

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Rescue Mission: Transformational Recovery Through Expository Preaching and Teaching**

Submitted to Dr. Scott Maze

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

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

David A. Mayes II

December 3, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by David A. Mayes II  
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

---

Mentor Dr. Scott Maze

---

Reader Dr. Brain Bohlman

## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

David A. Mayes II

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2021

Mentor: Dr. Scott Maze

The declining church stands in desperate need of regeneration, recovery, and revitalization. The primary goal for this thesis project is to lead Unity Missionary Baptist Church to a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry. This endeavor implements an eight-week reconciling gospel program consisting of the sermon series *Rescue Mission*, eight small group discussions focused on the early church in the book of Acts, and forty-eight devotional verses for the congregation to experience spiritual growth and health. The church will discover that God's Declaration is essential for a kingdom ministry. Ultimately becoming doers of the Word and not simply hearers. The quantitative research will measure change through the questionnaire responses and the congregation's engagement. Triangulation of the data is pre- and post-questionnaires, focus group study and personal interviews, and the researcher's observations. The gracious Savior employs and deploys his field ministry team of preachers to broadcast the good news of the truth through the life-giving force of Scripture to usher everlasting heart transformation. His divine influence primes the church to live out holiness, love, and service for the kingdom's expansion effort. The church urgently requires this vital spark to enflame unity and growth, learning to live and love like Jesus Christ in community. God will breathe new life into his church through expository preaching and teaching grounded in his Holy Word empowered by his Holy Spirit. The church will not only revive and survive but thrive for the believer's good and God's glory.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Lord and precious Savior, Jesus Christ, who bestowed salvation to me by rescuing a wretched sinner man and calling him into the ministry.

Thanks to my loving wife, Becky of twenty-five years, and our children for allowing this great opportunity by supporting, encouraging, and holding down the fort during many long hours of work, study, and writing.

Thanks to my parents who raised their children in church and taught them how to walk, talk, and act like Jesus Christ in everyday life. They encouraged me to continue learning by affirming, “You cannot acquire too much education.”

Thanks to all of my Liberty professors for they have touched my life in a profound way teaching the Bible, encouraging good prayer and study habits, and guiding all along the way.

Thanks to my mentor Dr. Scott Maze who advised me throughout this thesis project, truly inspired, and prayed for the church to experience spiritual growth and revitalization.

Thanks to my reader Dr. Brain Bohlman for his insightful suggestions.

Thanks to Luke Hensley for editing and making this thesis project the best possible product.

Thanks to Unity Missionary Baptist Church for allowing this research project and participating.

Fellow pastors, deacons, ministers, and church members.

Family and friends.

Glory to God.

## Contents

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction.....	1
Ministry Context.....	4
Problem Presented.....	11
Purpose Statement.....	12
Basic Assumptions.....	13
Definitions.....	15
Limitations.....	19
Delimitations.....	20
Thesis Statement.....	21

### CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review.....	23
Introduction.....	23
A Small Church Approach to Recovery.....	24
Christ-Centered Preaching.....	26
Reconciling Gospel.....	29
Revitalization.....	32
Church Growth and Health.....	35
Transformation.....	40
Conclusion.....	44
Theological Foundations.....	45
The Word.....	45
Conclusion.....	54
Theoretical Foundations.....	55
Biblical Approach.....	56
Conclusion.....	63

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction.....	65
Intervention Design.....	66
Method.....	68
Project Model.....	71
Logistics.....	75
Engagement.....	76
Implementation of Intervention Design.....	79
Purpose.....	79
Pursuit.....	81
Conclusion.....	86

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

<b>Introduction</b> .....	88
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	89
Questionnaires.....	89
Personal Interviews.....	111
Focus Group Study.....	115
<b>Engagement</b> .....	119
Week One.....	119
Week Two.....	120
Week Three.....	121
Week Four.....	121
Week Five.....	122
Week Six.....	122
Week Seven.....	123
Week Eight.....	124
<b>Expected Results</b> .....	125
<b>Personal Transformation</b> .....	127
Conclusion.....	131

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

<b>Introduction</b> .....	133
<b>Compare Information</b> .....	135
Framework Reflection.....	138
<b>Lessons Learned</b> .....	140
<b>Results Applied</b> .....	143
<b>Future Research</b> .....	145
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	149
 Bibliography.....	153
Appendix A.....	158
Appendix B.....	161
Appendix C.....	165
Appendix D.....	166
Appendix E.....	170
Appendix F.....	173
Appendix G.....	175
Appendix H.....	176
Appendix I.....	177
IRB Approval.....	179

## Tables

1.1	Table 1.....	90
1.2	Table 2.....	90
1.3	Table 3.....	91
1.4	Table 4.....	92
1.5	Table 5.....	92
1.6	Table 6.....	93
1.7	Table 7.....	94
1.8	Table 8.....	95
1.9	Table 9.....	95
1.10	Table 10.....	96
1.11	Table 11.....	97
1.12	Table 12.....	98
1.13	Table 13.....	99
1.14	Table 14.....	100
1.15	Table 15.....	100
1.16	Table 16.....	101
1.17	Table 17.....	102
1.18	Table 18.....	102
1.19	Table 19.....	103
1.20	Table 20.....	104
1.21	Table 21.....	104
1.22	Table 22.....	105
1.23	Table 23.....	106
1.24	Table 24.....	106
1.25	Table 25.....	107
1.26	Table 26.....	108
1.27	Table 27.....	108
1.28	Table 28.....	109
1.29	Table 29.....	110
1.30	Table 30.....	111

## **Abbreviations**

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

VBS *Vacation Bible School*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

It may seem extremely difficult for the church to experience revitalization and apprehend any real growth in today's climate. Church leaders may even surmise that spiritual growth and church revitalization are almost impossible. Jesus Christ, the divine Rescuer, leads His field team of ministry agents providing everything they need to succeed against enemy forces in accomplishing the kingdom mission. Jesus speaking of salvation, asserts, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).<sup>1</sup> Thus, ministers need to trust in the divine power of the Almighty to make salvation, transformation, spiritual growth, and church revitalization possible.<sup>2</sup> The main objective for ministers is to preach God's Word in demonstration of His Spirit and power, so the congregation will hear, believe, and respond in sincere action. There has to be action before growth will occur. Jesus affirms to the apostle Peter, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The primary rescue mission is the salvation of lost souls for the kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is necessary for ministers and the church to be well-versed in the Word of truth, allowing the Holy Spirit to carry out this excellent church-building assignment. The preacher must always be ready to

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *King James Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> The congregation that experiences true transformation and spiritual growth will become active in obeying the commandments of the Lord by hearing, believing, and responding to the expository preaching of God's Word. Thus, executing the Word in action, deed, and behavior are completed by carrying out the work of the ministry. The Bible says, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22).

<sup>3</sup> Gene Mims confirms, "Jesus Christ came to earth to fulfill the work of the Father in saving people from their sin. He came to live his life and to give his life in order that we might have salvation and live abundant lives. He left a church that he called into being to fulfill what he began on earth. He gave believers a Great Commission so that we might always know what to do. He left no doubt about *what to do*, but he left the *how to* in our hands. Every church and every pastor I know realizes the importance of the Great Commission. It is the grand statement of Christianity and forever stands above time and place." Gene Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church: A Compelling Image of an Achievable Future for Your Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), viii.

expose sin and encourage righteous behavior.<sup>4</sup> The mission that lies ahead is not as great as the spiritual power behind the willing minister and Christian. Paul asserts for all Christians, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10). The ultimate mission is to faithfully proclaim the Word of truth so the Savior, through the Holy Spirit, may breathe new life into the church.

One of the most prevalent problems in the church today is the lack of gospel preaching and teaching, which causes the church body to diminish.<sup>5</sup> This thesis project implements expository preaching and teaching to see the church experience transformational recovery.<sup>6</sup> Daniel Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage define faithful, expository preaching as “Christ-centered, text-driven, Spirit-led preaching that transforms lives.”<sup>7</sup> The lack of consistent expository preaching has found the church suffering from biblical illiteracy needing recovery. The church loses strength after experiencing heart-wrenching splits, which cause individual members to suffer trauma from this dysfunction and division. These divided, hurting, and dying

---

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur asserts expository preaching achieves six great ends: “Expository preaching expresses exactly the will of the glorious Sovereign and allows God to speak, not man. Expository preaching retains the thoughts of the Spirit and brings the preacher into direct and continual contact with the mind of the Holy Spirit who authored Scripture. Expository preaching frees the preacher to proclaim all the revelation of God, producing a ministry of wholeness and integrity. Expository preaching promotes biblical literacy, yielding rich knowledge of redemptive truths. Expository preaching carries ultimate divine authority, rendering the very voice of God. Expository preaching transforms the preacher, leading to transformed congregations.” John MacArthur, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 6.

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, *Preaching*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Dever asserts, “Expositional preaching is preaching in which the main point of the biblical text being considered becomes the main point of the sermon being preached. We believe the kind of preaching that tends most to the health of the church and the maturity of believers is *expositional preaching*.” Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 2. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, expanding the definition into a fuller description, assert, “Expository preaching is text-driven preaching that honors the truth of Scripture as it was given by the Holy Spirit. Its goal is to discover the God-inspired meaning through historical-grammatical-theological investigation and interpretation. By means of engaging and compelling proclamation, the preacher explains, illustrates and applies the meaning of the biblical text in submission to and in the power of the Holy Spirit, preaching Christ for a verdict of changed lives.”

churches stand in desperate need of spiritual awakening that inspires new life and vitality.<sup>8</sup> The church sometimes falters because individuals become saved, sat down, and satisfied. It is past time to awake out of sleep and allow the Holy Spirit to enflame hearts for Christ and His kingdom. The church at Sardis was clearly in need of revitalization.<sup>9</sup> Christ said, “You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God” (Rev. 3:1-2, ESV). The biblical approach to revitalization will be employed, which is the most effective and faithful to God’s local church’s intention. The primary purpose for executing this reconciling gospel intervention is for the church to revive, survive, and thrive in spiritual growth and health. An individual member of the church can only walk, talk, and act like Jesus Christ if they are intimately acquainted with how he walked, talked, and acted, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. God, the divine source through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, will breathe new life into His church as they receive and understand the Word. The Apostle Paul affirms, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Donald Whitney asserts, “The Holy Spirit not only empowers people who share the gospel, the gospel we share is itself embedded with the power of the Holy Spirit as well.”<sup>10</sup> Church restoration will

---

<sup>8</sup> William Henard communicates that for the church to awake, two essential ingredients are necessary, “The Word and Holy Spirit. The first requirement necessitates the preaching of God’s Word. The second standard for revitalization set by God involves the work of the Spirit. In order for the church to be revived, it will demand a mighty work of God’s Spirit.” William D. Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 2. John Ackerman asserts, “*Christian spirituality* is a specific quality of relationship-loving God, neighbor, and self and receiving love and grace. Perhaps the fullest expression of Christian spirituality in the New Testament is in Paul’s prayer that the Ephesians be: strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love and [that you] know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-19).” John Ackerman, *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to spiritual life in congregations* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), xi.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 125.

require a faithful under-shepherd with a passionate heart for God, the gospel, and the people. As the precious Savior and divine Author of “second chances,” Jesus Christ came to rescue, redeem, and redeploy His church for the kingdom expansion ministry. The church declines when it loses sight of the King, Jesus Christ. The church deteriorates by compromising the Word for the world, then the flesh through popular opinion rules instead of the Holy Scripture’s authority. The answer then is to keep one’s eyes on the prize, avoiding distractions allowing the Spirit to lead through the Word of truth to a kingdom focus. This thesis project will endeavor to address the declining church through expository preaching and teaching that is Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused for the good of the people and God’s glory.

### **Ministry Context**

Unity Missionary Baptist Church was established in 1974; the building is dark red brick construction with a lovely front porch and a towering white steeple. The flourishing brand-new one-hundred-and-fifty-person church retired its debt within ten years, located in the front of a subdivision close to the Knox and Anderson county line in Powell, TN. The church has a beautiful dogwood tree near the front porch, a paved parking lot, a full basement with Sunday school classes and complemented by a handsome brick fellowship hall. The formerly thriving church seemed successful for many years. One of the most predictable rituals of the congregation is meeting three times a week for worship services with a Sunday school hour before Sunday morning worship. This particular church holds fast to a traditional style of worship service. In previous years the church has been known for having extraordinary social characteristics hosting numerous dinners, Vacation Bible Schools, Fall Festivals, and events at the fellowship hall.

The church began waning about fifteen years ago when a beloved pastor resigned on an incredibly regular Sunday morning. The very afternoon the pastor left, realizing God was not finished with him and feeling that he had made a mistake, he called the deacon board chairman to ask if he could return that same Sunday evening. The deacon board would not let the pastor return resulting in the first split. Thus, inciting the search for a new pastor, which continued for many years. Over the past decade, the church has been unable to keep a pastor for more than a couple of years, which also created problems and caused the church to divide at least two more times.<sup>11</sup> This low tenure of pastors has increased the perceived power of those who have remained faithful to the church throughout, which produces potential problems and power struggles, thus creating inconsistent biblical literacy and shortage of biblical authority in the church. The church diminishes, losing effectiveness, and lacks influence when it turns inward to self-confidence instead of trusting, obeying, and focusing on Christ and His Holy Word for guidance. In the Revelation, Christ warns the seven churches in Asia Minor to remember their first love, remain faithful, and repent for the ongoing work of church reformation.<sup>12</sup> Christ's words demand a hearing, believing, and acknowledging the great truth for any hope of recovering the church.

Two years ago, Unity Missionary Baptist Church invited this seminary student to be their pastor, which he humbly and agreeably accepted. The church's remnant now consists of

---

<sup>11</sup> Henard, looking to the early church in Acts 6:1, asserts, "Even a church that has been in decline for a decade or more can grow and become a Great Commission church again because God wants the church collective and the local church to grow. Fulfilling the Great Commission." Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Davis avows, "How awesome, then, to see the resurrected Christ moving actively through these seven lampstands – tending them, dealing with their pastors, speaking words of comfort or rebuke to them. To some, Christ speaks words of commendation for their labor, doctrinal accuracy, faithfulness in persecution, discernment of error, and hatred of compromise. To others, Christ speaks words of rebuke for their forsaking of their first love, doctrinal compromise, toleration of sinning members, worldliness, spiritual deadness, self-confidence in wealth, and lukewarmness. To all, Christ gives words of exhortation to continue in courageous progress in the gospel, to look to the sweet eternal rewards, and to hear the words God speaks to the churches by the Spirit." Davis, *Revitalize*, 14.

predominantly long-term elder members and a few young people. The shortage of young members produces difficulties because they are the next generation and the church's longevity. The number of attendees certainly does not come close to the number of church members on the role. Gary McIntosh affirms, "A sure sign that a church is stagnate (or at least on the road to stagnation) is when the average membership tenure of everyone in the church is greater than ten years."<sup>13</sup> The membership tenure points out that there are not enough new people coming to the church with fresh ideas. The pastor must faithfully trust God in preaching Christ and standing firm on the authority of Scripture as he prepares expository sermons that will convict, encourage, strengthen, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, ignite a flame for God and others. First and foremost, the newly appointed pastor at Unity Missionary Baptist Church needs to be patient and shepherd the souls of those attending by doing what only a pastor can do and allow God time to do what only He can do.<sup>14</sup> The pastor must remain devoted to the Holy Scripture by preaching good expository messages centered on Christ for the church's spiritual growth and health.

Unity Missionary Baptist Church sets in the rural community of Powell, TN. At one time, the church flourished with a healthy children's ministry and youth group full of activities. The church became critically injured approximately five years ago when the youth minister and several families left the church, causing much harm by splitting the congregation and leaving it with almost no young people. Until this year, Unity Missionary Baptist Church has held an annual Fall Festival with activities for children and youth in the community, a small car and tractor show for adults, and a burger cookout for everyone to enjoy. The ladies at the church organized a Women's Ministry Unit, or WMU, that meets once a month. The church currently

---

<sup>13</sup> Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 35.

has some open positions for teachers, sound system technicians, and laborers for the kingdom. God will fill these positions when the congregation prayerfully acknowledges His power, and they saturate the church in prayer, relying on God's all-sufficient hand to lead, guide, and direct.<sup>15</sup> The church needs to revive the ministry work for the kingdom in the community. Andrew Davis asserts, "Cast a clear vision. Leaders must make clear to the congregation what God wants the church to be – both in the big picture and in the details."<sup>16</sup> The pastor must lead the church with a clear biblical perspective having a kingdom focus, kingdom agenda, and a kingdom hope for the future.

Like most churches in America, there are those active church members who dedicate themselves to the church and are faithful to the Father's kingdom ministry. Therefore, not being able to secure a pastor for longer than a couple of years at a time, results in this influential group controlling most of the church's decisions. The loyal remnant faithfully contributes to the offering and holds most of the church's leadership positions. One primary concern is that this faithful remnant has been at the church since its inception. McIntosh sustains, "One of the outcomes of church fights and splits is the consolidation of power by lay leaders. The loss of close friends brings pain that no one wants to relive. In an effort to protect themselves from additional pain, lay leaders grab the power and keep decision making close to home."<sup>17</sup> The new pastor must exude extreme patience with this older generation and unite the church in a kingdom-focus that earns their trust. Once the congregation realizes the pastor is committed to

---

<sup>15</sup> Davis warns, "Prayer changes us and also mysteriously changes things by the sovereign power of God. Pastors must personally become men of prayer more than ever before, and they must also call the godly together for fervent prayer, otherwise the church will not be revitalized." Davis, *Revitalize*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Davis continues, "This vision must come from Scripture and from the specific calling God places on that congregation. Leaders must powerfully cast this vision week after week to the church and lead the church toward it by the power of the Spirit and the ministry of the Word. Leaders must especially be effective in helping other key leaders see this biblical vision for the church." Davis, *Revitalize*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 44.

Christ and the biblical approach to health, they should join in disciple-making, prayer meetings, and worship services for God's glory.

The Scripture passage found on the front cover of the church guide for Unity Missionary Baptist Church is, "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). This guide speaks volumes to the church's critical need and how powerfully fundamental the prerequisite to learn how to live, love, and work together in unity is for the kingdom expansion effort. The paneling on the basement walls is a sign of the church's overall condition: it still looks good, but it is dated.<sup>18</sup> William Henard asserts, "In order for a church to develop and maintain good health, it must be committed to God's Word as its authority for both what the church believes and how it practices its polity and faith."<sup>19</sup> This committed attitude is waving the white flag of surrender for salvation, sanctification, and glorification, which transpires through the Word and Spirit. The faithful remnant at Unity Missionary Baptist Church will find it essential to surrender to sound expository preaching and teaching of the gospel before they will experience recovery after the significant ruptures that have transpired in the past. Davis asserts, "The revitalization of your church could end up being the most significant act of service you will ever render to Christ."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, committing a surrendered life to God, His Word, His Son, and His Spirit are central to Christianity for individuals and churches to experience abundant and eternal life. The church guide is a document that contains the Ten Commandments, the Church Covenant, the Declaration of Faith, and the Constitution of Unity Missionary Baptist

---

<sup>18</sup> Davis asserts, "Some who read this book will be in dwindling rural churches with senior adults who are hardly contentious but also hardly motivated to do much beyond the status quo." Davis, *Revitalize*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Davis emphasizes, "The resurrected and glorified Christ is still moving through the golden lampstands of his churches, speaking words of counsel and rebuke, wisdom and encouragement to each one of his blood-bought churches. Though in his sovereign power he has the right to remove any of these lampstands, it may well be that he has raised you up for such a time as this – to be an instrument in his hand for the revitalization of a dying church to become a light shining radiantly in an incredibly dark world." Davis, *Revitalize*, 28.

Church which establishes how the church operates and conducts business. There are instructions to members about living a Christian life and maintaining relationships between members.

Unity Missionary Baptist Church holds regular Sunday and Wednesday services with consistent hours of operation that provide ample time to conduct research, surveys, and expository preaching and teaching of the reconciling gospel. There are fabulously oriented facilities for preaching, Sunday school or small groups, and holding worship services. There should not be a considerable amount of money required to conduct this research and thesis project. The congregation will hopefully unreservedly participate in the research project by filling out questionnaires, actively listening to the preached Word, responding in action to the Holy Spirit's leadership, and contributing to the small group discussions for the benefit of all and the glory of the Almighty: specifically, praying for one another, reading and discussing the Bible, ministering to those in need, and praising God for everything. These actions will validate the research. With heavenly leadership and powerful influence, the Holy Spirit will strengthen the expository preaching and teaching, causing it to affect those that believe in the most positive transformational turn around as only He can.

