles had the Old Testament and the sermons by Peter in chapter 2 and Stephen in chapter 7 prove their reliance on it. Paul seals the authority of the New Testament with 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.
2. Biblical Leadership- Churches need leadership for shepherding, for providing direction, vision, and equipping saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Bill Lawrence (President of Leader Formation International) defines biblical leadership as, "the act of influencing/serving others out of Christ's interests in their lives so they accomplish God's purposes for and through them."<sup>99</sup>
3. Preaching and Teaching- "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21b). Preaching has been a "tool" God has used through the entire Bible and continues to use. An important note to consider on the subject of preaching is *preaching* generally refers to the proclamation of the gospel (*kerygma*) and *teaching* refers to the faith (*Didache*).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> E. Stetzer, "Marks of a Biblical Church Part 2: Biblical Churches in Different Contexts" September 21, 2015 accessed on May 20, 2020 from [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/september/marks-of-biblical-church-part-2-biblical-churches-are-simil.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/september/marks-of-biblical-church-part-2-biblical-churches-are-simil.html).

<sup>99</sup> B. Lawrence, "Foundational Principles of Leadership," taken from <https://bible.org/article/foundational-principles-leadership> accessed on May 21, 2020.

<sup>100</sup> J. Reed, "The Churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century from Simple Churches to Complex Networks," (BILD Intl., Ames, IA 2015), 21.

4. Ordinances- Paul instructed the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11 how to observe the Lord's Supper properly. Acts 2:42 reveals it as the normal practice for believers who are called together.
5. Covenant Community- They met one another's needs. They prayed with/for each other. They all continued together to follow the apostles' doctrines.
6. Mission- "Churches are called to be a part of the mission of propagating the gospel. Many in the churches today forget the church did mission before it did theology."<sup>101</sup>

As one can see, even though Stetzer doesn't specifically reference the Jerusalem Church as the ultimate model, his principles here very closely resemble the principles found in this research and the church described in Acts 2.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 24.



## **Chapter 3: Implementing the Acts Model at Winfall Baptist Church**

### **Statement of Methodology**

The methodology for this research will be conducted in three main stages. The first stage is to research the state of WBC before the implementation of the Acts model. Were there any fruits of obedience? Was there any numerical growth within the body? Was there any maturity within the body? Were there any reflections of the Acts model within the congregation?

This study will outline the details, and the changes made within WBC and why they were made. Could the activities and disciplines from the Acts church be reproduced here in the year 2020? Were there any significant theological issues the congregation faced as they were going through the “changes”? Was there any numerical growth or decline, not only in weekly attendance but in ministry involvement?

Finally, a review of Winfall Baptist Church will be given after implementing the activities given in Acts. How obedient was WBC to the Acts model? Were there any fruits of obedience? Was there any numerical growth in attendance or additional baptisms during these three years? Were there signs of sanctification and growth in those who were obedient? Is the church making a difference in the community?

#### **The First Stage**

In the years leading up to 2016 (when the new pastor began to implement changes), Winfall was a country church with people who had good hearts, but little spiritual direction. According to a long-time deacon, the attendance of the church had steadily been on the decline for many years. From 2010-2015, there had only been one baptism. Making matters worse, as the church averaged around 50 in attendance in 2010, a major disagreement occurred and caused

many to leave the congregation. The average attendance dropped back down to between 15 and 25 until August 2016.

In the last quarter of 2014, the pastor who had served at WBC for the previous four years resigned suddenly and without warning. Though the pastor had many friendships within the church and connections within the community, there seems to have been little spiritual fruit through the years of his ministry at this church. The decline would continue for two full years.

The moment the pastor came to this church he believed God could do big things from little Winfall, VA. This church, wondering if they were going to survive, couldn't, or wouldn't, believe God would lead them to see success. In January of 2017, the pastor told the church that within the year we would reach three specific goals.

1. We would reach a goal of having at least 80 people within a service.
2. WBC would see at least five people come to know the Lord and be baptized before the end of the year.
3. We would (more than) meet our budget.

These goals were not meant to feed our pride, but they were put in place to help a congregation believe God could do “big” things in a “small” church. One of the major attitudes which needed to be overcome was our belief God could, and that He would, make a difference in our community through our small congregation.

### **The Second Stage**

In August of 2016, Winfall Baptist Church (WBC) elected (unanimously) a new pastor who had given a promise to the congregation to return to the goals of reaching the community and ultimately, the world, with the gospel. There was no timetable, but to simply take one step of obedience to the next. As a congregation, it was decided our church would be a “place people

would come to feel loved, accepted, and find God’s will for your life.”<sup>1</sup> Though technically the church is over 100 years old, this pastor coming in had a “church planter” approach. Since there were only about fifteen to twenty people regularly, the pastor treated this as the nucleus for something “new.” From the very beginning, the desire for WBC to look like the Jerusalem Church (in the ways noted above) was always the goal.

### **Stage Three: Identifying the Problems**

In the first quarter of 2017 a survey was given to the deacons of WBC. This survey consisted of 15 questions and was designed to help give us a baseline of the spiritual status of our church. The survey was anonymous.<sup>2</sup> The pastor believed that the most accurate assessment would be given if anonymity was offered. Each answer was graded on a five-point scale where one is “least exhibited” and where five is “most exhibited.” Some of the questions from this survey are derived from Getz’ book, *The Measure of a Healthy Church*.

1. Do you believe this congregation understands the importance of working together as a group, and not simply as individuals?
2. Do you believe our congregation can identify the differences between biblical absolutes (ex. The unchanging truth of the gospel) and cultural norms (ex. Wearing a tie to church)?
3. To what extent do you believe our congregation knows that being a disciple of Jesus requires us to obey everything He has taught us?
4. Do you believe our congregation (generally) functions as a loving family?

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<sup>1</sup> This “motto” was passed unanimously by the church during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter business meeting of 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Once the survey questions were answered, they were told not to write their name on the paper and to place it in the pastor’s mailbox at their convenience.

5. Do you witness our congregation purposefully reflecting the “fruits of the Spirit.”  
(Gal:5:22, 23 “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”)
6. To what extent do you believe our congregation understands foundational biblical doctrine? (i.e. Trinity, atonement, Second Coming of Jesus, etc.)
7. Does our congregation have a strong believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus?
8. Is it generally believed within our church that salvation is a free gift of God and is not earned through good works?
9. Does our congregation understand every “Christian” is a “Disciple”? (Romans 12:1, 2)
10. Are people within this church committed to holiness in their daily living? (1 Peter 1:16)
11. Do you believe (generally) that our church avoids judgmental attitudes and accepts people (even those who are unlike them)?
12. Do you believe people in our church are praying for one another, especially when facing difficult circumstances?
13. To what extent is our congregation using their spiritual gifts for the uplifting of the church, and in conjunction with, fulfilling the Great Commission?
14. Is our church actively pursuing to interact with, and meet the needs of, our community?
15. Are the leaders in our church a faithful example to our congregation in matters of reflecting faith, hope, and love?

#### Devotion to the Apostle’s Teaching

There have been many ways and opportunities WBC has had to grow and emulate the Acts Church in the area of devotion to biblical teaching. One of the most significant ways the congregation was able to reflect the apostle’s teaching was in the denominational affiliation the

church made. In 1957 WBC became a member of the Baptist General Assembly of Virginia (BGAV). Though the history of the BGAV is not being discussed in this research, the unfortunate truth is the BGAV has taken a considerable moral turn from biblical principles. In essence, the BGAV was not devoted to the apostle's teachings and our connection, maybe specifically the money we were sending in support, didn't align with the beliefs the church held.

In June of 2017, the pastor of WBC contacted the BGAV and requested a receipt of all the money sent to the organization within the past five years and where the money eventually sent. There were several different organizations listed on the receipt with which anyone (conservative) would have considered questionable, but specifically, the money which had been sent to Union College in Richmond, VA is what drew the most interest. The pastor called Union and asked to speak to someone who could clarify their doctrinal stand on the foundation and fundamental issues, specifically the school's view on the inerrancy of Scripture. Upon reaching a secretary at the school I was transferred to the President of Union, Dr. William Rikard. When the pastor asked Dr. Rikard the stance of the college concerning inerrancy he is quoted as saying that "the Bible has inconsistencies and discrepancies."<sup>3</sup> The pastor responded and thanked him for his honesty and stated we would no longer be sending money to this school since it did not reflect our values.

