

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Investigating the Impact of Spiritual Gifts on Church Growth**

Submitted to Dr. Jeff Johnsen

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of  
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

Johnnie Finkley

February 28, 2022

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, February 28, 2022

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This thesis project uses spiritual gifts found in scripture as teachable models for church growth to address a decline in church attendance at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The research assumes that if church members are aware of their spiritual gifts, they will use them to build a healthy church. Therefore, the question that this thesis project asks is, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The Bible is the primary literary resource for God’s provision in transforming believers into His image. It is the foundation for church members’ spiritual growth. The book of Acts exhibits five teachable models for growing the church, the gifts of proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership, which are the focus of the investigation in this thesis project. Creswell’s Phenomenological Research provides a research framework for data collection and analysis. Church members are the target group for this qualitative study. Each participant gave responses to a pre-test and a post-test to validate the reliability and results of the assessments.

Four key results can contribute to the spiritual growth of this membership: first, members should use their gifts to glorify God; second, members should share their gifts with others; third, members should use their gifts to draw unbelievers to God; fourth, members should use their gifts to lift-up others in the congregation. This research thesis project provides foundational steps for this church and other churches in understanding how to use spiritual gifts to grow the church.

## Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Ministry Context.....	1
Problem Presented .....	5
Purpose Statement.....	6
Basic Assumptions.....	6
Definitions.....	8
Limitations .....	11
Delimitations.....	11
Thesis Statement.....	11
Research Question .....	12
Specific Objectives .....	12
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	13
Literature Review.....	13
The Dynamic Nature of the Concept Church Growth .....	13
The Criterion for Developing Spiritual Church Growth.....	16
Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Growth.....	19
Healthy Church Growth.....	21
The Holy Spirit, Gifts, and Church Growth.....	26
Theological Foundations.....	30
The Power of Proclamation .....	31
The Power of Teaching.....	33
The Power of Leadership .....	35
The Power of Prayer .....	38
The Power of Faith.....	41
Theoretical Foundations.....	43
Church Growth through Activation of the Five Gifts or Currents.....	43
Church Growth through Biblical Principles .....	44
Church Growth through Motivation and Influence of Leaders .....	46
Church Growth through Congregational Reflections .....	46
Church Growth through Practicing Social Justice .....	46

Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts Pertinent to Church Growth.....	47
Other Church Growth Models .....	48
Church Growth Principles: Models of Spiritual Gifts for Church Growth.....	49
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	54
Introduction.....	54
Purpose of the Study .....	54
Research Tasks to Accomplish.....	55
Research Objectives.....	56
Research Objective 1 .....	56
Research Objective 2 .....	56
Research Objective 3 .....	57
Research Objective 4 .....	57
Intervention Design.....	58
Theological Framework.....	58
Session One: The Gift of Proclamation .....	59
Session Two: The Gift of Prayer .....	62
Session Three: The Gift of Faith.....	65
Session Four: The Gift of Teaching.....	68
Session Five: The Gift of Leadership .....	72
Research Design Framework .....	75
Types of Data Collected/ Protocols/Analysis .....	75
The Tools for Gathering Information .....	76
Implementation of the Research Intervention Design .....	76
Research Objective 1 .....	76
Research Objective 2 .....	77
Research Objective 3 .....	78
Research Objective 4 .....	78
Sample Selection.....	78
Long-Term Members .....	79
Participants.....	79
Participants Selection.....	80
Sample Criteria .....	80
Sample Size.....	80

Informed Consent.....	81
Place and Timelines of Activities .....	81
Ethical Issues that Relate to Informed Consent and Confidentiality .....	82
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	83
Introduction.....	83
Demographic Profiles .....	83
Two Long-Term Members.....	83
Participants (Seventeen Members) .....	84
Results: Research Objective # 1 .....	85
Results: Research Objective # 2 .....	86
Spiritual Gift # 1: Proclamation.....	86
Spiritual Gift # 2: Prayer.....	87
Spiritual Gift # 3: Faith.....	87
Spiritual Gift # 4: Teaching .....	88
Spiritual Gift # 5: Leadership .....	88
Results: Research Objective # 3 .....	88
Introduction.....	88
Generate Themes .....	89
Textual and Structural Descriptions.....	90
Composite Description with Experience: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results .....	91
Awareness .....	92
Engagement.....	97
Teachable Moments .....	99
Results: Research Objective # 4 (Meeting with Long-Term Members).....	103
Introduction.....	103
Interview Review Item # 1.....	103
Interview Review Item # 2.....	104
Interview Review Item # 3.....	104
Interview Review Item # 4.....	104
Interview Review Item # 5.....	105
Interview Review Item # 6.....	105
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....	106
Summary .....	106

Conclusions.....	113
Future Research Recommendations.....	114
Implications.....	115
What Did the Researcher Learn from Implementing this Thesis Project? .....	116
Bibliography .....	118
Appendix A: Primary Planning Questions.....	125
Appendix B: Secondary Planning Questions.....	126
Appendix C: Pre-Test Interview Questions .....	127
Appendix D: Post-Test Interview Questions .....	128
Appendix E: Participants' Demographics.....	129
Appendix F: Interview Review Questionnaire .....	130
Appendix G: Consent Form .....	131
Appendix H: Recruitment .....	133
Appendix I: Recruitment Follow-Up.....	134
Appendix J: Permission Request Letter .....	135
Appendix K: Permission Letter .....	136
Appendix L: IRB Approval .....	137

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

This thesis project, investigating the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth, addresses the decline in church attendance at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The intersection of the two missional concepts, spiritual gifts and church growth, is an area of practical significance for church leaders, even though the combination of these two subjects has less than adequate academic attention in the literature.<sup>1</sup> The researcher will share the ministry context, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and basic assumptions. Definitions, limitations, and delimitations will help to narrow the study's scope. The researcher will present a theological proposition to focus on various aspects of the topic from start to finish to achieve the purpose of this project. The researcher will examine if the project is both researchable and significant for this church and the wider community. The researcher will use a primary<sup>2</sup> and secondary<sup>3</sup> planning questionnaire (Appendix A & B) to aid the researcher in developing this thesis project with the help of the church's pastor.

### Ministry Context

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church has a commandment to “witness to the gospel message.”<sup>4</sup> Those in the congregation who have a rejuvenating relationship with Christ over a long period must be examples of continual spiritual growth worth of followers.<sup>5</sup> These members

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<sup>1</sup> Brian A. DeVries, “Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth,” *In Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016): 2-3, <http://ezproxy.Liberty.Edu>.

<sup>2</sup> Dmin830\_B02\_202120 Luo Week 4 Module.

<sup>3</sup> Dmin830\_B02\_202120 Luo Week 5 Module.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Clothier, *To Each is Given: Spiritual Gifts in the Life of the Church*. (Ashland: BMH Books, 2020), 43. Accessed November 16, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher M. Johnson, “4D’S of Spiritual Growth: The Local Church’s Role in Spiritual Growth and Discipleship” (D.Min. Thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2020), 5.

should use their spiritual gifts to make disciples of Christ. The spiritual gifts have been given to the church by “God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the building up (growth) of the body of God the Son.”<sup>6</sup> Yet Friendly Missionary Baptist Church is declining in membership.

Asiru emphasizes that there are reasons why individuals seek a church to call their home church, one where their families can spiritually grow, and why they may not move towards a particular church. Numerous churches have large building structures, yet they remain empty in terms of attendance, fellowship, love, and fulfillment of the Great Commission.<sup>7</sup>

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church is one mile west of downtown Birmingham. It has been in its current location since 1931. It was rebuilt in 1944 and 1999 and has had ten senior pastors in its history. The congregation is primarily African American. The majority of church leaders are over the age of fifty-five. The congregation’s ages range from under the age of 18 to 98 years old. The pastor indicates in an interview that the “church’s vision is to build a family of devoted followers of Christ who worship God, distribute Christ’s hope and love, and minister to each other’s needs.”<sup>8</sup> Pastor Harrison, in his comments, maintains that the church’s vision is “We love because He first loved us.”<sup>9</sup>

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church has forty active members on the church’s role. The church is in a strategic location. Birmingham City School’s Professional Development Center is across the street from the church. Parker High School is one city block west, and Solomon Books & Church Supply is two blocks south. These organizations have been in the community for more

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Clothier, *To Each is Given: Spiritual Gifts in the Life of the Church*. (Ashland: BMH Books, 2020), 43. Accessed November 16, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>7</sup> Olanrewaja Asiru, *Ushering in His Presence: A Ministry Model for Serving in the Church* (Chicago: HigherLife Publishing, 2021), 8. Accessed December 4, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>8</sup> La Shelton Harrison, Pastor Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, Statement of Ministry Context, January 21, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:19 (English Standard Version).

than fifty years. Several members in the congregation work with these businesses to educate their grandchildren or to order books and supplies.

The routines, practices, and patterns of relationships that capture Friendly Missionary Baptist Church are Sunday school, Bible study, and the fourth Sunday communion observance with the oldest member in the congregation. She is also the wife of the longest tenure pastor to serve this church. Each auxiliary has a chairman, and elections occur every five years. The church has bylaws to govern church members and leaders' duties and responsibilities.

The pastor, presiding officers of the deacons, and the trustees meet monthly to assess the strategic plan. Pastor Harrison shares that the church's motto is "There is no I in team, and if it is not broke, do not try to fix it."<sup>10</sup> He also states that his "primary duty is to be the spiritual leader, to teach and preach, and first and foremost to be led by the Holy Spirit."<sup>11</sup> Henry Blackaby will agree that "God often uses people to bring about spiritual growth in others."<sup>12</sup> The pastor understands that church growth will require that he guide the congregation to understand their spiritual gifts. Thomas maintains that strengthening and the teaching of the church come through understanding.<sup>13</sup>

Driscoll shares that the Spirit gives gifts of God so that the church can minister similar to the Son of God.<sup>14</sup> Storm makes a similar assessment of church growth. He contends that it would be foolish for Christians to expect that the house of God, the body of Christ, the church will grow

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<sup>10</sup> La Shelton Harrison, January 21, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Driscoll. "Understanding Spiritual Gifts." *Cru Press Green*, (02, 2012), 1. [https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/02/Understanding\\_Spiritual\\_Gifts.pdf](https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/02/Understanding_Spiritual_Gifts.pdf)

into what God wants if the congregation fails to make use of the tools (spiritual gifts) that God supplies through His Spirit.<sup>15</sup> One significant problem in the church is that resources are spent to educate, train, and equip members, but very few members experience the transformation that Christ speaks of while walking the earth.<sup>16</sup>

The church's discipleship is through Sunday school and Bible study. Teaching materials and booklets come from the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention. Pastor Harrison indicates that his "focus is discipleship, the importance of evangelism, and how vital God's message is to people who do not know Him."<sup>17</sup> He wants the congregation to "show more involvement, ask more questions in classes, and give their perspective."<sup>18</sup> His challenge to the assembly is that "if the church is going to grow spiritually, members must participate and have more involvement in the church's ministries."<sup>19</sup> Jones maintains that a church must concentrate on nurturing knowledgeable followers of Jesus Christ who adore God and serve him from all facets of their lives.<sup>20</sup>

Pastor Harrison indicates that the deacons and trustees believe that Friendly Missionary Baptist Church has a great desire to grow. He believes that "prayer is the solid foundation for building up the congregation."<sup>21</sup> The pastor, the congregation, the deacons, and trustees are looking forward to working continuously with the researcher in this thesis project to help them

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<sup>15</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Joel A. Smith, "Measuring the Effect of Personal Coaching on the Implementation of a Journey Plan for Personal Spiritual Growth at Daybreak Church" (D.Min Thesis, Alliance Theological Seminary, 2016), 7.

<sup>17</sup> La Shelton Harrison, January 21, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Marion Diane Jones, "Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance," (D. Min diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), 18.

<sup>21</sup> La Shelton Harrison, January 21, 2021.

grow as a congregation. Harrison indicates that Friendly Missionary Baptist Church was “a very hurt congregation when he became their pastor and that they now are ready to transform beyond the pain.”<sup>22</sup> They “still have a long way to go, but the people are moving in the right direction.”<sup>23</sup>

The congregation indicates that the deacons and trustees should focus on achieving the churches’ primary mission. There is a need to develop followers who will use their spiritual gifts and take direct responsibility for the congregation’s growth and maturity. Most of the church members drive fifteen or more miles to the church. Also, there are several vacant lots in the area and a housing authority village nearby. The congregation needs to attract people to join Friendly Missionary Baptist Church to carry out the church’s mission of making disciples. Pastor Harrison insists that they have faith and that “God will bring people to the community to serve Him.”<sup>24</sup> People are coming to the community, but they are driving past Friendly Missionary Baptist Church to Parker High School, Saint Joseph Baptist Church, Birmingham City School’s Professional Development Center, and Soloman Books & Church Supply.

### **Problem Presented**

The problem is that Friendly Missionary Baptist Church is not growing in church attendance. Attendance in the worship service is declining. The congregation’s pastor will address the problem in collaboration with the researcher. The deacons and trustees will support the pastor and the researcher in this thesis project. The church Sunday school superintendent and the women’s auxiliary president will also aid the researcher.

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<sup>22</sup> La Shelton Harrison, January 21, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The research will examine the problem from diverse church growth strategies in the literature. Several factors contribute to an understanding of the issues. One theme that runs throughout the literature is the dynamic nature of the concept of church growth. The literature review identifies four other significant themes that facilitate analysis and synthesis of the concepts, spiritual gifts, and church growth. The researcher will present these themes in chapter two of this thesis project.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is the use of spiritual gifts found in scripture as teachable models for church growth. Adequate attention will be given to researchers and scholars with similar opinions and critics with different views. The researcher will also make recommendations on spiritual gifting that can contribute to the broader academic community and the field of healthy church growth. One significant outcome that the researcher anticipates at the start of this thesis project is that researching at a local church will generate a social change in the immediate and broader community, but this is not the project's focus.

### **Basic Assumptions**

There are several assumptions in this thesis project that the researcher will address. Believers are the central audience in the local church, but they are not the focus of worship. The primary intent of the corporate gathering is for the edification and growth of the church. Both believers and non-believers attend services because God is drawing them to ministry. Believers are there to honor God and carry out the mission of discipleship. They are there to “grow into a holy temple in the Lord.”<sup>25</sup> Non-believers, through the work of the Holy Spirit, can receive the gift of God. They, too, can experience the transforming power for service and ministry in God's

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<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 2:21 (English Standard Version).

redemptive plan. Believers have the duty of training fellow worshipers, but God also commands them to “make disciples of all nations.”<sup>26</sup>

This thesis project assumes the validity of church growth descriptions in the literature concerning a local church congregation’s spiritual and numerical growth. The research presumes that a decline in church attendance is directly related to spiritual and numerical church growth, although there may be other factors. God is the center of everything that happens in the local church. He is the central theme in the audience at every gathering in the community.

This thesis project presupposes that general solutions, plans, or programs may not fit the context at this church. Another presupposition is that members will participate directly in the research. Therefore, stakeholders in the investigation will receive an invitation to participate in the inquiry processes if they meet the research criteria.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the researcher is a facilitator who acts as a catalyst to help stakeholders define the problem clearly, monitor and support their activities. Members must work collaboratively toward a sufficient resolution of the issue that provides the investigation’s focus.<sup>28</sup>

The final assumption is that once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church. The researcher’s theological proposition concentrates on the biblical context of the problem to accomplish the project’s purpose.

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<sup>26</sup> Mathew 28:19 (English Standard Version).

<sup>27</sup> Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication, 2013), 6, Liberty University Online Bookshelf.

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 19.

## Definitions

The word church in this thesis project primarily refers to a local congregation.<sup>29</sup> When not referring to a local congregation, the word means “the Body of Christ.”<sup>30</sup> Friendly Missionary Baptist Church as a local community of worshipers is the focus of this concept.

Church growth is the multiplication of church members in the spiritual and physical aspects that they may become advocates of faith in whatever they do and wherever they go. Basically, according to Adegboye, the church as a living organism must experience growth, or it will perish.<sup>31</sup> Dada reports that Nihinlola contends that church growth is everything that brings the non-Christian into the knowledge of Christ and promotes the spiritual growth of the Christian for reproductive holy living. In essence, the church will not grow without increasing the congregation’s numerical and spiritual maturity attributes.<sup>32</sup>

Church growth indicates a qualitative and quantitative development of the church. Olalekan insists that church growth efforts create strategies, develop objectives, and apply growth principles to individual congregations, denominations, and the entire Body of Christ.<sup>33</sup> He claims that it involves “Church Growth Eyes”<sup>34</sup> to see the possibilities for growth and apply suitable strategies to gain maximum results. It also includes having and applying biblical church

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<sup>29</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth* (London: Routledge, 2016), 5. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27 (English Standard Version).

<sup>31</sup> Samson Olugbemiga Dada, “Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts 1:6-8 and Its Significance for Contemporary Nigerian Political Landscape.” *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos), 12 (2019): 191. <https://search.ebscohost.com>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Dairo Afolunso Olalekan, “Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa.” *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos) 12 (2019): 19. <https://search.ebscohost.com>.

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

growth principles, which could contribute significantly to church growth.<sup>35</sup> The focus of growth in this thesis project is the local church.

Spiritual growth is the process by which the Spirit of God fashions and transforms believers of Christ into His image.<sup>36</sup> Spiritual growth is the mysterious means by which the Christian's life comes into an ever more profound orientation with the pattern and personality of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Spiritual growth is lifelong and possible because of the believer's new connection with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit's manifestation, who works transformation within the believer's life.<sup>38</sup> The believer promotes this transformative relationship using practices and disciplines.<sup>39</sup> The precise understanding of spiritual growth varies from one Christian tradition to another. However, it relates to living out virtues and gifts (love, mercy, faith, justice) the scripture mentions, such as the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Numerical church growth is the physical growth of local congregations and the multiplication of local communities of faith.<sup>41</sup> Numerical growth is an expansion in the quantitative aspect of the members in the local church. But growth in the Christian life is never just about how many people are sitting in pews. Growth in the New Testament is about God's

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<sup>35</sup> Dairo Afolorunso Olalekan, "Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa." *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos) 12 (2019): 19. <https://search.ebscohost.com>.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremiah Ryan Stanley, "Promoting a Culture of Spiritual Growth through Equipping Student Leaders for Discipleship at Trinity Baptist College in Jacksonville, Florida." Order No. 13857415, (D. Min Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Saskia Alexandra Donner, "Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches in Urban Colombian Contexts Receive and Would Like to Receive from their Churches for Continued Spiritual Growth" (Ph.D. diss., Biola University, 2019), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Saskia Alexandra Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 5.

Kingly rule, into which the local church has to fit.<sup>42</sup> The local church must coexist within God's Kingdom and not the other way around.

Spiritual gifts are gifts of God's grace the Holy Spirit grants for the church's edification.<sup>43</sup> Spiritual gifts are given to believers for ministry tasks and lead to practical activities within the church.<sup>44</sup> When the Spirit is present in believers' lives, and when He is empowering believers for church growth ministries, He will be using spiritual gifts to build up and grow the church.<sup>45</sup> Spiritual gifts, spiritual abilities, ministry roles, or spiritual activities are interchangeable in this thesis project. They do not testify to natural or inherent human capacity but are gifts of God.<sup>46</sup>

The *Likert Scale* is a type of rating system that utilizes questionnaires to measure participants' attitude towards a specific subject".<sup>47</sup> In this project, a three-point categorical scale will represent the data items.

Personal connection in this thesis project means a participant's knowledge of their spiritual gift or gifts and the gifts of other Friendly Missionary Baptist Church members in the target group.

Awareness in this thesis project refers to "knowledge and understanding that sometimes happens or exists."<sup>48</sup> When participants can name spiritual gifts, they demonstrate knowledge of awareness.

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<sup>42</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 16.

<sup>44</sup> Brian DeVries, *Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Engagement is “the act of engaging: the state of being engaged.”<sup>49</sup> When participants can name gifts and describe a healthy church, they demonstrate this type of activity.