Spiritual growth can be measured by how the congregation hears, accepts, and responds to the Word of truth, thus observing how they answer the questionnaires and engage in real ministry. Jesus Christ is the living water sent from above to cleanse and make His people entirely whole. In creation, the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature (Gen. 2:7, ESV).<sup>21</sup> Therefore, man is just dust without the breath of God, and dust is fit for nothing. Man as dust cannot live or grow without water, but the Water of Life flowing through one's veins provides new abundant

---

<sup>21</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

everlasting life. The Bible says, “Whosoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14, ESV). Growth is evidence of that life. The cleansing, growing, and life-giving breath of Christ is in the gospel that meets every need: salvation, sanctification, and glorification. Individuals need to experience spiritual growth through the Word of truth before the church experiences renewal.

Unity broken in the divided waning church urgently requires regeneration that only an unconditional loving Holy Father can furnish. Only God’s power is sufficient to accomplish church revitalization. Brian Croft asserts, “Consider as the Holy Spirit balances God’s mighty power at work in faithful, persistent, yet broken jars of clay to build his church and make Christ gloriously known.”<sup>22</sup> Jesus asked the disciples whom people thought he was, and Peter wonderfully replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). With these words, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the anointed Messiah and Son of God who came to earth to save the lost, heal the broken-hearted, and breathe new life into His church. Jesus emphatically affirmed that the Father in heaven revealed the answer unto Peter. Afterward, Jesus powerfully asserts, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Nothing then can stand in the way of Jesus Christ building His church. With that statement, Jesus declared to who the church belongs and who will ultimately be responsible for the bride, the bridegroom himself. McIntosh unreservedly agrees, “The good news is churches that see problems as opportunities, set goals, and move into the future with hope, live! There is hope for your church! Do you believe that? If you do, your church is likely to thrive.”<sup>23</sup> It is incredible how God, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit,

---

<sup>22</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> McIntosh asserts, “Even the apostle Paul used a similar phrase when he described the expansion of the Christian faith in the world. Speaking about the spread of the gospel, he wrote, ‘Just as in all the world also it is constantly *bearing fruit and increasing*’ (Col 1:6, emphasis added).” McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 21.

marvelously rescues, heals, redeems, saves, sanctifies, and will one day glorify His church. The divine Potter exercises sovereign power over the clay in His mighty hands, knowing exactly how to shape and mold the earthen material to produce a usable vessel fit for the Master. The vessel's heart is transformed by God's Holy Spirit through His Holy Word that draws, convicts, and rescues from eternal punishment. The good vessel will produce fruit for the kingdom. God graciously forgives sin through the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. Christ will build His church. There is hopefulness for those who may think the mission is impossible found only in the precious Lamb and His Holy Word. Thus, the pastor is responsible for pointing the congregation in the right direction, which is heavenward, focusing and orienting toward Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life to overcome any problem or circumstance the church may endure.

### **Problem Presented**

Unity Missionary Baptist Church languishes from a divided approach, suffering and losing five pastors in the previous decade. Some struggle with embracing Christ's ownership of the church.<sup>24</sup> The current pastor implements a sound gospel expository preaching and teaching program to invigorate the church by inflaming their hearts of love for God and others in unity after the fragmentation. Sound gospel exposition teaches theologically correct doctrine by explaining Holy Scripture in a context centered on Christ, His life, and His teachings. Mark Dever asserts, "Sound teaching in our churches must include a clear commitment to the

---

<sup>24</sup> Davis asserts, "Christ is the only One who shed his blood for the church (Acts 20:28); it is his, for he bought it at a price. A common characteristic of dying churches is an unhealthy sense of ownership of the church by its members and/or leaders. Some feel that because of their financial contributions or hours of service, *This church is mine*. Hence the power struggles. Beyond this, a revitalizing pastor can get sucked into similarly unhealthy thought patterns as he suffers and makes sacrifices for the church. We must embrace, by faith, that the local church is Christ's, and do all our ministry for his glory." Davis, *Revitalize*, 22.

teachings of the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> The faithful remnant understands it is essential to surrender to the Holy Scripture’s authority when desperately desiring to apprehend church revitalization.<sup>26</sup> The Holy Spirit’s ongoing work through the Word of truth should be heard, believed, and applied in the congregation’s lives. This project probes the congregation’s soil, different types of responses to the Gospel, through survey questionnaires to gauge the effectiveness of the reconciling gospel program by measuring the investigation results to see if any change, either positive or negative, occurred within the present ministry context. The ultimate measure for spiritual growth is one’s understanding of God’s truth and application of that truth in life.<sup>27</sup> The problem is that the waning church requires a renewed Christ-oriented focus to recover after the split through gospel expository preaching and teaching.<sup>28</sup> The church stands in need of spiritual revival that transforms hearts and changes lives. The church will discover that revitalization only occurs when the Holy Spirit of God breathes new life into His church through the Word.<sup>29</sup>

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to lead Unity Missionary Baptist Church in a Christ-centered orientation that invigorates lasting heart transformation and

---

<sup>25</sup> Dever communicates sound expositional preaching is a wellspring of growth in the church, asserting, “Biblical theology is a mark of a healthy church.” Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 69.

<sup>26</sup> McIntosh proclaims, “The difference between an older and a younger church is related to two aspects of life: controllability and flexibility. Older churches typically have numerous policies and guidelines that create controls (some unnecessary). Thus, having many controls and less flexibility when it comes to starting new. The more flexible it is, the easier it will be to revitalize.” McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, *Revitalize*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Church revitalization is the remedy for the dying church. The church needs to pray and seek an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that results in greater holiness and evangelistic power. Davis, *Revitalize*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> God alone has the power to breathe life into His church. Davis identifies revitalization as, “Revival by the Holy Spirit.” Davis, *Revitalize*, 46.

recovery. This project's goal was to foster an understanding of spiritual growth and church revitalization at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The eight-week reconciling gospel program of expository preaching and teaching rejuvenated the saints in unity, focusing on growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord to be primed for the kingdom expansion work and glory of God. The author conducted this particular research because he genuinely desires to see the church return to its first love, Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). The divine Savior rescues believers and guides them through his Word by helping them to realize new life through expository preaching and teaching, which calls attention to biblical doctrine, magnifies the Word, is Christ-centered, and glorifies God. Through the Holy Spirit's inspiration and the reconciling gospel message, the congregation can grow in health, becoming Christlike in attitude and behavior to advance the church in the community. The maximum benefit of hearing, believing, and responding to the Word of God is salvation and everlasting life. Responding to God's Word is a soul transformation that leads to spiritual fruit and produces real change. The most incredible tangible value for those directly related to this ministry context is the spiritual nourishment that the Holy Spirit of God provides in building his church through an intimate relationship with the Savior deep in the heart and soul of those who believe in the gospel.

### **Basic Assumptions**

This project conducted at Unity Missionary Baptist Church is significant because it has demonstrated where the church is at considering spiritual development and restoration after the split. The goal is to lead the church in the recovery process, not only to revive and survive, but to thrive for the good of the people and the glory of God. If the church implements an eight-week

reconciling gospel program, it will experience healing, sanctification and ultimately grow in spiritual health. Isaiah 55:11 declares that God's Word will not return void accomplishing what He pleases and prospers anywhere He sends it. When God directs His Word, it will achieve His desires and purposes, flourishing wherever He propels it, especially in the heart of man. When God's Word saturates the believer's heart, the transformation will occur, causing them to respond to God with love and share the good news with others. The enriched congregation began talking about how they were touched, focused, and guided by the Holy Spirit through devotionals, small group discussions, and sermons in their everyday lives. Hopefully, the congregation continues to consider what lessons, sermons, or small group discussions significantly impact their lives, understand how to apply that knowledge, and live and love like Jesus. An individual can only walk the way Jesus walked if they are intimately acquainted with how he walked through his Word. Applying this truth in real life is functioning in obedience to God, walking in the spirit, and committing to the ongoing process of decreasing sin in one's life. Thus, the process of sanctification transforms lives.

Throughout this project, the researcher will discover that transformational recovery is only possible, even in small community churches, through the unchanging Almighty Father's power. McIntosh affirms, "When Luke used the words *fruitful and multiply* in Acts 12:24, the early disciples understood the implication: churches are to grow and multiply across the world as new believers accept the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ."<sup>30</sup> Since the local church is part of God's redemption plan, there is hope for the church to grow in fruitfulness established by his divine promise to build the church. God is ultimately the divine source through His precious Son's obedience by the Holy Spirit's working to save, heal, and redeem lost sinners who are

---

<sup>30</sup> McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 22.

broken-hearted and humbly believe. The Godhead continues His marvelous transforming revival work through sanctification of the spirit. The believers' final healing will transpire at His second coming to glorification in eternal heaven one day.

### **Definitions**

This project concerns Unity Missionary Baptist church's transformational recovery after several ruptures. Through expository preaching and teaching, the reconciling gospel curriculum advocates being an active church member who is Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused for the good of the community and the glory of God. Throughout this project, specific terms can help one better understand the essence of transformational recovery at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Keywords utilized in this project include: active church members, expository preaching, reconciling gospel, sanctification, and transformation.

*Active Church Members.* The church is considered the body of Christ and his bride that is ever yearning for the day he triumphantly returns to carry her home. The Bible conveys about believers are, "Fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). There are many rich analogies to consider when speaking of believers who are members of the church: fellow citizens, members of the household of God, the flock, the bride, brothers and sisters in the royal family, congregation, and joined together in the body of Christ. When a person becomes a Christian, by faith in Christ and his atoning sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary, they join a local church as an expression of what Christ has made them – a member of the body of Christ.<sup>31</sup> An active church member is a member of a particular congregation that attends faithfully and

---

<sup>31</sup> Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 26.

contributes to the welfare of the body of Christ. A family, a fellowship, and a body are all excellent descriptions of believing individuals who make up the church.

*Expository Preaching.* An expository sermon is a message developed from a biblical text that explains the meaning of a passage intended for the original audience, disclosing those enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Holy Spirit, who inspired the text.<sup>32</sup> An expository message focuses primarily on one particular text or passage of Scripture as opposed to skipping around.<sup>33</sup> Expository preaching and teaching will always assume what God declares in His Word as authoritative for His people. Sound expository preaching and teaching will be indispensable to those who heed the message for life that is abundant and eternal. Expository preaching puts people in immediate contact with the power of the Word.<sup>34</sup> The church's essential need is to hear the Word, so they would not be deprived of God's intention to conform them into His image.<sup>35</sup> Comprehensive expository preaching presents God's divine character revealed in the Holy Scriptures for an example to follow in Christlikeness. A commitment to sound expositional preaching and teaching is an essential mark

---

<sup>32</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 9. Chapell declares, "The main idea of an expository sermon the topic, the divisions of that idea, main points, and the development of those divisions, all come from truths the text itself contains. No significant portions of the text is ignored. In other words, expositors willingly stay within the boundaries of the text and do not leave until they have surveyed its entirety with its hearers." Ibid., 118.

<sup>33</sup> Chapell asserts, "The expository sermon uses the features and context of the text to explain what that portion of the Bible originally meant and what its significance is for us today." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Chapell asserts, "As expository preachers, our ultimate goal is not to communicate the value of our opinions, others' philosophies, or speculative meditations but rather to show how God's Word discloses his will for those united to him through his Son. Truths of God proclaimed in such a way that people can see that the concepts derive from Scripture and apply to their lives preoccupy the expository preacher's efforts." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Dever, *What is a Healthy Church*, 64.

of a healthy church.<sup>36</sup> Building a healthy church demands Christians to listen, heed, and obey God's Word in complete surrender to His will and purpose for their lives.

*Reconciling Gospel.* The gospel is absolutely the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Christianity is undoubtedly all about the news. It is unequivocally the good news – the best news the world has ever heard.<sup>38</sup> Reconciling means to be reunited, rescued, or restored into fellowship with God; after the fall of man, everyone stands in desperate need of salvation. The gospel is that God orchestrated salvation through the propitiation of Emmanuel's love. Consequently, Christ reunited sinners to be favorably inclined in the sight of God by paying their sin debt full and free. Jesus Christ ultimately took the offenders' place, so they could intentionally receive the reconciling gospel, which is the salvation of one's eternal soul, thus making them reconciled to God in a right relationship with him. *Reconciling gospel* in this context will mean that the more Christians explore what God has done through His Son and what He has promised in His Word, the bigger the good news gets.<sup>39</sup> The better Christians understand the reconciling gospel of God's intentions in salvation, sanctification, and glorification, the more they genuinely appreciate the excellent good news of Jesus Christ and redemption through His glorious name.

*Sanctification.* Sanctification is spiritual growth. This spiritual growth is directly related to an increase in one's understanding of God's revelation. It is the ongoing process of decreasing

---

<sup>36</sup> Dever, *What is a Healthy Church*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Jared Wilson asserts, "The word *gospel*, from the Greek word *evangelion*, means 'good news.' The gospel refers to the good news that God sent his Son Jesus to live a sinless life, die a substitutionary death, and rise from the dead so that sinners who repent and trust in Jesus will be forgiven and have eternal life." Jared C. Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church: Uniting Church Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 81.

<sup>38</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 87.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Pettit, ed, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 36.

sin in one's life through understanding the Word. Michael Allen asserts, "Christian theology and, in particular, a Christian consideration of holiness and sanctification seeks to do justice to the teaching of the prophets and apostles as found in the Holy Scriptures. Exegetical reasoning, then, serves as a barometer of any claim regarding sanctification."<sup>40</sup> Sanctification is the process of God imputing righteousness through Christ's atoning work and forgiving sin. Thus, making the individual holy and consecrated, being set apart as sacred as they continue to grow spiritually. The Bible says, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul, by encouraging the church, asserts, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Ultimately, sanctification is the entitled reverence and respect offered to God that makes the believer productive and conducive to spiritual blessings.

*Transformation.* In the act of conversion, the Holy Spirit draws with conviction and rescues the lost sinner. Individuals are responsible for repenting of sin and placing faith in Christ. The individual must hear, believe, and respond to the Word of Truth. This responsive turning to Christ produces transformation. Thus, believers are transformed in the inner man into a new creature in Christ. Paul affirms, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Christians need God to give them a new heart. The Bible tells what God has promised, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19). Dever highlights, "This kind of heart-transplanting is God's work. And he must work this change in us if we are to accept the spiritual truths of the

---

<sup>40</sup> Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 12.

Bible (see 1 Cor. 2:14).”<sup>41</sup> Profound soul transformation is the salvation that certainly stands the test of time for the universe’s unchanging sovereign God freely gave it.

### **Limitations**

This research focuses on effective transformational recovery at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, where the congregation has seen traumatic division several times, by exploring how sound gospel expository preaching and teaching revitalizes the body of Christ to flourish in spiritual growth and health. The main limiting factors are the small size of the congregation, their willingness to participate in the questionnaires, and how well they received the preaching and teaching curriculum. Ultimately, the individual’s responsibility is to hear, believe, and respond to God’s Word. This research will not emphasize a church model that is absolute or qualified for growth and health in every church context. Instead, this research will quantify a biblical foundation for church revitalization and spiritual growth through expository preaching and teaching.

Furthermore, this research does not attempt to imply that all churches are waning, diminishing, or require revival but wholeheartedly resolves that all thriving Gospel-centered churches employ sound gospel expository preaching and teaching. This student researcher recognized personal limits in creating a reconciling gospel preaching and teaching syllabus for an eight-week program. Indeed, the church’s transformational recovery proves to be a perpetual process of simple fundamental steps toward spiritual growth and health. The Holy Spirit is the only One who can perform this continual transformational work. Change is undoubtedly evidence of life and growing from a baby to a child to a mature adult takes considerable time,

---

<sup>41</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 115.

clearly a lifetime. Therefore, in an eight-week reconciling gospel program, it may not be possible to measure enormous growth. Still, the pastor should recognize recent growth spurts and experience the church becoming healthier.

Finally, this research will not attempt to create an all-encompassing reconciling gospel program of preaching and teaching for church recovery. Hopefully the research will encourage ministers to hold on to biblical truth while continuing to preach and teach expository sermons centered on the gospel for the people's good and God's glory. Specifically, this research will attempt to lead Unity Missionary Baptist Church in a Christ-oriented focus to experience healing, sanctification, and learn to live and love like Jesus in the community.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher will implement the questionnaires, focus group study, preaching, and teaching curricula during regular church service hours: Sunday at 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM, and Wednesday at 7:00 PM. Small groups will be held Wednesday evenings at 7:00 PM. A daily devotional will be passed out in the bulletin for individuals to read and apply, six devotions a week for the eight-week reconciling gospel program. The eight-week reconciling gospel program is a delimitation when considering the short amount of time to make observations, review data, and report results, because spiritual growth is not always evident immediately. Growth is an internal process of spiritual work that is not visible immediately. Often, it is seen weeks, months, and years later when an individual looks back on their transformation over time and declares they understand more of God's truth closer in their walk with him. The researcher will consult the Holy Bible, commentaries, and several scholarly resources to discover best practices for the church's good and God's glory.

This study has surveyed participants who are both eighteen years of age or older and members of Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The researcher primarily conducted this study on the faithful remnant, the more senior population who have weathered the storms of fracture but are still in critical need of recovery, revival, and restoration. This research's major delimitation is thorough study and preparation time for sermons, small group studies, and daily devotionals. The pastor's desire to produce forward momentum in church revitalization is paramount for the best preparation, delivery, and assessment results. Although there are many different strategies for implementing transformational recovery for church growth and health, this project has focused on expository preaching and teaching to guide the church to understand, obey, and live out the truth.

### **Thesis Statement**

The Bible says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). Jesus Christ, who is the light, salvation, and divine Savior, rescues believers and guides them through his Word and Spirit. This makes God's Word (the Bread of life), God's Holy Spirit (the Breath of life), and God's church essential for individuals to experience salvation and spiritual growth. Expository sermons are where preachers present the Bible as written and authoritative, allowing the Holy Spirit to bestow the life-changing heart transformation.

If the pastor researcher implements an expository preaching and teaching program, the church will experience transformational recovery and learn to live and love like Jesus. With an aligned strategy of weekly sermons, small group discussions, and daily devotions, this eight-week reconciling gospel program guides the congregation to a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused ministry. If conducted at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, spiritual revitalization

will occur, and both the individual saint's sanctification and the church will flourish in the community. The merciful God who graciously forgives, sent His Son to redeem the lost, and redeploys the saints invigorated through the reuniting gospel. The Holy Spirit breathes new life into his church to revive, survive, and thrive.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

There are numerous strategies and approaches to church growth and health that one may explore to discover what is appropriate for leading the waning church in a new perspective. The ultimate goal is to lead the church with a Christ-centered focus, not only to revive and survive but thrive by growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The key to handling church recovery is learning to trust what God's Word says to do.<sup>42</sup> Jesus empathically commands his disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Thus, fulfilling the Great Commission is the heart of ministry: preaching and teaching the gospel message to the world. The better individuals understand God's Word, the more they will surrender to God's will and desire to accomplish the kingdom's ministry work. The best approach to church recovery is trusting God's Word and presenting that authoritative Word to the congregation so they will hear, accept, and respond in spiritual growth for the body's good and God's glory. Trust is exercising faith by believing the principles found in God's Word and committing one's life accordingly.<sup>43</sup> This Literature Review will endeavor to discuss and analyze the prevalent works concerning the church's recovery, seek the saint's sanctification, and posture a life of love that reflects Jesus' in the community. This chapter focuses on six essential literature topics concerning church restoration: A Small Church Approach to Recovery, Christ-Centered

---

<sup>42</sup> Ed Hindson, *Trusting God When Times Are Tough* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 12. Hindson emphasizes, "There is hardly a problem today that Christians face that is not covered in the pages of Scripture. If we really want to know God's will for our lives in dealing with a particular problem, the Bible will guide us to the answer."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 15.

Preaching, Reconciling Gospel, Revitalization, Church Growth and Health, and Transformation. This section offers a theological and theoretical foundation to capstone this literature review.

### A Small Church Approach to Recovery

Karl Vaters in *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* writes about equipping pastors with the strategies and tools that encourage small churches to be great.<sup>44</sup> Unity Missionary Baptist Church certainly falls within the small church category. Smaller churches may be lesser in weekly attendance but can be great for kingdom impact. Regardless of size, great churches do not happen by accident; they require prayer, planning, hard work, cooperation, God's calling, and expository preaching and teaching to experience recovery.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, *Small Church Essentials* takes a different approach to church health and growth, affirming small churches have enormous potential for health, vitality, outreach, and more.<sup>46</sup> Becoming a healthy church should be the primary goal, not stressing over the number of attendees on Sunday morning. Focusing on individual spiritual growth produces a healthy church.<sup>47</sup> Pastors must strive in preaching for the health, strength, and spiritual progress of individual members of the congregation for an overall virtuous church recovery.

---

<sup>44</sup> Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 9. He asserts, "Church growth is a noble pursuit, and a blessing to the church." (11).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25. Vaters declares, "We were working on an upcoming church event, dealing with all the small church issues of trying to do more with less, then it hit me. Instead of asking, 'Our church is small, so what?' we needed to ask, 'Our church is small, now what?'" (26).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 35. Vaters confirms, "Just because we are small does not give us an excuse to do ministry with anything less than Christ-honoring, people-serving, world-transforming passion."