Shortly after the revelation of finding out these "connections," and the church's long-time support for them, it was brought before the entire church in a business meeting. In the August 2017 quarterly business of WBC, the pastor informed the church of these new revelations which were confirmed. The pastor suggested we cancel all funding and leave the BGAV immediately.

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<sup>3</sup> This quote from the president was written down by the pastor during the phone conversation made in June 2017.

Doug Lawrence made a motion, it was 2<sup>nd</sup> by Donnie Gilbert, and it was unanimously passed by the entire congregation.

The pastor continued to research for a convention we could support and found that the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV) was much more in line with the beliefs of WBC. When brought to the attention of the church that it would need to agree to the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, within two weeks<sup>4</sup> the church agreed unanimously to adopt the statement, “We affirm and adhere to the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.”<sup>5</sup> To make sure it was understood exactly what our church was agreeing to the pastor held a question and answer session after giving everyone a week to read and look over the new doctrinal statement. At the same time, we were confirming the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, WBC also removed from our constitution the statement “We agree with the *Baptist Faith and Message 1963*.” In November 2017, during the Annual Homecoming Meeting for SBCV, Winfall Baptist Church was officially voted in as a full member.<sup>6</sup>

The denominational switch from the BGAV to the SBCV was a major victory for this congregation. For those people and churches who say this can't be done, WBC proved them wrong. There were no disagreements, no votes against this change, and the congregation as a whole was very thankful this decision was made. During this time of change members of WBC were able to confirm foundational beliefs, clarified essential doctrines, and this allowed WBC to put action to their beliefs.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Constitution of WBC it requires a 2-week interval before voting on amendments.

<sup>5</sup> Winfall Baptist Church, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarterly Meeting, August 2017.

<sup>6</sup> SBC of Virginia, “Annual 2017 Homecoming Annual Report,” 70.

## The Lord's Supper

There is little that changed concerning the way the Lord's Supper is observed at WBC. This ordinance is still taken once a quarter. We do not close this ordinance to WBC members only but open it up to all have made the decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and have been immersed in believer's baptism. Before taking the elements, there is a time of reflection and specifically, asking for forgiveness of sin due to the warning the church was given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:30, "For this reason (taking the Lord's Supper unworthily) many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." The warning Paul gives here is something we don't take lightly therefore; we spend time in prayer to truly prepare our hearts specifically asking for forgiveness.

The only "minor" change we did make in administration of this ordinance was in the element of the bread itself. Before 2016, the bread used was your typical leavened bread. The pastor suggested this to be changed to unleavened bread to better represent the body of Christ who is without sin and broken for us. The picture of the bread representing the body of Christ, as well as all of the elements, have proved to be some of the most beautiful services WBC has been able to experience.

## Commitment to Prayer

The pastor has a familiar response to those who ask about any success WBC experiences. Success is not in the preaching, the music, the youth program, or any of the other ministries we get to take part in. The only success we will only see as a ministry is only found to the extent that we are connected in prayer. Francis Chan summarizes our thoughts well, "If prayer isn't vital for

your church, then your church isn't vital. If you can accomplish your church's mission without daily, passionate prayer, then your mission is insufficient, and your church is irrelevant."<sup>7</sup>

At least twice within the year, the pastor will do a series on prayer. The most recent sermon series was taken from The Disciple's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:1-3). One of the first points made was from Jesus' statement, "Pray in this manner..." There is a right way to pray ("in this manner" Matthew 6:9a) and a wrong way. The popular belief that prayer is simply talking to God and "you can talk to Him however you like" is not what Jesus believed or taught His disciples. The disciple's prayer begins with praise and adoration to the King, "Hallowed be the Name". Our prayer turns to a reflection of obedience "thy will be done" and finally asking Him for provisions "Give us this day our daily bread." Though the typical prayer seems to focus on our needs and wants, Jesus reminds us to praise and to make sure we align our will to His.

To reiterate and practically show the importance of prayer, WBC began a prayer meeting that met on the first Sunday of each month in the evening. There was no agenda, no music, no preaching, we simply took prayer requests and spent time in prayer as a congregation. These meetings began in October 2019 and went through to the end of the year.<sup>8</sup> The average attendance of each meeting was 18. The youth leader also made sure prayer was a priority with the group. Even today, the youth group have zoom conference calls, ask for prayer request, and spend time in prayer every week.

### Sharing Resources

The pastor has placed great emphasis on finding and meeting the needs of the community. Within the past three years, WBC has supported, not only financially, but spent

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<sup>7</sup> Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2018), 62.

<sup>8</sup> The Sunday Night Prayer Meeting was cancelled due to Coronavirus.



many hours working with ministries that help the people in our community. The pastor has repeatedly stated, “Just because we may be small in numbers and resources does not mean we are exempt from doing what we can to reach and meet the needs of our community.”<sup>9</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and the subsequent quarantine ordered by the Governor, WBC gave sacrificially like never before. In the summer of 2019, a food pantry was started by the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade class. Due to where our church is situated (six miles from Rustburg and eight miles from Brookneal) it didn’t seem like we would be able to help many people since there is not much traffic around our church building. However, once the pandemic happened people lost their jobs, some of the vulnerable were unable to go out of their homes to get food, and now the WBC food pantry became extremely helpful. We took orders from Altavista (about 15 miles away) to Lynchburg. The pastor kept filling boxes with food and delivering wherever the need arose. WBC didn’t ask any questions. It didn’t matter if the people in need were Christians, whether they went to church or anything they were simply people in need, and we wanted to help. As the food left the building, the members (and even people who don’t attend our church, gave to our work) continued to restock the pantry. WBC has truly done our best to meet the needs as we receive them. Besides feeding the people of our community through our church food pantry we also teamed up with “Meals on Wheels” (<https://mealsonwheelslynchburg.org/>) to provide food in this manner.

#### Meeting Together (Publicly and in Homes)

From the very beginning (in the three years before August 2016), the attendance fluctuated between 15 and 25. The moment the pastor was voted in he treated this church, that

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<sup>9</sup> P. Stevens, Winfall Baptist Church, Winfall’s Missions Conference, March 31, 2019 taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqN9xD8Dr4A&t=68s> accessed May 2, 2020.

was technically over 100 years old, as though it were a church plant. In the beginning, small things were done like creating a logo for the church. A website was created ([www.winfallbaptistchurch.com](http://www.winfallbaptistchurch.com)) and a church Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/winfallbaptistchurch](http://www.facebook.com/winfallbaptistchurch)) was created to assist in our communication within the Body. Sermons from the pastor were directed toward specific needs<sup>10</sup> and broadcasted on those platforms. There was no change in the music (traditional hymns).<sup>11</sup> With these changes alone, Sunday service attendance in the first year went up to 60.

One of the more significant statistics in this first full year was the number of baptisms (5) the church witnessed. For a church that had only seen one baptism in the previous four years, this was significant. Much of the overall numerical growth in the weekly services had come as a direct result of lives changed. Those who were coming to the Lord were asking their family members to come and see what was “going on” at Winfall.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, there was a larger focus on reaching out to the community. The church partnered with the Agape Center (<https://www.agapelyh.org/>) and other local ministries (Take My Hand Ministries, [www.hhbc.net/takemyhand](http://www.hhbc.net/takemyhand) and the Brotherhood Firewood Ministry sponsored by Rustburg Baptist Church, <https://www.rustburgbaptistchurch.org/about.html>). The pastor challenged every group that met together, from the choir to the preschool class, to have a service project. Within that time, the preschool class began to collect teddy bears to give to Gleaning for the World ([gftw.org](http://gftw.org)). The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-grade class started a food pantry. The middle and high school children did yard work for the elderly in our community. One of the adult

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<sup>10</sup> For example, sermons answered specific questions, “How does God view money?” or “How does God view evangelism?” or “How does God view gratitude?”

<sup>11</sup> Music wasn’t changed, not because we didn’t want to change it, but we honestly didn’t have the talent to do so.

classes worked with the Blue Ridge Pregnancy Center (providing bottles and diapers), even the choir adopted a playground to make upgrades for the community. The projects were not meant to bring any notoriety or attention to our church, but to have our church begin to look outward to the needs of others. There was still no change to the music. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, the Sunday service attendance average was approximately 80. The number of professions of faith and baptisms was 10 this year.