### **Limitations**

A monochromatic, African American group of followers limits this project due to Peace Baptist District Association membership. Many of the participants are over sixty-five and may leave the project for medical or other reasons. The effect of coronavirus (COVID-19) could affect the outcomes of this thesis project. The congregation size (forty active members) limits the application of the project for the wider academic community.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher will utilize spiritual gifts instead of programs and projects in the treatment with participants who consent to the research criteria. This thesis project is not a family-equipping model. The theoretical approach is a Spirit-empowerment model that utilizes spiritual gift principles and models to grow the church.<sup>50</sup> This thesis project does not address social or economic growth, even though those growth types may arise from its implementation. Instead, this thesis project will focus on spiritual gifts that could impact church growth spiritually and numerically. This thesis project derives theories from spiritual gifts and church growth models and applies them to Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### **Thesis Statement**

The thesis statement is that once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

<sup>50</sup> Brian DeVries, *Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*, 6.

## Research Question

The question that this thesis project asks is, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

## Specific Objectives

The specific research objectives are:

1. Compile a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church: This listing will be compiled by two long-term members (24+ years) of the congregation who will independently compile the list (each will have fifty-five minutes maximum to compile). The researcher will use the list to identify a total of five spiritual gifts, which will be used in this thesis project. The researcher will use one spiritual gift for each of the five sessions; each spiritual gift is a “treatment.”
2. Develop five sessions or “meetings,” with each session focusing on a different spiritual gift. Each session is a “treatment” and will consist of four components:
  - 1.) Where is this gift located in scripture? 2.) What is the biblical context of the gift? 3.) What is the implication of the gift in scripture? 4.) What is the implication of the gift for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?
3. Complete a pre-test by participants (prior to beginning the thesis project) and complete a post-test to measure the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth.
4. Share the results with the two long-term members (who participated in step #1) and develop a plan for assimilating/ disseminating for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The thesis statement is that once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church. Thomas Schreiner and other researchers have prior studies that contribute significantly to the literature review, theological foundations, and theoretical foundations in this thesis project. Therefore, the research question that this literature review asks is, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

### Literature Review

The literature review in this thesis project uses a matrix to organize and synthesis five significant themes. The first theme is the dynamic nature of church growth; the researcher then examines the criterion for developing spiritual church growth. Next, the researcher identifies the biblical and theological basis for church growth. Afterward, the researcher explores healthy church growth in the literature. The final theme that runs through the literature is the Holy Spirit, gifts, and church growth. At the end of the review, a summative declaration speaks to the framework and process.

#### The Dynamic Nature of the Concept Church Growth

One theme that flows through the literature is the dynamic nature of the concept of church growth. Olalekan contends that the best growing churches in the world have solid biblical preaching at their core.<sup>51</sup> They preach holiness, how to worship, how to deal with sin, how to communicate with one another, and how to love one another; evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship come out of these.<sup>52</sup> Dada adds an energetic component. He writes that the power of

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<sup>51</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

prayer maintains church growth.<sup>53</sup> In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke makes more than twenty-nine references to the individual or corporate prayers that promote church growth.<sup>54</sup>

Tennant contributes to this argument by asserting that if a church is not flourishing in numbers or maturity, then the neglect of the five gifts (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) is highly likely to be one of the primary causes.<sup>55</sup> Brian DeVries reports that several scholars classify spiritual gifts using different lists: Packer view them as gifts of speech; Satyavrata sort them as gifts of service, utterance (language), and miracles; Poythress categorize them as gifts of prophetic, priestly, and kingly (leadership) service which refers more to the message or messenger; others writers organize gifts as regular (which continue) and extraordinary (which are no longer).<sup>56</sup>

Dotson insists that Paul in 1 Corinthians might define gifts in terms of their function as expressions of God's love which the Spirit graciously gives for service to others.<sup>57</sup> The Friendly Missionary Baptist Church congregation demonstrates their love for each other when they gather during movie night. They bring foods they prepare at home for eating and drinking, relaxation, and conversation. Members take turns serving each other in the spirit of giving monthly. The expressions on their faces exhibit the gift of giving throughout the fellowship hall.

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<sup>53</sup> Samson Olugbemiga Dada, "Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts 1:6-8 and Its Significance for Contemporary Nigerian Political Landscape." *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos), 12 (2019): 200. <https://search.ebscohost.com>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church* (Springfield: Vital Resources, 2016), 22-25, accessed November 8, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>56</sup> Brian DeVries, *Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Peggy Dotson, "Follow the Way of Love and Eagerly Desire Spiritual Gifts..." (1Cor 14:1) *Spiritual Gifts as an Expression of God's Love for the Church Today*. Order No. 1595495, (Saint Louis University, 2015), 18.

Tennant argues that there is unity in the Spirit through activating and initiating these spiritual gifts. Evangelists, pastors, teachers, apostolic and prophetic servants work together smoothly, so the church functions harmoniously.<sup>58</sup> The five gifts of the Spirit form the foundation for how believers use spiritual gifts for church growth and understand its dynamic nature. Goodhew defines growth in the Christian life as a three-fold equilibrium involving growth in personal holiness, growth in social transformation, and the numerical growth of a church congregation.<sup>59</sup>

Voas addresses the concept of church growth by focusing on numerical church growth in his study. However, he insists that there must be a distinction between numerical growth and the level of participation and that the socio-demographic context is vital to each of them. For example, attendance is often highest in proportion to the population in rural areas where growth is hard to achieve; growing churches are in cities where relatively few people are active.<sup>60</sup>

Wilson expands the concept of church growth in his journal article. He shares that what is surprising is how infrequently academic biblical studies handle the theme of church growth in the book of Acts sustainably.<sup>61</sup> At the historical level, the early church growth receives considerable attention. Similarly, numerous works devote awareness to other considerations that touch vaguely upon facets of portraying a church's quantitative growth in Acts. However, researchers are neglecting the theme of church growth within Acts for the most part.<sup>62</sup> Hence,

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<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> David Voas, "Intentionality, Numerical Growth and Rural Church." *Rural Theology* 15, no. 1 (01, 2017): 2, DOI 10.1080/14704994.2017.1298265.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin R Wilson, "The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2 (06, 2017): 317-318, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

while practitioners enthusiastically approach the book of Acts hoping to endorse church growth in their ministry contexts, much critical interpretation must continue to appreciate what Acts says about church growth.<sup>63</sup>

Scholars need to engage in critical analysis to explain the written work in the book of Acts concerning the church's growth. It is also essential that this biblical text (Acts) receive the necessary attention for discovering the church's understanding of its spiritual gifts. Therefore, the primary focus of this research project is church growth in the book of Acts as teachable models for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### The Criterion for Developing Spiritual Church Growth

Another theme in the literature review is the criterion for developing spiritual church growth. Hathaway contends that spiritual gift inventories are in wide use by Christians to discover or confirm their spiritual gifts.<sup>64</sup> The tests have implicit or explicit theologies of spiritual gifts and their function in Christian lives.<sup>65</sup> Clothier maintains that tests and inventories are not bad or good, although he finds them unhelpful. He argues that it is more beneficial to ask three specific questions than test spiritual gifts. What is a person's passion? How is God using a person, and where does this person see the most fruit? What do people closest to them think their spiritual gifts are?<sup>66</sup> Hinds's position differs from Clothier's view on inventories and the criteria for spiritual gifts for an individual or corporate growth. Hinds insists that people must discover their gift and allow it to develop through divine revelation. The process offers a valuable tool in

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<sup>63</sup> Benjamin R Wilson, "The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2 (06, 2017): 317-318, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>64</sup> William L Hathaway, "Spiritual Gift Inventories: Validity & Function." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 37, no. 3 (Fall, 2018): 4. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>66</sup> Timothy Clothier, *To Each is Given: Spiritual Gifts in the Life of the Church*. (Ashland: BMH Books, 2020), 11. accessed November 16, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

terms of spiritual diagnosis because one of the primary outcomes in this project is the personal awareness of a gift and how it develops. He encourages men to become more aware of how their specific gift or gifts develop and grow.<sup>67</sup> The researcher contends that this awareness applies to women also, for God has no distinction in individuals, for Paul tells the Galatians, “there is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>68</sup>

Schreiner concurs with Clothier. He contends that believers should be zealous for spiritual gifts yet claims that Apostle Paul’s point in his writings is that people should not conduct an inventory of their gifts. The Spirit does not grant gifts for personal spiritual growth but for fellow believers’ growth and strength. He also asserts that some spiritual gift inventories give the notion that people can discover their spiritual gift in the privacy of their home, apart from vital involvement in Christ’s Body.<sup>69</sup> The real test of spiritual maturity or growth in believers’ lives is whether they live in love.<sup>70</sup>

Nantenaina and Others focus on the spiritual gift of the prophet for changing the community. They insist that the prophets are change agents because the Holy Spirit gave them the inspiration to confront social and moral issues in society.<sup>71</sup> The actions of the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2:19-22; 5:2, 5-27; 6:8-20) provide Christian leaders with a model for becoming agents

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<sup>67</sup> Jay-Paul Hinds, “A Gift Grows in the Ghetto: Reimagining the Spiritual Diagnosis of Black Men.” *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 2 (04, 2018): 141. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>68</sup> Galatians 3:28 (English Standard Version).

<sup>69</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Spiritual Gift*, 65.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>71</sup> Lollo Nantenaina, Joe Raveloharimsy, and Karan McWilliams, “The Prophet Elisha as an Agent of Change for Community Development,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 9, no. 2 (Fall, 2015): 10-20, accessed June 3, 2020, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

of change in the church using their spiritual gifts. Leaders need to understand their spiritual gifts to impact their church and community.

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church shows their love when they observe communion with the oldest church member each fourth Sunday. The pastor, deacons, and many other church members travel twelve miles from the church to Cherry Hill Healthcare Center to witness to a ninety-eight-year-old female member. They pray, sing, and fellowship with her and encourage her in the Lord. She often expresses tears of joy when they arrive and leave her bedroom.

Donner connects the concept of church growth to the spiritual maturity of believers in zealous churches in Colombia regarding their experiences of ongoing spiritual growth.<sup>72</sup> He shares that in a study of the concept of spiritual maturity, evidence indicates that believers can and should have maturity as their objective. They should make every effort to yield to the Holy Spirit to achieve maturity. Spiritual maturity, according to Donner, involves comprehending the faith, serving the church community, and developing attitudes that reflect the gospel's truth. Spiritual maturity is not an end goal in spiritual growth, but it paves the way for further awareness, service, and virtue.<sup>73</sup> Spiritual growth is "best understood" as a continuous process in which believers reach a place of steadfast assurance in their faith, which can "be depicted" as maturity, and yet the persistent pursuit of Christlikeness progressively.<sup>74</sup>

Dr. Stephen and Dr. Mary Lowe contend that in the natural world, nothing grows alone, in solitude from its ecological tendencies. But instead, everything grows ecologically through connection to and interacting with other living things. There is mutual growth in this process. They argue that an ecological theme runs through the Bible that uses the ecological development

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<sup>72</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, Abstract.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 202.

of nature to illustrate the spiritual growth of God's people. An ecological viewpoint reminds believers of how Christians grow spiritually in relationship to each other.<sup>75</sup>

### Biblical and Theological Basis for Church Growth

There is a significant focus on the biblical and theological basis for church growth in the literature. Stanley identifies three different passages of Scripture that provide the foundation for promoting a culture of spiritual growth.<sup>76</sup> The first passage that he examines is Matthew 28:18-20. Stanley contends that although initially given to the church, by extension, these verses provide the Christian with the reason for its existence, making disciples. The second passage he investigates is Ephesians 4:11-16. He argues that this passage instructs the church concerning spiritual gifts for use within the church. It promotes a culture of spiritual growth to build up disciples into Christian maturity. His third passage is II Timothy 2:1-7. He insists that this is the biblical pattern Paul instructs Timothy to follow for entrusting the gospel's message to loyal believers. Stanley's application of these passages is that a Christian institution must promote a spiritual growth culture and equip followers for a life of making disciples.<sup>77</sup> One result the literature review anticipates is that it will provide an understanding of the spiritual gift of discipleship, an aspect of teaching, and the process of making disciples for this congregation.

The scripture, according to Goodhew, "is central to the discussion of church growth."<sup>78</sup> He shares that McGrath, Warner, and Tomlin indicate in their study how the New Testament and fundamental Christian doctrine support the growth of the local church. The core teachings of the Bible on the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation work out in the church. Believing in

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<sup>75</sup> Stephen D. Lowe, and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth Through Online Education* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 4. Accessed December 3, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>76</sup> Jeremiah Stanley, *Promoting a Culture of Spiritual Growth*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 239.

such principles requires laboring to grow faith communities.<sup>79</sup> Jones agrees with Goodhew and adds that church growth as a concept has its basis in the biblical teachings on the church's increase in numbers such as the Antioch church according to Paul's teachings and other disciples.<sup>80</sup> Church growth in the numerical dimension may indicate growth in the spiritual dimension when the congregation expresses love towards each other.

Olalekan expands the biblical understanding of church growth to include the leadership in the congregation and the kind of growth the leader needs. He argues that the type of church growth the leader desires determines the principles to apply. If the desire is to have 'internal church growth,' this involves a Christian's spiritual growth.<sup>81</sup> However, if it is 'church expansion,' then the church must bring to the fold people who are still in the community through ongoing evangelization.<sup>82</sup> As people transform, the evangelist can motivate them to join Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. But the evangelist must remember that church growth is God's department and attendance of the church is according to His will. The evangelist must draw people from the community through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Voas shares in his abstract that a recent report on church growth argues that there are no strong connections between numerical growth and worship style. He maintains that what seems crucial is that congregations engage in reflection: choices should be intentional rather than by default.<sup>83</sup> He contends that the road to growth depends on the context; what works in one place may not work in another. Growth results from good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a

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<sup>79</sup> David Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 236-237.

<sup>80</sup> Marion Diane Jones, "Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance," (D.Min. Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), 20.

<sup>81</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> David Voas, *Intentionality, Numerical Growth and Rural Church*, 2.

willing set of people in a favorable atmosphere.<sup>84</sup> He adds that the investigation of clergy preferences shows that church growth may have a close relationship to deliberate aims rather than theological choice.<sup>85</sup> Voas contends that the research results suggest that clergy at growing churches emphasize the importance of numerical growth. In contrast, clergy in parishes are less likely to experience increases because they are more comfortable prioritizing discipleship or social transformation.<sup>86</sup>

Donner agrees with Voas and Goodhew and adds to the conversation on church growth in a review from previous studies of Ephesians 4:11-16 and other New Testament texts regarding spiritual maturity and the church's role. Donner presents several principles: spiritual maturity affects all parts of a Christians' life; spiritual maturity as a joint determination between the Christian and God; spiritual maturity is not the end-aim of the spiritual growth process; the church is a crucial environment that God has established to foster spiritual growth; the church must edify each of its members.<sup>87</sup> Friendly Missionary Baptist Church edifies members through the Bible study and Sunday school ministries. This researcher contends that an understanding and development of spiritual gifts will grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### Healthy Church Growth

Church growth is a massive field of study with distinctive factors contributing to a church's health and growth.<sup>88</sup> Multiple primary sources identify healthy church growth in the literature review. A strong indication that a church is growing is its spiritual wellbeing.

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<sup>84</sup> David Voas, *Intentionality, Numerical Growth and Rural Church*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 210-214.

<sup>88</sup> Michael B. McKay, "Civic Engagement and Church Growth: Does a Church's Civic Engagement Contribute to a Healthy Environment for Church Growth?" (D. Min. Thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 2019), 12.

DeYmaz insists that if reformers desire to build a healthy multi-ethnic church, they must have a solid understanding of God's Word and a revelation of His Will for the local church.<sup>89</sup>

Sanders and Smith identify seven habits of spiritual growth in producing healthy churches. They are repentance, personal devotion, corporate worship, small groups, community advocacy, evangelism, and discipleship.<sup>90</sup>

Dr. McClendon and Dr. Lockhard present five principles that characterize a healthy church from Acts. These principles are confessing, gathering, praying, giving, and engaging the church.<sup>91</sup> They contend that if a local church is deficient in one of these areas, a change agent (a church leader or member) can urge the members to become more faithful.<sup>92</sup> This change can result in spiritual growth that builds up and edifies the church.

Newtown maintains that healthy churches need healthy leaders. And while the need for church multiplication rises, churches also need to maintain a central focus on the gospel. He defines a healthy church as a congregation that increasingly reflects God's characteristics on the foundation of His word.<sup>93</sup>

Mills argues that the growth of a healthy church does not come mainly from the measurement of numbers and statistics. However, there is value in recognizing that numbers do signify people. The numbers of people in the church's ministry indicate the effectiveness of the

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<sup>89</sup> Mark DeYmaz, and George Yancey, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley, 2020), xxviii. Accessed December 5, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central. Accessed December 5, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>90</sup> Alvin Sanders, and Efrem Smith, *Uncommon Church: Community Transformation for the Common Good* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 87.

<sup>91</sup> Adam P. McClendon, Jared E. Lockhart, *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts* (Nashville: B&B Publishing Group, 2020), 117. Accessed December 5, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Phil A. Newtown, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Chicago: Kregel Publications, 2020), 15-16. Accessed December 6, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

church.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, healthy churches grow, and God desires to partner with ministry leaders to make local churches grow.<sup>95</sup>

Wilson raises the question, what does a healthy church look like? He identifies four distinct predictors of a healthy church. They are clarity of mission, authentic community, transparent communication, and transformational conflict. He insists that these indicators are plain and attainable for congregations in pursuit of a healthy church.<sup>96</sup>

Pegram applies the principles of appreciative inquiry as a strategy for developing a healthy church. This approach focuses on what is working in the church rather than what is broke.<sup>97</sup> He insists that concentrating on and doing those things that a church may already be doing causes God's Kingdom to increase, which embodies the church's life.<sup>98</sup>

As a spokesperson for God, Pang insists that the prophet Amos is critical of the Israelites for practicing a form of religion that ignores and condones social injustice.<sup>99</sup> He will agree with the reviewer's opinion that a healthy church's concern is using spiritual gifts to change the injustices in the world. The church's religious form addresses injustice and condemns anyone or organizations that violate humanity's rights and dignity. Blackaby contends that when a church

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<sup>94</sup> Rodney Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," *The Journal of Applied Leadership* 10, no.2 (Fall, 2016): 71, accessed December 6, 2020. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>96</sup> Bill Wison, "What Does a Healthy Church Look Like?" *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 3 (August 2016): Abstract, accessed December 6, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637316658582>.

<sup>97</sup> Nigel D. Pegram, "Appreciative Inquiry: A strategy for Being a Healthy Church," *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, no. 3 (November 2017): 67, accessed December 7, 2021. <https://search-informit-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/10.3316/informit>.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence Pang, "Spiritual Growth Through Authentic Worship." *Compass* 50, no. 3 (Spring, 2016): 4, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

plummets in attendance after its minister leaves, the congregation is built more on individuality rather than on healthy development.<sup>100</sup>

Meinert also agrees with the researcher's position and add to its expansion. He declares that gifts are the tools through which persistent grace heals the human relationship with God as the first mover and thus toward the suitable activity in this life's contingencies.<sup>101</sup> Believers achieve what the intellect can naturally obtain through the gifts but in a more excellent and fuller way.<sup>102</sup> Tennant insists that individuals in the church must undergo "rejuvenation" if the church is to have a "renaissance."<sup>103</sup>

Each congregation member must exhibit "godly" characteristics to change the church.<sup>104</sup> Tennant insists that the church will never rejuvenate without the individuals' regeneration. If the goal is to have a strong and healthy church, leaders must deal with congregational members and not focus on a team of pastors or a board of deacons.<sup>105</sup>

The pastor at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church addresses individual holiness in his communion sermon each first Sunday. He declares, "Let a person examine himself before eating the bread and drinking of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself."<sup>106</sup> Every individual in the local church must demonstrate the gift of holiness to thrive and become a healthy member of the congregation.