Living in a culture so obsessed with a bigger-is-better mentality has affected some believer's mindsets allowing this undesirable behavior to creep into the body of Christ.<sup>48</sup> Instead of obsessing over the numbers, congregations should focus on what God can accomplish if they are willing to obey the Holy Word. Vaters contrasts the idea of God giving new revelation concerning having a vision for church growth.<sup>49</sup> He emphasizes for pastors that there is a more profound truth behind having a vision for the church.<sup>50</sup> The truth is God has already revealed an awe-inspiring vision for the church in His Word, which is to obey God's commands and "go" tell the world.<sup>51</sup> Vaters asserts, "Preach, teach, and live as though the priesthood of believers is a real thing because it is."<sup>52</sup> The priesthood of believers is a principle that all believing Christians have access to God through Christ, the Great High Priest (1 Peter 2:5-9).<sup>53</sup> An individual must get a vision of God before they can get a vision from God.<sup>54</sup> With the reinforcement of the Holy Spirit and God's clear vision, the pastor will equip the saints to do the work of ministry and edify the church (Eph. 4:11-12). On the day of Pentecost, everything changed with the one-hundred-twenty disciples assembled being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which made them a body, a family,

---

<sup>48</sup> Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 76. He proclaims, "When healthy small churches grow, they become healthy big churches. When *unhealthy* small churches grow, they become *unhealthy* big churches. So instead of telling struggling churches to get bigger, help them become healthy."

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 167. Vaters asserts, "We've already been given the biggest, most audacious God-inspired vision of all, and it wasn't devised by a charismatic pastor, focus-grouped by a marketing team, or sold like a trendy new idea to people who need to be convinced that they want it. We have the Great Commandment and the Great Commission."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 73. He affirms, "A vision is simply a description of hope for the future" 74. Dever and Alexander assert, "Your vision for the church will more likely be biblical if you are preaching through Scripture expositionally." Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 45.

a kingdom of priests, and so much more.<sup>55</sup> The Body of Christ experiences recovery by becoming healthy, strong, and vibrant small churches through Christ-centered preaching and teaching that spreads the good news, exalts Christ, and glorifies God.

### Christ-Centered Preaching

The lack of Christ-centered expository preaching today is inexcusable in evangelical Baptist churches. Christ-centered messages are crucial to restore the fading church by preaching the gospel to the lost and sustaining the Savior's good news. A. W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, confidently proclaims that in the church of the Living God, sound Bible exposition is imperative.<sup>56</sup> Tozer intensely challenges ministers to slow down to gaze upon God's marvelous grace in faithful pursuit of God to achieve the highest fulfillment in life, which is salvation and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Donald Whitney in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* communicates regarding the Holy Spirit that no other factor is more influential in making believers more like the Son of God than the Spirit of God working through the Word of God.<sup>57</sup> Henard in *Can These Bones Live* emphatically harmonizes that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are two essential ingredients necessary for the church's return.<sup>58</sup> Thus, preaching God's Word empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit is the supreme priority in the ministry of reconciliation and indispensable for the congregation to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord.

---

<sup>55</sup> Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 169.

<sup>56</sup> Aiden W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 15.

<sup>57</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 28. Whitney conveys God initiates spiritual trust, "The reason a person thirsts for God is because the Holy Spirit is at work within him" Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 2.

Bryan Chapell, in *Christ-Centered Preaching*, stresses that Christ ministers to his people through preaching as a redeeming act in which the Holy Spirit opens individuals' hearts to receive the truth that God inspired in the Scriptures.<sup>59</sup> The Holy Spirit that inspired the Word of God convicts lost sinners through the Truth that saves those who believe in Jesus Christ, and then indwells those individuals, as dear children. Chapell harmonizes that commitment to a Christocentric perspective will uphold the sound exposition principles that the Savior himself revealed.<sup>60</sup> The divine privilege and responsibility in preaching Christ-centered messages are vital to the pastoral ministry's heartbeat because the eternal weight of the consequences hangs in the balance.<sup>61</sup> Chapell affirms God reveals himself through His Word, while Paul Pettit underscores the importance of the Holy Spirit's work. In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, Pettit highlights God's ministry throughout the ages to involve the Holy Spirit as an instrument to enable people to live, act, and think like Jesus.<sup>62</sup> Jesus was praying to the Father for the disciples' requests that He would, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Indeed, the Holy Spirit, who is the Truth, inspired the Word of Truth, which grants everlasting heart transformation. Dever, in *What is a Healthy Church*, stresses a healthy church's fundamental mark is a strong commitment to expository preaching.<sup>63</sup> Emphatically, the Godhead's Holy Trinity is inseparable from his divine Word of Truth. The Scripture states, "In

---

<sup>59</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>61</sup> Wayne McDill asserts, "Our message is a life-and-death issue." Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 119.

<sup>62</sup> Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 247. Chapell conveys no one reflects Christ's character as purely as he or she desires, asserting, "This does not deny the extraordinary power inherent in God's Word but affirms that it is the ordinary pattern of the Holy Spirit to affirm and further the purposes of his Word by the testimony of our lives" Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Dever, *What is a Healthy Church*, 68.

the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Therefore, preaching Christ, who is the Word, will prove foundational in the church revitalization effort as pastoral leadership endeavors to inspire fervent souls to live, act, and think like Jesus Christ.

John Piper, in *Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity*, emphasizes how Spurgeon was a truth-driven, Bible-believing, soul-winning, and hard-working preacher for the sake of the gospel.<sup>64</sup> Pastoring over thirty-eight years in London, Charles H. Spurgeon was a highly influential Reformed Baptist preacher and a preeminent pastorally minded theologian.<sup>65</sup> He was known as the “Prince of Preachers.” Spurgeon founded a college and authored several Bible commentaries. Piper beautifully expresses that preachers today may follow the Prince of Preachers’ example in preaching through adversity for God’s glory and souls’ salvation. Christ-centered preaching explains a text of Scripture in a context that examines Jesus Christ’s life, teachings, and perfect obedience.<sup>66</sup> Piper articulates that Spurgeon admonished his students, affirming that an influential preacher must be a sound theologian.<sup>67</sup> Whether a minister is considering a passage from the Old or New Testament, the faithful Bible student will discover the central theme of all Scripture points to Christ’s atoning work in redemption and salvation.

---

<sup>64</sup> John Piper, *Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity*, (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2015), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian life: Alive in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 21. Reeves concerning Spurgeon asserts, “In person he preached up to thirteen times per week, gathered the largest church of his day, and could make himself heard in a crowd of twenty-three thousand people (without amplification). In print he published some eighteen million words, selling over fifty-six million copies of his sermons in nearly forty languages in his own lifetime.” Ibid., 18.

<sup>66</sup> McDill adds, “The man-centered sermon concentrates on what believers should do. But the God-centered sermon focuses on who God is and what he has done, what he promises, what he will do, what he can do. That kind of information builds faith;” McDill, *Skills for Great Preaching*, 107.

<sup>67</sup> Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 2. Dever and Alexander declare, “This is why the expositional form of preaching is so important, not only at the outset but as a steady diet for the congregation – it presents the point of the text as the point of the sermon, grounding the authority of the sermon in the authority of the Scripture” Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 45.

Since all Scripture is ultimately about Christ, the pastor can preach the Gospel routinely from any biblical text.<sup>68</sup> Piper asserts that Spurgeon rekindled his zeal and passion for preaching by fixing his eyes on eternity and Christ rather than the immediate price of faithfulness.<sup>69</sup> The apostle Paul saw that the outer man was diminishing, but the eternal weight of glory far outweighed his momentary affliction, looking to things eternal (1 Cor. 4:16-18). A Christ-centered focus with a proper understanding of God's eternal promises will invigorate the preacher to rekindle the zeal, passion, and love for Christ, His Word, and His people. The pastor must look beyond the current situation or crisis the church is experiencing and focus, rather, on Christ and eternity by proclaiming the good news of hope. Christ-centered preaching is the reconciling gospel message the church desperately needs to acknowledge through hearing, accepting, and responding to the Word of truth.

### Reconciling Gospel

One theme that runs through the majority of sources selected is the gospel. The gospel is unique in its exclusivity, for it is the only way to be reconciled to the Almighty Creator, God. Jared Wilson, in *The Prodigal Church*, emphasizes, "The gospel cannot be improved. The message of Christ's sinless life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection is capital-S Spiritual power all unto itself."<sup>70</sup> The Apostle Paul affirms the gospel is God's power unto salvation to everyone that believes (Rom. 1:16). *The Prodigal Church* attempts to shake some sense into the bride of Christ by helping the church realize her desperate condition, repent, and return quickly

---

<sup>68</sup> Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 163.

back to the Father's restorative embrace. Wilson encourages ministry leaders to reconsider their priorities and approach concerning becoming a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused church.<sup>71</sup> He also exhorts ministry leaders by affirming them to not get caught up in the smoke, lights, and sound effects for the entertainment value that is only surface deep, but to dig deeper with the truth of the gospel.<sup>72</sup> Wilson sternly exclaims that only the gospel probes deep enough to influence real heart change, and anything else is simply behavior modification.<sup>73</sup> Wilson cuts straight to the point by insisting ministers must preach out of a changed heart and life before they may preach the gospel of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit, being able to preach Christ vividly and able to preach the truth practically.<sup>74</sup> The biblical approach to ministry in the church sounds evident to those of faith, but this practice is critical for the body of Christ today. The heart of the matter is aligning Christ as the central message to the bride. The faithful minister should be more concerned with the gospel of Jesus Christ than how dynamic one's preaching or storytelling is.

Dever agrees with Wilson in highlighting that it is predominantly crucial for churches to have a sound biblical theology and a thorough understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ: the gospel. Dever wonderfully complements Wilson's approach by stressing that the gospel's revelation is the heart of Christianity and should be the church's core nature.<sup>75</sup> The basis of

---

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 163.

<sup>72</sup> Dever and Alexander agree, "Many American churches have used entertainment-based methods of evangelism – theotainment, as it has been called by some – in sharing the Gospel with both adults and children. But evangelism that takes the form of entertainment has some harmful side effects. Remember – what you win them with is likely what you will win them to." Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 54.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 150.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Dever, *Healthy Church*, 75. Dever and Alexander confirm the gospel, "Is about God making his holiness and sovereign mercy known. It is about God's glory and gathering worshipers for himself who will worship him in spirit and truth." Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 56.

Christianity is the sacrificial death, burial, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ for the sins of those who believe in him, which is good news. Dever expresses that not only did Christ reflect God's glorious holiness through obedience, but "He displayed God's glorious mercy and love by dying on the cross for sinners, paying the penalty of guilt they deserved (John 17:1-3)."<sup>76</sup> It is this good news that paves the way for reconciliation through comprehensive expository preaching of the gospel. The exercise of expositional preaching and teaching assumes that what God has said in His Word is authoritative; the congregation needs to hear and apply the Word in their lives not rebelling against what God utilizes to conform them into His Son's image.<sup>77</sup> Wilson and Dever would wholeheartedly agree healthy churches know the gospel, implement the gospel, and share the gospel. Pettit enthusiastically enhances the argument by affirming the more Christians investigate and discover what God said, did, and promised in His Word the better the good news gets.<sup>78</sup> The church will understand the good news better when the faithful minister proclaims that the Gospel is the way, the truth, and the life.

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander in *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* accentuate that the Gospel alone contains the theology that must drive one's ministry approaches.<sup>79</sup> Christ alone is the cornerstone of salvation and the wise Master Builder upon which all justification and redemption hinges. The Gospel is the only foundation to build on. The Bible says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Dever and Alexander assert, "There is creating, conforming, life-giving power in God's

---

<sup>76</sup> Dever, *Healthy Church*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>78</sup> Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 36.

<sup>79</sup> Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 5.

Word!”<sup>80</sup> Nothing else has the power to transform the church in recovery except for God’s Word precisely expounded in preaching and exercised in living.<sup>81</sup> Christ announces His family is those that hear the Word of God and do it (Luke 8:21). As people see the pastor being faithful to present clear Scripture passages through the expository preaching of God’s Word, it will help them trust that the pastor is submitting to the sacred text and intention of the Bible.<sup>82</sup> The more thoroughly a pastor preaches Christ’s person and work to the church, the more vividly the congregation comes to reflect Christ’s glory. This rich portrait of Christ is vitally important to begin and continue the ministry work by expository preaching in a way that clarifies the Gospel.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, only the reconciling gospel of Jesus Christ brings about everlasting regeneration, recovery, and revitalization.

### Revitalization

The historic waning church may become a vibrant local body of believers full of life through the proper approach to finding the way forward with the Almighty’s strength. Darren Cronshaw, in “Revitalization Consultancy Models,” communicates a holistic approach to mission and church, which includes compassionate acts of service, advocacy for justice, care for creation and evangelism when he writes, “With that understanding of mission, ‘revitalization’ is the process of reconnecting a local church with the life and mission of God.”<sup>84</sup> Rejoining God’s

---

<sup>80</sup> Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 35.

<sup>81</sup> Dever and Alexander articulate, “The more your congregation is clear on the gospel, the less likely it is that either tepid nominalism or carnal divisiveness will find air to breathe – and the more likely it is that you will forge healthy and growing unity around the good news that distinguishes the church from the world.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>84</sup> Darren Cronshaw, “Revitalization Consultancy Models: Australian Church Case Studies,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 318, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS, EBSCOhost.

mission and life through sound principles, strong relationship, and a scriptural foundation, the church will discover a keen heart and passion for God, others, and the community. Croft, in *Biblical Church Revitalization*, advocates for a biblical approach appealing to the local church for specific scriptural reasons, “passionate biblical preaching, loving sacrificial fellowship, practical gospel application, zealous soul care, intentional evangelism, and authentic Christlikeness – to name a few.”<sup>85</sup> The Almighty’s reconciliation ministry involves rejoining His mission and life, established in the Holy Word through gospel preaching and teaching for the kingdom advance, spiritual growth, and entire local church’s health. The revitalization process touches the mind, spirit, and soul. Croft balances Cronshaw in that church revitalization is a compelling journey to reveal how the Lord can take a dead church and breathe new life into it again through a faithful biblical ministry.

Tom Cheyney, in *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, underscores the critical truth in revitalization and renewal: when a congregation or an individual compromises with the world for any reason, they are committing spiritual adultery against the Lord.<sup>86</sup> Churches, especially waning churches, cannot and must not compromise the gospel or allow such conceding to infiltrate the church. Church members wrongly argue that aligning with the world’s culture is needed to attract the community. Revitalization of a declining church will require a refocus of vision, a God-given vision that challenges and stretches the church’s dream, calls people to faith and unity for a future-oriented focus that makes a real difference over time.<sup>87</sup> The church must rely on the Lord for this commonly shared unifying vision for the

---

<sup>85</sup> Brain Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 17.

<sup>86</sup> Tom Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization* (Monee, IL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 36.

congregation's best future. Cheyney, writing about the church at Sardis, asserts, "God gives a brief formula for revitalization when he challenges them to '*be alert*,' remain '*watchful*,' '*repent*,' '*remember*' the Word of God, '*complete*' the task of God and do what it declares."<sup>88</sup>

This formula for church revitalization is where genuine renewal begins. The faithful remnant is the future church's turnaround and ministry advancement.<sup>89</sup> There is hope for any church as long as the remnant is willing to stay faithful to the gospel, encourage the brethren, and invite others to join. Now is the time for revitalization and renewal in the church.

Piper, in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, emphasizes the essential need to advance a movement of God-centered worship by preaching and teaching God's supremacy in all things, primarily related to the church. The apostle Paul tactfully announces:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14-15).

God graciously sends His messengers to herald the good news for salvation and church revitalization. Piper asserts, "God is the goal of preaching, God is the ground of preaching, and all the means in between are given by the Spirit of God."<sup>90</sup> Thus, all expository preaching and teaching must be Christ-oriented to fulfill God's purposes for individuals and the church effectively. Piper complements Cheyney's assertion that the church should not compromise the Word for the world, concluding where the Bible is esteemed as the inspired and inerrant Word of

---

<sup>88</sup> Cheyney, *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, 70.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 25. Piper conveys that Scottish preacher James Stewart put it like this: the aims of all genuine preaching are "to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

God preaching can flourish.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, if preaching flourishes, the church can realize restoration by trusting, obeying, and being ready to make a difference in the church and community through the Holy Spirit's leadership and guidance. Piper and Cheyney synchronize the essence of Croft's biblical approach for the church to be on mission, grasp revitalization and continue to grow in spiritual health.

### Church Growth and Health

The declining church requires a Christ-oriented focus through sound doctrinal expository preaching and teaching if any mending is going to occur in the body of Christ. The basis of this new focus is obedience to the Great Commandment and Great Commission. Croft unequivocally endorses that God is, in fact, able to breathe new life into every dying and divided church.<sup>92</sup> Solomon Ishola endorses that the American Society for Church Growth provides a complete definition of church growth, conveying, "Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God's commission to 'make disciples of all peoples.'"<sup>93</sup> Wilson powerfully contributes that any Christian establishment must accept that underneath all

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 46. Rainer asserts, "The breakout churches we studied are biblical churches. Their leaders hold a high view of Scripture, and they are intensely obedient to the Great Commission. The churches resemble closely the Jerusalem church in Acts 2:42-47 in their focus on the key purpose to which God has called them." Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 32. Richard Caemmerer asserts, "Rediscovery has taken place as Christians have realized that they are dealing, in the church, not just with a physical institution but with an assembly of God's people speaking God's Word and that as they speak it so, they do the one thing possible to make it believable and perceptible to the world that is around them: they witness to it." Richard R. Caemmerer, "Preaching and the Recovery of the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37, no. 3 (1966): 146, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS, EBSCOhost.

<sup>92</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 59. Henard declares, "Church revitalization becomes a viable means of church growth because it necessitates church health. Many churches fall into decline because they have become unhealthy, so a prospective pastor will never accomplish church turnaround if church health is not achieved. The two go inseparably together." Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Solomon A. Ishola, "Multi-Dimensional Approach to Church Growth," *Practical Theology* (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos) 12 (2019): 3, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS, EBSCOhost.

the confusion and ignorance, the church's actual deficiency is the absence of a heart for God and neighbors.<sup>94</sup> Croft warns pastors not to set lofty goals in churches that need revitalization in stark contrast to merely adding bodies to the church role for the sake of numbers. The pastor needs to humbly focus on shepherding the flock of God with all their might, sincerely demonstrating love for God and others. Discussing how church leadership conducts church, Wilson offers that pragmatism is anti-gospel and legalistically inverts the Great Commission into treating the gospel as a kind of pyramid scheme aimed at people who have it all together, not discerning those in need and assuming effective evangelism is the domain of the experts who put church productions together. He writes, "The missional mandate becomes less 'go and tell' and more 'come and see.'"<sup>95</sup> The biblical approach to making disciples is going and sharing the good news where Christians live, work, play, shop, and carry out all the community's normal life functions. Pastors must proclaim Jesus Christ's great *agape* love that is complete and final in the passion by going to the Cross of Calvary, which will rejuvenate a grateful heart of love for Christ and His people.

In cultivating a heart for God, the passionate follower will demonstrate spiritual disciplines in life, especially Bible intake and prayer.<sup>96</sup> According to Tozer, "Any man who by repentance and a sincere return to God will break himself out of the mold in which he has been held and will go to the Bible itself for His spiritual standards, will be delighted with what he finds there."<sup>97</sup> God's Word is the divine standard to live by and must be the central ministry focus. Paul's prayer for the Colossian saints is that they grow in knowledge, producing fruitful

---

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 144.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>96</sup> Whitney contributes, "God's Word is the manna by which the heavenly Father feeds his children so that they can grow more into the likeness of his perfect Son." Whitney, *Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, 30.

<sup>97</sup> Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 77.

works that are pleasing to the Lord through a Christlike walk (Col. 1:9-10). Tozer relates to Wilson by challenging that genuine church growth and health begins with individuals who desire to pursue God, who has first called believers into fellowship with himself and to know God, which compels the sheep to draw closer. In contemplating the languishing church, Tozer avows that the rigid and cold quality concerning one's religious life results from the lack of holy desire and self-satisfaction that is a deadly opponent of spiritual growth.<sup>98</sup> To invigorate the heart for God, believers must be intentional about pursuing God through the discipline of Bible reading and prayer. The Apostle Paul affirms, "Continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2) and "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayerfully seeking a closer walk with the Father by studying divine truth about God, His attributes, and His relation to the universe will produce an everlasting bond of fellowship.<sup>99</sup> The Bible says, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant to sin" (John 8:34). Tozer highlights people who surrender to Christ's authority exchange the cruel slave driver, their sins, for a kind, gentle, and loving Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.<sup>100</sup> The great exchange is the redemption and deliverance from the oppression of sin into the new creation found in forgiveness, which yields a genuine heart of love for the Master and fellow servants.