In the third year, we began a partnership with the Patrick Henry Family Services ([patrickhenry.org](http://patrickhenry.org)). The overall focus of our involvement was to help families, specifically children who live in homes where they are not safe.

Patrick Henry's "Safe Families for Children provides struggling families with an alternative to foster care where their children will be safe and loved until they get back on their feet. Volunteer Host Families are recruited from a large network of faith communities to care for children temporarily. Parents receive support in several ways, in order to help reunite their families as soon as possible."<sup>12</sup>

To be completely efficient, Patrick Henry has a list of ministry positions (Ministry Lead, Family Coach, Host Family, etc.) to best help families. The goal of the church was/is to have WBC members fill each one of those positions. The pastor's family decided to take the lead and become a host family (the host family is the family who would bring the child/children into their home and care for him/her). WBC truly stepped up and filled the positions, even partnered with a couple of churches in the community to help in this effort. Since November 2019, the pastor's family has hosted a one-year-old boy and continues to do so until his mother can take him back to her home. Our church determined that though we may be small in number, and though our resources are not the size of larger churches, the church is still determined to do what it can to

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from <https://patrickhenry.org/services/safe-families-for-children/> accessed on May 6, 2020.

reach even one. All of these ministry opportunities have contributed to attendance and participation at WBC. The weekly attendance average was approximately 70 (two large families moved to another state). The church also was able to witness eight more professions of faith as well as seeing them baptized.

2020 has certainly started as a very unusual year, not only for our church but for everyone. In the past few months, our country has suffered from a pandemic virus, COVID-19. The Governor of Virginia imposed a quarantine (due to health concerns) where churches were forced to change the ways we connect. The Governor's order stated only groups of 10 were able to meet at any given time. Before the virus came, the average attendance was around 70, and there have been no professions of faith or baptisms as of yet this year. Until Sunday services had to be canceled, we had a couple of Sunday morning where we reached over 100 people in attendance.

### Small Groups

Before the pastor came in 2016, the only small groups meeting were those which met on Sunday morning before service. The church held a traditional Sunday School program. The attendance for Sunday school was well attended by most of the church at that time.<sup>13</sup> In 2014, there were only three classes. The three classes were one which included all the children, a couple's class, and the senior adults.

As the Sunday morning service attendance numbers began to rise, one of the "statistics" which was most concerning was the ratio between those who attended the 11 a.m. service and those who came to the 10 a.m. "Sunday school hour." Typically, about 30% of those who

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<sup>13</sup> When the church was only having 20 to 25 those in attendance were mostly families. Those families were attending during the Sunday School hour.

attended the 11 a.m. service came to S.S. This was a problem that was identified and spoken of from the pulpit. With the new attendees who arrived, leaders were chosen, and new teachers were identified. Another adult class was added, and the youth were able to divide into different classes (ages 7-12 and 13-18) as well.

Other groups began to form outside of the Sunday School hour. Our “Winfall Women’s Group”<sup>14</sup> formed and began to meet at least once a month. This group has truly been thriving. Many of the ladies of the church from teenagers to our seniors have been regularly attending. One of the greater successes was seeing ladies who do not even attend our church attending as well.

One of the areas we have not been successful in has been in our men’s group. We have tried multiple times to get this started. The men will attend for a couple of weeks and then seem to fade off. We try to restart with a meal. The men will come but then again show little interest and fade away again. Leadership reiterates often the importance of men leading the way both within the church and our families. Though WBC has had little success in this area, there is a small group of men who want to try again because they realize this needs to be a priority.

### Biblical Discipleship

“Disciples of Jesus Christ fulfill their calling through discipleship: ‘the process of following Jesus.’”<sup>15</sup> The Great Commission of Jesus is to make disciples of all nations. This is accomplished through baptism (confession of faith and outward sign) and “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:20a). When Jesus taught the disciples to pray (Luke 11), at the time they may have believed it was only for their benefit,

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/181193925837407/> accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Earley, Dave, and Rod Dempsey. *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 18.

however, Jesus had more in mind. They were to take the lessons learned from Him and deliver them to the next generation of believers.

The great mistake of many believers is to believe that lessons learned were simply given to make themselves a better person. If someone is not a praying individual and then mature in their prayer life then certainly, they must be a “better” person, right? There are two great fallacies with this thinking. First of all, our maturity as believers was never primarily for our own benefit. Paul reminds us we are all part of the Body of Christ. “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Cor.12:12).

Secondly, God was never looking for us to be the best version of ourselves, but the highest reflection of Himself in us. “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). This is His commandment to us, and His desire for us to live. The teachings and commands of Jesus were not only to correct ungodly habits, but to display the righteousness of God through us to an ungodly world.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

Our good works light the way for the lost to see God, but they also are an avenue for us to glorify God with our lives. Barclay states the word for good is the Greek word *kalos*. This word “means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also beautiful and attractive.”<sup>16</sup> The beauty of our words and actions should not point people to ourselves, but to place the focus on God. Barclay

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<sup>16</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 125.

reminds us, “The Christian never thinks of what he has done, but of what God has enabled him to do. He never seeks to draw the eyes of men to himself, but always to direct them to God.”<sup>17</sup>

### Praising and Worshiping God

Praise and worship is the life blood of the church. Our worship as a congregation will provide the fuel for ministry and the passion we need to move forward. Though when many people think of worship, they are automatically drawn to the music program of a church. Worship shouldn't be limited to just the music. Believers can worship in their giving, their service to others, prayer, and so much more.

The description of the music program at WBC would be described as very traditional. Most of the songs are hymns. The choir sings more of the Southern Gospel genre. The church has a piano player, but there are no other instruments being played, on stage, etc. The pastor has certainly reached out to the area for musicians. He even reached out to Liberty University and spoke with some Departments (who even assured the pastor they could send someone), but we have not been able to acquire other musicians.<sup>18</sup>

In the past two months a violinist and a guitarist have offered to use their gifts within the service. While the country was going through the COVID-19 virus and our full congregation was unable to meet, our services would be on Facebook Live. Each week the violinist would play, and the pastor's daughter would sing to provide some music for our service. As we move into our regular services in the building, we plan to build from this newly discovered talent and improve in this area.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>18</sup> It truly should be noted that the congregation is not against contemporary music, in fact, the vast majority want to see both hymns and praise songs to reach out to the traditional crowd as well as the younger people who identify more with newer praise songs.

## Missions in WBC

Initially, implementing a missions program at WBC required overcoming barriers. There was a sense within the church of making sure we provided for the needs of our communities first before we venture out into the rest of the world. Overcoming this objection took time, but eventually this congregation did embrace our part in reaching the world. Some of the questions and concerns were as follows.

1. We do not have the resources (money) to reach our own community, how can we meet needs around the world?
2. We have never had a missions program, how do we begin one now?
3. What kind of impact could a small church in Winfall, VA have in other places in the world?

The answers to these questions were truly an answer to prayer. The pastor contacted a missionary who was serving in a Christian school in Mexico. Through many conversations we were able to establish a ministry we could provide. Money was raised through gifts within the congregation and church and community yard sales.

One of the guiding principles the pastor placed before the congregation concerning our missions involvement was we didn't want to only send money to missionaries, but to provide ourselves as fellow workers within those ministries. When WBC sent people within our own congregation to other parts of the world it provided encouragement, not only to the ministries we supported, but it encouraged us as well. There are people in other parts of the world know people in Winfall, VA love them, pray for them, and want to continue a physical presence within those ministries. WBC wanted them to know they were not alone.



## Chapter 4: The Results

### Measuring Success in the Acts Model

The survey given to the WBC deacons to fill out (located in chapter 3) told us much about the strengths and weaknesses of our congregation. It pointed out areas where barriers to success had to be overcome in order to better reflect the Jerusalem church. The strengths the deacons pointed out in the survey were as follows.

1. The Deacons averaged a 4 (5-point scale) when asked about whether WBC functions as a loving family.
2. The average score was a 5 when considering the foundational biblical knowledge of the church.
3. In matters of salvation, the deacons determined by a score of 5 that the congregation
4. They understood salvation was a gift, and not by our works, could it only be received.
5. When asked about whether members (generally) accept other (even those who are different than them) they scored a collective 5.
6. The Leadership also assessed a 5 to their belief of whether our entire leadership team served as a good example to the congregation in matters of faith, hope, and love.