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<sup>100</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 154.

<sup>101</sup> John Meinert, "Donum Habituale: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas," (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2015), 187.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 23.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29 (English Standard Version).

Dada harmonizes the discussion by introducing a treaty on spiritual warfare for church growth. He contends that according to Rainer, spiritual warfare is the norm<sup>107</sup> for the Church today if the church is to grow. It was like that in the church of old. In the face of defeat, the church rose to be champions in Acts 8:4-40 and following. The Nigerian church, according to Dada, is an example of this viewpoint. He shares that the church must get ready for spiritual warfare if it desires growth; the church growth ministry and mission have protection against ethnic, tribal, authoritarian, and territorial obstacles and even terrorist assaults when the Holy Spirit is in charge.<sup>108</sup> God's people must wait on the Holy Spirit in prayers and fast to break through all political barriers.

The church can flourish irrespective of the catastrophe around it, even after facing countless dangers.<sup>109</sup> The researcher can celebrate the incredible power of the Holy Spirit, who delivers members of the church from troubles in this world. It is through prayer and a commitment to God that Friendly Missionary Baptist Church remains "devoted followers of Christ, worship God, distribute Christ's hope and love, and minister to each other's needs."<sup>110</sup>

Olalekan contributes another piece to this ongoing discussion on healthy church growth. He insists that church growth begins with church health, not the other way around. An individual can recognize this growth in nature because healthy things grow. The question is, how do they grow? What kind of instrument will measure the growth? He provides healthy categories to help the church measure and monitor the congregation's health. Olalekan provides the following list: God's empowering presence, God's exalting worship, spiritual disciplines, learning and growing

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<sup>107</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 201.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> La Shelton Harrison, Pastor Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, Statement of Ministry Context, January 21, 2021.

in community, a promise to loving and caring relations, servant-leadership growth, an outward focus, wise administration, and answerability, interacting with the Body of Christ, stewardship, and kindness.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, Olalekan solidifies this discussion on healthy church growth. He shares that God is the one who gives growth to the church. Therefore, prayer to God for the growth of the church is vital.<sup>112</sup> The early church was a praying and believing church. An assessment of the Book of Acts shows how prayer permeates the church's life from its birth to the present day.

### The Holy Spirit, Gifts, and Church Growth

The last theme that runs through the literature review is the Holy Spirit, gifts, and church growth. The church's action brings about the power of the Holy Spirit in being an effective witness. Olalekan asserts that "The Lord added to their numbers day by day those who were being saved."<sup>113</sup> The Holy Spirit gives great power to the apostles to proclaim the Word of God with boldness.<sup>114</sup>

DeVries contends that the Spirit works through believers to build up the Body of Christ through spiritual gifts.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, believers must continually receive empowerment from the Holy Spirit to live as overcomers.<sup>116</sup> He insists that the presence and practice of spiritual gifts in the church have been with the church at least since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Corinth's first-century churches attest to this reality in 1 Corinthians 12-14.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Acts 2:47 (English Standard Version).

<sup>114</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> Brian DeVries, *Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 1.

Empowerment will unquestionably grow the church. The church's influence and breakthroughs will bring the world into Christ's saving grace.<sup>118</sup> Hathaway agrees with Dada concerning the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And adds, Paul is clear that the gifts "are empowered by one and the same Spirit;<sup>119</sup> gifts are for the "common good;"<sup>120</sup> they are all for edification or for "building up"<sup>121</sup> the church.<sup>122</sup> Hathaway reports that Thomson and Elwell, in 2017, define spiritual gifts as gifts of God empowering the Christian to perform service.<sup>123</sup>

Tennant insists that the five ministry gifts' primary purpose is to prepare God's people for the ministry work.<sup>124</sup> She adds Christ Himself "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ."<sup>125</sup> Finally, she affirms that Paul indicates that "when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."<sup>126</sup>

Curry maintains that when an individual knows his spiritual gift and uses it with love and care for others, God calls him to a higher level in the Christian walk.<sup>127</sup> He adds that in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul lists the gifts of help and administration. The gift of help he says

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<sup>118</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 202.

<sup>119</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:11 (English Standard Version).

<sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthian 12:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>121</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26 (English Standard Version).

<sup>122</sup> William Hathaway, *Spiritual Gift Inventories*, 206.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>124</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 23.

<sup>125</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12 (English Standard Version).

<sup>126</sup> Ephesians 4:8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>127</sup> Kristan, David Curry, *Turbulence on the Wings of Faith* (Chicago: Austin Macauley Publishers, 2021), 44. Accessed November 25, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

signifies the gift of serving. This gift aims to meet the needs and care of others within the Body of Christ.<sup>128</sup>

Schreiner expands the discussion. First, he insists that the work of the Spirit is evident when someone confesses Christ. Second, the existence of God as three persons comes out in the different gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 through the Spirit's role in giving gifts. Third, he insists that the Spirit gives various gifts, but they do not indicate the believers' spirituality; instead, they reflect the Holy Spirit's sovereignty.<sup>129</sup> Schreiner magnifies the argument on spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit in his book on *Spiritual Gifts*. He explains that he is presenting five truths about spiritual gifts. First, every gift has its activation under Christ's Lordship. Second, believers must use their gifts to exalt God and show humility. Third, gifts given by God are remarkably diverse, and believers should celebrate this diversity. Fourth, gifts do not make any believer inferior or superior to another. Fifth, the Holy Spirit sovereignly appoints gifts by Himself.<sup>130</sup>

Dotson adds to the discussion on the Holy Spirit's spiritual gifts as an expression of God's love to build up or grow His Church. She asserts that although Paul provides insights and lists of the different gifts, he does not offer a comprehensive definition of these "charismata."<sup>131</sup> Dotson contends a gift is "any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church."<sup>132</sup> She maintains that Paul, in 1 Corinthians, "might say that gifts of the

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<sup>128</sup> Kristan, David Curry, *Turbulence on the Wings of Faith* (Chicago: Austin Macauley Publishers, 2021), 44. Accessed November 25, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 252. accessed November 12, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>130</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 37-38.

<sup>131</sup> Peggy Dotson, *Follow the Way of Love*, 18.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Spirit are abilities that are given freely and graciously by God for the service to others as an expression of the power and love of God.”<sup>133</sup>

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church freely gives of their talents and service to each other in love when they share their stories of survival in this pandemic time. One church member is great at listening to the hurt and pains of members who have lost friends and family due to coronavirus (COVID-19). As a nurse, she sees many seriously ill people at UAB Hospital in Birmingham, yet she takes time to minister to the elderly who are afraid. She has a calming spirit that helps to heal the pain of others. She is a remarkable woman and a champion for Christ.

Jones enhances the discussion on church growth through church leadership’s motivation and influence rather than the Holy Spirit’s influence on believers. Also, he narrows the argument to young people in the church. Jones does not discount the heavenly factor but focuses on the human element. He writes that church leadership is the deliberate motivation and influence of the believers or congregation to pursue the principles of Jesus Christ by being role models and giving people the opportunity to heed the salvation call.<sup>134</sup> But, he adds, if the purpose is to draw young people to Christ to grow the church, then deliberate practices involving the participants will help them understand how the church can be productive.<sup>135</sup>

Brandt and Fredrick remind believers that the church’s calling is to grow in Christ. Yet, it often overlooks the practical magnitudes of the faith. The church is a worldwide body of believers. But it has divisions through denominations and ethical boundaries.<sup>136</sup> They believe that

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<sup>133</sup> Peggy Dotson, *Follow the Way of Love*, 18.

<sup>134</sup> Marion Jones, *Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance*, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Marion Jones, *Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance*, 20.

<sup>136</sup> Ryan A. Brandt, and John Frederick, *Spiritual Formation for the Global Church: A Multi-Denominational, Multi-Ethnic Approach* (Wesmont: InterVarsity Press, 2021), Abstract. Accessed December 7, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

the global church should focus on a multi-denominational and multi-ethnic methodology to grow the church.

Church leaders need to be receptive to new ideas since the world is continually changing. In addition, it exposes young people to various trends that continuously change how they think and behave.<sup>137</sup> For example, a twenty-two-year-old girl in the congregation works with an outreach ministry that tutors students. She shares that the ministry program could be helpful, but some congregation members believe that this could create expenses that would burden the people.

Generally, the literature review represents many sources from various authorities from different contributors in investigating spiritual gifts and church growth concepts. The researcher identifies a gap in the literature in addressing church growth using spiritual gifts. The findings provide a foundation to justify that this thesis project is relevant and worthy of contributing to church growth at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The process allows the researcher to compare, contrast, and effectively evaluate the literature to develop theological and theoretical foundations for this thesis project.

### **Theological Foundations**

This thesis project maintains that an understanding and development of spiritual gifts will grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The congregation understands that spiritual gifts are gifts of grace “to equip the saint for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.”<sup>138</sup> They believe that these gifts are unique talents given by God to serve Him and the church as a

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<sup>137</sup> Ryan A. Brandt, and John Frederick, *Spiritual Formation for the Global Church: A Multi-Denominational, Multi-Ethnic Approach* (Wesmont: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 86. Accessed December 7, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>138</sup> Ephesians 4:12 (English Standard Version).

witness to the world.<sup>139</sup> The scripture discloses many biblical and theological passages on spiritual gifts for church growth. The theological foundations focus on the power of proclamation, teaching, leadership, prayer, and faith.

### The Power of Proclamation

Church growth has roots in the power of proclamation (the word of God). Numerical and spiritual growth emerges with individuals and corporate groups through God's works and the power of His word. Hays reminds people that the Bible is a collection of documents that assist in preserving and proclaiming the message of the church.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, the church must continue to grow to preserve the gospel message.

The account of Noah in the biblical narratives reveals this growth. The Lord says to Noah and his sons, "Be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."<sup>141</sup> Vos contends that God's commandment to Noah and his sons is reminiscent of those He gave to Adam. Although the passage does not speak about procreation (spiritual and numerical) for God's glory, that must be His purpose. In subsequent generations, new people (numerical) must receive training (spiritual) in fear of God.<sup>142</sup> The people of God must proclaim God's word as faithful believers and expect His word to accomplish God's will. God intends that the church grows through exercising spiritual gifts.

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<sup>139</sup> Boubakar Sanou, "Spiritual Gifts, Pastoring, and Gender: An Ongoing Dialogue," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 11, no. 2 (Fall, 2017): 85, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>140</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Reading with the Grain of Scripture* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 35. Accessed December 8, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>141</sup> Genesis 9:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>142</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Genesis: Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 44. Accessed February 6, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Kidner elaborates on Isaac's blessings to Jacob, "God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples."<sup>143</sup> The term company of people adds a new splendor to God Almighty's (El Shaddai) promise to His patriarch family (Abraham, Issac, Jacob). Kidner maintains that the word company, from its root, means to assemble, is the Old Testament word for the church or congregation.<sup>144</sup> The idea is that God will multiply the church. Church growth also has an association with Jacob again in God's commandment, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply."<sup>145</sup>

God expands His blessings of church growth to growing a nation of people, including descendants who will become kings or royal families. Although the text does not indicate that they must become a royal priestly nation, they must be a holy nation (spiritual growth) because they are God's people. "The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly numerous."<sup>146</sup> This increase results from God's word (spoken word) fulfilling God's decree.

Alexander explains that although Joseph's "generation died," the Israelites as a people flourished (numerical growth).<sup>147</sup> Luke shares this same point on church growth, "As the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt,"<sup>148</sup> The Psalmist makes it clear that, "by his blessing, they multiply greatly."<sup>149</sup> Ezekiel

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<sup>143</sup> Genesis 28:3 (English Standard Version).

<sup>144</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 169. Accessed February 6, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>145</sup> Genesis 35:11 (English Standard Version).

<sup>146</sup> Exodus 1:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>147</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus: Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downer Grove: IVP Academy, 2017), 40. <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>148</sup> Acts 7:17 (English Standard Version).

<sup>149</sup> Psalms 107:38 (English Standard Version).

declares that God causes them to “flourish like a plant of the field. And (they) grew up and became tall”<sup>150</sup> The passages which most directly convey the numerical growth of the church in Acts are (Acts 2:47; 5:13-14; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 16:5).<sup>151</sup>

Luke reports that “the word of God powerfully continues to increase and prevail mightily.”<sup>152</sup> And likewise, “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”<sup>153</sup>

Kuhn and Grimmond report that Peter Adam provides a helpful definition of proclamation (gift of preaching). According to Adam, preaching (proclamation) is ‘the explanation and application of God’s word to the congregation to produce corporate preparation for service, unity of faith, maturity, growth and upbuilding.’<sup>154</sup>

DeSilva contends that the Bible is practical for people of faith as a means to allow the text to speak God’s word. But this understanding by inquiry is achievable best in a prayerful connection with God who speaks through the text.<sup>155</sup>

### The Power of Teaching

Matthew 28:18-20 provides Christians with the reason for the church’s existence, to teach and make disciples. In his commentary on Matthew, Brown reports that the critical exhortation Jesus gives to the disciples is to ‘disciple’ the nations. All the accompanying verbs ‘go,’

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<sup>150</sup> Ezekiel 16:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>151</sup> Benjamin R Wilson, *The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts*, 319.

<sup>152</sup> Acts 19:20 (English Standard Version).

<sup>153</sup> Acts 6:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>154</sup> Chase R. Kuhn, and Paul Grimmond, *Theology Is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method, and Practice* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2021), 37. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty>.

<sup>155</sup> David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), xix. Accessed December 8, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

‘baptize,’ and ‘teach’ are in the text on the Lord’s commandment. The inclusive reference indicates that the scope of the church’s mission is universal.<sup>156</sup> II Timothy 2:1-7 addresses a spiritual culture for equipping members of the Body of Christ for making other followers.<sup>157</sup>

Ephesians 4:11-16 instructs believers concerning spiritual gifts for use within the church. This text promotes a culture of spiritual growth to build up learners into Christian maturity. Osborne reports that Paul declares that believers must grow “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>158</sup> He argues that Christ-likeness is the real goal of spiritual growth, that is, “a new self.”<sup>159</sup>

The writer of the book of Genesis discusses the depth of the spiritual gift of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that Adam and Eve acquire in the Garden of Eden. The Lord commands the man saying, “of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”<sup>160</sup> However, when the woman saw “that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”<sup>161</sup>

Osborne contends that Paul speaks to the spiritual gift of wisdom<sup>162</sup> when he writes, pray “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.”<sup>163</sup> Believers need divine wisdom through the Spirit of

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<sup>156</sup> Jeannie K. Brown *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 318. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>157</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 210.

<sup>158</sup> Ephesians 4:13 (English Standard Version).

<sup>159</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse* (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 2017), 99. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>160</sup> Genesis 2:17 (English Standard Version).

<sup>161</sup> Genesis 3:6 (English Standard Version).

<sup>162</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 119.

<sup>163</sup> Ephesians 1:17 (English Standard Version).

God to be successful in making decisions. “Wisdom and insight”<sup>164</sup> reveal the ways of God so the Christian can live rightly before God<sup>165</sup> and “walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”<sup>166</sup>

Hitman and Others insist that each spiritual concept region has a specific level of learning (the outcome of teaching) that shows understanding about God for every age.<sup>167</sup> Their focus is on the spiritual growth of children into adulthood. Knowing or understanding God’s word is more than memorizing; it includes internalizing biblical truths in the mind and heart.<sup>168</sup> The response of the people in Berea after hearing Paul and Silas is an example of the result of the gift of teaching, “They received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”<sup>169</sup> These believers understood the word of God and put their knowledge into action for spiritual growth.

### The Power of Leadership

Lee reminds disciples of Christ that the church began after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The book of Acts traces the birth and expansion of the Church. After Pentecost, there are increases in the number of believers. Thus, this growth reveals that Jesus Christ is the beginning and the foundation for church leadership.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ephesians 1:8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>165</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse*, 119.

<sup>166</sup> Colossians 4:5 (English Standard Version).

<sup>167</sup> Ken Hindman, Landry Holmes, and Jana Magruder, *Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God’s Truth at Home and Church* (Nashville: B&B Publishing Group, 2021), 7.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>169</sup> Acts 17:11 (English Standard Version).

<sup>170</sup> Seon Yi Lee, “Missiological perspective of Church Leadership: Restoring Missional Leadership,” *The Korean Society of Mission Studies* 46, no.2 (2017): 216.

Nehemiah contends that the believers' goal is to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>171</sup> In 1 Timothy 4:11-16, he adds that Paul focuses on four areas crucial to successful shepherd-leadership, conduct, love, faith, and purity.<sup>172</sup> Growth in knowledge and understanding of God indicates a transformation of the believer. Therefore, change must take place at the heart's level for spiritual development and learning in the lives of leaders. Further, the biblical definition of the heart includes the mind, the affect, and the believer's will.<sup>173</sup>

Donner contends that church growth results come from spiritual leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favorable environment.<sup>174</sup> Spiritual leadership requires leaders to cultivate a life of natural, habitual conversation (prayer) with God and then help others do the same.<sup>175</sup> The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts to leaders to train people for service or ministry. Paul, in Ephesians, links spiritual gifting for church growth to unity in the Body of Christ. Paul writes, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints 'holy ones' for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ."<sup>176</sup>

Paul uses the Greek word ἔδωκεν (edōken) "gave" (in various senses, both literal and figurative). The *NASB Exhaustive Hebrew Concordance* translates ἔδωκεν (edōken) 122 times as "give," 117 times as "given," 79 times as "gave," and four times as "bestow." Paul also uses the

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<sup>171</sup> 2 Peter 3:18 (English Standard Version).

<sup>172</sup> Joseph Nehemiah, *Leadership Training in the Hands of the Church: Experiential Learning and Contextual Practices in North Africa and Middle East* (Carlisle: Langham Creative Project, 2021), 37.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 210.

<sup>175</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 42. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest book Central.

<sup>176</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12 (English Standard Version).

Greek word καταρτισμὸν (katartismōn) “*a preparing*” and “*equipping*.” This word refers to the action of bringing to a condition of fitness and perfection. The prophet and other spiritual leaders have a special sacred duty to perform: ἁγίων ἔργον διακονίας (agiōn ergon diakonias) that is, a “*holy work*” “*service or ministry*.”

The original word for διακονίας (diakonias) “*ministry*” is διάκονος (dee-ak'-on-os) is “*a servant, minister*.” The servant or minister is one who performs a service as an administrator thoroughly and adequately. Because it is a sacred service, the prophet, and other leaders move in a hurry to satisfy God's requirements. διάκονος (dee-ak'-on-os) “*minister*” in the New Testament usually refers to the Lord inspiring His servants to carry out His plans for His people (Matthew 20:26; Mark 9:35; John 12:26; Romans 13:4; 1 Corinthians 3:5).

Paul declares, “I was made a minister (servant) according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me by the working of his power.”<sup>177</sup> He uses the Greek δωρεάν (dōrean) “*a gift*.” It translates as the gift of God in John 4:10; Acts 8:20; the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, 10:45; the gift of Grace in Romans 5:15; the gift of righteousness in Romans 5:17; indescribable gift in 2 Corinthians 9:15; the gift of Christ in Ephesians 4:7; and the heavenly gift in Hebrews 6:4.

One of the significant gifts that the church needs in modern times is the gift of leadership. The gift of leadership plays an essential role in every church’s growth, for without the direction of a visionary leader, churches become stagnant and aimless.<sup>178</sup> Friendly Missionary Baptist Church has leaders who understand that now is the time to collaborate and use their spiritual leadership gifts for church growth.

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<sup>177</sup> Ephesians 3:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 23.