Thom Rainer, in *Simple Church*, communicates that God had impressed on their church's leadership's hearts to focus people on four main things: an intimate relationship with God, community with others, serving, and influencing nonbelievers.<sup>101</sup> The Bible says, "Where *there*

---

<sup>98</sup> Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Rainer conveys church leaders should be prayer warriors asserting, "Not only do they pray and fast for the church regularly themselves, but they have also led the members to times of intensive corporate prayer." Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 130.

<sup>100</sup> Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 108.

<sup>101</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 93.

is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). Wilson complements by adding that churches who are zealous about simplicity will follow a simple vision.<sup>102</sup> First-century Christians focused on four dimensions in the church: the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer in Acts 2:42. This church growth method is grounded in teaching, ministering companionship, communing together, and continual prayer that is essential to church growth and health.<sup>103</sup>

Rainer guides Christians back to the simple gospel-sharing methods of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Dever, in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, supplements Rainer’s strategy asserting that a healthy church categorizes by developing members who are sincerely concerned for their spiritual growth and who want to imitate Jesus Christ better.<sup>104</sup> Cooperatively, Rainer and Dever realize people with the desire to follow Jesus Christ will have an intimate relationship with God and be found in the community by serving and loving others, which influences a more profound desire to make disciples for the kingdom expansion effort.

The disciple’s response to Jesus’ sermon was intriguing on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:32. Wilson brilliantly dispenses, “Something happened to them by the preaching of the Word that runs deeper than an exciting experience, truer than an inspirational feeling. Their hearts burned within them. Their affections were stirred – for Christ.”<sup>105</sup> David prayed in the Psalms, “One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:4). In parallel to Wilson, Rainer felt David’s heart of love and desire for God articulate

---

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 128.

<sup>103</sup> McDill asserts, “Growth is character must be a specific matter, a concrete and particular quality being cultivated. It cannot be a general, abstract growth without intention. Nineteenth-century preacher G. D. Boardman put it in these familiar words: ‘Sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.’” McDill, *Skills for Great Preaching*, 226.

<sup>104</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 210.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 79.

that his main central focus was an intimate and passionate relationship with God, which consumed him.<sup>106</sup> Paul addresses the Philippians, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Wilson emphasizes preaching the Word, while Rainer contrasts the focus and goal should be Christlikeness that compels believers to move forward in their spiritual journey.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, preaching the Word is essential to spiritual growth, but it should be for the goal of living and loving like Jesus in everyday life and ministry. For without Jesus, there would be no hope because everything else compared to him is nothing but rubbish. Preaching the Word and spiritual growth by the Word are two concepts brought together because Jesus Christ is the Word. Therefore, preaching the Word is preaching Jesus Christ for the objective purpose of generating everlasting heart transformation that constrains Christlike characteristics in individuals who are the body and bride of Christ, the Church.

Pettit complements that the focus of the congregation must be on Christ’s character and wisdom. Instead of the attention of one’s prayer being for God to “reveal his will,” one’s prayer should be for him to create Christlike character and understanding within the heart, soul, and mind.<sup>108</sup> Pettit communicates that to discern well an individual’s actions, thoughts, and desires should reflect God’s priorities in their life.<sup>109</sup> God freely reveals His divine will through His Holy Word and His Holy Spirit. Pettit contrasts other methods by supporting the community approach to becoming like Christ without compromising individual responsibility to study the

---

<sup>106</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 201.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 209.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Bible and pray to enrich the church's whole body, both personal and community. In comparison, Wilson places substantial responsibility on the church's leadership to faithfully and appropriately lead the parishioners in growth and health. Dever matches Pettit's view by proclaiming that living a Christian life means being committed to God and one another. Dever strengthens the argument by affirming this commitment entails being part of a community that centers around Jesus Christ and, "Being rooted in a church also encourages accountability. It helps in so many ways to grow as Christians."<sup>110</sup> The church can realize growth and health when the congregation unites together in worship, and the flock of God will find divine supply and nourishment through His Holy Word. The authentic, honest worship that elevates God and sincerely addresses the human condition can be attractive and invitational, as only genuine honesty can be.<sup>111</sup> Ultimately, for the everlasting transformation of the heart, soul, and mind to emerge, the potter must mold the delicate clay into Christlikeness for the believers good and God's glory.

### Transformation

In *When God Builds a Church: 10 Principles for Growing a Dynamic Church*, Bob Russell communicates the reality of man's problem: sin, a condition that only Jesus Christ can transform by forgiveness.<sup>112</sup> Russell powerfully declares the reason for church failure is that they have not been following at least one of the ten principles.<sup>113</sup> Their leaders are not humble people with vision and a desire to change, the congregation does not get along, they do not worship God, they do not give generously, they do not care about evangelism, they do not do things with

---

<sup>110</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks*, 221.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 39.

<sup>112</sup> Bob Russell and Rusty Russell, *When God Builds a Church: 10 Principles for Growing a Dynamic Church* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2000), 16.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

excellence, or God's truth is not being preached from the pulpit.<sup>114</sup> As Paul states about heralding the gospel, "For if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle" (1 Cor. 14:8). Therefore, ministers must preach the gospel with incredible clarity before anyone will listen to the warning. Piper conveys the definition of a preacher's work like this: "To know truth as it should be known, to love it as it should be loved, and then to proclaim it in the right spirit, and in its proper proportions."<sup>115</sup> To preach with clarity, the pastor must study and comprehend the Scripture well enough to explain it for children to understand. Preachers are the primary guardians of the unchanging biblical truth.<sup>116</sup> The truth-driven preacher will preach to stimulate ever greater love for God driving the world's affections from the heart so that it beats ever stronger for God's purposes.<sup>117</sup> With pastors devoted to expository preaching from the pulpit, the problem of preaching God's truth from the pulpit resolves quickly. Christ-oriented gospel expository preaching and teaching will lead to lasting heart transformation.

For transformation to occur in an individual by the power of God, they must hear, believe, and respond to His Holy Word by His Holy Spirit. Surrendering one's own will to the Father's will in complete obedience to His commands is an example of someone being sold out to God. Russell and Russell convey what Dwight Moody said, "The world is yet to see what God can do through a few people who are totally sold out to him."<sup>118</sup> The twelve sold-out disciples of God were able to spread the marvelous Word across the world. They were ushering the good

---

<sup>114</sup> Russell and Russell, *When God Builds a Church*, 10.

<sup>115</sup> Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 318.

<sup>118</sup> Russell and Russell, *When God Builds a Church*, 133.

news of atonement and salvation to all nations. Indeed, the church needs a vision for what the Lord can accomplish through a few faithful people with the courage to finish the race.<sup>119</sup> Without vision, there is no hope of transformation. The proper focus toward the One source of all hope, Jesus Christ, will produce a new sense of renewed hope, faith, and belief.

In *There's Hope for Your Church*, McIntosh expresses the first step to church turnaround is hope. Asserting the church will not move forward until they believe the pastor commits to staying long enough to realize transformation.<sup>120</sup> The committed pastor must first believe there is hope; this new sense of confidence will reflect in his actions and behaviors, inspiring others to follow. McIntosh emphasizes, "Revitalization leaders live the mission."<sup>121</sup> The pastor has to live what he preaches, effectively communicating the gospel message. The responsibility of leading the suffering church is taxing on the devoted under-shepherd. As they lead the congregation in a new direction, the pastor must maintain the four pillars of overall personal health: spiritual, emotional, physical, and social. Christ must first capture the pastor's heart before the church can capture the community's heart.<sup>122</sup> A fruitful kingdom ministry hinges on a heart for God, His Word, and His people. A transformed hopeful heart of love and gratitude for God's heavenly invitation makes an enormous impact.

Although God certainly has the power and authority over all created beings, they respond to His divine invitation. In *Simple Church*, Rainer addresses four ideas for thriving if the church is willing: clarity, movement, alignment, and focus.<sup>123</sup> He accentuates the simple church as

---

<sup>119</sup> Russell and Russell, *When God Builds a Church*, 133.

<sup>120</sup> McIntosh, *Hope for Your Church*, 32.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>123</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 57.

God's building, His spiritual house because God redeems believers that he created with the precious blood of His own Son, "Next, He moved in. He took up residence in our lives. And He is not done. He continually works on us. He is constantly redecorating. Continual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>124</sup> The principle is that if the congregation follows these four simple ideas for making disciples, the church will prosper. The pastoral ministry will then shift its focus onto priming the people to love God and love others in divine service.<sup>125</sup> Croft emphasizes that the church is revitalized by God's power through His Holy Spirit at work through the Word utilizing a faithful under-shepherd of God.<sup>126</sup> Rainer and Croft share the principle that the Holy Spirit's work is an inevitable continual work that is never done and is a lifelong process.<sup>127</sup> Croft adds that only God's supernatural work can transform a heart that is a hater of God who is dead in sins into a lover of God who is alive because of His righteousness that provides divine power of forgiveness, eternal life, and spiritual adoption.<sup>128</sup> Saul on the Damascus road seeing Jesus brighter than the noonday sun is a perfect example of the Lord transforming a stony heart filled with hate for Jesus Christ into a loving, obedient servant and powerful gospel preacher. This one-hundred-and-eighty-degree change is true heart transformation.

---

<sup>124</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 60.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>126</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 60.

<sup>128</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 55.

## Conclusion

This Literature Review has highlighted some prominent foundations concerning church growth and health for the congregation's revitalization. Rainer emphasizes, "Church leaders and members who embrace the reality of the Great Commission and Great Commandment for their lives will be a part of churches that don't just survive and live but thrive and grow."<sup>129</sup> Rainer also stresses the church must know that God is not done with them and understand, "You have been called to your mission field for such a time as this. That field demands you use your talent. Use it. Invest it. Make a difference with it. But don't bury it."<sup>130</sup> A healthy congregation will reflect God's character as He graciously reveals in His Word.

When living in fellowship with Christ, the minister is never alone in this revitalization work. Christ will build His church. He has promised never to leave or forsake His followers (Heb. 13:5). Before the ascension, Jesus directs His disciples to proclaim the gospel by preaching the Word. Jesus declared, "Lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:20). Hindson asserts, "This promise climaxes Jesus' Great Commission."<sup>131</sup> Christ sends His ministers to preach the gospel message to the entire world, touching the lost, revitalizing the church, and purifying the saints. The blessed assurance of the Holy Spirit's divine presence ought to embolden conviction and commitment in preachers to continue. The ultimate goal is to lead the church in recovery after the split, sanctify the saints, and better posture believers to live and love like Jesus in the community.

---

<sup>129</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020), 35.

<sup>130</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Scrappy Church: God's Not Done Yet* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 115.

<sup>131</sup> Hindson, *Trusting God*, 140.

## Theological Foundations

This project aims to implement a reconciling gospel intervention by preaching God's Holy Word for the church to experience spiritual transformation. This transformation occurs when individuals undergo spiritual growth through the Word, and then the church will experience renewal and recovery. The pastor must endeavor to fulfill the Scriptural mandate to faithfully expound the inerrant, infallible, and inspired Word through expository preaching and teaching that is Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused.<sup>132</sup> David Allen asserts, "In fact, it is the oldest method in the preaching pantheon, having been used by the earliest preachers as far back as the apostolic era of the church. It is called 'expository preaching.'"<sup>133</sup> God employs His ministers in distributing the Word through expository preaching that reveals His purposes and principles to His dear children. Through His Son by His Holy Spirit, God's power uses scriptural truth to save lost sinners and change the lives of those who believe. Thus, the Word transforms hearts by strengthening individuals and ushering in church revitalization.

## The Word

The Word of God creates: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).<sup>134</sup> God created the world through His Word, and what He speaks is true becoming existent realities.<sup>135</sup> The Bible says, "For he spoke, and it was *done*; he commanded, and it stood fast"

---

<sup>132</sup> Dever asserts, "I think that I would add that we want our congregations to be outward-looking. We are to be upwardly focused – God-centered." Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 21.

<sup>133</sup> Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 1.

<sup>134</sup> Sugel Michelén asserts, "God made everything that exists with the power of his Word. It is that simple. He spoke, and an unlimited quantity of beings and things came into existence—from gigantic stars to minuscule particles." Sugel Michelén, *From and Before God: A Practical Introduction to Expository Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 3.

<sup>135</sup> Lester Meyer, "Luther in the Garden of Eden: His Commentary on Genesis 1-3," *Word & World* 4 (1984): 430, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS*, EBSCOhost.

(Ps. 33:9). The Word of God convicts, “‘Let him speak my word faithfully . . .’ saith the LORD. ‘Is not my word like as a fire,’ declares the LORD, ‘and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces?’” (Jer. 23:28-29). God’s Word is like a hot burning fire, and if that zeal is within anyone, it has to come out. Preaching God’s Word allows the Holy Spirit to perform His convicting work on individuals for regeneration, revival, and church renewal.<sup>136</sup> The Word of God achieves His purposes:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

Preaching is essential to life and church invigoration for God’s purposes. Shalom Paul asserts, “The Deity is always ready to answer Israel’s need.”<sup>137</sup> God is always ready to provide everything the church needs. The Word of God is paramount: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). The Word of God should be a treasure in the heart, completely obeyed, and diligently taught from generation-to-generation as is commanded in Deuteronomy 6:6-9.<sup>138</sup> Christ-followers should desire the Holy Scriptures nourishment necessary for growth and health. Therefore, the Word of God creates, convicts, and achieves

---

<sup>136</sup> Russell and Russell assert, “Preaching is an essential ministry of the church and should be held in high regard. We need to develop in our young people not only a hunger for worship but a desire to be fed God’s Word through good preaching. And we need to creatively instill in their minds the idea that God could use them someday to spread the gospel.” Russell and Russell, *God Builds a Church*, 25.

<sup>137</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 173.

<sup>138</sup> Dever and Alexander confirm, “There is creating, conforming, life-giving power in God’s Word! The Gospel is God’s way of giving life to dead sinners – and to dead churches (Ezek 37:1-14).” Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 35.

God's purposes, being the vital resource for Christian living and invaluable to the church's recovery.

The church will experience new life through gospel expository preaching of the Word.<sup>139</sup> There is a magnificent vision for restoration found in Ezekiel 37:1-14.<sup>140</sup> Two crucial ingredients are essential for the church's return; the requirement necessitates the preaching of God's Word, and the standard set by God involves the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>141</sup> Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones proclaiming God's Word and the Holy Spirit brings them the breath of new life. The Bible reveals that the Lord said, "And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD" (Ezek. 37:14). As Ezekiel delivers God's Word of restoration for the Israelite people, preachers today will discover it vitally important to declare God's Word to the congregation for the church's restoration. The Holy Spirit will work through the message to breathe new life into the church. The apostle Paul charges young pastor Timothy to "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). The humble pastor must preach expository sermons proclaiming the Word for gathering and building up of the people.

---

<sup>139</sup> Dever declares, "Sound, expository preaching is often the fountainhead of growth in a church. Let a good expository ministry be established and watch what happens. Forget what the experts say. Watch hungry people have their lives transformed as the living God speaks to them through the power of his Word." Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Dever, concerning Ezekiel 37, asserts, "This is one encouraging vision! If you have ever been called to pastor a church that looks like it might be on its last legs, or if you can recall your own feelings of spiritual hopelessness before you found salvation, then you can see why this is a great passage of hope." Ibid., 49.

<sup>141</sup> Henard declares, "In order for the church to be revived, it will demand a mighty work of God's Spirit. Following a particular methodology or program does not guarantee success. One might greatly desire for the church to revitalize and grow, but genuine church growth calls for more than personal passion. It requires the Spirit of God. Church revitalization begins with laying the foundation of God's Word as it is preached and followed through a movement of God's Spirit. The two are inseparably linked." Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 2.

Lester Meyer asserts a fundamental principle of God's Word is that "Christ is the content of all of Scripture."<sup>142</sup> In the Old Testament, Christ is present as the promise in Genesis 3:15.<sup>143</sup> In the New Testament, Christ is present as supreme sacrifice in Hebrews 10:12.<sup>144</sup> Since Jesus Christ's sacrificial work is complete, he sits triumphantly at God's right hand on the throne.<sup>145</sup> Chapell asserts, "God fully reveals the dynamic power of his Word in the New Testament, where he identifies his Son as the divine *Logos*, or Word (John 1:1)."<sup>146</sup> Jesus identified as the Word denotes the inseparable characteristics of His message and person. Jesus Christ is the Truth that embodies the Word. Paralleling the Genesis account of creation, "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1), is St. John's Gospel highlighting that without God's Son, nothing exists. The Bible says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word of God is the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ.<sup>147</sup> MacArthur asserts, "Though easily understood by a child, John's Spirit-inspired words convey a truth beyond the ability of the greatest minds in human history to fathom: the eternal, infinite God became a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorious, incontrovertible truth that in Jesus the divine 'Word became flesh' (John 1:14) is the theme of John's gospel."<sup>148</sup> Jesus, the incarnate Word, not only came to fulfill the promise of the Old Testament but to offer himself as the supreme sacrificial Lamb for the atoning redemption of those who place faith in him, that is, the New

---

<sup>142</sup> Meyer, "Luther in the Garden of Eden," 434.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, vol. 36 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 304.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 6.

<sup>147</sup> Meyer, "Luther in the Garden of Eden," 434.

<sup>148</sup> John MacArthur, *John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006), 13.

Testament. Therefore, Jesus Christ the Rescuer is on a mission to redeem the lost, sanctify the saints, and one day glorify the church.<sup>149</sup> Christ provides the Holy Spirit power through His message to regenerate His church and faithfully sustain their growth and health.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, God's people have found it essential to depend on His faithful everlasting message. Paul encouragingly declares to young pastor Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, the faithful pastor must preach the Word in spirit and truth for the flock to experience regeneration, revival, and restoration.<sup>150</sup> Chapell vividly proclaims, "The efficacy of the truths in God's message, rather than any virtue in the messenger, transforms hearts."<sup>151</sup> God will accomplish His divine will and purposes for the church despite the weakness found in ministers. Paul affirms that sometimes, ministers are weak, but Christ is mighty within believers and shall live by His power (2 Cor. 13). The first-century church received the Word of truth with gladness, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The early church had their heart, soul, and mind focused on Christ that acknowledged His Word, participated in Christian fellowship, committed their lives, shared equally, and demonstrated singleness of heart. They continued, "Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). For any transformation to occur in individuals' lives, they will have to receive Christ's infinite Word as the divine source of all

---

<sup>149</sup> Michelén asserts, "Through the Word sinners are regenerated, brought to the faith, and added to the church (1 Cor 1:21; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23), and through that same Word believers are sanctified and brought to maturity (John 17:17; Acts 20:32; Eph 4:11; 5:25-26; 1 Peter 2:1-3). Remember that the Word of God is the most powerful force in the universe. If we truly believe that, then we will let him speak, not us." Michelén, *From and Before God*, 9.

<sup>150</sup> Dever and Alexander declare, "God's Word builds his church. So, preaching his Gospel is primary." Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 35.

<sup>151</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 4.

truth, apply those solid foundational principles to their lives, conform to His image, and profess God's eternal message to the world.

Peter profoundly professes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God in Matthew 16:16. Haddon Robinson asserts, "Genuine expository preaching has behind it the power of the living God."<sup>152</sup> This wonder-working power is from heaven, strengthening the confession of Jesus Christ and His supreme sacrifice through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Lord graciously gives a message of great hope in His reply to Peter, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). In Matthew 16:18-20, he identifies at least seven features and characteristics of the church he builds; he speaks of its foundation, certainty, intimacy, identity and continuity, invincibility, authority, and spirituality.<sup>153</sup> Jesus is the church's foundation being, the chief cornerstone and the rock to build His church.<sup>154</sup> This grand affirmation of who is responsible for building the church should afford preachers to proclaim the Word with greater zeal, confidence, and freedom realizing that God, who is in sovereign control, takes the spiritual manipulation monkey off their back.<sup>155</sup> Paul again encourages Timothy to be an example to the believers, "In word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). Preachers must continue to read the Word, preach Christ, and proclaim the good news of the gospel, for in doing so, the minister will preserve his life and those that hear the Word (1 Tim. 4:16). God, who is all-sufficient, will accomplish His divine

---

<sup>152</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 7.

<sup>153</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23 MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1988), 28.

<sup>154</sup> Dever asserts, "Jesus is building his church, and he is doing it by the power of his own Word (Matt 16:18; Rom 1:16; 10:17)." Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 81.

<sup>155</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 4.

purposes despite the minister's insufficiency (2 Cor. 3:5). God will build His church, and nothing will prevent or prevail against it.