The weaknesses were also made clear in the survey as well. Though weaknesses truly were translated to us as opportunities to grow. Here are some of the areas the leadership deemed as opportunities to improve within our congregation.

1. The leadership averaged a 2 when evaluating whether the congregation was committed to holiness in their personal lives.

2. One of the lowest scoring disciplines our deacons gave was in prayer, specifically in praying for one another, this received a 1.
3. One of the notes written on the survey was that members of our congregation don't typically come together during the week, that WBC lacks a sense of community.

The remainder of this chapter describes the ways we addressed these needs and some of the successes and failures we experienced as a congregation.

Measuring success in the business world might be easier than measuring success within the church. In business, numbers need to add up. If your financial income exceeds your outcome, then you could be deemed a success. However, in a spiritual sense, success is not as easily quantifiable. For example, after the death of Moses God speaks to Joshua and defines success. "That you be careful to be obedient to all that is written it (the Law). For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8b). Obedience is difficult to measure; it is even more difficult to quantify.

Measuring success based on numbers, or even a certain desirable outcome, is extremely dangerous. Joseph, the son of Jacob (Israel), was sold into slavery at a young age. Potiphar, Joseph's master, gives him charge over all of his household. This charge did not include Potiphar's wife. Potiphar's wife made sexual advances toward Joseph, and he refused. His reply to her, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Joseph's reward for obedience to God was time in prison. If the "successful" outcome for obedience means one is thrown in jail, many might choose to be "unsuccessful." The principle here, and throughout Scripture, is the desired outcome (peace, prosperity, etc.) is rarely the result of obedience, at least on this side of life. Countless men and women paid the ultimate price, their life, in obedience to Christ. Is the martyr unsuccessful because their obedience led to death? One

of the more famous stories is the life of Jesus. In Jesus, we have the testimony of a man who followed the Law every day of His life, and yet, the reward for His perfect life of obedience was crucifixion at the hand of Romans.

For the church in Jerusalem, as they followed the model found in 2:42-47, they experienced success. Though success can be measured in so many ways, giving glory to God through our obedience must be considered the ultimate view of success. Our obedience to God is not determined by outcomes, possible rewards, attendance, money, or what anyone might consider a positive outcome. Our obedience to God is based on the fact He is the King, we are His servants, and we are responsible to Him. When our success is based on anything less (than absolute obedience) we fall short of His calling on our lives. Our human nature thrives for importance and the desire to build a legacy beyond our self. We define success as obedience because it is important to note the two outcomes listed in Acts 2:47 (Favor with the people and church growth) is not the definition of success, but the result of God blessing their obedience. Getz, author of *The Measure of Healthy Church*, proposes four principles to help churches define success. Success described biblically as opposed to the modern definition of success which normally includes building, budgets, and how many are in attendance each week.

- Principle 1. When measuring a church, we must measure functions, not forms or structures.
- Principle 2. One must have a comprehensive understanding of biblical discipleship.
- Principle 3. One must evaluate the degree to which the true disciples in that church are functioning as a family.

- Principle 4. One must evaluate the degree to which believers are reflecting the fruit of the Spirit in their relationship with one another.<sup>1</sup>

#### Function not Form

Within the Acts model, we are given the function (i.e. “fruit”) of what God desires from His Church. When the Church is obedient than the disciplines we have mentioned throughout this research, will be displayed (i.e. prayer, worship, devotion to the apostle’s teaching, etc.). How these disciplines are obtained are found in the form. Scripture gives very little on the form each church should take, and this may be by divine design. “If God had made church structures absolute, He would have locked believers into a particular culture. God-ordained functions and principles, however, transcend all cultures, and when we examine the way our churches are functioning, we can then evaluate whether our forms are appropriate and adequate.”<sup>2</sup> In the book *11 Innovations in the Local Church*, the authors declare “leaders and members follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit- to use the huge toolkit of options at their disposal. Churches today are using more methods to do more ministry in more different ways to accomplish more different results to reach more people and to involve more workers.”<sup>3</sup> The authors state there is a difference between methods and principles. “Methods are many principles are few, methods may change but principles never do.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Getz and Michael J. Easley, *The Measure of a Healthy Church How God Defines Greatness in a Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>3</sup> Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

In the 1600's sermons were regularly over two hours long and there was an actual fine if one fell asleep during the service! Musical instruments (i.e. an organ) were considered of the world. It would be interesting to see research on whether these methods were effectively reaching the people of their (cultural) day.<sup>5</sup> Towns suggests every congregation should evaluate how they are reaching their goals. "When culture changes, adjust your methods or you will lose your effectiveness...but never change your message or your principles! When methods no longer work, don't blame the harvest as being unreachable; instead, ask God if it's time to change your methods."<sup>6</sup>

This research has not focused on the different forms of ministry but has been focused on the "*What*" each ministry should be striving to reach, the principles churches should reflect. The biblical pattern given is somewhat limited, but we can ascertain a few things. Reed summarizes, "We also know from early church literature that the picture in 1 Corinthians 11–14 became the common practice of the churches throughout the Empire.

1. In a family/household environment
2. Fellowship of a meal
3. Celebrative
4. Authentic, personal, relational
5. Interactive Some structure/formality (breaking of bread, hosting)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> No research was done to find out if the cultural church of the 1600's has been attempted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seems highly unlikely it would be effective.

<sup>6</sup> Towns, Stetzer, and Bird, 16.

<sup>7</sup> J. Reed, "The Churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century from Simple Churches to Complex Networks," (BILD Intl., Ames, IA 2015), 14.

God defines the finish line; He determines the goal. Churches find themselves straying from the mission when form leads them to different goals, other than those mentioned. Often the forms taken begin as a good tool to reach God-given goals, but over time they can turn in-ward or even in the wrong direction altogether. The trend of WBC before 2016 was certainly the in-ward direction. The only ministry was to the group within the walls. Through conversations with longtime members, the event which took a considerable toll was the split that was “finalized” in 2014. “Finalized” in 2014, because the factors which caused the split were present for a long time. In 2016, God gave WBC a new start, a new opportunity, to replace the old priorities with the priorities He has for this church.

Churches also find danger when they “worship” forms over function. Many times, within WBC we encountered an attitude that the programs we use must be SBC approved. The pastor noticed programs that were being used which didn’t actually assist our church in reaching our desired goals. The health of a church is not determined from the number of programs, or even how long the program has been “active,” but by faithfulness and obedience to what He has called us to become. If programs can be used to help congregations attain further obedience and maturity in levels of prayer, fellowship, etc. then by all means, churches should take advantage of them. Periodically, leadership within the churches should evaluate programs being used and determine whether they truly are reaching the desired goals. Leadership should also have the courage to eliminate programs that do not lead to the disciplines God desires of us. Many times, leaders find it difficult to eliminate programs people enjoy or are deemed a success by a majority of the congregations. It is incumbent upon leaders who seek to be faithful to God’s design for His Church to reflect.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the pastor had three major goals to accomplish in 2017. Reaching an attendance of 80 in service was not a goal to reach to show we were healthy or claim we were growing, but to break an attitude within our little church that God could do big things, even in Winfall. Another goal was for our church to witness five baptisms, and to financially exceed the budget responsibility for the year. WBC accomplished all of these goals within the year. In September, during the Officer Appreciation Day we had over 80 people. In October, during our annual revival two people came forward to receive Christ as Savior making it five for the year. Just a couple weeks later those two teenagers got baptized on the same Sunday. By November, we already made budget. Though these goals may be considered small to some churches, these were events this church hadn't seen in a very long time. After reaching these goals the congregation began to believe, and this began to change the entire culture of our church. In 2018, we kept the momentum moving forward as we saw 10 people come to the know the Lord as well as see them baptized.

WBC is still in the process of maturing in this area of understanding form and function. In 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 have forced us to reevaluate many of the ways we do ministry, and this was a great blessing for our church. The "we've never done it that way" before mentality is slowly dissipating as the virus prohibited us from doing ministry the same way. Here are some of the changes made in our ministry approach specifically from the virus.

1. Every deacon had a family they were specifically assigned. They are responsible for contacting them on a regular basis, discovering prayer requests, meeting specific needs, and communicating with the pastor of any major needs.