Olalekan expands the biblical understanding of church growth to include the leadership in the congregation and the kind of growth the leader needs. The type of church growth the leader desires determines the principles to apply.<sup>179</sup> “If the desire is to have ‘internal church growth,’ this involves the spiritual growth of Christians, but if it is ‘church expansion,’ then the church must bring to the fold people who are still in the community through ongoing evangelization.”<sup>180</sup>

Jordon indicates that a study of leadership style identifies a significant factor influencing church growth; his focus is on decision-making. How leaders share administrative decisions has a high correlation to growing the church. Thus, pastors in local churches need to identify ministry leaders and develop strong relationships using the biblical model.<sup>181</sup>

### The Power of Prayer

Olalekan declares that God is the one who gives growth to the church. Prayer to God for the growth of the church is vital. The early church was a praying and believing church. A survey of Acts shows how prayer spreads through the heart of the church. The church is born in prayer. The church’s action brings about the power of the Holy Spirit in being effective witnesses. Luke reports that followers of Christ “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer,”<sup>182</sup> “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 20.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Harold Jordon, “Leadership Factors that Influence Church Growth for Western North Carolina Churches of God” (D. Min. Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019), 149.

<sup>182</sup> Acts 2:43 (English Standard Version).

<sup>183</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 25.

Kereszty asserts that growth in the spiritual life demands daily prayer or meditation and that it starts by listening to God.<sup>184</sup> The goal of prayer is to develop an understanding of the presence of God. Faith teaches that He is always with the believer and constantly sends messages speaking not through momentous interventions but through ordinary events.<sup>185</sup>

Michael Youssef extends the discussion of prayer by connecting it to the Christian's praise. He insists that praise is more than a responsibility and spiritual practice. Praise leads worshipers closer to God's throne. He adds that praise is not manipulating God into responding to prayer requests, but rather praise emerges from the love of God and joy in being in a relationship with Him.<sup>186</sup> Wright adds to the discussion on prayer by saying, prayer is a calling and not just a spiritual duty to grow closer to God. Christians pray because God chooses to work this way in response to prayers.<sup>187</sup>

Driscoll and Chase assert that when an individual is born again, he does not instantaneously know how to pray and reverence God.<sup>188</sup> An example of this is when the disciples said to Jesus, "Lord teach us to pray."<sup>189</sup> Jesus' answer to them is that prayer is all about receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that even though believers address trinitarian prayers to God the Father, the Holy Spirit empowers prayers.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Roch A. Kereszty, *Rekindle the Gift of God: A Handbook for Priestly Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), 38. Accessed November 26, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Michael Youssef, *Empowered by Praise: Experiencing God's Presence and Power When You Give Him Glory* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2021), 8.

<sup>187</sup> Catherine J. Wright, *Spiritual Practices of Jesus: Learning Simplicity, Humility, and Prayer with Luke's Earlier Readers* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 123. Accessed December 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>188</sup> Mark Driscoll, and Ashley Chase, *Pray Like Jesus: Learn to Pray to God as Father* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2021), 39.

<sup>189</sup> Luke 11:1 (English Standard Version).

<sup>190</sup> Mark Driscoll, and Ashley Chase, *Pray Like Jesus: Learn to Pray to God as Father* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2021), 39.

Johnson affirms that biblical prayer is about building a relationship with God. Knowing God teaches his people to relate to Him in authentic ways.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, prayer must be central in the believer's being because God is central, and through prayer, Christians are open to Him at the deepest level of their existence.<sup>192</sup>

Dada maintains that Christ requires leaders to demonstrate a prayerful leadership of spiritual gifting in day-to-day expressions of their faith to make disciples. The power of prayer sustains church growth in the local congregation. Prayer is paramount for evangelizing and doing mission work. Proclamation (preaching) and ministries of all forms will need the Holy Spirit's empowerment and endorsement through prayers. His approval seal is the only means of receiving His favor to avoid a misinterpretation with earthly canvassing.<sup>193</sup> The book of Acts contains more than 29 references to individual and corporate prayers. Prayer releases the power of ministry in all forms and is essential for church growth (Isaiah 65:24; Daniel 9: 20-23; Acts 1:14; Act 1:23-26; Acts 6:4-6; Act 12:5-12; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18-19).<sup>194</sup>

Swindoll, in his commentary, explains that the first community grew numerically. It grew because prayer produces people with satisfying vertical and horizontal relationships.<sup>195</sup> He maintains that the way Luke amplifies the idea of prayer results in "The Lord adding to their numbers day by day those who were being saved."<sup>196</sup> He insists that leaders must continuously

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<sup>191</sup> Jan Johnson, *Prayer and Listening* (Westmount: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 7. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty>.

<sup>192</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, *Revealing the Heart of Prayer: The Gospel of Luke* (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 2016), 17. Accessed December 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>193</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 200.

<sup>194</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 200.

<sup>195</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on Acts* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 69. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest book Central.

<sup>196</sup> Acts 2:47 ((English Standard Version).

communicate (prayer) with God and teach others to follow their behavior patterns (spiritual growth).<sup>197</sup> Spiritual and numerical growth results from the power of prayers to God in the corporate gathering.

### The Power of Faith

Luke reports a constant growth in the number of people in the church movement because of faith in the Old Testament proof about the Messiah.<sup>198</sup> “The disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, as the church grew stronger in faith (spiritual growth), they also grew more prominent (numerical growth).<sup>200</sup>

Thomas asserts that it seems that Paul has the gift of faith in mind when he speaks of a faith<sup>201</sup> that can “remove mountains.”<sup>202</sup> He adds that perhaps the “prayer of faith”<sup>203</sup> that elders exercise when praying for the sick in the book of James may also be an example of the gift of faith.<sup>204</sup> It also speaks to the power of faith in spiritual gifting. Paul writes, “The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me.” Stanglin adds to the discussion on faith. He asserts that the Spirit intends that all God’s people should have the ‘light of faith,’ that is, the illumination of the Holy Spirit.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on Acts*, 42.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>199</sup> Acts 2:47 ((English Standard Version).

<sup>200</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on Acts*, 312.

<sup>201</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 21.

<sup>202</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2 (English Standard Version).

<sup>203</sup> James 5:15 (English Standard Version).

<sup>204</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 21.

<sup>205</sup> Keith D. Stanglin, “Spiritus Propheticus: Spirit and Prophecy in Calvin’s Old Testament Exegesis,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 50, no. 1 (April 2015): 23-42. <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

Calvin maintains that faith in God begins with faith in His Word, producing results. When the believer knows God through God's Word, he can walk in His fullness. Thus, each Christian should take time to know Him through prayer and His Word.<sup>206</sup> Eigen adds that faith is a vehicle that plays a role in building tolerance for the human experience. It is one of the mysteries that help individuals grow through situations with no solutions in view.<sup>207</sup> An example of this moment is in the account of Job, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him."<sup>208</sup> This response represents the ultimate moment in a person's struggle with life situations.<sup>209</sup>

Crosby maintains that there are two signs of sustaining faith. First, faith sustains believers in a stable path of life while continually challenging them to explore more profound understanding and ways of expressing those meanings. Second, genuine sustaining faith gives believers courage and steadfastness of will. It strengthens the human will, energizes, and transforms people's lives over their life span.<sup>210</sup>

The following section identifies theoretical foundations for using spiritual gifts to address church growth at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. An understanding and development of spiritual gifts could grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The researcher contends that a spiritual gift model that utilizes church growth principles is the best theoretical model for growing a local church.

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<sup>206</sup> Calvin King, *Trinity of Faith: A Biblical Teaching in the Dimensions of Faith* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2018), 6. Accessed December 2, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>207</sup> Michael Eigen, *Faith* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 124. Accessed December 2, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>208</sup> Job 13:15 (English Standard Version).

<sup>209</sup> Michael Eigen, *Faith* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 124.

<sup>210</sup> Donald Crosby, *Faith and Freedom: Contexts, Choice, and Crises in Religious Commitments 1st ed.* (London: Routledge, 2018), 12. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/>

## Theoretical Foundations

The researcher's overall objective is to develop a practical model on church growth for a local church. The researcher shares how other scholars address church growth and then present principles applicable to church growth at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### Church Growth through Activation of the Five Gifts or Currents

Tennant delineates a prescription for Spirit-empowerment on church health through the dynamics of the five leadership gifts of Ephesians 4:11, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers."<sup>211</sup> She argues that most teachings on church growth focus on church leadership. On the other hand, she emphasizes what she calls ministry currents that each person should oversee. She maintains that this model requires the whole church's involvement.

The five gifts or currents consist of the following:<sup>212</sup>

- First, seeing people come to Christ. The powerful wooing current.
- Second, ensuring that new believers learn to follow Christ closely and mature into what He desires them to be. The radical forming current.
- Third, caring for His disciples in the body of Christ so they stay healthy, connect, and show love. The corresponding choreography current.
- Fourth, providing direction for the church: correcting and restoring, affirming, and encouraging. The house-cleaning directional current.
- Fifth, pushing back the darkness and taking new territory for the kingdom of God. The miraculous sending current.

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<sup>211</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church* (Springfield: Vital Resources, 2016), 10, accessed November 8, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Each current is consistent with ministry roles (evangelist, teacher, pastor, apostolic, and prophetic).<sup>213</sup> The primary purpose of the five gifts Jesus bestows upon the church is to equip each person in the body of Christ to minister somewhere within the five ministry currents as God directs.<sup>214</sup> Tennant claims that if a church is not flourishing in numbers or maturity, then neglecting the five gifts is likely one of the primary causes. Through the activation and of these spiritual gifts, there is the unity of the Spirit. Evangelists, pastors, teachers, apostolic and prophetic servants work together congenially, so the church functions in harmony. The outgrowth of the five leadership gifts being fully operational is that the church will become mature (spiritually and numerically) and attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.<sup>215</sup>

#### Church Growth through Biblical Principles

Olalekan proclaims that seeing the church grow is always the desire of every church leader; if not, there must be something wrong.<sup>216</sup> He adds the best growing churches in the world have solid biblical preaching (proclamation) at their core. These churches are not watering down the gospel so that people cannot see the cross. They do not overemphasize the seeker and ignore discipleship. These churches preach holiness, how to worship. They teach how to deal with sin, with one another, and love one another while modeling it. Evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship come out of these. As people experience transformation, they receive teaching and

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<sup>213</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church* (Springfield: Vital Resources, 2016), 13, accessed November 8, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>216</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 18.

motivation (Jeremiah 33:6; Romans 7:12; Galatians 3).<sup>217</sup> Shanks reminds believers that God alone gives life to the church in his assessment of Acts 2:24-47.<sup>218</sup>

Olalekan shares that the Bible is flourishing with various principles of church growth.<sup>219</sup> He insists that the following principles are necessary:<sup>220</sup>

- The role of prayer and miracles in church growth
- The reliance on the leading of the Spirit of God
- Evangelism through most normal relationships
- Being flexible in the church's approach
- Growing the church involves both evangelism and discipleship
- Expecting resistance but do not bend its opposition to the gospel
- The leadership's character
- Strategic planning
- Operation reach and hold
- Start evangelism through the needs of the people
- Identification of receptive people in the community
- Growing the church through church health principles
- Grow the Church by minimizing conflict, and gossip
- Pastoral care and support for members

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<sup>217</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 18.

<sup>218</sup> Andrew Shanks, "Developing a Training Module for Revitalization Utilizing Church Planting Methodologies with a Select Group of Members of Fontaine Baptist Church in Martinsville, Virginia" (D. Min. Thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 23.

<sup>219</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 21.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-26.

## Church Growth through Motivation and Influence of Leaders

Jones enhances the discussion on church growth through a church leadership motivation and influence model rather than the Holy Spirit's influence on believers. He narrows the argument to young people in the church. Jones does not discount the heavenly factor but focuses on the human element. He writes that church leadership is the deliberate motivation and influence of the believers or congregation to pursue the principles of Jesus Christ by being role models and giving people the opportunity to heed the salvation call.<sup>221</sup> If the purpose is to draw people to Christ to grow the church, then deliberate practices involving the participants will help them understand how the church can be productive.<sup>222</sup>

## Church Growth through Congregational Reflections

Voas shares in his abstract that a recent report on church growth argues that there are no strong connections between numerical growth and worship style or theological practice. Instead, what seems crucial is that congregations engage in reflection: choices should be intentional rather than by default.<sup>223</sup> He contends that "the road to growth depends on the context; what works in one place may not work in another. Growth is the consequence of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favorable environment."<sup>224</sup>

## Church Growth through Practicing Social Justice

Pang insists that, as spokesperson for God, the prophet Amos is critical of the Israelites for practicing a form of religion that ignores and condones the apparent social injustice.<sup>225</sup> The

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<sup>221</sup> Marion Jones, *Youth Decline in Church Growth and Attendance*, 21.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>223</sup> David Voas, *Intentionality, Numerical Growth and Rural Church*, 2.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>225</sup> Lawrence Pang, "Spiritual Growth Through Authentic Worship." *Compass* 50, no. 3 (Spring, 2016): 4, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

church's religious form addresses injustice and condemns anyone or organizations that violate humanity's rights and dignity.<sup>226</sup> Meinert agrees with this position and adds to its expansion. The gifts are the tools through which customary grace heals the human relationship with God as the first mover and thus toward the suitable activity in this life's contingencies.<sup>227</sup> Believers achieve what the intellect can naturally obtain through the gifts but in a more excellent and fuller way.<sup>228</sup>

Tennant insists that individuals in the church must undergo rejuvenation if the church is to have a renaissance. Each congregation member must exhibit "godly" characteristics in the church.<sup>229</sup> Both Dada and Rainer see social justice as spiritual warfare for church growth. It was like that in the church of old. In the face of defeat, the church rose to be champions in Acts 8:4-40 and following. So likewise, the church must get ready for spiritual warfare if it desires growth.<sup>230</sup>

#### Ten Truths about Spiritual Gifts Pertinent to Church Growth

Thomas presents ten truths or principles about spiritual gifts that may apply to biblical church growth for a local church. He gives the following truths about spiritual gifts in chapter three of his book on *spiritual gifts*.<sup>231</sup>

- All gifts are to be under Christ's lordship.
- People are to reasonably think about their gifts.

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<sup>226</sup> Lawrence Pang, "Spiritual Growth Through Authentic Worship." *Compass* 50, no. 3 (Spring, 2016): 4, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>227</sup> John Meinert, *Donum Habituale: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 187.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>229</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 23.

<sup>230</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 201.

<sup>231</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 37-38.

- Gifts given by God are remarkably diverse, so people should celebrate their diversity.
- Gifts do not make people inferior or superior to others.
- The Holy Spirit is sovereign and appoints gifts to people, Himself.

Thomas presents more truths about spiritual gifts in chapter four of his book.<sup>232</sup>

- God does not give gifts to edify people but to build up and strengthen the church.
- Baptism of the Spirit is not a gift after conversion, but people receive it at conversion.
- Strengthening and the teaching of the church come through understanding.
- It is the path of wisdom to focus on a person's gifts.
- Love is even more essential than all the gifts, for love signifies the character of God, and love is superior to every gift. Therefore, the real test of spiritual maturity in people's lives is whether they live in love.

#### Other Church Growth Models

Garrison and Rodriguez insist that church leaders should build their church growth model around the functions of the church in Acts 2:42-47, which are connect, grow, serve, go, and worship.<sup>233</sup> These represent the core values for their Spirit-empowerment approach to developing a church.

Paas contends that churches in Europe depend on the models they import from other continents to sustain or replenish membership. They also draw Christians from different

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<sup>232</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 62-63.

<sup>233</sup> Alton Garrison, and Samuel Rodriguez, *A Spirit-Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model* (Nashville: Influence Resources, 2015), 230. Accessed December 4, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

churches to increase their numbers.<sup>234</sup> His goal is to examine church planting critically for understanding its value as a growth model.

Vala insists that Protestants have possibly the most sustaining religious church growth structure that confronts the Chinese Communist Party's ordering society.<sup>235</sup> By developing components of social capital: norms, trust, leadership-follower relations, leadership capacity, organizational structure, and local context, Protestants can grow the church amid oppositions.<sup>236</sup>

#### Church Growth Principles: Models of Spiritual Gifts for Church Growth

This section's purpose is to present church growth principles for developing spiritual gifts that may have value for Christian leaders in a local church. The researcher examines what the research says about spiritual gifts and church growth and uses the result to plan intervention for this thesis project.

The first principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of discipleship (an aspect of the gift of teaching). Mathew 28:18-20 provides the Christians with the reason for its existence, to make disciples. Disciples are the ones in need of a teacher. The accompanying verbs 'go,' 'baptize,' and 'teach' are in the passage of the Lord's commandment to His followers. The inclusive reference indicates that the scope of the church's mission is universal.<sup>237</sup> II Timothy 2:1-7 addresses a spiritual culture for equipping members of the body of Christ for making other followers.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), xiii. Accessed December 4, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>235</sup> Carsten T. Vala, *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God Above Party?* (London: Routledge, 2017), Abstract. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., Abstract page 20.

<sup>237</sup> Jeannie K. Brown *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 318. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>238</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 210.

The second principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of Christ-likeness. The church must promote a culture where believers can grow “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>239</sup> Christ-likeness is the real goal of spiritual growth, and therefore a new self.<sup>240</sup> The new image is an outgrowth of spiritual growth and development in a local church.

The third principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of empowerment for the church’s ministry work. Church members must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit liberates members of the congregation to be free to overcome any opposition to achieving God’s mission in the world. The Holy Spirit’s power in the believer’s life is evident when someone confesses Jesus Christ is Lord. Evangelism is the church’s ministry work. Members of the church must walk in the Spirit’s empowerment to help God free unbelievers so that they can become followers of Christ.

The fourth principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of prayer that changes things in the local church and the community. God is the only one who can grow the church. Prayer to God for the growth of the church is vital. The early church was a praying and believing church. The local church can experience new growth by committing to a praying ministry beyond physical building walls. The church’s action can bring about the Holy Spirit’s power in believers’ lives in being effective witnesses. Believers must transform the requests made to God through prayer into activities that accomplish the church’s work.

The fifth principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of leadership.<sup>241</sup> Leadership requires leaders (lay and ordained) to cultivate a life of nature, habitual conversation

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<sup>239</sup> Ephesians 4:13 (English Standard Version).

<sup>240</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians Verse by Verse* (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 2017), 99. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>241</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, 210.

with God,<sup>242</sup> and help others do the same through “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings.”<sup>243</sup> The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts to leaders to train people for service or ministry. The church needs spiritual leaders (visionary leadership). Thus, the gift of leadership plays a significant role in every church’s growth, for without direction, churches become stagnant and aimless.<sup>244</sup>

The sixth principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of proclaiming God’s word (preaching and shepherding) through the Holy Spirit’s power. Luke declares that “the word of God continued to spread and prevail.”<sup>245</sup> Likewise, “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”<sup>246</sup> Luke writes, “And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.”<sup>247</sup> The word of God had such an impact that the governor “was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”<sup>248</sup>

The seventh principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of faith. Thomas contends that it seems that Paul has this gift in mind when he speaks of a faith that “can move mountains.”<sup>249</sup> He adds that perhaps “the prayer of faith”<sup>250</sup> that elders exercise when praying for

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<sup>242</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 42. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest book Central.

<sup>243</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1 (English Standard Version).

<sup>244</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 23.

<sup>245</sup> Acts 19:20 (English Standard Version).

<sup>246</sup> Acts 6:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>247</sup> Acts 13:49 (English Standard Version).

<sup>248</sup> Acts 13:12 (English Standard Version).

<sup>249</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2 (English Standard Version).

<sup>250</sup> James 5:15 (English Standard Version).

the sick may be an example of the gift of faith.<sup>251</sup> Paul writes, “The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>252</sup>

The eighth principle of church growth is developing the spiritual gift of teaching (understanding, knowledge, insight, interpretation) to serve in significant ministry roles. Believers with this gift have the skills to expound, explain, and unpack the word of God, imparting instruction through the revelation of the truths in scripture. Thomas notes that the gift of teaching is in every other list of Paul on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11. He contends that the “message of wisdom” and the “message of knowledge” refer to the gift of teaching.<sup>253</sup> “For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.”<sup>254</sup>

The scripture declares that “an extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel.”<sup>255</sup> Thus, God grants the spiritual gift of teaching (understanding, wisdom, and knowledge) to those He places in leadership positions to govern aspects of His creation.