The reminder that God will build His church is a beautiful declaration, promise, and assurance to ministers across the globe today that God will create, construct, and craft the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit for His purposes despite their insufficiency. MacArthur conveys the Holy Word that the apostles taught and that the faithful church has always taught, Jesus Christ is the true foundation, the living Word to whom the written Word bears witness (John 5:39).<sup>156</sup> The Jewish people based their pattern of life on Scripture.<sup>157</sup> The church desiring to experience regeneration should pattern their life after Scripture as well. Paul declares, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Col. 1:16). Jesus Christ, who is the Word and solid rock foundation of the church, is divulged through the written Word, making His person and presence real to His people. The Almighty creator and sustainer of the universe who is the Word uses His Word to reveal His image and character, providing the standard to carry out His divine purposes.

The Word of God supersedes human weakness: for example, Paul in prison, determined to defend the gospel, writes, "What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). Paul rejoiced in that Christ is preached; even when others preach with false motives, the work of God is still advancing.<sup>158</sup> The Word of God saves, "For it is the power of God unto salvation to every

---

<sup>156</sup> MacArthur, *John 1-11 Commentary*, 29.

<sup>157</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 268.

<sup>158</sup> Jim Shaddix asserts, "One of the greatest tragedies of human nature is that we have a tendency to use perceived 'success' in church growth to validate preaching philosophy and practice. In other words, if a church has

one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is salvation.<sup>159</sup> The Word of God transforms, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Christ being the absolute standard of all righteousness sets the focal point in His Word for all to follow.<sup>160</sup> When Paul exhorts the Colossian readers to “seek the things above” (Col. 3:1), he depicts this pursuit as putting sin out of their lives and adopting the virtues appropriate to their new life in Christ.<sup>161</sup> The new life conforms to Christ’s image, which transforms one’s mind and heart in regeneration to surrender to His perfect will in obedience, turning from sin in true repentance and focusing on him in faith.<sup>162</sup> Martin Luther contributes, “Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost.”<sup>163</sup> Ultimately, devoted Christians should fill their whole life with the Word. The genuine believer realizes that the Word is essential to

---

experienced numerical growth, then the preaching approach of the pastor must be right and worthy to be modeled. Certainly, such is not the case. God does not call his preachers to *success*, especially what is measured by worldly standards. God calls his preachers to *faithfulness*, and faithfulness includes the careful handling of his revealed Word with the utmost integrity. And besides, we will never know how much more effective some of the ‘successful’ preachers – past and present – could have been had they been faithful to allow the biblical text to drive their sermons.” Akin, Allen, and Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching*, 54.

<sup>159</sup> Wilson asserts, “It is grace that saves us, grace that sustains us, and grace that will lead us home to heaven. Grace is what makes Christianity unique among all the world religions and philosophies. Only the Christian faith has grace.” Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 187.

<sup>160</sup> Whitney asserts, “The purpose of all methods of Bible intake is to ‘keep it’ that is, do what God says and thereby develop into Christlikeness.” Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 24.

<sup>161</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>162</sup> Dever confirms, “Everyone – those who are church leaders and those who are not – is made in the image of God. We are to be walking pictures of the moral nature and righteousness character of God, reflecting it around the universe for all to see – especially in our union with God through Christ.” Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 36.

<sup>163</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), xvii.

life, the abundant life, and eternal life. Thus, the Word will be indispensable to the church and her desperate need to recover, revive, and redeploy.

The waning congregation must recognize and acknowledge who is in charge of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's Word and His Holy Spirit are vitally important, being critical for the life and heartbeat of the body of Christ to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Authority matters because not every individual can present their say on every issue in the church. Christ is in charge of His church, and His Word is the final authority. Christ has the authority and power to command (Luke 4:36). Jesus Christ taught with authority (Matt. 7:29). Paul conveys ministers should preach the Word with power and influence by affirming, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15). Croft conveys Christ is the one to whom the church must submit if it will experience the breath of new life and unity that only he can produce, for it came at the cost of His own life (Eph. 2:11-15).<sup>164</sup> The resurrected Christ gives His last words to His disciples, affirming that all power and authority is now in His mighty capable hands (Matt. 28:18).<sup>165</sup> Ministry leaders are to trust in Christ for the church's health and restoration it desperately requires through sound expository preaching that advances the reconciling gospel generating new life by the miracle-working Holy Spirit.<sup>166</sup> Now is the time for pastors to preach sound expository sermons to change, refocus, improve, and

---

<sup>164</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 67.

<sup>165</sup> Rainer endorses, "There are foundational, unchangeable issues. The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus died for sinners. He defeated death with his resurrection from the grave. Christ is the only way of salvation. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Eternity is a reality." Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 21.

<sup>166</sup> Caemmerer asserts, "How wonderful if the preacher can stand before his listeners as a man who sees with horror and pity the tragedy of unfaith and distance from God, who reflects the serenity and certainty of a man in whom God, not logic or demonstration or evidence but God through the Word of the work of Jesus Christ, has wrought the faith which he wants to share as a matter of life instead of death." Caemmerer, "Recovery of the Church," 154.

move toward more significant church accomplishments.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, focusing on the One in authority, the minister can powerfully preach Christ-centered expository sermons for the congregation's growth and health.

### Conclusion

The Word of God powerfully transforms the hearts and minds of those who hear, accept, and respond to the message of good news. The preaching of God's Word produces spiritual growth in individuals that inspires them to live and love like Jesus in the community. The Lord will direct one's path, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:12-13). The revitalization pastor will soon discover that a heart of love for God, His Word, and His people will be necessary for successful church growth.<sup>168</sup> God engages His ministers to proclaim the revelation of Jesus Christ to the world. Preaching is a rescuing act in which Christ ministers to His people by His Holy Spirit, opening and transforming their hearts and minds with the truth.<sup>169</sup> The minister must prepare and deliver wholesome expository sermons from the Holy Scripture to realize spiritual growth in the congregation for the church's health. Allen emphasizes, "The best preaching throughout church

---

<sup>167</sup> Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 37.

<sup>168</sup> McArthur cautions, "People may be well trained and highly skilled in a technical or professional field, but they are a liability in the workplace if they are self-centered. Likewise, the most academically well-prepared pastor can be a liability in the church if he does not seek to sacrificially love and serve the people." John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2002), 67.

<sup>169</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 6.

history has always been expository preaching.”<sup>170</sup> The exercise of expository preaching and teaching will prove vital for the church’s regeneration and recovery.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The church’s problems will only be corrected, improved, or resolved when people understand their desperate need for rescue and receive the forgiveness of sin that only Christ provides. Those who hear the Word, place faith in Christ, and turn from their iniquity experience His divine rescue in salvation.<sup>171</sup> Christ, in all of His redemptive glory, delivers this essential transformation. The declining church will find it necessary to place Christ first in all things and remain committed to a kingdom-focus. With the strength of the indwelling Holy Spirit, through Christ-centered expository preaching and teaching, the congregation should experience a renewed vision for advancing the gospel locally, nationally, and globally.<sup>172</sup> They are dreaming again about what it means for the church to be in the world, salt and light, positioning themselves with an outward and upward focus in unity, faith, love, and spiritual disciplines to grow in the sanctification process. Sanctification is fundamental Christianity, conforming to Christ-like characteristics in mind, body, and soul. The Savior ultimately came to rescue, redeem, and redeploy people for the kingdom’s agenda. The church is to let Christ’s marvelous light shine

---

<sup>170</sup> Akin, Allen, and Mathews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Mims stresses, “A kingdom-focused church reaches heights it cannot reach by itself and bends down to rescue persons from the depths of the sin it denounces. It is a community of ordinary saints used by God to accomplish extraordinary things. It is his perfect combination of heaven on earth.” Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 10.

<sup>172</sup> Bill Henard declares, “Leadership must learn to strike a balance between developing ministry that cares for the church and getting the church onto the mission field . . . People are encouraged and trained to become decision-makers and are allowed the freedom to try and to fail. The church moves beyond its four walls to engage the culture with greater relevance and impact. The congregation becomes more gospel-centered in its approach to growth, health, and ministry.” Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 19.

through their attitudes and actions to fulfill the Great Commission and Great Command for the good of the flock and God's glory. Throughout this thesis project, the student pastor will support the biblical approach to church revitalization.

### Biblical Approach

Croft, in *Biblical Church Revitalization*, accentuates that dying churches can experience transformational recovery if they adhere to a biblical approach.<sup>173</sup> Croft details his approach in three main sections: church revitalization being defined, diagnosed, and done.<sup>174</sup> The adoption and implementation of the biblical approach will undergird this thesis project. Church leaders must approach church revitalization with the presumption that God has a blueprint for the church.<sup>175</sup> God establishes His impeccable plan for the church in His Holy Word. Church revitalization is necessary when the congregation slides into unrighteousness and loses its first love, Jesus Christ.<sup>176</sup> Bill Henard proclaims, "Revitalization is grounded in the Word of God; its application is rooted in the principles that are drawn from Scripture."<sup>177</sup> Revitalization is forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead (Phil. 3:13). Davis applies the word revitalization "to describe the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church

---

<sup>173</sup> Mims asserts about the biblical approach, "The message is that the answers you are looking for are not found, nor will they ever be, in someone else's successes, ideas, methods, or models. Your answer is in knowing the biblical model of a church and understanding how to conform your church – regardless of size, location, resources, history, or any other variable – to that biblical pattern." Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 11.

<sup>174</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17.

<sup>175</sup> Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 7.

<sup>176</sup> Peter Toon asserts, "The God of grace intervenes on behalf of his people to declare them in the right before himself and the world. So, the way is prepared for the further righteous activity of God in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, by whom the gift of righteousness is offered to the whole world in his gospel." Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 19.

<sup>177</sup> Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 6.

from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health as defined by the Word of God.”<sup>178</sup> To become effective in the kingdom ministry, pastors must fulfill their specific calling to be expositors of God’s Word to revive the church toward God’s mission.<sup>179</sup> The church leadership should diagnose the current church’s state to discover potential challenges moving forward and adjust their tactics accordingly. The biblical approach to church revitalization and health will eliminate most problems by becoming the supreme standard of conduct. Cheyney asserts, “Realignment means to put back into proper order or alignment, such as a readjustment, restructuring, shake-up, reshuffling, reorganization, rationalization, or rearrangement; to cause to form new arrangements or to have a new orientation; reorganize.”<sup>180</sup> A church requiring revitalization is a plateauing or declining body of Christ that needs to be refocused and reoriented to Christ through the Word.<sup>181</sup> God’s Word and Holy Spirit are instrumental in the church’s recovery, spiritual growth, and sustaining health. It must be committed to God’s Word for the church to experience revitalization and develop enduring health.<sup>182</sup> Revitalization done correctly occurs when the church will trust and commit to the promises God makes in the Holy Scriptures.

---

<sup>178</sup> Davis, *Revitalize*, 20.

<sup>179</sup> Henard declares that “revitalization demands a specific calling. The church obviously is losing ground in reaching the world, so a part of the answer to getting the church back on track with God’s mission is for pastors to help churches get back on track with God’s mission. That is church revitalization!” Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 45.

<sup>180</sup> Cheyney, *Church Revitalization and Renewal*, 13.

<sup>181</sup> Davis asserts, “Rely on God’s Word, not on techniques. Church revitalization cannot be bought from a Christian bookstore. God’s Word must be unleashed, not only weekly from the pulpit but also throughout every ministry and moment of church life. God’s Word alone has the power to save souls and bring them to Christlike maturity.” Davis, *Revitalize*, 23.

<sup>182</sup> Henard affirms, “In order for a church to develop and maintain good health, it must be committed to God’s Word as its authority for both what the church believes and how it practices its polity and faith. Every method, program, and change must be evaluated on its biblical content, not just on its effectiveness.” Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 10.

God discloses that His Word will not return void, penetrating to the depths of the heart and soul by cultivating the soil through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity activates the everlasting heart transformation in the life of individuals who place their faith in Him. Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, certainly encourages His ministers to remain faithful in shepherding and feeding the sheep until He powerfully returns to give them a crown of glory that will not fade away (1 Pet. 5:4). When pastors realize their worth and identity is in Christ alone: they are free and secure to be themselves, live authentically, embrace their brokenness, emotionally connect, graciously love those who reject them, preach to those who hate their preaching, and lead in godly strength those who struggle to follow, knowing the Chief Shepherd is always present.<sup>183</sup> The biblical approach is key to the pastor's diligent personal soul care, expository preaching of the Word for the dying church to experience revitalization, which results in love for God and others.<sup>184</sup> Throughout the sacred text, highlighting God's sovereignty will establish and build His church by His Word through His Spirit. Hopefully, through sound expository preaching and teaching, the dying, diminishing, and the divided church will comprehend their need for revival and unity. When faithful ministers set their affections and stand on the Word, God will strengthen these courageous pastors to see their churches revive, survive, and thrive.

Dever, in *What is a Healthy Church*, helps believers distinguish the fundamental characteristics of a healthy church: expositional preaching, biblical theology, and a proper understanding of the gospel.<sup>185</sup> These key characteristics of a healthy church are the epitome of

---

<sup>183</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 40.

<sup>184</sup> Jerry Vines asserts, "As the preacher grows confident in God's call and builds upon that foundation strong convictions about God's Word and the practice of intimate personal worship, the divine anointing will not be far behind. Such is the lifeline of effective preaching. The anointing is the spiritual fervor that flows through a man in the preaching event." Jerry Vines and James L. Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999), 13.

<sup>185</sup> Dever, *What is a Healthy Church*, 63.

this thesis project. Helping the congregation recognize God's character revealed in the Holy Scripture to begin building a healthy church that reflects His holy characteristics in everyday life. God's Word and Holy Spirit are the divine sources of life and health.<sup>186</sup> Every church should aspire to become a healthy growing church in the community for the kingdom expansion mission.<sup>187</sup> God's congregation members must work, live, and love together as God designed to become a healthy church family. Dever communicates that as any good parent desires several virtuous attributes to symbolize their family, so also the church should display love, joy, holiness, unity, and reverence before the Lord.<sup>188</sup> This student pastor desires to be a co-participant in the research activity and walk alongside the congregation in spiritual growth for the good of all and God's glory. This project's essence is to prime the church for living out the characteristics that Paul praised the early Christians at Thessalonica for by being an exemplary church. Paul thanked them for their genuine conversion, increasing faith, and growing love in 2 Thessalonians 1:3. Dever powerfully concludes, "If we *increasingly* reflect God's character, then it stands to reason that aspects of our lives, individually and corporately, don't reflect his character – there must be smudges on the mirror that need to be polished out, curves in the glass that need to be flattened. That takes work."<sup>189</sup> It will take work, dedication, and commitment to

---

<sup>186</sup> Throughout his book, Robert Warren understands church health as a translation of "the biblical concept of salvation, namely wholeness, balance, and harmony with God and all creation. Christ frequently said to people whom he healed, 'Your faith has saved you.' This is variously translated 'made you well,' 'made you whole.' So, a healthy church is one that has been touched and energized by the presence of God, so it reflects something of the good news of the wholeness made possible through the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit." Robert Warren, *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church* (Wiltshire, England: Church House Publishing, 2012), 15.

<sup>187</sup> Mims asserts, "My biggest challenge to conventional thinking about building a healthy church is this: you will never find the full meaning of your church or the pathway to a healthy, successful church in methods, conferences, and overhead transparencies. You will only find the full understanding of your church's life and mission in the heart of God and his will for you." Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 10.

<sup>188</sup> Dever, *What is A Healthy Church*, 39.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 122.

God and His Word to apprehend church renewal and spiritual growth. Paul also reveals, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, to transform into Christ’s glorious image, the waning congregation must increase in faith and grow in love by the sound expository preaching and teaching of the gospel grounded in biblical theology. When individuals hear, heed, and honor the Word, it powerfully weeps through like a mighty rushing wind increasing their understanding.

A positive way to inspire church renewal and spiritual growth in individuals is Sunday School or small groups. Sunday School offers individual participants the opportunity to study God’s Word and discuss how it applies to contemporary life. Sunday School is one of the essentially fundamental factors in church growth.<sup>190</sup> Robust study habits will form, biblical literacy will increase, spiritual revitalization will occur, and the church will experience successful growth. Rainer conveys a four-step strategy to assimilate new members:

1. Believing – leading people to a life-changing commitment to Christ.
2. Belonging – guiding people to commit to Christ’s church through believer’s baptism and meaningful church membership.
3. Becoming – helping people become what God has created them to be, particularly through involvement in discipleship.
4. Behaving – encouraging people toward regular attendance, ministry involvement, community impact, and personal evangelism.<sup>191</sup>

Therefore, intimate groups of biblical training are vital for the church’s restoration creating exciting opportunities to invite the community to participate. Sunday School involvement is one gauge to determine if effective assimilation occurs.<sup>192</sup> Teaching the Word is essential to life;

---

<sup>190</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 28.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

coming together to learn of the glorious gospel with a kingdom-focus supplies the nutrition necessary to revitalize, mature, and flourish.<sup>193</sup>

The church will find it indispensable for transformation to have a kingdom-focus.<sup>194</sup> The pastor who desires church revitalization should have a clear biblical vision with a kingdom-focus for the people's good and God's glory. Pastors must learn to be humble toward opponents because God resists the proud and gives grace unto the humble (Jas. 4:6).<sup>195</sup> Why should a youthful expositor give his best years to a dying church? Davis's number one answer is, "To bring glory to God by doing something difficult for the kingdom."<sup>196</sup> Although it may be challenging to experience church turn-around in renewal, God alone is the life-giving power source. Gene Mims asserts, "Church renewal in our world is largely dependent on our understanding of the kingdom of God and the church's relationship to it."<sup>197</sup> The kingdom of God exists in the heart of believers knowing Christ (Luke 17:21); if the church desires to know about the kingdom, they need to get to know the King.<sup>198</sup> Therefore, pastors must receive, trust, and preach the kingdom of God, which is at hand and found in Christ. Mims profoundly expresses, "The *kingdom* means the reign of God in the lives of his people, enabling them to

---

<sup>193</sup> Mims explains, "A kingdom-focused church makes disciples, matures them through spiritual transformation, and multiplies them as kingdom agents throughout the world. Such a church has a passion for seeing every person complete in Christ." Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 16.

<sup>194</sup> Mims defines a kingdom-focused church, "Is a church that exists to transform unbelievers into Christlike believers and to mature these believers into kingdom multipliers of the message of Christ." Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Davis affirms, "In the struggle to revitalize a local church, it is easy to demonize opponents and slander them privately. It is easy to play political battles and lower your ethical standards, all the while forgetting that you are every bit as sinful as they are apart from the sovereign grace of God in Christ. God commands that we be humble and loving toward all who oppose us and allow his Word to transform them as it is transforming us." Davis, *Revitalize*, 24.

<sup>196</sup> Davis asserts, "No ministry of eternal consequence is easy, and each display of valor for the glory of God will shine in heaven with its own radiance. Overcoming the specific obstacles that attend the revitalization of a local church brings a unique kind of glory to God." Ibid., 34.

<sup>197</sup> Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 24.

<sup>198</sup> Mims proclaims, "The kingdom-focused church is one that has found its full meaning in the heart of God and in his actions toward all of us here on earth." Ibid., 9.

serve him wholeheartedly and to live the kind of life Jesus died to give us.”<sup>199</sup> The key to recognizing a kingdom-focus is that Christ alone has exclusive ownership of His church, which he purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Since Christ bought the church with His supreme sacrifice, he alone is the church’s power and authority.<sup>200</sup> The kingdom-focused church will expand the kingdom by pointing people to Christ, the King of kings, for salvation, sanctification, and ultimately glorification.

A sincere desire to see the church grow and prosper into the healthy body of Christ that sustains in Scripture will require a biblical approach to church revitalization. The solution for the dying, divided, or plateaued church is to have an upward Christ-centered focus grounded in the Word. Biblical revival is the Spirit’s work of the reconciling gospel that God employs to build His church for their good and His glory. Mark Clifton, in *Reclaiming Glory*, contributes that struggling churches can turn around as he “started churches by loving and exegeting (assessing) my community, by reaching and discipling young men, by creating simple and reproducible strategies, by preaching Christ-centered, biblically sound sermons, and by covering it all with prayer.”<sup>201</sup> Ultimately, all worship, fellowship, communion, prayer, and preaching are for the glory of God. Thus, to see the church turned around in biblical revitalization, the reconciling gospel must be preached and taught from the pulpit for the glory of God. Wilson affirms the biblical approach is Christ-centered, “Indeed, everything the Bible teaches, whether theological

---

<sup>199</sup> Mims emphasizes, “The *kingdom* of God, in its simplest form, is the reign of Jesus Christ as Lord and King in our lives. It is his Holy Spirit working in us, through us, and around us in such a way that we actually live and do the will of God. Through the kingdom, we can live the lives God created us to live – life at the maximum.” Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 40.

<sup>200</sup> Mims insists, “A kingdom focus is utterly dependent on God. People sitting out there in the pews do not give their lives to Christ because they like up-tempo music or great Sunday School lessons – through those things might appeal to them on the surface. They commit their lives to Jesus because they see the need in their lives and because they recognize that Jesus can satisfy in a way nothing else can.” Ibid., 21.