2. Small Groups became a necessity due to the virus. The Governor mandated groups of over ten were prohibited, therefore, it was incumbent on us to continue having connections within the congregation through small groups.
3. Facebook Live became a new avenue of ministry for WBC during the virus as well. Many of our members now meet in small groups on Sunday morning in different homes for their group time, and then turn on Facebook where they would hear announcements and a message.
4. As mentioned before, the food pantry became another avenue for us to be visible in the community and communicate our desire as a church to help meet their needs. There was true success in this new ministry as people who were not even attending WBC heard of our food pantry and recommended it to others to contact us for help.

#### Disciples Functioning as Family

The Apostle Paul said it well, “For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14a). The family is the most basic of institutions God created for us to learn. We learn to respect the authority given to our parents. We learn to love and serve one another. We learn to fellowship, share, and grow. “The family was the first classroom for religious instruction ordained by God. He commissioned parents with the responsibility of teaching their children and passing along from one generation to another not only the truth of God’s word but also an all-encompassing love for Him and desire to serve Him alone.”<sup>9</sup> When disciples function as a family it reflects maturity, love, and a higher commitment to a greater goal.

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Church” *Southwest Journal of Theology*, Volume 50, Number 2, Spring 2008, 220.



There are two aspects WBC recognizes in this process. Disciples who continue to mature personally, as well as, disciples who find their place within the family of believers. Putman, in *Discipleshift* provides a broad definition of who a disciple of Jesus is. A short list is provided here.

1. A disciple is committed to learning the Bible.
2. A disciple cares for the lost.
3. A disciple lives life with others.
4. A disciple loves the poor and marginalized in Jesus' name.
5. A disciple commits to abstain from sin and lives differently from the world.
6. A disciple worships God with all their resources.<sup>10</sup>

The attributes described here are the attributes we believe need to be present in the disciple we seek to grow. Success is when we see these fruits grow in the lives of the members of WBC.

The greatest example, and testimony of disciples functioning as family may be found during the ministry of Jesus. The Messiah had called Matthew, a tax collector, to be one of his disciples. Tax collectors were considered worse than even the “sinner.” Pharisees believed it was acceptable to lie to a tax collector. “It’s perfectly acceptable to tell murderers, robbers or tax collectors that the money you have is for a temple offering, or that you’re a member of the king’s family and exempt from taxes.”<sup>11</sup> Tax collectors in Israel were Jewish men who collected taxes from other Jewish families (who often received more for themselves) and forwarded the money to Rome. The taxes helped fund Rome to continue to enslave the Jews. Publicans were so hated

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<sup>10</sup> Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Mishnah*, Nedarim 3:4.

it was encouraged not even to allow them into your house. “If a tax collector goes inside a house, everything the house becomes ritually unclean and needs to go through purification rituals.”<sup>12</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, Jesus also chose Simon the zealot to follow Him and be one of His disciples. “The Zealots were Jewish revolutionaries in first-century Israel whose religious zeal led them to fight to the death against Roman domination and to attack or kill other Jews who collaborated with the Romans.”<sup>13</sup> Zealots made it their goal to remove the oppressing government, with force if necessary.

Jesus chose a publican who took money from Jews and gave it to the Romans to continue their dominance and He also chose a zealot, one who devoted his life to overthrow the same government. One could certainly question what Jesus was thinking bringing two men into his inner circle whose worldviews couldn’t be further apart. It was the leadership of Jesus which made these two men work together. Jesus presented a mission to both of them that was bigger than their present worldviews. He presented them with the gospel. He presented them with the Great Commission and they both dropped their differences to pursue a greater calling on their lives.

At WBC, as we mature as disciples, as we work together within the congregation, it will lead us to a deeper obedience to the Great Commission. Being a follower of Jesus is “about making disciples because fulfilling the Great Commission is making disciples, and making disciples is the only way to fulfill the Great Commission.”<sup>14</sup> The New Testament places a great

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Tohoroth 7:6.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/judaism/judaism/zealots> accessed on May 19, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 3.

emphasis on every Christian being a disciple. Hull explains the process simply, “Disciple making included introducing people to Christ, building them up in faith, and sending them into the harvest field. This process can be summarized by what I call the three Ds of disciple making: *Deliver them, develop them, and deploy them.*”<sup>15</sup> Christ has delivered us from the penalty and power of sin (Romans 6:23). As one matures as a disciple, we learn what God expects of us, He develops them. Finally, disciples are deployed into the world to continue the process in others.

From a pastoral observation, WBC doesn’t have a divide on race or affluence. There has been some strife among members from a political standpoint. Recently, due to many of the visitors who have come, there has been somewhat of a divide from putting the people who have been here awhile verse those who just started coming. New people bring in new ideas and many times it has been noticed that the “veterans” have been slow to help and volunteer.

The biblical answer to bridge this divide is the gospel, just as it was in Jesus’ day. The constant focus on the gospel and understanding we are on the same team and reaching the same goals will be what will unite us. Consistent gospel and Great Commission messages will remind us that WBC is more than a personal club, but the organism God has called to send out the gospel. WBC, though it may be considered small, and though we don’t have many resources, has the opportunity to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves if we will only make His Kingdom our priority.

#### Favor within the Community

Everything is about reaching out to the community and we look no further than the life of Jesus, and his example, of running around the Israeli countryside helping people in need. WBC

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Hull, *Disciple-Making Church, The* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 21.

may be a small congregation, in a small town, but the attitude, from the pulpit to the pew, is to never make our size and (or lack of) resources a reason why we don't reach out to our community. We might not be able to "headquarter" certain ministries, but we can certainly combine resources with other ministries who are doing work within the community. President Reagan once said, "There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit."<sup>16</sup>

WBC has determined to be "a place people come to feel loved, accepted, and find God's will for your life." Theresa Cho, graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary, relayed their church's findings concerning outreach, "What we concluded was that everything we do is about reaching out to our community in the hopes to make a connection with them. This meant being intentional about providing a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for members and visitors to feel at home within the church and out in the community."<sup>17</sup>

### **Community Wide Revival**

In September 2019, WBC combined with two other churches in community to have a city-wide revival, Rustburg Baptist and Silver Grove Baptist. Each night a meeting was held at a different church and featured the musical talent of the "Home" church. The truly unique aspect of these meetings was our desire to make this an interracial affair. Silver Grove is an African American congregation and we (Rustburg Baptist and WBC are predominately Caucasian) purposefully wanted to combine with Silver Grove to show solidarity and unity which is why the meetings were called "Unity in the Community." B.J. Glover, Pastor of Silver Grove, noted as a

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald Reagan, <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/reagan-quotes-speeches/remarks-at-a-meeting-of-the-white-house-conference-for-a-drug-free-america/> accessed on May 23, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> T. Choe, "10 Ways to Revive a Dying Church" Sojourners from <https://sojo.net/articles/10-ways-revive-dying-church>, accessed on May 23, 2020.

longtime resident and member of the community, this had been the very first time an integrated service like this had ever been performed. These services were an amazing success filling each of our buildings, all races, differing cultures sitting with each other and all possible because of the gospel.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> night of our services, as we were doing a final invitation, an attendant from the meeting asked, “Where do we go from here, how can we keep this going?” To keep this momentum, all three of our churches planned events to come together in 2020,<sup>18</sup> including another revival in September. Thankfully, the meetings which were held in 2019 were such a success another African American, St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church has also decided to join our revival extending it to four nights. All of these churches have truly sought to proclaim to our community a message of racial reconciliation through the gospel that brings true unity.

### **Police Officer Appreciation**

In September, WBC takes time to highlight and appreciate our local law enforcement, firefighters and emergency medical responders. WBC has been privileged to have the Campbell County Sheriff attend as well as many of our officers. The initial intention and goal of this day was to take a stand within our community and support those who dedicate their lives to help our area. WBC seeks to honor them and also to give the community an opportunity to come and get to know those who serve and protect us.