The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts to leaders so that they may train His people for service or ministry. God’s power inspires spiritual leaders, and that same power motivates the people to serve God and carries out His mission in the world. Thus, all spiritual gifts, including authentic biblical leadership, come from God to whomever He rouses to serve Him for His Glory.

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<sup>251</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 21.

<sup>252</sup> Galatians 2:20 (English Standard Version).

<sup>253</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 19.

<sup>254</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>255</sup> Daniel 5:12 (English Standard Version).

God's people will adhere to the leaders He appoints for them but is skeptical to follow those who do not have the anointing of the Spirit of God. An understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church through the power proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership. These five spiritual gifts are essential for the intervention design and implementation of the research design to address the problem in this thesis project.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The researcher in chapter one gives a sketch of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The congregation has a rich history and an active ministry leadership team in the Smithfield community. God continues to bless the congregation with a desire to develop their spiritual gifts for church growth. However, the congregation is not growing in attendance with an aging membership. The pastor and leadership team believes that they should develop followers who use their spiritual gifts to grow the church.

The researcher in chapter two reviews the literature in response to the question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?” The sources identify the dynamic nature of church growth and the criteria for developing spiritual gifts. The literature gives the biblical and theological basis for healthy church growth in the Bible. The researcher drawing upon the literature, identifies church growth principles and five spiritual gifts (proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership) which could grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

The researcher, in chapter three, explains the methodology of this thesis project for how an understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The research was conducted through interviews with two long-term church members, followed by a collection of data with a sample of seventeen participants who signed consent forms at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this project is the use of spiritual gifts found in scripture as teachable models for church growth. The participants will understand and develop spiritual gifts when

engaging with the researcher. The question that this thesis project asked is, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

### **Research Tasks to Accomplish**

The specific research objectives are:

1. Compilation of a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church:  
This listing was compiled by two long-term members (24+ years) of the congregation who independently compiled the list (each had fifty-five minutes maximum to compile). The researcher used the list to identify five spiritual gifts, consistent with the research findings in chapter two of this thesis project (one spiritual gift for each of the five sessions; each spiritual gift was a “treatment”).
2. Development of five sessions or “meetings,” with each session focusing on a different spiritual gift. Each session was a “treatment” and consisted of four components: 1.) Where is this gift located in scripture? 2.) What is the biblical context of the gift? 3.) What are the implications of the gift in scripture? 4.) What are the implications of the gift for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? In addition, the researcher shared selected Pauline lists of spiritual gifts to help participants understand spiritual gifts in each session (participants were given a handout and asked to respond to a discussion question after the session for homework).
3. Completion of a pre-test by participants (prior to beginning the thesis project) and completion of a post-test to measure the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth.

4. Share research results with the two long-term members (who participated in step #1) and develop a plan for assimilating/ disseminating for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

### **Research Objectives**

#### Research Objective 1

1. The researcher met with two long-term members (24+year) at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church to capture information for the sessions. First, the researcher shared how gifts are crucial to the church's growth. Next, the researcher explained the gifts' significance in the scriptures. Then, ask the long-term members to compile a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in scripture.
2. Two long-term members compiled and submitted their list by checking the church's membership role and comparing the members' gifts with a list of spiritual gifts found in scripture using a spiritual gift inventory.

#### Research Objective 2

1. The researcher selected five spiritual gifts found in scripture. The researcher conducted an in-depth instruction on each spiritual gift: Where is this gift located in scripture? What is the biblical context of the gift? What are the implications of the gift in scripture? What are the implications of the gift for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? Developed a two-page handout on each spiritual gift. Created a half-page group homework handout for each session on understanding spiritual gifts found in scripture.

2. The researcher gave a brief description and explanation of the spiritual gift for each of the five sessions (Meeting #2-6) (Each meeting = 55 minutes maximum).

#### Research Objective 3

1. Meeting #1: Participants signed a consent form, listened to a brief description of the study, and completed a pre-test (55 minutes).
2. Meeting #7: Participants completed a post-test and individual demographics (55 minutes).

#### Research Objective 4

1. Video-record interviews with each of the two 24+year members, identifying what spiritual gifts impacted their growth and development at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The researcher, on August 1, 2021, met with the two long-term members and asked them to respond to six items on a questionnaire (Appendix F), to which they responded, and their responses were documented.
  - Identify five (5) spiritual gifts and share how each gift contributed to your growth as a Friendly Missionary Baptist Church member.
  - Why is each gift necessary for church growth?
  - What ministries can cultivate your growth, understanding, and development in this church?
  - How can we better develop spiritual gifts in this church?
  - What do you think a healthy church looks like?
  - What specific recommendations do you have concerning building a healthy church?

2. The discussion also identifies the assimilation/ dissemination of the thesis project results.

## **Intervention Design**

### Theological Framework

This thesis project uses spiritual gifts found in scripture as teachable models for church growth. Olalekan’s model highlights the importance of biblical preaching.<sup>256</sup> Tennant’s model emphasizes the whole church’s involvement in the gifts of leadership.<sup>257</sup> Thomas’s model stresses teaching for understanding. Storm’s mode elaborates on understanding spiritual gifts.<sup>258</sup> Finally, Dr. Johnsen’s model uses the phenological research framework to address the provisions of God observed throughout the Old Testament.”<sup>259</sup>

The researcher, building on their models, focused on the spiritual gifts of proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?” The church growth principles: models of spiritual gifts for church growth in chapter two of this thesis project were used to select five spiritual gifts to present to the target group, with help from two (24+ years) members. The following five consecutive handouts were given to participants at the start of each session in this thesis project:

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<sup>256</sup> Dairo Olalekan, *Biblical Principles for Growing the Church in Africa*, 18.

<sup>257</sup> Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 12.

<sup>258</sup> Sam Storms, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), V.

<sup>259</sup> Jeff Johnsen, “Provision of God in our Lives: Examining Impact of Church Memorials,” (D.Min. Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019), 14.

## Session One: The Gift of Proclamation

The researcher, on August 25, 2021, presented session # 1, the spiritual gift of proclamation, to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The specific outcome of the session: Members should develop an understanding and purpose of the spiritual gift of proclamation.

The gift of proclamation comes from the Greek word *εὐαγγελίζω* (yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo), which means to announce the good news or preach good tidings, with or without an object, expresses either the individuals who are receiving the good news or the good news itself. In the Septuagint (the earliest Koine Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew), the verb is used for any message intended to cheer the hearers. The Hebrew word for the gift of proclamation is *בִּשְׂרֵטִי* (bis-sar-ti) to bear tidings. The Psalmist declares, “I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation.”<sup>260</sup>

Where is this gift located in scripture? Acts 8:26-40 provides a teachable model for using the gift of proclamation for church growth. Other scriptures are Isaiah 40:9; Psalms 40:9; Matthew 11:5; Luke 3:18; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:17; and Revelations 10:7.

Luke reports the effect of the word through proclamation to an Ethiopian Eunuch and people in the various towns where Phillip preached the gospel. He writes, “those who were scattered went about preaching.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Psalms 40:9 (English Standard Version).

<sup>261</sup> Acts 8:4 (English Standard Version).

What is the biblical context of this gift? There is a central theme of the gift of proclamation throughout scripture. The theme is the power of proclamation.

Church growth has roots in the power of proclamation (the word of God). Numerical and spiritual growth emerges with individuals and corporate groups through God's works and the power of His word. Alexander explains that although Joseph's "generation died," the Israelites as a people flourished (numerical growth).<sup>262</sup>

The immediate context of Acts 8:26-40 is that Phillip and the believers with him became the first missionaries of the Church. He was one of the leaders chosen to be a deacon (Acts 6:5). After proclaiming the good news about Jesus and baptizing the eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away," and "he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea."<sup>263</sup> He became an evangelist and proclaimed the word of God to Paul at Caesarea concerning how "the Jews at Jerusalem will bind him (Paul)."<sup>264</sup>

What is the implication of this gift in scripture? While the pastor (shepherd) is the primary object of gifting for this ministry area, exhortation can also find expression through ministries such as discipleship, evangelist, Sunday school leaders, staff-support, deacons, and trustees. All disciples must proclaim the gospel of Jesus (Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Return).

What is the implication of the gift of proclamation for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? The congregation must proclaim Him as a congregation and expect His Word to accomplish His will. It is God's will that the church grows through exercising the spiritual gift of proclamation.

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<sup>262</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus: Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downer Grove: IVP Academy, 2017), 40. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

<sup>263</sup> Acts 8:30-40 (English Standard Version).

<sup>264</sup> Acts 21:8 (English Standard Version).

Sam Storm provides an understanding of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8.<sup>265</sup> He contends that Paul writes about gifts that differ according to believers (v. 6a). His introductory remarks lead the reader to expect that he would identify every gift of the Spirit. Instead, Paul selects seven gifts. (1) if prophecy, in proportion to faith; (2) if service, in serving; (3) the one who teaches, in his teaching; (4) the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; (5) the one who contributes (contributing), in his generosity (giving); (6) the one who leads (leading), with zeal; (7) the one with acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (6b-7).

The group homework question for this session is: discuss these seven (7) gifts and explain how understanding and developing spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, focusing on proclamation.

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<sup>265</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 33-34.

## Session Two: The Gift of Prayer

The researcher, on September 1, 2021, presented session # 2, the spiritual gift of prayer, to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The specific outcome of the session: Members should develop an understanding and purpose of the spiritual gift of prayer.

The gift of prayer comes from the Greek word *προσευχή* (*proseuchē*), which means to make a request or to ask for what is wanted. This gift indicates fervent prayer to God as demonstrated by the prophet Elijah, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.”<sup>266</sup> The Hebrew word for the gift of prayer is *וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל* (*ve-yit-pal-lel*) which means to intervene, to intercede, or to make supplication.

Where is this gift located in scripture? Acts 12:5-12 provides a teachable model for using the gift of prayer for church growth. Other scriptures are Isaiah 65:24; Daniel 9:20-23; Psalm 72:15; Acts 1:14; Act 1:23-26; Acts 6:4-6; Act 12:5-12; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18-19. Prayer address God the Father in Matthew 6:6 and the Son of God in Acts 7:59.

Luke records the impact of prayer on Peter’s deliverance when he was put in prison during King Herod’s persecution of the church. “So, Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”<sup>267</sup>

What is the biblical context of this gift? There is a central theme of the gift of prayer throughout scripture. The theme is the power of prayer.

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<sup>266</sup> James 5:17 (English Standard Version).

<sup>267</sup> Acts 12:5 (English Standard Version).

The immediate context of Acts 12:5-12 is that the church, through continuous prayer, must utilize this gift to release the power of the Holy Spirit to protect and deliver members of the church from persecution. The congregation must evoke earnest prayer to God to do the church's work. Paul makes this point when he writes, "You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."<sup>268</sup> Isaiah connects the power of prayer to the eternal blessing of the people of God on the earth. He writes, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear."<sup>269</sup>

What is the implication of this gift in scripture? Prayer is necessary for empowering believers to overcome their fears in the face of the many dangers in this world. Perils can threaten and hinder the growth of the church. Dada argues that the church can flourish irrespective of the catastrophes around it, even after countless persecutions.<sup>270</sup>

What is the implication of the gift of prayer for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? The church must be in continuous prayer to God for strength and empowerment to build up the congregation. Thomas maintains that the church's strengthening and improvement come through understanding.<sup>271</sup> The church should pray to God for understanding in trying times. Job declared that "it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand."<sup>272</sup> "With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding."<sup>273</sup> Experiences (preaching) that

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<sup>268</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:11 (English Standard Version).

<sup>269</sup> Isaiah 65:24 (English Standard Version).

<sup>270</sup> Samson Dada, *Power Dynamics for Church Growth in Acts*, 201.

<sup>271</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are & Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 62.

<sup>272</sup> Job 32:8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>273</sup> Job 12:13 (English Standard Version).

excite without intellectual content will not build up the church. But fervent prayer will build up the church.

Sam Storm offers an understanding of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.<sup>274</sup> He maintains that Paul mentions the existence of various gifts and varieties of service and activities. For to one is given through the Spirit (1) the utterance (or, “word,” logos) of wisdom, and to another (2) the utterance of knowledge according to the Spirit, to another (3) faith by the same Spirit, to another (4) the gifts of healing(s) by the one Spirit, to another (5) the works of miracles, to another (6) prophecy, to another (7) the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another (8) various kinds of tongues, to another (9) the interpretation of tongues. (vs. 8–10).

The group homework question for this session is: discuss these nine (9) gifts and explain how an understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, focusing on prayer.

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<sup>274</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 34-35.

### Session Three: The Gift of Faith

The researcher, on September 8, 2021, presented session # 3, the spiritual gift of faith, to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The specific outcome of the session: Members should develop an understanding and purpose of the spiritual gift of faith.

The gift of faith comes from the Greek word *πίστις* (pistis), which means belief, trust, confidence, fidelity, or faithfulness. Thus, faith is a firm persuasion and a conviction based upon hearing the word of God (proclamation). The Hebrew word for the gift of faith is *בְּטוּחַ* (be·'e·mu·na·tov), which means firmness, steadfastness, fidelity, or to trust firmly in the truth.

Where is this gift located in scripture? Acts 6:1-8 provides a teachable model for using the gift of faith for church growth. Other scriptures are Habakkuk 2:4; 1 John 5:4-5; Hebrews 11:1; Hebrews 11:39-40; Matthew 8:8-10; Luke 17:15-19; Acts 16:5; Acts 16:15; 2 John 4-6.

Luke reports a constant growth in the number of believes in the church movement because of faith in the Old Testament proof about the Messiah.<sup>275</sup> “The word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”<sup>276</sup>

What is the biblical context of this gift? There is a central theme of the gift of faith throughout scripture. The theme is the power of faith.

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<sup>275</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insight on Acts* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 109. Accessed February 1, 2021. ProQuest book Central.

<sup>276</sup> Acts 6:7 ((English Standard Version).

Thomas asserts that it seems that Paul has the gift of faith in mind when he talks of a faith<sup>277</sup> that can “remove mountains.”<sup>278</sup> He adds that perhaps the “prayer of faith”<sup>279</sup> that elders exercise when praying for the sick in the book of James may also be an example of the gift of faith.<sup>280</sup> Paul also speaks to the power of faith in spiritual gifting. Paul writes, “The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself for me.”<sup>281</sup>

The immediate context of Acts 6:1-8 is that Stephen, “full of faith and the Holy Spirit,”<sup>282</sup> and other faithful men like him committed to serving the Lord and meeting the congregation’s needs, resulting in church growth. Luke also reports that “Stephen, full of grace (faith) and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.”<sup>283</sup> Likewise, other leaders such as “the priests were obedient to the faith.”<sup>284</sup>

What is the implication of this gift in scripture? Faith is necessary for spiritual maturity. Believers should make every effort to yield to the Holy Spirit to achieve maturity. Spiritual maturity involves comprehending the faith, serving the church community, and developing attitudes that reflect the gospel’s truths.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Thomas R Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 21. accessed November 12, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>278</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:2 (English Standard Version).

<sup>279</sup> James 5:15 (English Standard Version).

<sup>280</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 21.

<sup>281</sup> Galatians 2:20 (English Standard Version).

<sup>282</sup> Acts 6:4 (English Standard Version).

<sup>283</sup> Acts 6: 8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>284</sup> Acts 6:7 (English Standard Version).

<sup>285</sup> Saskia Donner, *Types of Support that Spiritually Mature Believers in Evangelical Churches*, Abstract.

What is the implication of the gift of faith for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church must exercise the gift of faith by putting it into action to grow the church.

Sam Storm presents an understanding of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.<sup>286</sup> He argues that this text combines miraculous gifts and notably more routine ones. God appointments in the church (1) first apostles, (2) second prophets, (3) third teachers, (4) then miracles, (5) afterward gifts of healing, (6) helping, (7) administrating, and (8) different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all (9) interpret? (vs. 28–30).

The group homework question for this session is: discuss these nine (9) gifts and explain how an understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, focusing on faith.

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<sup>286</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 35.

## Session Four: The Gift of Teaching

The researcher, on September 15, 2021, presented session # 4, the spiritual gift of teaching, to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The specific outcome of the session: Members should develop an understanding and purpose of the spiritual gift of teaching.

The gift of teaching comes from the Greek word *διδάσκοντες* (didaskontes), which means to cause to learn, to give instruction, to impart knowledge, or to disseminate information. Teaching (didaskontes) nearly always refers to teaching the scriptures (the written Word of God). The Hebrew word for the gift of teaching is *למד* (lamad) which means to teach, to learn, or to cause to learn. This Semitic term is found throughout the Hebrew language and in ancient Akkadian. Lamad, the gift of teaching, is found approximately 85 times in the text of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Where is this gift located in scripture? Acts 5:17-29 provides a teachable model for using the gift of teaching for church growth. Other scriptures are Exodus 18:17-20; Deuteronomy 4:1; Matthew 4:23-25; Matthew 28:19; John 14:26; Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

The gift of teaching is *למד* (lamad) is first used in the Hebrew Old Testament in Moses charge to God’s people, “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.”<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Deuteronomy 4:1 (English Standard Version).

What is the biblical context of this gift? There is a central theme of the gift of teaching throughout scripture. The theme is the power of teaching.

Matthew 28:18-20 provides Christians with the reason for its existence, to teach and make disciples. In his commentary on Matthew, Brown reports that the critical exhortation Jesus gives to the disciples is to *disciple* the nations. All the accompanying verbs *go*, *baptize*, and *teach* are in the text of the Lord's commandment.

The immediate context of Acts 5:17-29 is that the church during persecution must be obedient to God's word by teaching (causing the people to learn). Luke reports that "the high priest rose up, and all who were with him,"<sup>288</sup> and put the apostles in prison for instructing (teaching) in the temple. But when the high priest and the council learned that the Apostles were again teaching, they were "brought before the council and the high priest."<sup>289</sup> The high priest said to them, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name (Jesus), yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching."<sup>290</sup> "But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."<sup>291</sup>

What is the implication of this gift in scripture? Stanley's argument on II Timothy 2:1-7 provides implications on the spiritual gift of teaching. He insists that this passage is the biblical pattern Paul instructs Timothy to follow for entrusting (teaching) loyal men of the gospel's message. Stanley's application of these passages is that a Christian institution must promote a

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<sup>288</sup> Acts 5:17 (English Standard Version).

<sup>289</sup> Acts 5:27 (English Standard Version).

<sup>290</sup> Acts 5:28 (English Standard Version).

<sup>291</sup> Acts 5:29 (English Standard Version).

spiritual growth culture and equip followers for a life of making disciples.<sup>292</sup> The local church is a Christian institution and must use the gift of teaching to foster a growth culture to attract followers and develop members.

What is the implication of the gift of teaching for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? Friendly Missionary Baptist Church must create a learning culture for making disciples. The power of teaching could fill Friendly Missionary Baptist Church with learners and grow the church spiritually and numerically through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>293</sup> Evangelism, preaching, and witnessing, will require the gift of teaching to communicate the gospel to the whole creation.<sup>294</sup> Friendly Missionary Baptist Church must teach disciples “to observe all” that Christ has “commanded.”<sup>295</sup>

Sam Storm gives an understanding of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 8-10.<sup>296</sup> He explains that this passage reveals several spiritual gifts. Paul mentions tongues in verse 1, prophecy in verse 2, most likely the word of knowledge in verse 2, and the gift of faith in verse 2. Paul may have referred to the gift of giving in verse 3 (If I give away all I have), which he described in Romans 12:8 as (the one who contributes). A bit further down in the chapter, he again mentioned prophecy, tongues, and perhaps the word of knowledge (v. 8).