<sup>201</sup> Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 11.

or practical, and everywhere it teaches, whether historical or poetical or applicational or prophetic, is meant to draw us closer to Christ, seeing him with more clarity and loving him with more of our affections. The Bible is about Jesus.”<sup>202</sup> The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. Christ’s redemptive work on the Cross of Calvary completes salvation, sanctification, and glorification for God’s elect. The gospel is compelling, the gospel is good news, the gospel is going into the world, the gospel is bearing kingdom fruit, the gospel is growing, and the gospel renaissance comes Spiritually as Spirit-filled men and women freely embrace it.<sup>203</sup> When Christ is exalted, the church will experience regeneration, recovery, and revival.

### Conclusion

The church reflects Christ’s marvelous light through their actions, behaviors, and characteristics in the community. The congregation will find the perfect example to follow in the Holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ. The diligent pastor and faithful deacons will find it essential to follow the biblical mandate to trust the Word. Following this mandate will cause leadership to shepherd souls, love all people, pray hard, celebrate more senior members, be patient, expect to suffer, and pick battles wisely.<sup>204</sup> The wisdom to lead well originates from the Word and the Spirit that inspired it to tell the story of Jesus. The story of Jesus is the good news that God Orchestrated Salvation through the Propitiation of Emmanuel’s Love (GOSPEL). The biblical approach is the transformational heart work of the Holy Spirit that penetrates down deep in the soul to cultivate the fruitful life accomplishing spiritual growth and revitalization in the church. This Bible study method is the expository preaching and teaching of God’s Word with an

---

<sup>202</sup> Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 79.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>204</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 48.

application for the people to cultivate health. The ultimate goal of this action research thesis project is to advance the biblical approach, kingdom-focus, and posture the church to live and love like Jesus in the community.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter describes the intervention plan to address the problem outlined in chapter one and reflects the theological and theoretical foundations established in chapter two. The purpose of this strategic design is for Unity Missionary Baptist Church to adopt a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry that postures for church revitalization, spiritual growth, and invigoration to live and love like Jesus. This methodology section expounds on the implementation of the intervention design at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. In this action research thesis project, the primary instrument in evaluating this intervention plan's results is utilizing a pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire. The project's questionnaire establishes a baseline for measuring the change in the remnant that remains loyal to the church after the divisions; this is the senior adult group of faithful members. The baseline measures their biblical understanding and desire for spiritual growth and health. The key to measuring change is the engagement of the congregation, which follows the reconciling gospel program. Indeed, one's behavior measures one's spiritual status, whether Christlike or not, which establishes how well individuals come together as a community.<sup>205</sup> This engagement is measured, exposed, and assured by how the participants listen and apply lessons learned in the sermons: to increase biblical literacy, follow Christ, attend worship services, participate in Vacation Bible School, pray for one another, practice spiritual disciplines, fellowship together in unity, fulfill the Great

---

<sup>205</sup> Ernest Stringer asserts, "Community based, in the sense of establishing a 'common unity' of purpose and perspective, is inherent in all aspects of the investigation. Through working together, establishing an understanding of each other's experience and perspective, we establish the basis for truly effective outcomes with head, heart, and hand. Community is not a place. It is a state of mind." Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2014), xxi.

Commission, exercise the Great Command, and ultimately glorify the Father.<sup>206</sup> This student researcher truly desires to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this project and the reconciling gospel program, acknowledging that only he can breathe new life into His church. The Holy Spirit will transform hearts making a profound impact on the church for the glory of God and fruit for the kingdom. The researcher will collect data from the questionnaires, observation, field notes, personal interviews, and a focus group study. This section closes with the details of the eight expository sermons, small group discussions, and daily devotionals implemented, followed by a focus group session.

### **Intervention Design**

This student researcher's degree is in expository preaching and teaching. The intervention design centers around a biblical approach that emphasizes sound expository preaching and teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture. Jesus Christ is the Word, written and spoken, or bread of life and the Holy Spirit is the breath of life, new life, and abundant life. Thus, making the bread and breath essential for the church to experience revitalization and new life. Fundamental expository preaching and teaching will explain and apply a passage of Scripture that illustrates the truth of the text to the congregation.<sup>207</sup> If any improvement occurs concerning the problem, it will be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Word breathing new life into His church, ushering in everlasting heart transformation. The main

---

<sup>206</sup> Wilson asserts, "True fruitfulness is evidenced chiefly in obedience to the commands of God, the greatest of which is loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). If a church exists for the sake of its own survival, for the sake of its own enterprise, or for the sake of creating wonderful experiences for people, it is not fruitful no matter how big it gets." Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church*, 65.

<sup>207</sup> Vines and Shaddix define expository preaching as "The process of laying open the biblical text in such a way that the Holy Spirit's intended meaning and accompanying power are brought to bear on the lives of contemporary listeners." Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 30.

intervention design implements the eight-week reconciling gospel program at Unity Missionary Baptist Church for the saints' regeneration and sanctification. Over the last decade, the church has suffered from splits, separations, and divisions that need exploring to discover possible solutions. This particular research thesis project's ultimate goal and purpose are to provide critical aid in posturing the church toward unity, spiritual growth, and living and loving like Jesus in the community. This intervention design's scope is to observe, evaluate, and report results to understand if the church has progressed forward, continued waning, or stalemated in spiritual growth.

For Unity Missionary Baptist Church to experience *Transformation Recovery Through Expository Preaching and Teaching*, it needs to unite together, orienting toward Christ, centering on the gospel, and focusing on producing fruit with a kingdom motivated agenda. Unity accomplishes fruit for the kingdom when the pastor and congregation display a heart for the lost.<sup>208</sup> Mims asserts, "A church's kingdom focus has to come from outside the congregation – never from the inside. The focus of every successful church comes from the God of the universe, from heaven, His presence, and His reign. It is a kingdom focus because it comes from, rests in, and is empowered by the King."<sup>209</sup> With all attention solely on the King, the Savior who gave His life for the church, the kingdom mission cannot fail.<sup>210</sup> When the church centers its focus on Jesus Christ, who redeems, revives, and redeploys it, the church can and will flourish.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup> Davis proclaims, "This is a crowning element of all true works of revitalization. A pastor who yearns to see revitalization in a local church must make a steady appeal to God to work in him and the church a passion for the lost." Davis, *Revitalize*, 46.

<sup>209</sup> Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 9.

<sup>210</sup> Davis addresses, "The exaltation of Christ as the sole owner of the church was the power for revitalization." Davis, *Revitalize*, 49.

<sup>211</sup> Mims emphasizes, "With a kingdom focus, any church can and will flourish. A kingdom-focused church will be strong in times of trouble and change. It will be certain in uncertain times. It will persevere with confidence in God's work. It will thrive when neighborhoods fail, and circumstances turn bad. A kingdom-focused church is a powerful tool the Lord uses to accomplish his purposes." Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, X.

Encouraging pastors and church leaders to understand a few basics about the essential nature of the church. Mims stresses, “No church is perfect, the only church you can change is the one you are serving in right now, and every successful church is a kingdom-focused church.”<sup>212</sup> The kingdom focused congregation requires humble repentance and surrender to the Word. Thus, avowing to follow and obey Christ’s divine will makes the church successful. Christ alone can transform hearts through His amazing grace. Davis emphasizes, “This change of human hearts is influenced by the Spirit of God through the Word of God, and it is done under the kingship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>213</sup> Jesus Christ is the Almighty power source of all revitalization in the church. He needs to be the main focus of any research to lead the church in following His commands, commission, and progress in Christlikeness.

### Method

The research method employed in this thesis project is action research. Ernest Stringer contributes the primary purpose of action research is “to provide the means for people to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to design an appropriate way of accomplishing the desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness.”<sup>214</sup> The ultimate goal for the DMIN researcher who desires to exercise biblical pastoral leadership will be to facilitate an intervention design so that the congregation can become what God has called and intended them to be.<sup>215</sup> In action research, the facilitator becomes a co-participant with the congregation, collaborating for the necessary

---

<sup>212</sup> Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church*, 7.

<sup>213</sup> Davis asserts, “This work of revitalization is a supernatural work of sovereign grace. It is not merely the rescue of a building and a bank account, but it is fundamentally the transformation of human hearts.” Davis, *Revitalize*, 54.

<sup>214</sup> Stringer, *Action Research*, 6.

<sup>215</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), xxiii.

transformation. The investigation exposes ideas, concepts, and everyday experiences that provide the basis for reformulating practices, policies, programs, and services related to community life at the church.<sup>216</sup> The questionnaire design is to connect the participants with relevant issues or problems concerning the declining church. The unstructured form will be open-ended questions, flexible and exploratory, and conversational in approach.<sup>217</sup> Hopefully, the unstructured and informal attitude of the questions will set the participants at ease, giving them the confidence to provide sincere heartfelt answers that benefit the congregation as the body of Christ for God's glory. The most successful and fruitful action research emerges when participants are free to voice their experiences and perceptions that influence their future extensively.<sup>218</sup>

Good observation throughout the data collection process, evaluation, questionnaires, and reporting the results is an important technique. Harry Wolcott communicates that identifying participant observation as the core research activity in the qualitative inquiry by underscoring the everyday nature of what is studied and the researcher's collecting data is naturally routine.<sup>219</sup> Observing the participants is the main instrument used in ethnography. Tim Sensing asserts, "In ethnography, the researcher would be observing people as they engage in their routine activities of worship, meetings, service, fellowship, and education."<sup>220</sup> A fundamental observation of the church's culture, relationships, traditions, and practices is vitally important for the pastor researcher discovering problems or issues in a particular ministry context. Since the participants are the most valuable source of evaluation for this project, observing their behavior is a powerful

---

<sup>216</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 63.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>219</sup> Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 86.

<sup>220</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 93.

way to check the participants' consistency in the questionnaires. Sensing offers an observation protocol including demographics, physical settings, events, interactional patterns, verbal and written content, and meaning.<sup>221</sup> The observation of the participants is a necessary piece for the triangulation method employed in this thesis project. Ministers will undoubtedly observe whether the participants are listening, excited, sleeping, anxious about the time, or running out of oxygen during the sermons. The student researcher will gather data by looking for what people experience while executing the reconciling gospel program to discover their reactions, behavior changes, and impact on the congregation.

Implementing a strategic intervention plan at Unity Missionary Baptist Church will encourage the congregation to develop a vibrant Christ-focused kingdom agenda. They will cultivate a clear vision of aspirations, an operational plan to accomplish the dream, and action plans that layout activities for spiritual growth and health.<sup>222</sup> The strategic action research plan is to implement a sound expository preaching and teaching program, collaborate with the participants to develop a clear vision for the church, and evaluate the circumstances to better posture toward revitalization in unity, overall health, and spiritual growth. The ultimate goal of this project is to see the church fulfill the biblical mandate that requires the body of Christ to love the Lord and others, which is the Great Commandment found in Luke 10:27. By participating in this reconciling gospel program by completing questionnaires and contributing to the focus group study, the church should realize its strengths and areas of improvement. The congregation at Unity Missionary Baptist Church should then be able to maintain any sustainable progress and continue through the lifelong sanctification process of the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>221</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 99-102.

<sup>222</sup> Stringer, *Action Research*, 191.

## Project Model

The pastor researcher will begin with a permission request letter to the church communicating the topic and purpose of this thesis project to receive permission to contact and invite church members to participate and allow the reconciling gospel program of preaching and teaching to be conducted at the church.<sup>223</sup> Next, the researcher will invite members of Unity Missionary Baptist Church over eighteen years of age to cooperate in this research thesis project through the participant recruitment letter.<sup>224</sup> The consent form will need to be signed by the focus group study participants at the end of the eight-week program.<sup>225</sup> These forms explain the theme for this project, the purpose of the implementation at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, the participation needed, and the action research time frame.

The reconciling gospel program's implementation will begin with the pre-questionnaire that establishes a baseline for the church. This is handed out on a Wednesday evening before the sermon series, small group discussions, and daily devotionals initiate. This biblical approach to church revitalization will begin the following Sunday morning, launching the *Rescue Mission* sermon series. This series will consist of eight expository, biblically grounded sermons that are Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused. The faithful biblical pastor must surrender his style, thoughts, and intents in preaching driven by a stronger desire in the pulpit ministry.<sup>226</sup> The stronger desire surrenders one's preaching and life to God, who will change hearts and transform lives through this submitted proclaiming of his glorious gospel. Transformational

---

<sup>223</sup> See Appendix G for the permission request letter.

<sup>224</sup> See Appendix H for the participant recruitment letter.

<sup>225</sup> See Appendix I for a consent form.

<sup>226</sup> Steven Smith asserts, "The 'drive' of preaching is birthed from the recognition that in order for Godlike results to take place, preaching must be surrendered to God, and the preacher must give his life in that surrender." Steven W. Smith, *Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2009), 17.

recovery is only achievable by biblically based expository preaching and teaching through the Holy Spirit's activity and the inspired Word of God. The following eight sermon titles and topics were employed in the *Rescue Mission* sermon series.

1. *Can These Bones Live: All Hope is Not Lost* will examine Ezekiel's vision to discover the Holy Spirit's divine power to breathe new life into the dying, dead, or divided church (Ezek. 37:1-14).

2. *Personal Need: God Will Hear from Heaven* is essential to the spiritual revitalization and the plan for healing (2 Chr. 7:14).

3. *God's Unspeakable Gift* will disclose how this healing, salvation, and rescue is made possible through the Savior who ultimately came to redeem, revive, and redeploy His church (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

4. *Loves Transforming Effect* will explain how Christ's great love invites, inflames, and instructs. Jesus restores Peter at breakfast and empowers him to preach and teach with passion (John 21:12-19).

5. *Power Source* will reveal Christ's superiority and supremacy over the church, the indwelling fullness of the Father, and how He makes reconciliation possible at the cross through His blood sacrifice (Col. 1:18-22).

6. *Christian Calling* relates that a church God could be proud of experiences genuine conversion, increasing faith, and growing love for God and others (2 Thess. 1:1-4).

7. *A Healthy Fear* of the Lord in reverential awe and respect, which is the beginning of wisdom and the only way to experience God's great love, joy, and treasures (2 Cor. 7:1).

8. *An Outward Focus* is how a healthy church will posture. The church can trust in Christ's sufficient power, Great Commission, and eternal presence (Matt. 28:18-20).

If this reconciling gospel program of preaching and teaching is to accomplish its goal, Jesus Christ will have to remain the supreme focus, and every message will have to be gospel centered. The eight sermon outlines are in an appendix.<sup>227</sup>

The small group discussions or teaching messages will explore the Apostles' doctrine, fellowship in the gospel, breaking of bread, and prayer that the early church believed and established. These Bible lessons' primary objective is to discover foundational lifelines that invigorate an authentic commitment to live and love like Jesus in the community. These practical instructions unveiled in the New Testament should motivate the believer to perform vital spiritual disciplines in everyday life. The small group discussions convened during the same eight-week period as the sermon series.<sup>228</sup> These discussion lessons will consist of eight consecutive meetings navigating through the book of Acts, selecting specific Scriptures, and discovering powerful lessons on how the early church began, developed, and sustained a God-honoring ministry. These eight essential lifelines for church revitalization are found in the book of Acts: gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Word, preaching, prayer, faith, hope, and love.

The daily devotional plan will maintain the *Rescue Mission* theme that the sermon series and small discussions conveyed.<sup>229</sup> The plan will cover forty-eight days of Scripture verses designed to encourage, uplift, and stimulate spiritual growth and health. The daily devotions based on spiritual disciplines align with the eight essential lifelines explored in the small group discussions. For example, the first week centers on the gospel; consequently, the six daily devotions that same week will coincide with a particular verse in the Bible that points to the good news of Jesus Christ. The objective of these small group discussions and daily devotionals

---

<sup>227</sup> See Appendix D for the sermon series.

<sup>228</sup> See Appendix E for small group discussion lessons.

<sup>229</sup> See Appendix F for daily devotionals.

is to kindle a flame for the gospel in the heart and soul of those who believe, stirring them to talk about church revival and direct their focus to the paramount Creator, Builder, and Sustainer of the church, Jesus Christ.

This thesis project's principal tool is the questionnaires given at the beginning and end of this action research.<sup>230</sup> The post-questionnaire was distributed on the last Wednesday evening of the small group discussions and requested to return within one week. The insights revealed, discovered, and exposed during this time were recorded by keeping questionnaire answers, field notes and collecting the data to report the results in chapter four unbiasedly. The pre-and post-questionnaires will have eighteen of the same questions to reveal if any transformation has occurred and see if the church has grown, waned, or stalemated during these eight weeks. The qualitative research data collected from the questionnaires, observations, and follow-up focus group study are analyzed.

When the small group discussions are complete, the research facilitator will conduct the focus group study when all questionnaires return.<sup>231</sup> This focus group study is an informal interview with at least three congregation members who faithfully participated in the church's eight-week program. Those three participants were chosen based on their commitment to church attendance, having been there throughout the eight-week program, and willing to provide feedback. The participants' perception that volunteered to complete questionnaires will be the insider angle in the triangulation method employed. The facilitator will ask fellow pastor Doug Fielden to function as an independent expert. The focus group study questionnaire is in Appendix C. The logistics of this project will cover the eight-week reconciling gospel program.

---

<sup>230</sup> See Appendix A and Appendix B for the questionnaires.

<sup>231</sup> See Appendix C for the focus group questionnaire.

## Logistics

*Rescue Mission*, the eight-week expository sermon series, was implemented in the sanctuary at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The pastor delivered the reconciling gospel messages during the regular meeting hour on Sunday mornings; they started on May 16, 2021 and concluded on July 4, 2021. The time frame was between 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM during the already scheduled morning worship service. The small group discussions took place in the church's sanctuary during the Wednesday night prayer meeting from 7:00-8:00 PM. The daily devotionals were distributed weekly in the bulletin for the participants to take home and read; six daily devotionals a week for eight weeks to enhance the participants' spiritual formation.

The participants are the entire congregation and faithful remnant at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, but the main focus was the senior adults who make up the majority of church members. The participants have to be eighteen years of age or older. They do not have to work in a specific career or field because the research concerns the church. The "buy-in" will come from the humble, patient, and persistent attitude of the facilitator soliciting the support of the congregation by keeping the process simple. Hopefully, they will recognize the immense benefit of sound expository preaching and teaching, thus being eager to participate in the questionnaires and learning lessons. The project facilitator is the pastor at Unity Missionary Baptist Church and already responsible for preaching and teaching God's Holy Word through faithful exposition as the obedient servant of the Lord. The Holy Spirit working through the Holy Word breathes everlasting heart transformation in the individual and the church. An individual must experience spiritual growth for church renewal to occur. Since the pastor is conducting this intervention design, he feels optimistic about this action research. The need to build rapport and trust begins by allowing the participants to invest in the reconciling gospel program fully.

## Engagement

The researcher cannot measure spiritual growth easily because it is not quantified by counting bodies in seats on Sunday morning. Since spiritual growth is the process of becoming more like Jesus Christ, the faithful follower should walk and talk like him in everyday life. The method of hallowing oneself for the service of the Lord initiates at the moment that individual is redeemed by grace through faith and begins conforming into Christ's image. The Bible says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23, ESV). These should characterize the Christian’s life because they have experienced salvation in Jesus Christ. Spiritual growth identified by these fruits of the Spirit should become more evident as believers engage in faithfulness. Engagement is the essential element in measuring change, and this centers on the congregation's faith and commitment. Pastors are encouraged and instructed to preach the Word faithfully as Paul asserts, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Thus, preachers must be persistent in the study of the Word to proclaim Scripture’s gospel-centered messages faithfully. As ministers are required to remain faithful to the Holy Word and study, the congregations they serve will find it necessary to remain steadfast in following Jesus Christ in all things. Faithfulness produces fruit and spiritual growth.<sup>232</sup> Exercising their faithfulness by engaging in Bible study, Sunday School, prayer, participating in worship services, lovingly serving God and others, building relationships, and sharing Jesus Christ will determine the amount of fruit produced. This fruit

---

<sup>232</sup> Wilson declares, “The church is not called to be successful by attaining certain numbers or meeting a preset standard of growth, but we are called faithful. And faithfulness will lead to fruitful growth. There may be seasons – hopefully many! – when your fruit leads to numeric growth. But the fruit of faithfulness, according to the Bible, is deeper discipleship, maturing in Christ, and a more loving reach outward in service to our neighbors.” Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church*, 67.

should be evident to the dedicated observer concerned about the church's spiritual growth and health.