In September 2019, Campbell County was in the middle of an election year for the Sheriff’s position. WBC invited all three candidates for Sheriff and gave each of them the opportunity to introduce themselves to the church, and after morning service, we showed our appreciation to them and our officers with a church-wide meal. During this time, we gave our

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<sup>18</sup> Sadly, due to COVID-19 we have had to cancel many of our scheduled meetings.

congregation the opportunity to meet the candidates, ask questions, and enjoy the company of our fine men and women.<sup>19</sup>

### **Fright Night**

Fright Night is a ministry of WBC that has allowed them to communicate the gospel, advertise for our church, and activate a number of the members to service. In short, the ministry owns an old house in the middle of a field. Through the month of October, the old shack is turned into a haunted house with a maze through an old barn. During this time hundreds of people go through this house to be scared and have good family fun. In the past, the only “goal” was to have fun. In 2019, the new leadership had determined this ministry needed to also have a gospel focus. There was no need in wasting the opportunity of reaching hundreds of people with the gospel as the community came out to participate. To add this new focus, the preacher or other leader, waits at the end of the maze to greet and give a brief presentation of the gospel to everyone who participates. For a relatively small church like WBC, Fright Night has become a major outreach within the year.<sup>20</sup>

### **Rustburg Wood-Cutting Ministry<sup>21</sup>**

Rustburg Baptist Church (RBC) is a small Baptist church about five miles from WBC. RBC found that many people in our community depended on firewood to heat their homes. For the past several years they have been helping people by providing, and delivering, firewood to them. WBC men decided to come alongside them this past year to help them cut wood and

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/winfallbaptistchurc/photos/a.412998292370098/964913383845250/?type=3&theater> accessed on June 13, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Winfall Baptist Church Fright Nite! From <https://www.facebook.com/events/972373682945368/> accessed on May 23, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Rustburg Wood Cutting Ministry (<https://www.rustburgbaptistchurch.org/about.html>) accessed on June 27, 2020.

deliver it. Again, WBC would have never had the resources to do it on our own, but through this local partnership we have been able to make a difference in the lives of many families this past winter.

### **Partnership with Agape Lynchburg**

The Agape Center<sup>22</sup> is a ministry located in Lynchburg who help those in need of food, clothes, even appliances and household goods to get people back on their feet during difficult times. Even though this is the kind of ministry WBC would enjoy performing ourselves, due to our limited resources (a pretty small building) we would be unable to do this ministry properly. However, even though we don't have the building space to perform this ministry, it is not an excuse for us not to do what we can to help those less fortunate in our community. Since partnering with Agape we have donated no less than 12 truckloads of food, clothes, and other supplies. WBC also financially gives each year to this ministry.

### **Take My Hand Ministries**

The Take My Hand ministry<sup>23</sup> is located and operated from the Hyland Heights Baptist Church. They help those who are mostly in need of furniture. Many women who are leaving bad relationships come to this ministry and they can choose furniture, beds, clothes, and furnish a new place. Our church partnered with them and we were able to deliver furniture to those who were in need. People within WBC also donated their own furniture as well.

### **Acts 29/ WBC Youth Group**

The Youth of WBC have truly been a light for our church. In 2016, there was a weekly meeting, but few attended. The leadership within the youth was strong, and they truly had/have

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<sup>22</sup> [www.agapelyh.org](http://www.agapelyh.org) accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.hhbc.net/takemyhand> accessed on June 27, 2020.

the best interest of the youth in mind. Every single member within the youth group was asked directly if they believed in their leaders and all of them emphatically strongly agreed.

In 2017, the Youth group changed their name to Acts 29.<sup>24</sup> In years past, the youth group would take an annual trip to King's Dominion (an amusement park in Richmond, VA). This particular year the pastor proposed the youth do something different with that money, instead of King's Dominion the youth should take a mission trip through MFUGE. This trip would separate our youth to work in groups to assist others in different projects, witnessing in the park in downtown Asheville, NC, as well as team building and nightly devotions. In 2018, 12 youth took the trip and it truly broadened their thinking of the impact they could make. In 2019, 14 youth went, and it was another amazing success as two of our teens gave their life to the Lord. The next month, both followed the Lord in believer's baptism.

### **Second Sunday Luncheons**

As part of our desire to follow the Acts Model, we purposefully scheduled a meal where the congregation could come together to eat lunch and fellowship. This meal was scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month throughout the year. Though there is no specific record of attendance for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Luncheons, it is very clear the attendance on those Sundays are higher than other services. Though the obvious observation is people enjoy having a free meal, but it also became an opportunity for members to invite friends and family and introduce them to our church family.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> WBC Youth Group, "Acts 29" found on <https://www.facebook.com/Acts29WBC/> accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/601375067341468/> accessed on June 13, 2020.



### **Samaritan's Purse**

For the past three years our church has enjoyed this ministry during the Christmas holidays. The entire congregation has come together to provide shoe boxes to send to children around the world through this ministry. In 2017, our church came together and sent out 70 boxes. 2018 saw our church send out 80, but in 2019 we sent over 100 boxes to children through Samaritans purse.<sup>26</sup> Our process has been for people to bring gifts and items for youth and on a scheduled day we all come together and fill the boxes. We then have an opportunity to pray over those boxes and send them out.

World Missions is a new venture for this small church. It was the pastor's goal to have an ongoing relationship with global ministries WBC partners with. This meant we did not simply want to give money to a ministry and not have a physical connection to them. Here are a couple of the global mission partners we not only supported but sent people to minister there as well.

### **Big World Project**

In 2018 and 2019 Big World Project<sup>27</sup> was introduced to WBC. One of our deacons traveled to India through their ministry, specifically an orphanage located in Hyderabad, India. This deacon owns a nursery in Winfall and has much experience with growing shrubs, trees, etc. He took his skills to this orphanage and taught them how to plant crops in order for them to be able to be self-sustaining. In 2019, the pastor joined them on their trip to the orphanage. The pastor had the unique privilege of speaking at a local pastor's conference to over 30 pastors in the Hyderabad region. He also spoke for an ordination service where 10 pastors who were identified as called by God for ministry. Finally, he was able to speak at one of the local

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/> accessed on June 27, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> [www.bigworldproject.org](http://www.bigworldproject.org) accessed on June 27, 2020.

churches. Future trips were planned for 2020, but due to the virus it seems highly unlikely we will be able to physically be there to minister, but in our absence, we send financial help and other needs.

### ***El Manantial***

*El Manantial*, a ministry of Global Education Ministries,<sup>28</sup> is a school located in Puerto Escondido, Oaxaca, Mexico. *El Manantial* is a Christian school who has made it their mission to saturate every class with the gospel. With almost 300 students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade they have been growing every year. WBC made two trips to assist them in ministry and partnered with *Camina de la Cruz*, the church associated with the school.

#### Fruit Reflected in our Ministry

The first principle we note here is what the fruits of the spirit are identified as. These “fruits” are located in Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” For WBC these fruits need to be displayed in every service we perform, in every ministry we have the opportunity we get to be a part of, and in every witnessing opportunity God places in our path.

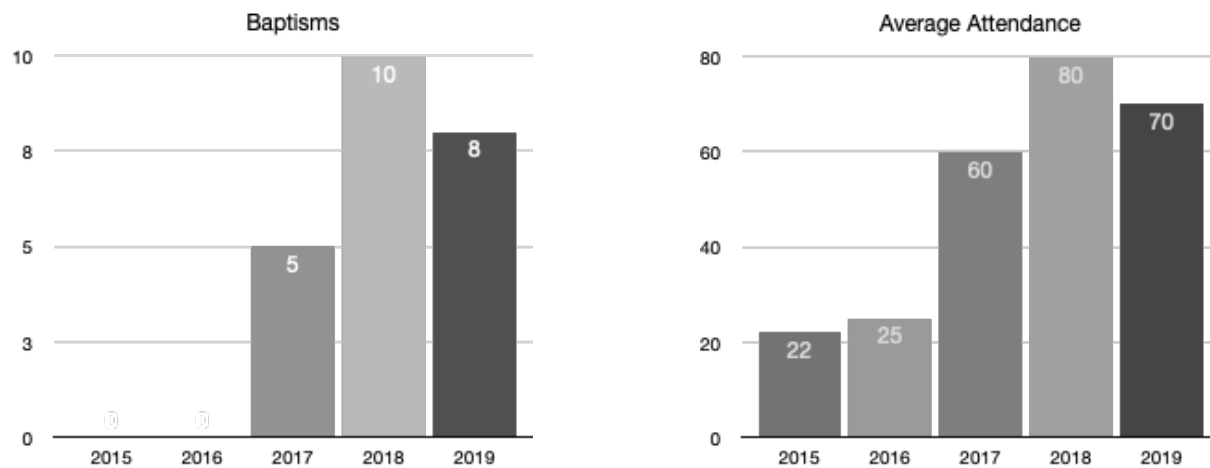
Every ministry should display these fruits. The world is not offering anything better. When our church displays these fruits, we will truly be attractional (word used intentionally). The attraction won’t be directed toward the church, Jesus will be the attraction. Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32).