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<sup>292</sup> Jeremiah Ryan Stanley, “Promoting a Culture of Spiritual Growth through Equipping Student Leaders for Discipleship at Trinity Baptist College in Jacksonville, Florida.” Order No. 13857415, (D. Min Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 13.

<sup>293</sup> Acts 1:8 (English Standard Version).

<sup>294</sup> Mark 16:15 (English Standard Version).

<sup>295</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (English Standard Version).

<sup>296</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 35-36.

The group homework question for this session is: discuss these five (5) gifts and explain how an understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, focusing on teaching.

## Session Five: The Gift of Leadership

The researcher, on September 22, 2021, presented session # 5, the spiritual gift of leadership, to address the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

The specific outcome of the session: Members should develop an understanding and purpose of the spiritual gift of Leadership.

The gift of leadership comes from the Greek word κυβερνήσεις (kubernēseis), which means to steer, to pilot, to lead, or to guide. Leadership (kubernēseis) correctly refers to the divine calling or gift that empowers someone to lead (administrating) in the church’s affairs. The Hebrew word for the gift of leadership is יָצָא (yaw-tsaw') which means to bring<sup>297</sup> out, to cause to go out, to cause to come out or to lead out. The idea is that of bringing a person or a people from a place for a particular purpose.

Where is this gift located in scripture? Acts 7:17-34 provide a teachable model for using the gift of leadership for church growth. Other scriptures are Exodus 3:9-12; John 10:1-3; Acts 13:17-23; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Hebrews 8:8-10.

The biblical record indicates that God uses people who do not look or act like leaders in the traditional sense. For example, certain biblical personalities had a significant impact on society but did not demonstrate identifiable common competencies. Yet God chose them as spiritual leaders to lead His people.

What is the biblical context of this gift? There is a central theme of the gift of leadership throughout scripture. The theme is the power of leadership.

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<sup>297</sup> Exodus 3:10 (English Standard Version).

The immediate context of Acts 13:17-34 is that God often uses spiritual leaders (Joseph, Moses, Jesus) to bring about spiritual growth in others. For example, God commissions Moses to go to Egypt to free the Israelites from their oppressive bondage.<sup>298</sup> Luke reports that God said to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”<sup>299</sup> Thus, God commissions Moses to steer, pilot, lead, and guide His people out of Egypt using the gift of leadership.

What is the implication of this gift in scripture? Spiritual leaders with the gift of leadership must seek God’s will, whether for their church, family, or corporation, and then mobilize their people to pursue God’s plan.<sup>300</sup> Spiritual leaders must develop an understanding of God’s will for them and the church and then move the congregation away from their plan to God’s agenda.<sup>301</sup>

What is the implication of the gift of leadership for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? Friendly Missionary Baptist Church must understand that each member has a role in response to God’s Will for their lives in this church. The spiritual leader with the gift of leadership must faithfully serve God in a leadership role, but members in the congregation are required to follow the leader God has given them.<sup>302</sup>

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church must understand that God uses the spiritual gift of leadership to guide them to an awareness of His purpose for the church. His purpose is to turn

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<sup>298</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 38.

<sup>299</sup> Acts 7:34 (English Standard Version).

<sup>300</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 41.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

His people away from their self-centeredness and obsession with temporal, material concerns and to draw them into a relationship with Him so that they are His instruments in accomplishing His Will.<sup>303</sup>

Sam Storm conveys an understanding of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:11.<sup>304</sup> He asserts that many scholars insist that the gifts in this list are less abilities and more specific and somewhat authoritative or governing offices (leadership positions) in the local church. Storm reports that Paul says that the risen Christ gave (1) the apostles, (2) the prophets, (3) the evangelists, (4) the shepherds, and (5) teachers or possibly, (4) shepherd-teachers. There are two gifts in this passage that Paul does not mention elsewhere: evangelism and shepherding or pastoring.

The group homework question for this session is: discuss these five (5) gifts and explain how an understanding and development of spiritual gifts can grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, focusing on leadership.

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<sup>303</sup> Henry T. Blackaby, and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 40.

<sup>304</sup> Sam Storm, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 36.

## Research Design Framework

A pre-test and post-test were used in this study to investigate the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth with the target group. The same three questions were utilized for the pre-test and post-test, and these instruments are presented in (Appendix C and Appendix D). In addition, the interview questions used with the two (24+ years) long-term members are shown in (Appendix F).

Creswell's phenomenological research methodology was used to analyze the data for this qualitative research project. This research's components describe several people's common meanings and lived encounters with a concept or phenomenon. Thus, phenomenology focuses on portraying what all the participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon.<sup>305</sup>

### Types of Data Collected/ Protocols/Analysis

Creswell identifies five different models for qualitative data analysis. The phenomenological model was selected from Creswell's five analyses for this thesis project. Creswell (2018, Figure 4.3, p.80) portrays a visual diagram of the procedure for data analysis, which the researcher followed.

“Removed to comply with copyright.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> John W. Creswell, and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches Fourth Edition* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 80.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

## The Tools for Gathering Information

The researcher used a data table and written documentation to depict results, using Creswell's model:

- Generate themes from the assessment of essential statements
- Develop textural and structural explanations
- Report the core of the phenomenon by using a composite description
- Present an understanding of the “essence” of the experience in written form
- Results of the process are represented in chapter 4 of this thesis project

### **Implementation of the Research Intervention Design**

The following identifies the seven participant meetings:

#### Research Objective 1

The researcher met individually with two long-term members (24+ years) before meeting with participants in the target group. They were given identical study purposes and instructions that met the research project's criteria. First, each member was directed to check the church's membership role and compare the members' spiritual gifts with a list of spiritual gifts<sup>307</sup> the researcher shared with them. Both individuals had access to the church role in their typical day-to-day duties at this church. They were then asked to compile a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in Scripture and share the results with the researcher. They were given 55 minutes to complete this task. They each shared that they had sufficient time to accomplish the task.

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<sup>307</sup> <https://upwards.blog/2012/06/13/how-many-spiritual-gifts-are-there>.

## Research Objective 2

Both long-term members met independently and shared their compiled list of spiritual gifts with the researcher. The researcher used the list to identify five (5) spiritual gifts consistent with the literature review in chapter 2 of this thesis project. After choosing the spiritual gifts (proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, leadership), the researcher determined that they would be used to develop five sessions or “meetings” for the target group in this thesis project. During the five sessions, the researcher applied the same format. Handouts were passed out to each participant as they arrived at the session. The researcher gave a presentation on a spiritual gift using a lesson plan developed before the sessions.

The steps in the lesson plan for each session are as follows:

- Purpose statement
- Thesis statement
- Research question
- The specific outcome of the session
- The definition of the gift in the session
- Where is the gift located in scripture?
- What is the biblical context of the gift?
- What is the implication of the gift in scripture?
- What is the implication of the gift for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?
- Understanding spiritual gifts (group homework discussion question)

At the start of each session, the researcher allowed participants to share their responses to the discussion question from the previous session. After each session, the researcher entertained questions and comments from participants. In addition, several long-term members brought

information on spiritual gifts and shared it with other participants in each session in the form of handouts. Their handouts were passed out at the start of each session. Each session also started and closed with a prayer to God for participants and the congregation.

### Research Objective 3

The consent forms (Appendix G) were emailed to each of the seventeen participants, inviting them to participate in the weekly scheduled times on Wednesday nights from 6:00-6:55 pm. Participants signed the consent forms (Meeting #1), listened to a brief description of the study, and completed a pre-test (Appendix C). Participants also completed a post-test (Appendix D) and demographics (Appendix E). The pre-test and post-test gave the purpose of this thesis project and asked participants to respond to three items:

- List the spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in scripture.
- Select 5 of the spiritual gifts listed in item # 1 and describe how once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church.
- List any additional questions/thoughts/comments about the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth.

### Research Objective 4

#### Sample Selection

The researcher followed Creswell's procedures for conducting phenomenological research to implement the research design in this thesis project. The sample selection was substantial to obtain the reliability and validity of the research methodology. Furthermore, it was

essential to the researcher that the sample selection yield results that demonstrate internal consistency in the quantitative analysis in chapter four of this thesis project.

#### Long-Term Members

The researcher sought out two Friendly Missionary Baptist Church members who had been active for (24+ years) in this congregation. The two long-term members in this research project were not randomly selected. The researcher spoke with the senior pastor, via cell phone call, on July 5, 2021, and asked him to recommend two long-term members who had been members of the congregation before its last erection in 1999. The researcher believed that they would know the spiritual gifts of members in the congregation because they were members of the church before its previous erection and had access to church records. The researcher contacted both long-term members, via cell phone call, on July 22, 2021, and invited them to participate in this thesis project. They each agreed to serve and signed the consent form on July 29, 2021 (Appendix G). The researcher also arranged to meet with them on August 1, 2021, to complete an interview review questionnaire (Appendix F).

#### Participants

The researcher emailed the recruitment letter to the congregation members on three consecutive Sunday mornings, August 1, 8, 15, 2021, via email (Appendix H & Appendix I). The church secretary also made announcements during the worship services on the same days. In addition, the recruitment documents invited members to email the researcher if they desired to participate in the study. After receiving their email, the researcher emailed each respondent a consent form and scheduled a time to meet with them and other participants. Accordingly, the researcher arranged August 18, 2021, as the first meeting date and met with the participants to sign consent forms and take the pre-test.

## Participants Selection

One participant group of active church members of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church served as the participants in this research project (n =17). This suitability sample consisted of new active believers and well-established members (Appendix E). The researcher collected the following demographics on all participants:

- How long have you been active in this church?
- What is your education level?
- What is your gender?
- Do you know your spiritual gifts?
- What is your age range?

### Sample Criteria

- An active member of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church
- Church member at least 18 years of age
- Available on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes to attend consecutive sessions starting August 18, 2021
- Willing to attend four (4) of the five (5) teaching sessions (Meetings #2-6)
- Complete the pre-test and post-test in the study (Meetings # 1 and # 7)
- Sign the consent form agreeing to participate in this thesis project

### Sample Size

The initial sample target for this thesis project was approximately 12 participants, based on the congregation's size (forty active members). However, the study exceeded expectations with a sample size of 17 active participants. In addition, several were active members for less than one year and participated in the church's new membership class.

## Informed Consent

The informed consent document was provided to participants before the first meeting and discussed during the interview/survey (Meeting # 1). The researcher answered questions before the participants' signed the consent forms and before administering the pre-test (Meeting # 1). Participants were informed that they would not receive compensation for participation in this thesis project. Permission was requested and approved by the church pastor, who met with the chairmen of the deacons and trustees to get their approval (Appendix J). Although the Institution Review Board did not require the formal proof of permission (IRB), the researcher shared the complete contents of the IRB document with the pastor and his ministry leadership team. After approval, the researcher provided planning questions with the pastor and his team to obtain comments and opinions (Appendix A & B).

## Place and Timelines of Activities

The researcher met with each of the two long-term members (24+ years) through individual Zoom interviews. The pre-test and post-test and the five (5) teaching meeting sessions were held at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama.

The timeline schedule for activities and durations are as follows:

Activities	Dates
Researcher contacted two long-term members (24+ years)	July 22, 2021
Researcher interviewed two long-term members	July 29 and August 1, 2021
Recruitment letter emailed to the congregation	August 1, 8, 15, 2021
Secretary announced project in worship services	August 1, 8, 15, 2021
Meeting # 1 (55 minutes)	August 18, 2021

Meeting # 2-6 (55 minutes each)

August 25, September 1, 8,  
15, 22, 2021

Meeting # 7 (55 minutes)

September 29, 2021

#### Ethical Issues that Relate to Informed Consent and Confidentiality

The records of this thesis project were kept private by the researcher. All research records are stored in a secure location, and only the researcher has access to the records in this thesis project. Data were obtained via the researcher's password-locked computer. This thesis project is confidential, and the researcher is the only one who knows which participants gave which responses. Participants were assigned a pseudonym code to collect the names and data for this thesis project. The researcher maintains a codebook to conceal the identity of participants in this thesis project. The researcher stored the codebook in a location separate from the data collected. After three years, all records on the electronic devices will be deleted, and physical documents will be shredded.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The results of this thesis project were propelled by the research question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?” The participants demonstrated an understanding and development of spiritual gifts when engaged with the researcher. The researcher noticed that it was possible to boost the awareness and engagement of the target group, using spiritual gifts found in scripture as teachable models. Several participants expressed this responsiveness by researching selected gifts and sharing their findings with other participants. Participants showed an enhanced interest and desire to understand the connection of their personal gifts to the scripture’s background on spiritual gifts.

### **Demographic Profiles**

Members of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church participated in this thesis project. Two membership groups were: a) two long-term members (24+ years) and b) seventeen (17) members who participated in this thesis project by completing the pre-test and post-test; also, they completed the five sessions or meetings “treatments.”

#### **Two Long-Term Members**

The two long-term members in this thesis project were not randomly selected. Instead, the researcher spoke with the Senior Pastor, via cell phone call, on July 5, 2021, and asked him to recommend two long-term members who had been members of the congregation before its last erection in 1999. The two long-term members selected met the researcher’s criteria. In addition, they knew the history of spiritual gifts at this church and were still active in the church’s life in leadership positions. The two long-term members chosen profile has a combined church membership of seventy-six years of active participation in this church.

Participant number one has been a church member for thirty years. More than thirty-one years earlier, she moved to the community outside Central Alabama. She serves as the chairwoman of the trustees and is an adult women choir member. In addition, she works well with the senior women in the church and regularly provides kitchen ministry.

Participant two has a church membership of forty-six years. In addition, his parents are active members of the congregation. His father and mother have been deacon and deaconess for more than fifty years, respectively. The participant is the chairman of the deacons, assistant superintendent of the Sunday school, chairman of the new members class, and an adult men choir member.

#### Participants (Seventeen Members)

The seventeen participants responded to either the letter emailed to the congregation or the secretary's announcement of the thesis project in worship services (three consecutive weekly emails and announcements) with instructions for research participants. Each signed a consent form, which stated that they were a Friendly Missionary Baptist Church member, 18 years or older, and agreed to take a pre-test and a post-test. In addition, each participant agreed to attend at least four of the five sessions (meeting) on Wednesday at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The seventeen participants are grouped as follows:

- Ten of the participants have been members for less than one year.
- Four of the participants who have been members for less than one year completed new members training (5-week class), Saturday, before the third session in this thesis project.
- Two of the participants have been members for one to five years.
- Four of the participants have been members for more than thirty years.

- One participant has been a member for more than fifty years.
- Eight of the participants had only a high school education.
- Three of the participants finished high school and had a two-year college education.
- Six of the participants earned a bachelor's degree.
- Six of the participants were male.
- Eleven of the participants were female.
- Five of the participants' age range was between forty to sixty-four.
- Twelve of the participants' ages were sixty-five and older.
- All participants indicated after the post-test that they knew their spiritual gift or gifts (Meeting #7).

### **Results: Research Objective # 1**

The researcher met independently with the two long-term members (24+ years), shared the purpose of this thesis project and a list of spiritual gifts<sup>308</sup> as defined in this thesis project. Then, the researcher asked them to compile a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in scripture. This list was compiled and shared with the researcher on July 29, 2021. Also, the two long-term members were asked to identify a group in the church that demonstrated each gift. The following is the compiled list of spiritual gifts at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church (Table 1).

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<sup>308</sup> <https://upwards.blog/2012/06/13/how-many-spiritual-gifts-are-there>.

**Table 1: Spiritual Gifts Listing: Friendly Missionary Baptist Church**

(Identified by two long-term members who signed consent forms)

The gift of leadership	1 Corinthians 12:28	Pastor and Deacons
The gift of giving	Romans 12:8	Trustees and Seniors
The gift of faith	Acts 16:5	Bible study class
The gift of serving	1 Peter 5:2	New Members class
The gift of teaching	Matthew 4:23	Sunday school
The gift of preaching	Acts 8:4	Pastor/ Ministers
The gift of singing	Psalms 30:4	Men and Women Choir

**Results: Research Objective # 2**

The researcher identified five spiritual gifts to present objective #2 results consistent with the research findings in chapter two and the two long-term members (24+ years) list of gifts at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The researcher prepared handouts for each session “treatment” for each participant. The researcher gave a presentation on a spiritual gift using a lesson plan developed before each session. The participants were able to ask questions to check their understanding of the subject matter. In addition, the researcher allowed participants to share their responses to the discussion question from the previous session. Chapter three, methodology, intervention design, gave a detailed account of the spiritual gifts in each session “treatment.” The following are the results of the spiritual gifts presented to address the question, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

**Spiritual Gift # 1: Proclamation**

Acts 8:26-40 provides a teachable model for using the gift of proclamation for church growth. Other scriptures are Isaiah 40:9; Psalms 40:9; Matthew 11:5; Luke 3:18; Romans 12:6-8;

1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:17; and Revelations 10:7. The pastor believes that his primary duty at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church is preaching to his congregation. He has three associate ministers that support this ministry. Each Sunday morning, the pastor or associate ministers proclaim the word of God, via Facebook, to the congregation, and the community, despite the challenges of coronavirus (COVID-19).

#### Spiritual Gift # 2: Prayer

Acts 12: 5-12 provides a teachable model for using the gift of prayer for church growth. Other scriptures are Isaiah 65:24; Daniel 9: 20-23; Psalm 72:15; Acts 1:14; Act 1:23-26; Acts 6:4-6; Act 12:5-12; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:18-19. Prayer address God the Father in Matthew 6:6 and the Son of God in Acts 7:59. Friendly Missionary Baptist Church begins and ends each meeting with a prayer to God for the congregation's growth. The researcher observed this focus on prayer during each session in this project. The church's bylaws indicate that prayer is the solid foundation for church growth.

#### Spiritual Gift # 3: Faith

Acts 6:1-8 provides a teachable model for using the gift of faith for church growth. Other scriptures are Habakkuk 2:4; 1 John 5:4-5; Hebrews 11:1; Hebrews 11:39-40; Matthew 8:8-10; Luke 17:15-19; Acts 16:5; Acts 16:15; 2 John 4-6. Pastor Harrison insists that the congregation has faith that God will grow the church. The researcher observed their faith when twenty-two members came to the sessions for spiritual gifts and church growth training. Seventeen participants signed consent forms, completed a pre-test, a post-test, and attended the five sessions. Six participants who have less than one year of membership indicated faith in God in growing the church during session # 3.

### Spiritual Gift # 4: Teaching

Acts 5:17-29 provides a teachable model for using the gift of teaching for church growth. Other scriptures are Exodus 18:17-20; Deuteronomy 4:1; Matthew 4:23-25; Matthew 28:19; John 14:26; Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Teaching materials and booklets come from the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention. The pastor led a five-week new members class on Saturday, August 7, 14, 21, 28, and September 4, 2021. The congregation has a dedicated Sunday school ministry that teaches classes via Zoom, coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions.

### Spiritual Gift # 5: Leadership

Acts 7:17-34 provide a teachable model for using the gift of leadership for church growth. Other scriptures are Exodus 3:9-12; John 10:1-3; Acts 13:17-23; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Hebrews 8:8-10. The pastor, presiding officers of the deacons, and the trustees meet monthly to assess the church's strategic plan. On September 29, 2021, the pastor met with his leadership team to plan the next steps in this thesis project. His leadership team allocated funds to support the church's lecture series on church growth. They plan to use the results in this thesis project as foundations for this next task.

## **Results: Research Objective # 3**

### Introduction

The researcher followed Creswell's Phenomenological Research steps, as outlined in chapter 3, to analyze the data for the target group. The first step of data assessment was the identification of three broad themes. The themes uncovered were awareness (Question # 1), engagement (Question # 2), and teachable moments (Question # 3). The second step was to identify textual and structural descriptions for each theme. Finally, the third step was to identify

composite descriptions of the “essence” of the experience and report an understanding of the experience in written form.