Sanctification is spiritual growth that involves both fellowship with God and fellowship with each other.<sup>233</sup> God desires His children to grow spiritually, and He has graciously provided everything needed to experience real spiritual growth. God's marvelous Word, His Holy Spirit, and His church are the three essential components in spiritual formation and development.<sup>234</sup> The Bible says, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Sanctification is a lifelong engaging process of taking in the truth of God's Word and growing based on believing and responding to that truth. One cannot grow spiritually unless they grow in their understanding of God's truth. Jesus affirms, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). Revitalization is a process, not an event or program.<sup>235</sup> Church revitalization and spiritual growth is a process over the long term and may not be immediately detectable. Still, one should be able to look back over the years and notice the progress. Like natural growth, a person starts as a baby, grows into a young adult, and matures into an adult. Christians start as newborn babes, rise through the Word into young believers, and then develop into faithful disciples who make disciples. This sanctification process is the ongoing work of the Word heard, believed, and applied in the lives of believers producing spiritual growth.

---

<sup>233</sup> Pettit asserts, "Spiritual formation as seen in the New Testament has four key components. Spiritual formation possesses (1) an agent – the Spirit; (2) a dynamic – growth in the context of community identification; and (3) a goal – holiness in the context of mission. It also requires (4) an open and responsive heart that pursues formation as a key purpose in life." Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 103.

<sup>234</sup> Pettit proclaims, "So God has given us all we need for the task of spiritual formation through three essential resources that empower us in our journey toward Christlikeness – his Word, his Spirit, and his people." Ibid., 47.

<sup>235</sup> Alvin L. Reid, *Revitalize: Your Church Through Gospel Recovery* (Columbia, SC: Gospel Advance Books, 2017), 7.

Spiritual growth is a privilege, obligation, and responsibility of all believers, and the purpose of this spiritual development is to become like Christ. The Bible says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Therefore, the intuitive expectation of loving and developing Christians is faithfulness and obedience to God’s commands exhibiting justice, mercy, and humility in their character.<sup>236</sup> Christians should love not simply because of duty but also out of deep heartfelt love and gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done to deliver salvation. A passion for His Word and truth produces faithful obedience. A believer’s identity is in Christ, and they exist to know, love, and serve God. The inspired Holy Scripture is the primary catalyst for spiritual growth.<sup>237</sup> The Bible itself claims, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is the authority in which one must surrender to refocus the church in a Christ-oriented direction.<sup>238</sup> Of course, the purpose of this intervention is not to simply change the church model but to change the church’s heart. That transpires by preaching gospel-centered messages because only the good news of Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection changes hearts.<sup>239</sup>

Reestablishing a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused vision at Unity Missionary

---

<sup>236</sup> Pettit emphasizes, “These qualities – justice, mercy, and humility – are the fundamental qualities necessary to accomplish the greatest commandments, namely, to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ and to ‘love you neighbor as yourself’ (Matt. 22:37, 39).” Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 144.

<sup>237</sup> Wilson emphasizes, “The American Bible Society has done their own surveys and found the same results: the number one predictor of spiritual growth is ‘engaging Scripture.’ If we are looking for the one thing that effects change in the human heart, nothing compares to the Word of God.” Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church*, 80.

<sup>238</sup> Wilson declares, “The Bible has a supernatural power to address the human condition. Within the Bible is an essential message with the power to draw our focus to Jesus Christ and transform our hearts. This gospel is the power of God. It is supernatural.” Ibid., 81.

<sup>239</sup> Wilson highlights, “Preach grace and grace alone – and do not give up! – and then watch as the metrics of grace emerge to become the measurement of your church’s health over time. Preaching the gospel is the first and most important way to give your church the power it needs to bear fruit for Christ.” Ibid., 201.

Baptist Church through the Holy Spirit's supernatural strength will provide the anticipated dynamic spiritual growth and development.

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

The following section will provide a detailed account of how the intervention design was implemented at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The church is where Christians can link arms united together to strengthen the weak in faith so that non-Christians will hear the gospel and strong Christians will positively focus their energies living in the community. Dever conveys, "Faithfulness to the Gospel must be our measure of success, not results."<sup>240</sup> Ultimately, the Holy Spirit invigorates sound expository preaching and teaching of the inspired Word for churches to experience revitalization. This breath of new life in the church will transform individuals as their understanding of God, His Word, His work, and His will as it is revealed in the Scripture. Thus, the church will become better postured to live and love like Jesus in the community for God's glory. This section will also include a description of the eight expository sermons in the series *Rescue Mission*, details of the small group discussions, and daily devotions employed in this action research thesis project.

### **Purpose**

Unity Missionary Baptist Church has suffered over the past decade from church splits, the loss of friends, and being hurt by pastors who would not stay longer than a couple of years at a time. Thus, it is vitally important to the longevity of Unity Missionary Baptist Church to experience church revitalization, spiritual growth and become focused on Jesus Christ, who

---

<sup>240</sup> Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 28.

transforms hearts and lives.<sup>241</sup> This student pastor's desire and the primary purpose of this thesis project are to lead Unity Missionary Baptist Church in *Transformational Recovery Through Expository Preaching and Teaching* that benefits the church and the community for kingdom impact. The salvation of just one more soul and the sanctification of a dear saint is well worth studying and producing this thesis project. The enthusiasm for this thesis is to find out if the church is helping people become more like Christ? Is the church growing spiritually and increasing in biblical literacy as they travel along life's way? The motivation is to realize God's divine purpose for the church and implement the proper focus beginning with the pastor to the lay member of the congregation. When everyone aligns in the kingdom mission with a kingdom focus, the abundant benefits of God's blessings will manifest at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Indisputably, the ultimate benefit of hearing, believing, and responding to the gospel's good news is salvation and eternal life.

The direct benefit for participants who genuinely participate in this study is learning how to posture for spiritual growth and experience health in the church. With a Christ-oriented kingdom priority, the church should comprehend the necessity to live and love like Jesus in everyday community life. Imitating the Savior is only accomplished by the expounded Word through the Spirit, which results in the church's restoration. Thus, producing an excellent benefit for society because the community should be able to acknowledge the church conforming to His image by helping those in need, sharing the gospel, and demonstrating God's love through service. The church exhibiting Christ-like characteristics outside the church's walls in their everyday walk of life should make a difference in the community. The most tangible benefit for

---

<sup>241</sup> Davis asserts, "Churches need revitalization precisely because they have become increasingly dominated by man's glory, wisdom, efforts, agenda, and power. If a church is to be revitalized, then the absolute ownership of the church by Christ must be central to everything you yearn for and do." Davis, *Revitalize*, 48.

the church in hearing the Word preached is the spiritual nourishment that God provides through His Word, His Holy Spirit, and His exposed truth.<sup>242</sup> The Holy Spirit breathes new life into His church through expository preaching and teaching of the inspired Scripture that calls attention to biblical principles, magnifies the Word, Christ's person and work, and glorifies God. When God builds His church through His Word, His Holy Spirit, and His Son's supreme sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary, salvation, sanctification, and spiritual growth will result. The church will not only revive and survive the past troubles and hurts but thrive for the good of the people and God's glory. Pursuing a kingdom mission is the paramount duty of the faithful, following, and focused church.

### Pursuit

Jesus Christ powerfully stated, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). He calls the individual disciples to "Follow me" (Luke 5:27). Jesus, after the resurrection, reiterates to Peter, "Follow me" (John 21:19). In the pursuit of invigorating the church, pastors and leaders must follow Christ, pointing others to the glorious Savior. Jesus restored Peter on the Sea of Galilee before sending him out to preach; three times, Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (John 21:16, ESV). David Helm asserts, "The point being driven home was clear: those whom Jesus sets apart to proclaim the gospel are those who demonstrate their love for him by loving his church!"<sup>243</sup> In the pursuit of expository preaching and teaching for transformational recovery, the primary audience of God's Word is the

---

<sup>242</sup> Vines and Shaddix assert, "Numerous benefits surface when the truth of God's Word is exposed, especially through the systematic preaching of Bible books. Many of the same benefits, however, apply to the general exposition of various passages." Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 49.

<sup>243</sup> David R. Helms, *Expositional Preaching* (Wheaton, IL: 9Marks, 2017), 90.

church, God's people.<sup>244</sup> The ultimate goal of preaching God's Word is to cause a stir among the dry bones that revives a love and passion for following Christ, who first loved the church. When a person truly loves Christ, they will obey His commands, feed His sheep, and follow him out of a profoundly grateful heart of appreciation for His great loving sacrifice.<sup>245</sup> Love will transform the pastor's heart, enhancing the sermons and overflowing to the congregation. Then they will become active church members who share the good news, attend regularly, and serve faithfully in the body of Christ, yearning for His triumphant return.

Serving as the principal investigator or lead researcher on this project, this pastor will endeavor to faithfully proclaim the reconciling gospel messages throughout this project with love and passion for Christ and His people. The majority of this study is anonymous, and it will not be possible to link any participants to the pre- and post-questionnaires. Since the pastor is the lead researcher, there is potential for a conflict of interest. Still, the primary safeguard is upholding integrity by transparent communication with the congregation about the nature and purpose of this thesis project. The researcher will emphasize that participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will not affect current or future relations with the researcher, Liberty University, or Unity Missionary Baptist Church. In the beginning, the pastor presented a verbal announcement to the congregation a week before the *Rescue Mission* sermon series started. He had previously

---

<sup>244</sup> Helms asserts, "And so I say to all of you who would desire to preach the message for Christ: Do you love Jesus? Do you really love him? Then manifest your love for him by feeding and tending those for whom he died. Learn to love people." Helms, *Expository Preaching*, 90.

<sup>245</sup> Pettit declares, "If we want to be conduits of God's love in the world, our expressions of love in the world need to be patterned after his expressions. We experience God's love because we have responded to concrete and meaningful expressions of his love toward us – none more significant than the Son's physical atonement for our sins. Our love also must be a love characterized by action. Spiritual formation must never be a private experience or an entirely interior experience. It should express itself in an active love for others." Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 175.

coordinated with the deacon board to gain permission to carry out this project and invite Unity Missionary Baptist Church members to participate in the study.

The researcher implemented an after-action notebook for taking notes during the entirety of this thesis project at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. He recorded immediate impressions concerning the congregation's health and attitude throughout this reconciling gospel program. The researcher supplied a pre-questionnaire comprised of eighteen questions, comprised of seven short answers and eleven multiple-choice questions, which was expected to take less than fifteen minutes to complete. The post-questionnaire consisted of thirty questions: five short answers, nine yes or no, and sixteen multiple-choice. Hard copy questionnaires are stored in a locked filing cabinet, and all other documents or recordings are stored on a password-locked computer. During the first week of this expository preaching program, the pre-questionnaires were handed out to establish a baseline for change during these eight weeks. The questionnaires were furnished to everyone eligible and present in the church. The researcher reiterates that these were strictly voluntary to complete but would be greatly appreciated. A manila envelope is placed on the back pew in the church to keep the questionnaire results anonymous for participants to return their unsigned and completed questionnaires. It usually took about three to four services to get the completed questionnaires returned. The current pastor preached the eight reconciling gospel messages and the final outlines, which can be found in Appendix D. He also taught the eight small group sessions on Wednesday evenings that covered The Acts of Apostles and the early church dynamics for spiritual growth. The daily devotionals were delivered to Unity Missionary Baptist Church members in the bulletins each week on Sunday mornings. During the last week, the focus group consent forms and post-questionnaires were handed out to determine if any

change had occurred in the congregation. Participants signed and returned the consent forms on Wednesday evening when they met for the focus group study.

The focus group study was held the following week on Wednesday night after the eight-week reconciling gospel program. The researcher allowed forty-five to sixty minutes for the twenty focus group questions to be fully answered, hearing from everyone that wished to contribute. The questions cover the participants' perspectives on controlling passions, personal reflection, and transformation in the church. Stringer conveys some rules the researcher should implement for the focus group study, "Each person should have opportunities to express his or her opinions and perspectives, participants should be respectful and non-judgmental of each other."<sup>246</sup> The focus group study was audio recorded for the duration of the time spent discussing and answering the questions. The questionnaires and group study were terrific resources for data collection.

The primary data collection instruments are the pre- and post-questionnaires and the focus group questionnaire, but data collected from observations and field notes will also contribute. The researcher employed the ATLAS.ti computer program to organize and systematically analyze the qualitative research data collected from the participants. The data was sorted into patterns for thematic and content analyses for conceptual ideas discovered in the qualitative information. The ATLAS.ti program assisted the researcher in charting and sorting the data collected to produce a better product. The data collection results are in chapter four of this thesis project.

Through transparency, the student-pastor researcher will support the participants in understanding Scripture mandates and impart pastoral care and leadership that implements

---

<sup>246</sup> Stringer, *Action Research*, 111.

change.<sup>247</sup> Triangulation is actively working to develop an unbiased point of inquiry that benefits all participants in the study. Triangulation employed in this thesis project are the pre-and post-questionnaires, focus group study, and observations of participants. Looking at the data from three different sources is the only way to establish an impartial and balanced view of the situation.<sup>248</sup> Comparing observational data with the questionnaire and focus group data will reveal if what people say in public correlates with what they say in private.<sup>249</sup> Discerning these differences or similarities will provide the best foundation for understanding how to progress in health and spiritual growth. Throughout this thesis, the researcher engages qualitative action research as a multi-method focus to genuinely grasp a love for God and His people that ushers in everlasting heart transformation.<sup>250</sup> The pastor that loves God will feed His sheep the Word for the nourishment and overall strength of the body.<sup>251</sup> Church renovation accomplishes making sense of the surroundings involving the participants' social structures, social roles, and tenderness. Observing how the participants come together to focus on the Savior for His glory and honor will reveal the current state of the church. Through the natural course of ministry at

---

<sup>247</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 63.

<sup>248</sup> Sensing stresses, "Triangulation is cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible." Ibid., 72.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>250</sup> Sensing asserts, "I simply advocate a form of action research that employs a multi-method approach with community located in a specific setting and is intended to bring transformation." Ibid., 55.

<sup>251</sup> Rainer asserts, "Christ's death on the cross was an unconditional act of love for people who did not deserve his love. Some of these leaders said they have prayed for this unconditional love for their congregants. And although they cannot match the love of Christ in its depth, they can demonstrate it in their unconditional acceptance of all of their members." Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 62.

Unity Missionary Baptist Church, the researcher has noticed some problematic behaviors and sincerely aims to inspire transformation for better practices.<sup>252</sup>

### Conclusion

When the reconciling gospel program was implemented at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, the participants should acknowledge the Holy Spirit's work in revitalizing the church for the kingdom agenda: advancing the congregation to make disciples who learn to live and love like Jesus in the community. The church will experience transformation, spiritual development, and new life when the Word of God is expounded to the flock through sound expository preaching and teaching of the gospel. Jesus Christ is the bread of life, and the Holy Spirit is the breath of life in the church today. The work of the bread and breath is essential to the church, which empowers spiritual growth for the kingdom mission causing the people to persevere and praise God.<sup>253</sup> The Bible says, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7, ESV). God emphatically brings the increase when the preacher explains, illustrates, argues, and applies the Word through the Holy Spirit-inspired message to the people. Christ the King has promised to build His church.<sup>254</sup> Expository preaching and teaching that the Holy Spirit guides is indispensable for the church because its health and holiness are at stake. This revitalization work is the beginning of the Holy Spirit's revival in the church. Praise God that His marvelous grace and mercy endure forever. The

---

<sup>252</sup> Sensing asserts, "The essentially practical, problem-solving nature of action research makes this approach attractive to practitioner-researchers who have identified a problem during the course of their work and see the merit of investigating it and, if possible, of improving practice." Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 59.

<sup>253</sup> Helms emphasizes, "While it is true that people are converted and matured through expository preaching, the word of the gospel must be wedded to the Spirit's work in order for conviction of sin, regeneration and faith, and lifelong perseverance to come." Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 34.

<sup>254</sup> Davis asserts, "A vigorous establishment of Christ at the center of every aspect of church life is essential to the work of revitalization, so do it, and the church will be transformed." Davis, *Revitalize*, 57.

faithful, loving pastor's prayer is to remain a humble servant for the Lord who preaches Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused messages for the church's good and God's glory.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

In the beginning, God spoke this world into existence with the word of His mouth. Nothing would be without him, and nothing can live without him. Therefore, the declining church will find it essential to hear, respond, and obey His written Word in the Holy Scriptures to increase in the knowledge and grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The more one knows, the more one grows. John clearly states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ is the Word and, “In him was life” (John 1:4). Since Jesus is the Word, it formulates the need for preachers to declare Christ to all people manifesting His glorious salvation message that delivers new and abundant life to those who believe. Chapter one defined the problem at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, being in a languishing position after losing several pastors over the past decade. The church desperately requires a spiritual revival that inflames their heart for God and others. Chapter two of the literature review arranged the foundation for the biblical approach to church recovery through expository preaching and teaching. The rescue mission of Christ is to deliver the lost sheep from the bondage of sin, “For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The salvation that Jesus Christ imparts to those who believe is the ultimate heart transformation. Chapter three unveiled the methodology for implementing the intervention design at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Indeed, the purpose of this thesis project is to lead the church in a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry that produces church revitalization, spiritual growth and health, and a desire to live and love like Jesus. The ministry’s chief end is to do everything for the good of the people and the glory of God. Chapter four will explore the results of this implementation at Unity Missionary Baptist Church.

Indeed, this methodology's insights will help strengthen the church in future endeavors to make a kingdom impact. The qualitative research is analyzed using a simple triangulation system; these sources are the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire, the focus group study and personal interviews, and the researcher's observations recorded in after-action notes. This cross-checking of the accuracy of the data will bring to light the condition of the church and assist the pastor researcher in plans at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The information is collected through the questionnaires, focus group study, personal interviews, and the congregation's engagement identifies themes and slippages discovered concerning the data.

## **Data Collection**

### **Questionnaires**

The baseline for measuring change was the pre-questionnaire. The pre-questionnaire consisted of eighteen multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The pastor researcher will gain valuable insight by examining the congregation's understanding of expository preaching, God's Word, spiritual growth, and desire to conform to Christ's image. Thus, understanding what needs to be preached and taught for the people's best interest and God's glorification. Fourteen copies of the pre-questionnaire were passed out to Unity Missionary Baptist Church's congregation, and seven were completed giving a fifty percent return rate. The researcher measured the change between the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire. The researcher provided the post-questionnaire consisting of thirty multiple-choice and short-answer questions after the eighth week of the reconciling gospel program. The post-questionnaire consisted of thirty multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The researcher distributed fifty copies of the post-questionnaire to the congregation, co-workers, and brethren from two other churches; forty-seven were completed giving a ninety-four percent return rate.

Table 1. What kind of things do you currently do to enhance spiritual growth?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Bible reading	3	14	43%	30%
Praying	1	18	15%	38%
Bible reading, praying and singing	1		14%	
Exercise Spiritual Gifts		5		9%
Evangelism		2		6%
Meditation				
Small-Group/Sunday School				
Church Attendance	1		14%	
Devotionals				
All of the above		5		9%
Left Blank	1	3	14%	8%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

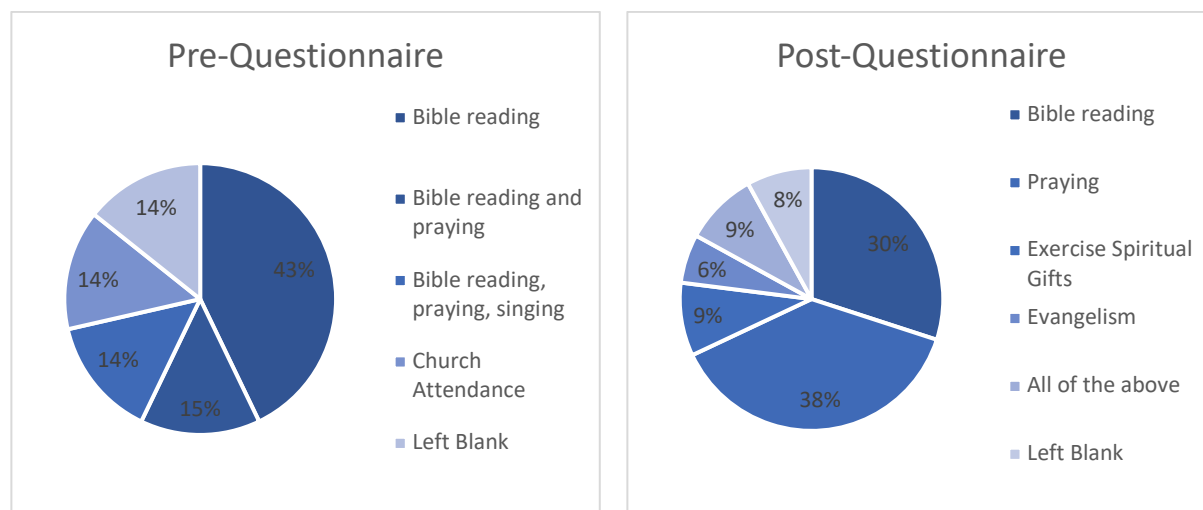


Figure 1. Table 1 Answers.