In the early days of pastoring we used to count everything. On Monday morning we had to know how much was given in offering the day before. Did anyone count how many were in

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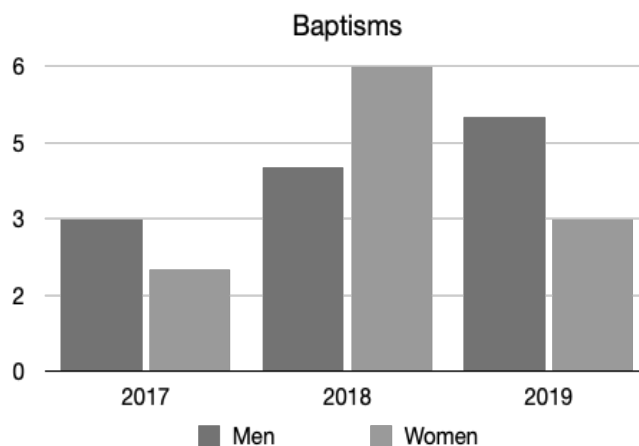
<sup>28</sup> [www.globaleducationministries.org](http://www.globaleducationministries.org) accessed on June 27, 2020.

attendance on Sunday morning? How many were in Sunday School? The emotions would go up and down. As WBC's pastor and staff matured, there is now only one number we concern ourselves with anymore, conversion that lead to baptism. Admittedly, professions of faith get me excited, but there have been many "conversions" which didn't lead to changed lives and may have been described by Jesus as the "seed which landed on stony ground" (Matthew 13:20). However, when conversion leads to baptism there is more root to their faith. Hoyt agrees, "Count conversions. If you could count only one thing you should count conversions. On the day of Pentecost, they did not count attendance. *They counted conversions measured by baptisms.*"<sup>29</sup>




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<sup>29</sup> William R. Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 9.



WBC wants to build a culture where we celebrate what we believe God celebrates. Jesus came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He has “chosen and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain...” (John 15:16). Our obedience is ultimately for His glory, and when we are praying, serving, praising, giving, and sharing our faith we thank God when it leads us to witnessing new lives changed.

### **Revisiting the Leadership Survey**

In the Summer of 2019, the leadership revisited the survey we took in 2017. We didn’t fill out the questionnaire again, but we did discuss some of the major themes of the survey; prayer, biblical devotion, favor within the community, and the use of spiritual gifts within the church. There was an overwhelming consensus among the leaders that our congregation had improved in every category within that survey. The one category which seemed to be the most improved was our favor within the community. Our involvement in community events, the Officer Appreciation Day, providing school supplies for our local schools, filling the local food pantry, and so many more acts of kindness throughout the community have not gone unnoticed. One of the signs we all felt encapsulated this victory was when we found out people who weren’t even attending our church were referring others to contact us to help them with food.

## Area of Improvement

The area we felt we had improved, but still had a lot more opportunity to grow in, was people who attend small groups. Stanley has encouraged members within his church as he encourages others to know, “circles are better than rows. And from day one, we’ve been committed to creating a culture that’s all about circles and not rows. We are famous for our rows. But the strength of our churches is what happens in circles.”<sup>30</sup>

Meeting publicly on Sunday is important, but the greater successes we have seen have not come from our larger gatherings (11 a.m. Sunday), but the small groups throughout the week. Each year, those who attend the 11 a.m. service and attend a Small Group through the week is growing, but still needs improvement.<sup>31</sup>

Attendance	2017	2018	2019
Small Groups	20	23	28
11 a.m. Service	60	80	70
% attend Both	33%	28%	40%

During the Christmas season of 2019, the adult small group adopted a family and provided gifts for the children of that family. These are just some of the acts of kindness small groups have helped to contribute to the needs within our community. With greater participation within our small groups by the entire congregation, WBC will be able to perform so much more ministry.

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<sup>30</sup> M. Howell, “Andy Stanley: Circles Are Better Than Rows” ChurchLeaders from <https://churchleaders.com/smallgroups/small-group-blogs/164198-andy-stanley-circles-are-better-than-rows.html> accessed on May 29, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Statistics taken from the Annual Profile for SBC churches on [sbcworkspace.com](http://sbcworkspace.com) accessed on May 2, 2020.

## **Conclusion**

As our leadership moves forward with planning, determining future programs, and even our budget, it is imperative for us to answer the question as to how this decision helps us look more like the Acts church. Does what we are planning today align with the disciplines outlined in Acts 2. Since making this shift, our conversations have become more fruitful and the rewards we enjoy together have been sweet.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

WBC wants to be a biblical church. Chan inspired us with his this quote, “If we were to start with Scripture and allow it to dictate our actions, how would we live?”<sup>1</sup> When WBC began to implement programs that enabled us to look more like the Acts church, the church truly began to come to life. It is amazing to witness our congregation light up as they see lives changed, people giving their heart to the Lord and seeing them obey Christ in baptism. The apostle Paul wrote there is power in the gospel of Jesus (Romans 1:16). When people make Jesus Savior and Lord of their life, he doesn’t simply fix their heart, He gives us a completely brand-new heart. God doesn’t put a band aid on our mind, He gives a brand-new mind. Paul wrote, “for anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, old things are passed away, behold all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The inception of this research began with the pastor’s instillation into this new ministry, and his immense desire to shape this ministry into what God would have it to be. Every day throughout the week, the pastor began each morning at the front pew, on his knees, begging God for wisdom and the heart to be the leader He had called him to be. (The pastor’s sincere belief in prayer was/is the foundational discipline to building WBC.) The congregation was small, but the people who were committed to the ministry were eager to work and making changes (or upgrades in current practices) didn’t seem difficult. An attitude this small congregation had (which is difficult to measure on paper) was the trust they placed in their pastor that allowed him to make those necessary changes. There is no recollection on the part of the pastor where a member of the congregation went against his “leading” or a program he desired to pursue. WBC

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage, 2009), 1.

didn't even have a "formal" deacons meeting during the pastor's first full year of service. The first official, formal meeting the pastor and deacons did have concerned the decision to pray for, and elect, new deacons as the growth of the congregation necessitated more servants. The trust this congregation had in their pastor may have been one of the most valuable qualities this ministry provided in the transformation and revitalization WBC experienced. The research, the statistics, the books that were read could never measure this all-important factor.

Throughout this research there was no surprise to the number of books and articles written on the multiple methods and models churches use to reach their goals. Some of the models are quite complicated. Multi-site, Ancient-Future, cyber-enhanced models, to name a few, require a lot of structure, organization, and in many cases a lot of resources. Though there are many churches who have successfully used these models, none of these forms fit every congregation. WBC is a smaller church, and certainly many could say that our lack of attendance enables us to remain simple in our structure, but this little congregation has done some amazing work in ministry over the past couple of years. WBC has intentionally and purposefully tried to keep our structure simple. In fact, it has never been the intent to grow a large church. There is no "magic number" but before our church gets too large, it has always been the vision to start new churches and send people out from Winfall.

What was surprising in my research was the lack of focus authors placed on the model(s) given within the New Testament. With over 50 books on my desk (which would be characterized "church growth" books) only a few of them placed any focus on any biblical model. For example, *Breakout Churches* did have some good information, but spends much of its content on identifying Acts 6/7 leaders who 1. Accept a Painful Reality, 2. Is/Should be Discerning, 3.



Positive Outside Influences, 4. Influence Change.<sup>2</sup> This process is Rainer's description of the leader who can take a "good" church and turn them into a "Breakout" church. Though this description is grossly oversimplified on my part (Rainer spends much more time on this subject), it serves to prove the point of how complicated modern leaders have made leading a church. What happened to leaders who seek God from our knees in humility, looking to the examples given to us through Scripture, and modeling our lives and ministries after them? This research is worthy of the time and attention of every pastor and leader to examine and assess their churches.