#### Generate Themes

Awareness is defined as “knowledge and understanding that sometimes happens or exists.”<sup>309</sup> For example, for Question # 1, when participants were asked to list spiritual gifts, they were able to record some spiritual gifts, which meant they had the knowledge and knew that Friendly Missionary Baptist Church exhibited these gifts.

Engagement is defined as “the act of engaging or the state of being engaged.”<sup>310</sup> The participants, when asked to identify five spiritual gifts and describe how once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church (Question # 2), revealed engagement. There were different degrees of engagement, but the engagement was not directly related to the years of membership. Instead, the level of engagement was linked to increased knowledge gained from the pre-test to the post-test.

Some members’ engagement came from greater clarity, others from heightened awareness. But most participants’ engagement came from a personal connection and knowledge of how God uses spiritual gifts to grow the church.

Teachable moments can occur when participants have a heightened interest in spiritual gifts and desire to utilize their understanding and purpose of spiritual gifts to grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church individually and collectively (Question # 3). Teachable moments allow the participants to become a part of the shared growth of the church using spiritual gifts. When participants knew their spiritual gifts and the gifts of other members in the congregation,

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<sup>309</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

they were more likely to share their understanding and purpose of spiritual gifts with others. Also, they are more likely to recognize that every member in the congregation has gifts that they can use to grow a healthy church. Finally, teachable moments remind members that spiritual gifts are given to believers for ministry duties and lead to practical activities within the church.<sup>311</sup>

### Textual and Structural Descriptions

The researcher utilized the textual and structural descriptions (coding) to interpret the participants' responses. The *Likert Scale* was used to develop a coding system for participants' responses. The *Likert Scale* is a type of a rating system used in questionnaires and is designed to measure participants' attitude towards a specific subject".<sup>312</sup> The responses used with this scale provided the researcher with guidelines to differentiate the seventeen participants. The coding structure for each of the first two questions (Question # 1 and Question # 2) was measured with the *Likert Scale*: 1, 2, or 3 in this thesis project.

Receiving a 1 indicates that the participant had limited knowledge of spiritual gifts and their actual location in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Receiving a 2 indicates that the participant had a general knowledge of spiritual gifts and their precise location in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Receiving a 3 indicates that the participant had a personal connection to spiritual gifts and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church (Friendly Missionary Baptist Church). A personal connection is interpreted as a participant's knowledge of their spiritual gift or gifts and the gifts of other members of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

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<sup>311</sup> Brian DeVries, *Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*, 5.

<sup>312</sup> <http://www.britannica.com>.

### Composite Description with Experience: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

It was evident that asking the same three questions on the pre-test and post-test relative to years of membership yielded greater awareness and engagement for new members in this thesis project. However, the most significant is that incremental engagement results were directly related to increased knowledge gained from the pre-test to the post-test.

The composite description is listed in tables below, with results from three questions the researcher asked the seventeen participants on both the pre-test and the post-test.

Question # 1: *List the spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in scripture.* Coding: 1 - limited or no knowledge of spiritual gifts; Coding: 2 - general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church; Coding: 3 - a personal connection to gifts and understanding of how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church (Friendly Missionary Baptist Church).

The composite description for question # 1 is presented in Table 2, reveals the levels of awareness:

**Table 2. Composite Description Question # 1: Levels of Awareness**

Participant	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test vs. Post-Test	Comments/Questions/Thoughts
#1	2	3	+1	1 to 5 years membership
#2	2	3	+1	1 to 5 years membership
#3	2	2	Same	More than 20 years membership
#4	1	3	+2	Less than 1 year membership
#5	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#6	1	2	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#7	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#8	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#9	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#10	2	2	Same	Less than 1 year membership
#11	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#12	2	2	Same	More than 35 years membership
#13	2	2	Same	More than 30 years membership
#14	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership
#15	2	3	+1	More than 38 years membership
#16	2	3	+1	More than 52 years membership
#17	2	3	+1	Less than 1 year membership

Awareness

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church has been established since 1931. Four participants were around before its last erection in 1999 and have memories of spiritual gifts in the

congregation then and now. What is remarkable is that twelve participants have a personal connection to gifts on the post-test and understand how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church (Friendly Missionary Baptist Church). Five of the twelve came early to each session and asked questions about using their gifts to help grow the church. Eight of the twelve have been members for less than one year. When asked by the researcher in session one why they sought to unite with this church, the typical response was that they felt like part of this church family and could grow spiritually. Although they are new members at this church, they all have previous membership at other churches and are over forty years of age.

The initial question asked participants to *list the spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found on Scripture*. Two participants had a code 1 rating on the pre-test (both were members for less than one year). Fifteen participants had a code 2 rating. Five of the fifteen were long-term members (more than twenty years membership). Ten of the fifteen were new members (five years or less membership). The results of the pre-test indicated that fifteen participants were engaged. They had a general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. However, no participants on the pre-test had a personal connection (gifts) and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church.

On the post-test, five participants had general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church and had a code 2 rating. Four of these participants had the same response on both tests (one was a new member, and three were long-term members). Of the five spiritual gifts, the researcher identified twelve participants with a personal connection to gifts and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church. They each had a code 3 rating. When the researcher finished the last presentation, all

Seventeen participants indicated that they knew their spiritual gift or gifts. They recommended that training on spiritual gifts be incorporated into the church's new member's class and shared with every member in the congregation. The pastor and his leadership team meet at the end of the last session for the next steps in their strategic plan on Church growth.

Further analysis of the participants awareness from the pre-test to the post-test revealed remarkable results:

- Four participants had a predetermined mindset concerning spiritual gifts. This response was indicated by the same answer on both the pre-test and the post-test. Three were long-term members, and one was a new member.
- Thirteen of the seventeen participants grew from the pre-test to the post-test in awareness of recognizing and understanding spiritual gifts that they did not previously have. Incremental growth was indicated in a personal connection to spiritual gifts they identified. These participants had incremental growth when they mentioned at least one new spiritual gift on the post-test and its location in scripture.
- Becoming a new member could enhance awareness in the desire to understand spiritual gifts and how God uses gifts to grow the church. Awareness impact grew from the pre-test to the post-test. For example, one new member had a code 1 rating on the pre-test and a code 3 rating on the post-test and understood how spiritual gifts are used to grow the church. This new member had less than one year of membership and finished the new members class on Saturday before session # 3 in this thesis project.

Question # 2: *Select 5 of the spiritual gifts listed in question # 1 and describe how once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church:* Coding: 1 - limited or no knowledge of spiritual gifts; Coding: 2 - general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church; Coding: 3 - personal connection (to gifts) and understand how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church (Friendly Missionary Baptist Church).

The Composite Description for question # 2 is presented in Table 3, reveals the levels of engagement:

**Table 3. Composite Description Question # 2: Levels of Engagement**

Participant	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre vs. Post-Test	Comments
#1	3	3	Same	New Member
#2	3	3	Same	New Member
#3	1	2	+1	Long Term; additional gifts; greater clarity
#4	2	3	+1	New Member; recognized all 5 gifts; engaged
#5	2	3	+1	New Member; additional gifts; engaged
#6	2	2	Same	New Member
#7	2	3	+1	New Member; recognized all 5 gifts; engaged
#8	2	3	+1	New Member; additional gifts; engaged
#9	1	3	+2	New Member; additional gifts; engaged
#10	1	2	+1	New Member; additional gifts; heightened
#11	2	3	+1	New Member; additional gifts; engaged
#12	2	2	Same	Long Term Member
#13	1	2	+1	Long Term; additional gifts; greater clarity
#14	2	3	+1	New Member; additional gifts; engaged
#15	2	3	+1	Long Term; additional gifts; engaged
#16	1	2	+1	Long Term; additional gifts; greater clarity
#17	1	3	+2	New Member; additional gifts; engaged

## Engagement

All seventeen participants attended the five sessions, which increased their knowledge and understanding of the purpose of spiritual gifts and how God uses them to grow the church. The participants were asked questions and shared their understanding of spiritual gifts and how they can use their gifts to grow the church. The researcher also asked questions at the end of each session.

All seventeen participants made the connection from naming five spirit gifts found in scripture from the pre-test to the post-test. Four participants had predetermined mindsets with the same rating on both tests in engagement. Two had a code 2 rating, and the other two had a code 3 rating. The five teaching sessions significantly impacted six participants' general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts found in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. They had a code 2 rating on the post-test. But two of the six participants had predetermined mindsets with the same rating on both tests. Eleven participants made the personal connection (gifts) and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church. They had a code 3 rating on the post-test. But two of the eleven participants had predetermined mindsets. Therefore, they had a code 3 rating on both tests. What is significant is that two of the eleven participants had an increased engagement from a code 1 to a code 3 rating on engagement.

Two new members demonstrated highly increased engagement from the pre-test to the post-test. They moved from a limited knowledge (code 1) to making personal connections to how God uses spiritual gifts to grow the church (code 3). One new member recognized additional gifts in the sessions on the post-test with a code 2 rating, which was not predetermined. Three long-term members recognized additional gifts on the post-test with a code 2 rating, which was not predetermined. Six new members recognized additional gifts on the post-

test with a code 3 rating, which was not predetermined. One long-term member recognized additional gifts on the post-test with a code 3 rating, which was not predetermined. Two new members recognized all five gifts on the post-test with a code 3 rating, which was not predetermined.

Three long-term members had greater clarity (code 2 rating) in their engagement and asked questions during each session. The researcher responded to their questions which helped them list additional gifts on the post-test. One new member had a heightened engagement (code 2 rating) on the post-test and listed additional gifts on the post-test. Nine members were engaged (code 3 rating) with a personal connection and knowledge of how God uses spiritual gifts to grow the church. Eight of the nine engaged were new members. Only one of the nine engaged was a long-term member.

Six members had limited engagement (code 1) on the pre-test yet increased engagement on the post-test (code 2 or 3). Three were new members, and three were long-term members. In addition, seven participants were knowledgeable of spiritual gifts in scripture and Friendly Missionary Baptist Church on the pre-test (code 2). However, they did not make the connection to how God uses spiritual gifts to grow the church (code 3) until they took the post-test.

Two participants' level of engagement on the pre-test and post-test was (code 3) and predetermined. Although their engagement was predetermined, they asked questions and gave helpful comments at each session. As a result, they positively enhanced the engagement of other participants in this thesis project. They also attended all five sessions and encouraged the other participants. All seventeen participants attended the five sessions and had comments and questions.

In addition, two participants brought information on spiritual gifts to each session and shared it with other participants. These participants were new members and facilitated engagement in all sessions.

### Teachable Moments

The last theme was attached to the third question on the pre-test and the post-test in listing further comments, thoughts, and questions. On the pre-test, all participants had comments. However, on the post-test, two participants did not have comments. As a result, four sub-themes of teachable moments emerged among the seventeen comments:

- The use of gifts to glorify God
- The use of gifts to share with others
- The use of gifts to draw unbelievers to God
- The use of gifts to lift-up other believers in the congregation.

Question # 3: *List additional questions/ thoughts/ comments about the impact of spiritual gifts on church growth.*

The Composite Description for question # 3 is presented in Table 4, reveals teachable moments:

**Table 4. Teachable Moments Sub-Theme Question # 3: Teachable Moments**

Participants	Pre-Test Sub-Themes	Post-Test Sub-Themes	Composite Sub-Themes
#1	Involvement	Glorify God	Glorify God
#2	Gifts	Sharing Gifts	Sharing Gifts
#3	Sharing Gifts	Draw Unbelievers	Sharing Gifts
#4	Existence	Understanding	Integrated
#5	Sharing Gifts	Sharing Gifts	Sharing Gifts
#6	Draw Unbelievers	No Comments	Draw Unbelievers
#7	Overcome fears	Stability	Integrated
#8	Lift-Up Believers	Glorify God	Lift-Up Believers
#9	Use Gifts	Use Gifts	Use Gifts
#10	Development	Discover Gifts	Development
#11	No comments	Use Gifts	Use Gifts
#12	Use Gifts	Practice Gifts	Use Gifts
#13	Lift-Up Believers	Witnessing	Lift-Up Believers
#14	Glorify God	Sharing Gifts	Glorify God
#15	Healing	Prayer	Integrated
#16	Feeding	No Comments	Integrated
#17	Development	Understanding	Integrated

Four composite sub-theme results are presented below for the seventeen participants in this research project (several other sub-themes were integrated into the four exhibited):

First, members should use their gifts to glorify God. Members can glorify God by proclaiming His name as faithful followers of the Christian faith. Glorifying God is most important in the life of the church. All honor goes to the Lord. Members must never forget that God is always the central theme in every ministry, whatever gift or gifts they have. The church is at its best when God is the focus and not programs or individual achievements. Involvement in the church's activities is essential to lifting-up God in the church and the community. Glorifying God will happen when the Spirit leads members to serve God's agenda rather than personal gratification. Finally, members must lift-up God's name in prayers. Through Him, members can build a healthy church and bring healing to lost people in the world. Glorifying God can grow the church. Leaders must glorify God and teach members to do the same.

Second, members should use their gifts to share with others. Sharing gifts is one sign of a healthy church. It is a means by which members sustain their faith. Members who share their faith with others help them to transform their lives. Sharing gifts with others in faith encourages others to be steadfast in walking in the fulness of God. When members discover their gift or gifts and apply them in their daily walk with God and share them with others, the church can grow and accomplish its mission in the world. Sharing is one way that members can witness not only in the church but also in the community and develop their families. People need to see God at work as believers practice using their gifts to build up the body of Christ. Members must share their gifts to help each other overcome fears in the world. Sharing gifts with others can grow the church. Christian leaders must promote a culture of sharing where members can grow in knowledge and understanding of God.

Third, members should use their gifts to draw unbelievers to God. Members can draw unbelievers by teaching them how to live the Christian life. They can demonstrate how to internalize biblical truths in mind and heart as living examples of the faith. If members use their spiritual gifts to impact the lives of unbelievers, they can see God in them and discover an alternative to the lives they are living. Members must help God draw people to the church so that they can have a new beginning in life and come to hear the good news for salvation and redemption. Everything members do in the church should focus on God and using gifts to help save unbelievers. The primary mission of making disciples must never stop at the church doors. People may never come to the church building, but what they observe in believers can make a difference in whether they stay in the world or unite with a congregation. Unbelievers are looking for stability in their lives. When believers use their gifts to draw them, it helps unbelievers find peace with God and others. Using gifts to draw unbelievers can grow the church. Spiritual leaders must guide the local church into drawing unbelievers by training members to serve God in the various ministries in the church.

Fourth, members should use their gifts to lift-up other believers in the congregation. The primary way to lift-up other followers of Christ is through individual and corporate prayers. Through prayer, members build a daily relationship with God and other believers. Prayer can motivate others to be open with God at the deepest level of their being, especially in difficult times. Members in the church need to encourage each other using their gifts. Lack of motivation may be why many youths in this generation are falling away from the church. Youths need to be built up by older members to understand their role in the church. All members in the church can benefit when other members use their gift or gifts in times of stress and despair. For example, some members have lost friends and relatives in this pandemic, yet other church members have

blessed them through their spiritual gifts. Lifting-up other believers can grow the church. Spiritual leaders can lift-up other believers in the congregation through prayer and faithfulness to the word of God.

### **Results: Research Objective # 4 (Meeting with Long-Term Members)**

#### Introduction

The researcher met separately with two long-term members (24+ years) on August 1, 2021. The researcher gave a brief outline of this thesis project, including six interview questions (Appendix F). The meetings were recorded to capture information to plan five sessions for the seventeen target participants. The first meeting started at 3:00 pm and ended at 3:55 pm, and the second meeting began at 4:00 pm and ended at 4:55 pm. Notes were taken after each video recording to document the meetings further. The researcher compiled the finding to develop lesson plans for the five sessions for the target group.

The following are the questions and composite results from the two long-term members who were interviewed and signed consent forms:

#### Interview Review Item # 1

*Identify five (5) spiritual gifts and share how each gift contributed to your growth as a Friendly Missionary Baptist Church Member.*

The gift of leadership (1 Corinthians 12:28): The pastor and deacons are called by God to lead the congregation. The gift of giving (Romans 12:8): The church needs effective trustees and senior members to manage the church's finances.

The gift of faith (Acts 16:5): All members must have faith in God. The Bible study class meets every Tuesday night has faith that God will open their hearts so that they can learn how to use the Word of God to attract unbelievers.

The gift of serving (1 Peter 5:2): Every member in the church must serve God and praise His Holy Name. The new members in the church are dedicated to learning how to serve God.

The gift of teaching (Matthew 4:23): The Sunday school is the training arm of the church and the best way to teach young members how to use their gifts.

The gift of preaching (Acts 8:4): God leads the pastor in delivering sermons to grow the church. As a result, he has faithful members committed to his vision.

The gift of singing (Psalms 30:4): The choir leads the congregation in singing songs that help members remember that blessings and praise are to our Lord and Savior.

#### Interview Review Item # 2

*Why is each gift necessary for church growth? (Prompt for biblical teachings chapters and verses)*

Gifts are necessary to encourage mature church members and those who desire to become effective in ministry. These gifts are based upon individual functional and practical abilities.

#### Interview Review Item # 3

*What ministry can cultivate your growth, understanding, and development in this Church? (Prompt for shepherding, outreach, Christian education, visionary, giving, prayer, faith)*

The church is lacking motivation and physical fitness for growth. The main target is the young generation.

#### Interview Review Item # 4

*How can we better develop spiritual gifts in this Church? (Prompt for inclusions in sermons, Bible study, Sunday school, written/printed/website information/ results from the study)*

Members need to take more ownership, invest more time in today's life experiences, and get other people involved for the church to grow.

Interview Review Item # 5

*What should a healthy church should look like? (Prompt for human rights, dignity, justice, change agent, empowerment, holy, service, faithful)*

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church needs more members of all ages; the younger, the better. In addition, the church needs dedicated members who are willing to work together. Working together will produce a healthy church.

Interview Review Item # 6

*What specific recommendations do you have concerning building a healthy Church? (Prompt for the power of the word, faith, prayer, leadership)*

Members need to learn about themselves, determine the church's needs, develop a growth plan, hire and recruit people to assist the ministries in the church, and develop each leadership team in the congregation.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### Summary

Chapter one gave the framework for the ministry context of this thesis project at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, where seventeen participants met for seven weeks. This church is a fantastic testimony of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Attendance in worship services has been declining for more than twenty years. However, this year, ten new members have joined the congregation. While numerical growth is significant, the focus of this thesis project is spiritual growth. The congregation is primarily African American. The pastor understands that church growth will require that he guide the congregation to understand their spiritual gifts. As the congregation is aging, there is a need to develop followers who will use their spiritual gifts and take direct responsibility for the continuous growth and development of the church. The research question was, “Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?”

Chapter two gives the framework for the research literature on investigating the impact of spiritual gifts on Church growth. Generally, the literature review represents many sources from various authorities from different contributors in exploring spiritual gifts and church growth concepts. The research identified a gap in the literature in addressing church growth using spiritual gifts. Several themes ran through the literature. The first theme was the dynamic nature of church growth. Another theme in the review was the criterion for developing spiritual church growth. The subsequent theme scholars focused on was the biblical and theological basis for church growth. Also, sources identified healthy church growth in the literature review as another theme. The last theme that ran through the literature review was the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and church growth.

Academic scholars need to engage in critical analysis to explain the written work in the book of Acts regarding the church's growth using the spiritual gifts of God. At the historical level, the early church growth contours received much attention. Similarly, numerous works devoted awareness to other considerations that touched vaguely upon aspects of the church's quantitative growth in Acts.