In 2019, a couple name Brittany and Kendall began to attend WBC. They were not married, they were living together, and they had a six-month beautiful girl with them. They were invited to come to WBC by one of our deacons to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday luncheon.<sup>3</sup> Relationships began to be formed with them and they ended up attending the Sunday morning group the pastor teaches. After attending for about three months this couple asked to speak to the pastor in his office one evening. Kendall informed the pastor that he had decided to come to know the Lord. Brittany had more questions and we all talked for about an hour, we prayed together as she decided to make Jesus Lord of her life. Within two weeks they came back to the pastor and said they would like to get baptized and the pastor was honored to perform it under one condition, they would have to get married. Within a month they came back to the pastor and said they had talked with their parents, they've prayed about it, and they have decided to go ahead and get married. The pastor was thrilled at their decision and officiated their marriage. Less than a month after their marriage the pastor then baptized both of them on a Sunday morning. As of June 2020,

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<sup>2</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 83.

<sup>3</sup> Every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month we have a Lunch after service. Everyone is invited and it has been amazing to witness the people who will come when food is offered. This was done purposefully to fulfill the Acts 2 model of the church who fellowshiped and ate together.

this couple is still very involved in WBC. Kendell is a talented guitar player, and he now uses his talents for service during our Sunday morning worship. Brittany and Kendell are one of many couples WBC has had the blessing of seeing their lives changed.

This story is told because it shows many of the aspects described in the Acts Model. A deacon invited them to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Church-wide meal (the church ate together 2:46) as we want to have favor in our community (2:47). We shared with them the apostles' doctrine, specifically of salvation (the church continued in the apostles' teaching 2:42). They came to know the Lord and showed their obedience through baptism (2:41). We prayed together (2:42). They continued to be a part of our congregation as they celebrated the Lord's Supper (2:42) and also became involved in a small group (they continued to meet publicly and privately 2:46). The entire WBC congregation had a part in seeing this couple through this transformation and we celebrated with them (the church praised God 2:47). This model is simple. Very little resources were required and yet the love our congregation shared with this amazing couple will be enjoyed throughout eternity.

What everyone in ministry finds out (sooner or later) is there is no amount of talent or speaking ability, not even the most eloquent of speeches can transform one, single, heart. We need the power of God working through us and into the lives of the people we seek to minister to in our communities. WBC, and every church who seeks to make a godly difference, must seek His face and invite His presence into their ministry. For every social injustice, for every broken marriage, for every addict, for every lost cause is the gospel of Jesus who can heal, unite, and empower for His glory and honor.

As the research for this project began, specifically in our fact-finding phase of submitting the 15-question survey to our deacons (mentioned on page 75), there are changes that would

have been made if given the opportunity to give the survey again. There was good information obtained from the survey as it was presented, however, questions could have been reworded, or categorized, to allow our leaders to understand the direction we were moving as a church. In this way, the pastor would have not only been receiving the necessary information to understand the current status of the church, but to educate the leaders to the biblical connection the pastor was trying to make. For example, if we were to have a 15 questions survey again, three of the questions would have been under the heading of “Prayer” and would have helped us assess our focus on prayer. Another heading would have included “Favor within the Community” and three questions to assess this discipline within our church, and so on. It was clear to the pastor as we came together as a leadership team there was some confusion, but with clarification, and a brief picture of the model, there was more understanding to the intent of the survey.

One of the goals this research seeks to accomplish is to remind and encourage church leaders, especially churches who may be struggling, to return to a biblical model. Pastors and leaders truly need to be careful with the “church growth” books published and measure them alongside biblical truth. The flow of this research was to give a strong biblical foundation that not only educates on the description of the Acts church, but to produce the evidence that this model is not outdated. Though the Acts 2 church was meeting 2,000 years ago, this model is still effective today. WBC made the Acts 2 model the template and God blessed in our efforts.

There are still ways WBC can more fully commit themselves to this model. There are deeper levels of obedience to be explored. The information gleaned here is (hopefully) only the beginning of the greater things God does here as we continue to find new ways to praise Him, meet together, fellowship, and commit our lives to biblical teaching. We originally set out to revitalize this church, but the long-term plan is to start other churches with this same biblical

model. Maybe through the process we may also become a blueprint for other congregations to follow us as we follow Christ.

The conclusion WBC discovered through following this model was new spiritual growth and we are witnessing God's Spirit at work within this congregation. WBC saw people's lives transformed. We witnessed them get baptized and begin to be connected within the congregation. WBC credit's the model in Acts 2 for this success. It is my belief this model could also work in other settings as well. For example, if a pastor or church leadership were to take this model and apply it to an inner-city congregation, would they have experience some of the same results WBC experienced? If this model was followed in other countries, would they also see the same fruits? WBC is considered a small church, could this model be applied to larger churches and still be successful? WBC is a church who in 2016 had a more senior population within the congregation, could this model work with a younger congregation?

Through this research there was an encouraging challenge. With the background of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 in mind, the question was asked, "Why didn't Jesus say to each church, 'Why can't you be more like the church in Jerusalem?'" The answer is essentially, He did. The Lord reveals to the churches in Ephesus and Laodicea that their praise and worship to God needed to be genuine and authentic. To the churches in Pergamos and Thyatira He encourages them to follow the apostles' doctrine. Sardis was dead, the congregation there may have needed to implement all of the disciplines mentioned. Even the commendations Jesus gives to these churches is in line with the Acts model. To Ephesus and Smyrna, He commends them on their ability to hold fast to the apostles' doctrine (2:2). To Pergamos, they "held fast to His Name," though it may seem small they held to the apostles' doctrine. To Thyatira, they reflected "works, love, service, faith, and patience," which displays care for their

community. To Philadelphia they “have kept My word” and showed adherence to the apostles’ doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The examples given here only further the importance of this research and the desire for each church to conform to the biblical model.

From the very moment sin entered into the world, God had a plan of redemption (Genesis 3:15). When one imagines what an omnipotent, omniscient God can do obviously nothing is impossible. How would God proclaim this most powerful message, the only message that can save mankind, to the world He loved so much (John 3:16). God, who has all of the angels (1 Peter 3:22) at his service could have had one of them preach the gospel from the heavens for humanity to listen. God, the author of life and even resurrection (John 11:25), could have sent one of the great Old Testament prophets back from the dead to earth to proclaim the good news and the whole world would’ve marveled (theoretically). What did an infinite, all powerful God actually do? He established the Church.

Admittedly, from a human perspective, it seems like a bad idea. Why would God place this most important message in the hands of fallen people? People who will misuse the message, they might even take the gospel and use it for selfish gain. Humans might even change the message of the gospel to make it suit themselves and be less offensive to others, but even with all of these possibilities (or realities) this is the method in which God chose. He chose to use people who have been saved by His grace (Eph. 2:8), those who have experienced His love (2 Cor. 5:14) and invited them to be a part of His Church. He then does what seems unthinkable, He sends them throughout the world to give this same message of restoration to those in need (2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 28:19, 20).

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus had no commendations for the churches at Sardis and Laodicea.

Looking back through the research, as we implemented the model (though no one could have predicted the COVID pandemic), the pastor would have placed a greater importance on small groups the ministry did. If the small group ministry of our church had been stronger then our congregation could have met more needs, had a greater ministry influence, and done much more to help our community. WBC worked from behind, and instead of thriving, we found ourselves developing structure within before we could look outwardly. If and when there is another emergency WBC will be better prepared. Not only will we be prepared for a national emergency, but community-wide emergencies as well. Maybe the most imminent emergencies we will be prepared for are the needs within our homes and families. A closer community will be able to determine the needs, and the biggest issue we have had has not been meeting those needs but finding those needs. Over the past three years if the pastor has learned anything it has been the amazing generosity within the membership.

The Church, when working by God's design, is the most beautiful organization in the world. The Apostle Peter wrote we "come to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). The gospel has had the power to overcome every, single, barrier this world could have ever brought before it. Whether issues of race, affluence, power, even governments nothing could stop the gospel's advance. There is a scene in heaven pictured in Revelation 5. John, the author sees this vision and writes, "And they sang a new song, saying:

You are worthy to take the scroll,  
And to open its seals;  
For you were slain,  
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood  
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9, 10)

The Apostle John describes a day when the Bride of Christ, the Church of Jesus will all be assembled together in one place, around the Throne. Every single person in the crowd on that day, if you could ask them how they got there, every one of them would tell you, it is because of the “Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 5:12a).

Winfall Baptist Church seeks to do their part, in obedience to God, to add as many people to this great gathering as possible. Disciples of Jesus have shown the way. Jesus is our ultimate example. The Holy Spirit leads, empowers, guides and will provide for our every need. There would be no greater honor than to add to the voices who will one day give ultimate praise to the King of the Universe.

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