Therefore, the central focus of this thesis project was church growth in the book of Acts as teachable models for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. The scripture disclosed numerous biblical and theological passages on spiritual gifts for church growth. The researcher presented church growth principles for developing spiritual gifts that may benefit Christian at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Building upon the literature, the researcher saw a clear link between church growth and the five spiritual gifts presented to the target group of participants:

- Spiritual gift # 1: Proclamation
- Spiritual gift # 2: Prayer
- Spiritual gift # 3: Faith
- Spiritual gift # 4: Teaching
- Spiritual gift # 5: Leadership

In chapter three, the researcher used Creswell's procedures for conducting phenomenological research. This model provided the researcher with a well-thought-out plan to interpret the data collected. The research question, "Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?" was the driving question in collecting and analyzing data. The researcher began with two long-term members whose combined church membership was seventy-six years of active participation. Next, the researcher met individually with the two long-term members, shared the purpose of this thesis project and a list of spiritual

gifts defined in the project. Then, the researcher asked them to compile a list of spiritual gifts within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church found in scripture. This list was compiled and shared with the researcher on July 29, 2021. Also, the two long-term members were asked to identify a group in the church that demonstrates each gift.

The researcher identified five spiritual gifts consistent with the research findings in chapter two and the list of gifts compiled by the two long-term members at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Then the researcher conducted in-depth instruction on each spiritual gift: Where is the gift located in scripture? What is the biblical context of the gift? What are the implications of the gift in scripture? What are the implications of the gift for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church? Also, the researcher developed a two-page handout on each spiritual gift. In addition, the researcher created a half-page group homework handout for each session on understanding spiritual gifts found in scripture.

In chapter four, the researcher analyzed the data from Creswell's research procedures, with all seventeen participants taking a pre-test and post-test. This methodology allowed the researcher to interpret what the participants learned and understood, resulting in three major themes. The themes were awareness, engagement, and teachable moments. Analyzing the data collected using these themes solidified answers to the research question, "Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?"

The awareness component of the data (Table 2) revealed several findings from the pre-test to the post-test concerning the seventeen participants who started and completed the treatment:

- It was evident that asking the same three questions on the pre-test and post-test relative to years of membership yielded greater awareness for new members in this thesis project.
- Thirteen of the seventeen participants grew from the pre-test to the post-test in awareness of recognizing and understanding spiritual gifts that they did not previously have. Incremental growth was indicated in a personal connection to spiritual gifts they identified. The thirteen participants had incremental growth when they mentioned at least one new spiritual gift on the post-test and its location in scripture.
- Becoming a new member could enhance awareness in the desire to understand spiritual gifts and how God uses gifts to grow the church. Awareness impact grew from the pre-test to the post-test. For example, one new member had a code 1 rating on the pre-test and a code 3 rating on the post-test in understanding spiritual gifts and how God uses gifts to grow the church. This new member had less than one year of membership and finished the new members class on Saturday before session three in this project.
- What is remarkable is that twelve of the seventeen participants have a personal connection (to gifts) on the post-test and understand how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church (Friendly Missionary Baptist Church).

The engagement component of the data (Table 3) revealed several findings from the pre-test to the post-test:

- All seventeen participants attended the five sessions, which increased their knowledge and understanding of the purpose of spiritual gifts and how God uses

them to grow the church. Incremental engagement results were also directly related to increased knowledge gained from the pre-test to the post-test.

- All seventeen participants made the connection from naming five spirit gifts found in scripture on the pre-test to the post-test. This connection revealed that the five teaching sessions significantly impacted four participants' general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts in scripture and within Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Also, nine participants made a personal connection to gifts and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church. What is significant is that two participants (new members) had an incremental engagement rating from code 1 to code 3.
- Six members had limited engagement (code 1) on the pre-test yet increased engagement on the post-test (Code 2 or 3). Seven participants were knowledgeable of spiritual gifts in scripture and Friendly Missionary Baptist Church on the pre-test (code 2). However, they did not make the connection to how God uses spiritual gifts to grow the church (code 3) until they took the post-test. The researcher's opinion is that knowledge gained from the five sessions increased their engagement.
- Two participants' level of engagement on the pre-test and post-test was (code 3) and predetermined. Although their engagement was predetermined, they asked questions and gave helpful comments at each session. As a result, they positively enhanced the engagement of other participants in this thesis project.

Teachable moments (Table 4) are the thesis project's climax and reveal significant sub-themes. The researcher saw four sub-themes in responding to the research question, which has driven the researcher to look further in interpreting the data collected.

- First, members should use their gifts to glorify God. Members must never forget that God is always the central theme in every ministry, regardless of the gift or gifts they have. Glorifying God will happen when the Spirit leads them to serve God's agenda rather than personal satisfaction. Also, involvement in the church's ministries is essential to lifting-up God in the church and the community.
- Second, members should use their gifts to share with others. Sharing gifts is one sign of a healthy church. Sharing is one way that members can witness not only in the church but also in the community and develop their families. People need to see God at work as Christians utilize their gifts to build up the body of Christ. Members must share their gifts to help each other overcome fears in the world.
- Third, members should use their gifts to draw unbelievers to God. If members use their spiritual gifts to impact the lives of unbelievers, they can see God in them and discover an alternative to the lives they are living. Members must help God draw people to the church so that they can have a new beginning in life and come to hear the good news for salvation and redemption. People may never come to the church building, but what they observe in believers can make a difference in whether they stay in the world or unite with a congregation.
- Fourth, members should use their gifts to lift-up other believers in the church. All members in the church can benefit when other members use their gift or gifts in times of stress and despair to lift-up others. For example, some members have lost

friends and relatives in this pandemic, yet other church members have blessed them through their spiritual gifts. In addition, members can lift-up other believers through individual and corporate prayers.

The meeting with the two long-term members allowed the researcher to highlight the significance of spiritual gifts in the church's life, which is passionate to him. The church has a rich history as faithful members who have used their gifts to glorify God. The researcher reviewed the entire process with them, starting with the list of spiritual gifts they identified. Then, the researcher revealed the five spiritual gifts presented on five consecutive Wednesday nights. The two long-term members were told that seventeen church members were in the target group and that they were given both a pre-test and a post-test. The researcher explained the results to each long-term member and listened to their feedback. They were overwhelmed to discover how God has provided a means for growing the church. When asked about the spiritual gifts that contributed to their growth, they agreed that teaching and preaching gifts were most significant. They believe that gifts are necessary for congregation members to become effective in various ministries.

The long-term members insisted that the focus group for church growth is the young generation. They believe that older church members need to train young members to be successful leaders. They shared that a spiritual gift can be developed when every member commits more time to its (church) ministries and gets others involved. They believe that a healthy church is a church that shows love to each other and is willing to work together for the glory of God. When asked what specific recommendations they have concerning building a healthy church, they indicated that the church needs to train more young people and prepare them for leadership roles at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church and the district association.

## Conclusions

- Understanding and developing spiritual gifts impact church growth because they are found throughout scripture as teachable models
- Once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church.
- This thesis project uses spiritual gifts found in scripture for church growth. Olalekan's model highlighted the importance of biblical preaching. Tennant's model emphasizes the whole church's involvement in the gifts of leadership. Thomas's model stresses teaching for understanding. Storm's mode elaborates on understanding spiritual gifts. Finally, Dr. Johnsen's model uses the phenological research framework to address God's provisions throughout the Old Testament.
- The researcher, building on their models, focuses on the spiritual gifts of proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership to address the research question, "Will an understanding and development of spiritual gifts grow Friendly Missionary Baptist Church?"
- The church growth principles: models of spiritual gifts for church growth in chapter two of this thesis project were developed by the researcher and used to select five spiritual gifts to present to the target group, with contributions from two long-term members.
- Opportunities existed for the researcher to define spiritual gifts, discuss where gifts are found in scripture, and focus on the Acts of the Apostles.
- Opportunities were also available to examine the impact of spiritual gifts in scripture and on Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

Spiritual leaders should encourage members to freely use the five spiritual gifts, proclamation, prayer, faith, teaching, and leadership, to build up the body of Christ. These gifts represent the biblical foundations for this Spirit-empowerment model to address church growth in this thesis project. If a church is not growing, it lacks one or more of these spiritual gifts. Once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they can use them to build a healthy church.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

This thesis project makes recommendations to benefit future studies using spiritual gifts to grow healthy churches. First, church leaders can research spiritual gifts' effect on new members' training in an urban church. New members' desire to understand their gifts is a significant outcome in this thesis project and has value for the church's spiritual growth. Second, researchers can use the church growth principles: models of spiritual gifts to address improvements in strategic planning for the local church. Leaders must be intentional in tackling specific issues that will enhance church planning and use these biblical principles to move the church forward. Third, church leaders must understand their gift of leadership in addressing the effectiveness of the numerous ministries in the church, which is an outgrowth of this thesis project. Therefore, research on the effect of leaders as organizational change agents is helpful for pastor leadership and the academic community, focusing on the understanding of their gift. Fourth, there are significant reasons to believe that the results in this thesis project can help in investigating similar churches, even across social diversities, given university decline in church membership across denominations and cultures. Fifth, a healthy church should attest to God's provision in using spiritual gifts to move a congregation on to His agenda through the power of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, a recommendation for future research investigating the decline in

attendance in church membership should include a more significant sample size and diverse membership for the target group to highlight His provision. Finally, future researchers should use a Spirit-empowerment model as the foundation for their inquiry.

### **Implications**

This thesis project results will provide the next steps for Friendly Missionary Baptist Church, beginning March 2022. As a result, the ministry leadership team can adjust the church's 2021-2022 strategic plan on church growth to include the following:

- The new members' training class can be revised to include instruction on the five spiritual gifts in this thesis project and changed from five weeks to eight weeks.
- The church's Sunday school can focus on developing an understanding of the spiritual gift of teaching to ensure that each learner is prepared to deal with the radical changes in the church and the world today, with particular emphasis on young adults.
- The pastor, deacons, and trustees can ensure that other Christian leaders are loving as they guide church members in the church from where they are in their Christian journey to where God desires them to be.
- The members in the congregation can focus on modeling the Christian character of love as they use their spiritual gifts to draw unbelievers to Christ.
- The ministry leadership team can set aside time and resources to develop the church's prayer and proclamation ministry, including quarterly and yearly training sessions for church leaders at the district and state levels.

### **What Did the Researcher Learn from Implementing this Thesis Project?**

This thesis project advanced the researchers understanding of spiritual gifts for growing the church spiritually and numerically. Meeting in the five consecutive sessions taught the researcher that, although church members are familiar with gifts, using spiritual gifts to grow the church was new to them. This result was evident when the target group had general knowledge and location of spiritual gifts on the pre-test but had no personal connection and understanding of how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church. However, what is remarkable is that after the five sessions, twelve participants had a personal connection (to gifts) and understood how God uses spiritual gifts to build a healthy church.

This thesis project gave the researchers insight into how new members respond to training on gifts of the Spirit relative to members who have been active for more than twenty years. It was evident that asking the same three questions on the pre-test and post-test relative to years of membership yielded greater awareness and engagement for new members in this thesis project. The most significant is that incremental engagement results were directly related to increased knowledge gained from the pre-test to the post-test.

This thesis project expanded the researcher's understanding of the theoretical foundations of church growth. A researcher must select a theoretical model that addresses the problem in the ministry setting or develop a model that does. Since there was no model available to meet the researcher's criteria, the researcher had to create a model. The development of the church growth principles: models of spiritual gifts for the church was refreshing to the researcher. This model and the implementation of this thesis project have given the research much joy. The researcher can now celebrate with gratefulness and appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit and the fruit He has displayed in understanding the effect of spiritual gifts on church growth.

Finally, this thesis project revealed that God is still working His plan in the church's life concerning the spiritual gifts and growth of the researcher. The researcher started working on the Doctor of Ministry in Fall 2019 here at Liberty University. Through the power of God's Holy Spirit, family support, and perseverance, the researcher can see the end to this intense training. The researcher has been waiting with great anticipation to share this project's results with the many churches in the Mount Pilgrim District Association in Central Alabama. The researcher is thankful to God for the many professors who have shared their gifts in preparing the researcher for future works. To God Be the Glory for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of this research.

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## **Appendix A: Primary Planning Questions**

### **PLANNING QUESTIONS: PRIMARY QUESTIONS**

1. What intervention (plan) will you use to address the problem?
2. Define in great detail the actual intervention plan. (This may take a page or two.)
3. Specify how the intervention would make a change in your problem.
4. How will you inform or involve those in the project?
5. Whose approvals will you need?
6. How will you get the participants' consent?
7. Will you need any other resources or other personal preparation, and if so, what?
8. What is currently true regarding the problem you want to address?

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## **Appendix B: Secondary Planning Questions**

### **PLANNING QUESTIONS: SECONDARY QUESTIONS**

1. When and how will you begin the project once approved by IRB?
2. What will be a fair trial period to evaluate your intervention (how long?)
3. What are your criteria for evaluating, i.e., what do you see as a successful outcome in this intervention?
4. In what specific ways will the new approach be compared to the old approach or what was done before?
5. What specific tools will you use to gather data and measure the effects of the intervention?
6. Are you using triangulation? If so, what are they? (ex: three methods for gathering data might include participant journals, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, etc.)
7. Will you keep a reflective journal to bracket any biases during the entire project?
8. How will you explain the project to the participants?
9. What will you do if some do not want to participate or drop out? (We cannot add new members in once the research begins.)





## Appendix E: Participants' Demographics

Please respond to the following questions. Check all that apply to you.

1. How long have you been active in this church?

- Less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_
- 1 to 5 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 to 20 years \_\_\_\_\_
- More than 20 years \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your education level?

- Finished High School \_\_\_\_\_
- Finished a two-year college \_\_\_\_\_
- Earned a bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_
- Earned a graduate degree \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your gender?

- Male \_\_\_\_\_
- Female \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you know your spiritual gift or gifts?

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your age range?

- 25 to 39 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 40 to 64 years \_\_\_\_\_
- 65 and older \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Interview Review Questionnaire

### Interview Review Questions

#### 24+ years Members

Gifts are crucial to the growth of members at this Church. As you review the list of the spiritual gifts, respond to the following:

1. Identify five (5) spiritual gifts and share how each gift contributed to your growth as a Friendly Missionary Baptist Church member.
2. Why is each gift necessary for church growth? (Prompt for biblical teachings chapters and verses)
3. What ministry can cultivate your growth, understanding, and development in this Church? (Prompt for shepherding, outreach, Christian education, visionary, giving, prayer, faith)
4. How can we better develop spiritual gifts in this Church? (Prompt for inclusions in sermons, Bible study, Sunday school, written/printed/website information/ results from the study)
5. What do you think a healthy church should look like? (Prompt for human rights, dignity, justice, change agent, empowerment, holy, service, faithful)
6. What specific recommendations do you have concerning building a healthy Church? (Prompt for the power of the word, faith, prayer, leadership)

## Appendix G: Consent Form

Investigating the Impact of Spiritual Gifts on Church Growth  
Johnnie Finkley  
Liberty University  
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to participate in a research study held at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, and you are a member of this church. The purpose of this study is the use of spiritual gifts found in Scripture as teachable models for church growth. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research project. Johnnie Finkley, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this research study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of the study is the use of spiritual gifts found in Scripture as teachable models for church growth. The thesis statement is that once church members understand their spiritual gifts and purpose, they will use them to build a healthy church.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, I am asking you to do the following things:

1. Attend a meeting on Wednesday at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a pre-test.
2. Attend the second-sixth meeting on consecutive Wednesdays at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes. At these meetings, you will be receiving information on spiritual gifts and church growth. The information will include: what are spiritual gifts? Are they necessary? Can you develop your gifts? What ministries can cultivate church growth? What is the biblical basis for church growth?
3. Attend a seventh meeting on the following Wednesday at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a post-test.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants may receive the direct benefits of the understanding and purpose of spiritual gifts and the biblical basis of church growth.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private by the researcher. In any report that I publish, I will not include any information that would make it possible to identify a participant. All research records will be stored in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to the records in this study. I may share the data I collect from you for future research studies or with other researchers. If I share the data that I collect concerning you, I will remove all information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym to conceal their identity in this study.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all records on the electronic device will be deleted.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study.

**Voluntary Description of this Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the researcher, or Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from this Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the cell phone number or email address included in the next paragraph. If you choose to withdraw, data and information collected from you will be removed from electronic devices, destroyed immediately, and not used or included in this study.

**Contact Information and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Johnnie Finkley. You may contact me and ask any questions you have. Later, if you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact me at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx or call my cell phone at xxxxxxxxxxxxxx. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeff Johnsen, at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Please notify the researcher if you would like to receive a copy of the information in this document.**

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

---

Print Name & Signature of Participant Date

---

Signature of Investigator Date

## Appendix H: Recruitment

Dear Church Member:

As a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the Doctor of Ministry degree requirement. The purpose of this study is the use of spiritual gifts found in Scripture as teachable models for church growth. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older and you are a member of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to do the following things: 1) Attend a meeting on Wednesday, August 4, 2021, at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a pre-test. 2) Attend the second-sixth meeting on consecutive Wednesdays at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes. At these meetings, you will be receiving information on spiritual gifts and church growth. The information will include: what are gifts? Are they necessary? Can you develop your gifts? What ministries can cultivate church growth? What is the biblical basis for church growth? 3) Attend a seventh meeting on the following Wednesday at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a post-test. Participation in this study will be confidential and participant names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

In order to participate, please contact me at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

After receiving your email, I will email you a consent form and schedule a time for you to meet with me and other church members who want to participate in the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After receiving and reading the consent form, please sign and date it if you wish to participate. You may complete the consent form in person or email it to my email address.

Sincerely,

Johnnie Finkley  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
Rawlings School of Divinity  
Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
Cell Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

## Appendix I: Recruitment Follow-Up

Dear Church Member:

As a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the Doctor of Ministry degree requirement. The purpose of this study is the use of spiritual gifts found in Scripture as teachable models for church growth. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older and you are a member of Friendly Missionary Baptist Church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to do the following things: 1) Attend a meeting on Wednesday, August 4, 2021, at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a pre-test. 2) Attend the second-sixth meeting on consecutive Wednesdays at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes. At these meetings, you will be receiving information on spiritual gifts and church growth. The information will include: what are gifts? Are they necessary? Can you develop your gifts? What ministries can cultivate church growth? What is the biblical basis for church growth? 3) Attend a seventh meeting on the following Wednesday at 6:00 pm for 55 minutes and take a post-test. Participation in this study will be confidential and participant names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

In order to participate, please contact me at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

After receiving your email, I will email you a consent form and schedule a time for you and me to meet together with other church members who want to participate in the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After receiving and reading the consent form, please sign and date it if you wish to participate. You may complete the consent form in person or email it to my email address.

Sincerely,

Johnnie Finkley  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
Rawlings School of Divinity  
Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
Cell Phone: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

## Appendix J: Permission Request Letter

April 3, 2021

Rev. La Shelton Harrison  
Pastor  
Friendly Missionary Baptist Church  
xxxxxxxxxxxxx, Birmingham, AL 35204

Dear Rev Harrison:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the Doctor of Ministry degree requirement. The title of my research project is Investigating the Impact of Spiritual Gifts on Church Growth, and the purpose of my research is the use of spiritual gifts found in Scripture as teachable models for church growth.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Friendly Missionary Baptist Church.

The researcher will use the data to instruct participants in understanding their spiritual gifts and purpose for building a healthy church. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Sincerely,

Johnnie Finkley  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
Rawlings School of Divinity

## **Appendix K: Permission Letter**

Johnnie Finkley  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University  
Rawlings School of Divinity.

I am so excited that the Friendly Missionary Baptist Church will be a part of this research, investigating the Impact of Spiritual Gifts on Church Growth. As the Pastor of Friendly Missionary Baptist, I give permission to Johnnie Finkley, Doctoral Candidate to conduct this investigation at our church.

Sincerely,

Rev. La Shelton Harrison  
Pastor  
Friendly Missionary Baptist Church  
xxxxxxxxxxxxx, Birmingham Al 35204

## Appendix L: IRB Approval

May 20, 2021

Johnnie Finkley  
Jeff Johnsen

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-811 Investigating the Impact of Spiritual Gifts on Church Growth

Dear Johnnie Finkley, Jeff Johnsen:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**