Table 2. How would you rate your personal understanding of God's truth?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Baby				
Child		3		7%
Young Adult		16		34%
Mature Adult	5	19	72%	41%
Senior Adult	2	8	28%	17%
Left Blank		1		1%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

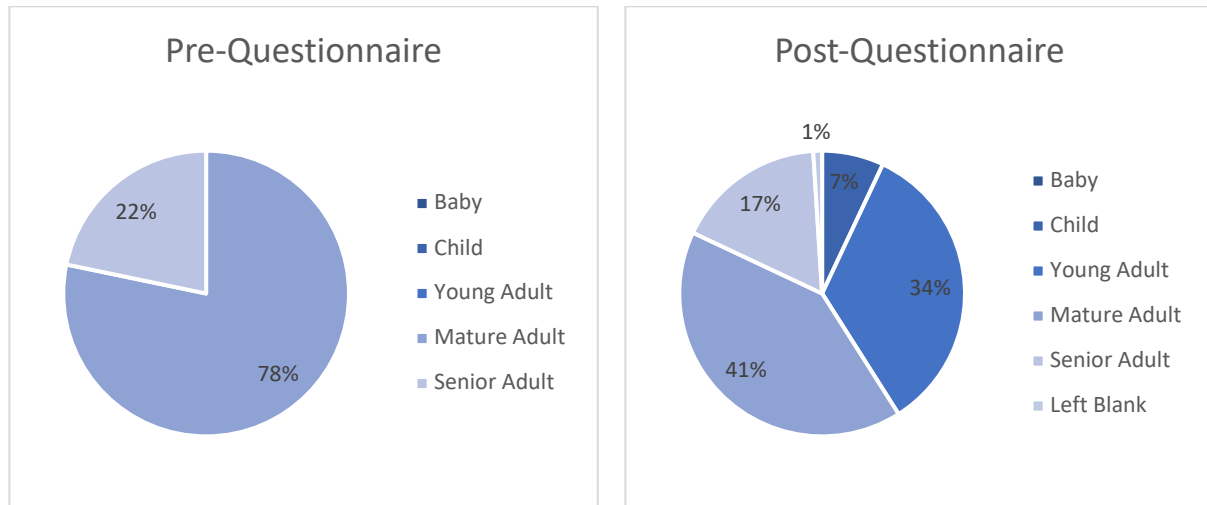


Figure 2. Table 2 Answers.

Table 3. What do you feel is the most important discipline for spiritual growth?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Bible reading	2	13	29%	28%
Praying	2	10	29%	22%
Worship		6		12%
Serving		4		8%
Evangelism				
Group Bible Study				
Staying focused on Christ				
All of the above	3	14	42%	30%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

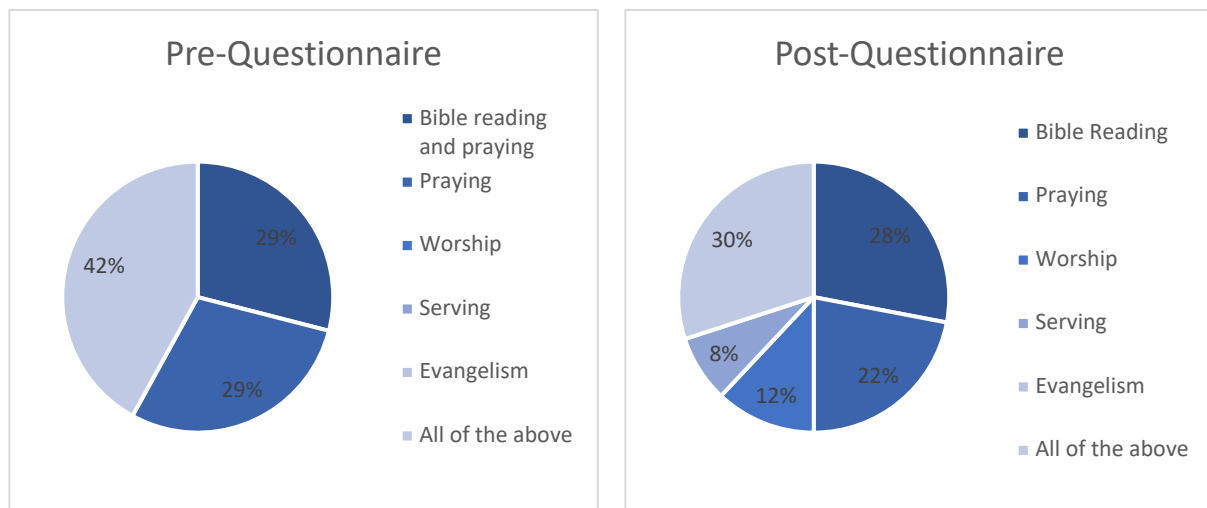


Figure 3. Table 3 Answers.

Table 4. How do you demonstrate Christ-like transformation in daily life?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Desire to evangelize	3	3	42%	7%
Harmony in your home		4		9%
Patience with others		10		21%
Compassion for the needy	1	8	16%	17%
Christ-centered focus		10		21%
All the above	3	12	42%	25%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

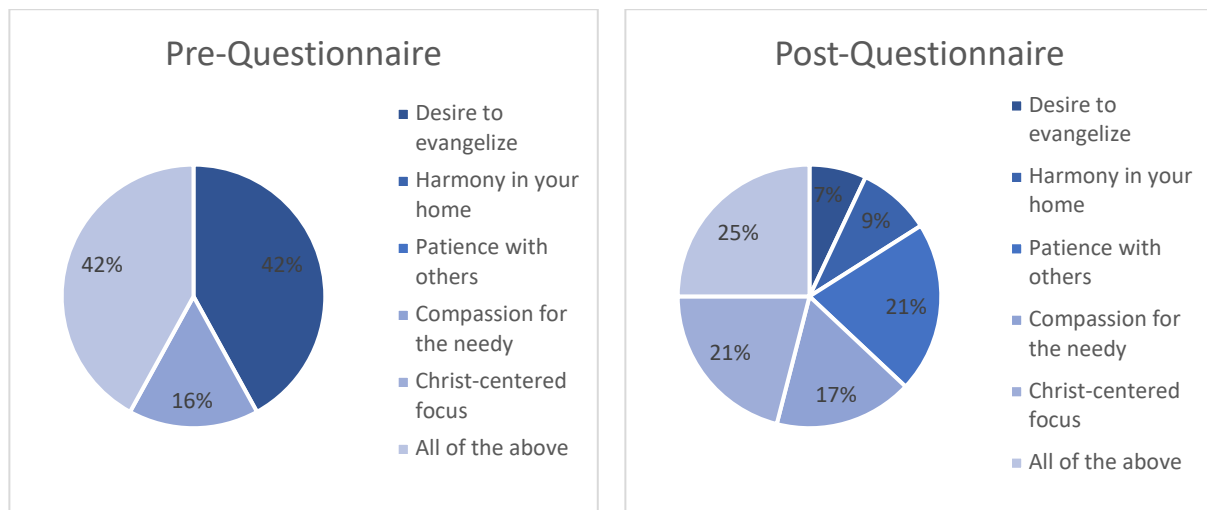


Figure 4. Table 4 Answers.

Table 5. How would you rate your perceived status of spiritual growth over the last three months?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Declining		1		1%
Unhealthy				
Neutral		15		33%
Healthy	7	24	100%	52%
Flourishing		6		13%
Left Blank		1		1%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

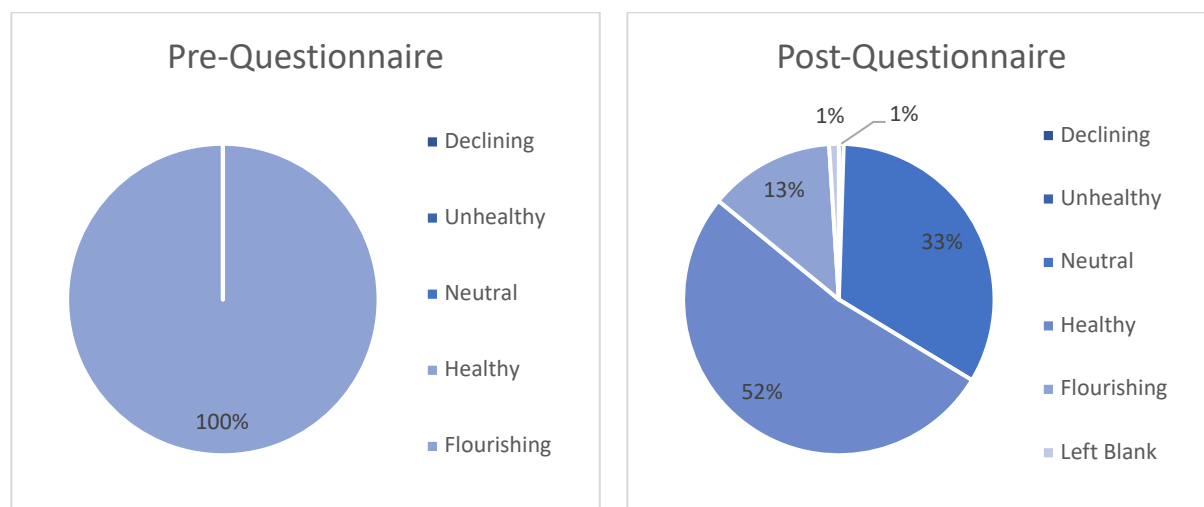


Figure 5. Table 5 Answers.

Table 6. Do you feel spiritual growth is a process of taking in the truth of God's Word and growing on the basis of believing and responding to that truth?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Yes	7	45	100%	95%
No		2		5%
Total	7	47	100%	100%

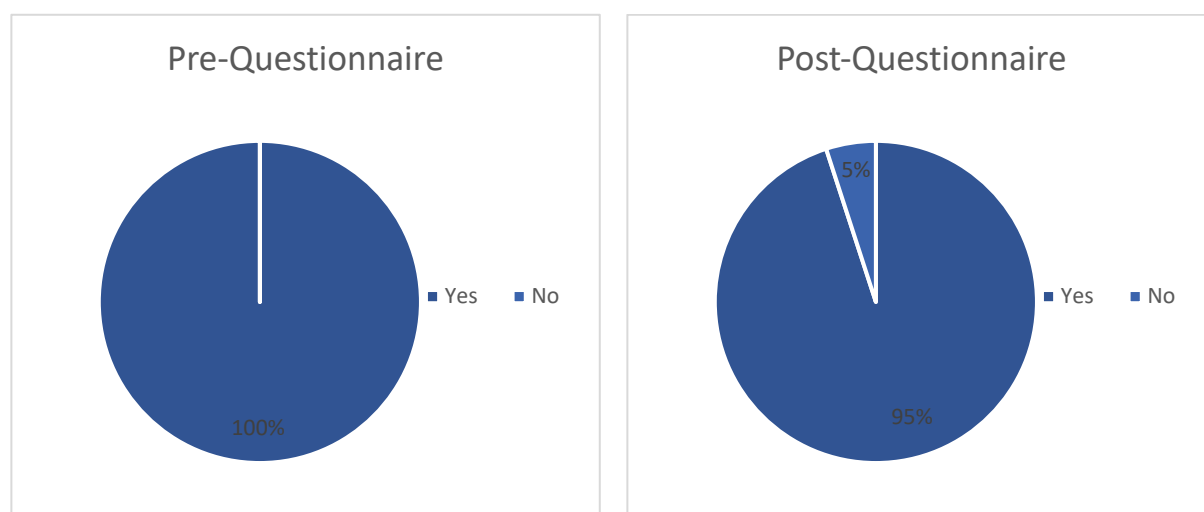


Figure 6. Table 6 Answers.

Table 7. Do you feel the expounding of God's Word through preaching and teaching leads to better understanding and personal spiritual growth?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
Yes	45	95%
No	2	5%
Total	47	100%

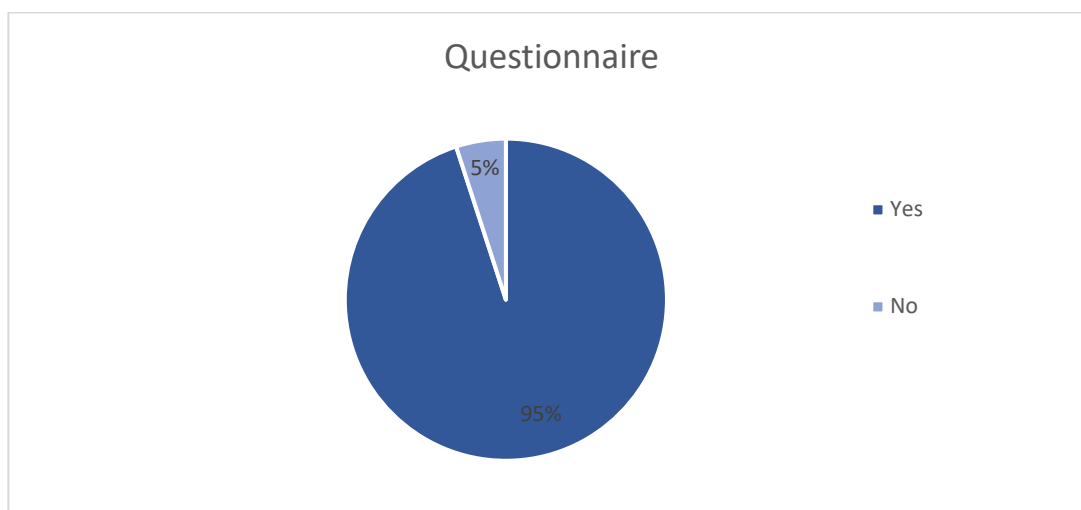


Figure 7. Table 7 Answers.

Undeniably, one pastor interviewed asserted, “No Action = No Growth.” Expository preaching and teaching must utilize the application to inspire action. Explaining God's Word is essential to understanding and spiritual growth. Theological understanding stimulates wholehearted obedience by applying biblical principles of divine truth in the lives of believers. One participant concluded there is always more to learn about God's Word. Another participant answered, “most definitely,” Jesus is the Word. Jesus expounded God's Word to His disciples. One participant explained if an individual's heart is in the right place, ready to respond, then preaching and teaching can lead to better understanding and results in spiritual growth. One participant declared they are trying to learn how to apply what they learn into their daily life. One participant asserted that those pastors whose gift is expounding the Word help their

congregations understand better. Indeed, the more one knows, the more they grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Table 8. Do you deeply desire to search diligently for knowledge and understanding in God's Word?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	<b>Post</b>	<b>Post</b>
Yes	42	90%
No	5	10%
Total	47	100%

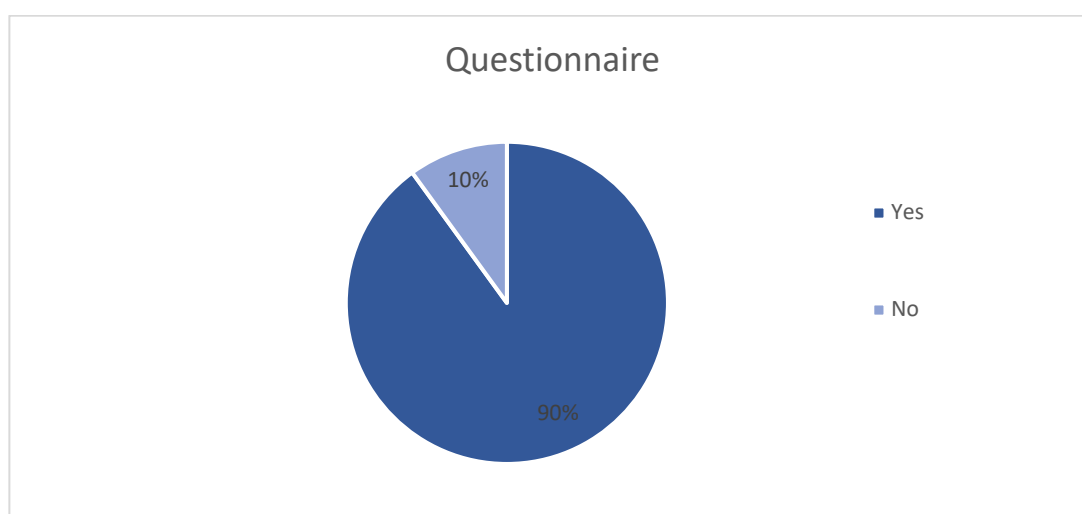


Figure 8. Table 8 Answers.

Table 9. Does the truth found in the Bible produce fruit in the lives of believers?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	<b>Post</b>	<b>Post</b>
Yes	47	100%
No		
Total	47	100%

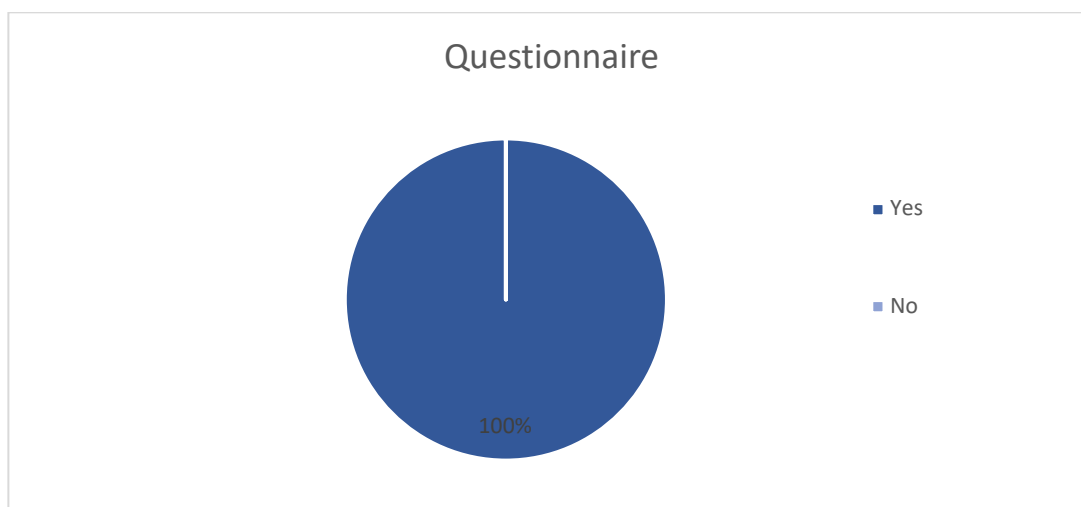


Figure 9. Table 9 Answers.

The most surprising answers arose in question nine, which yielded a unanimous one hundred percent yes. An unbeliever and agnostic, by their voluntary confession on the survey, said that the truth found in the Bible would produce fruit in the life of a believer. The Scripture emphasizes, “That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11). Jesus Christ is the truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures. When a person comes to Christ in faith, they are saved by His grace and bestowed the ability to produce spiritual fruit for the kingdom. The mark of salvation is noted by fruit and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Truth produces holy living for the bountiful harvest in the lives of believers, which glorifies God.

Table 10. Do you have more Bible knowledge now than you had three months ago?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
Yes	36	77%
No	11	23%
Total	47	100%

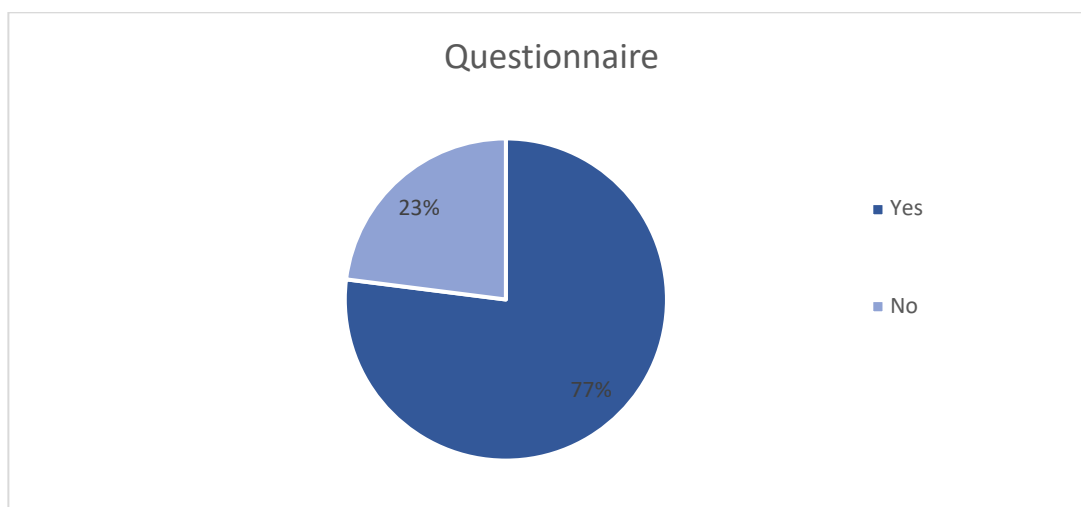


Figure 10. Table 10 Answers.

It is alarming to understand that twenty-three percent of people that completed the questionnaire are not progressing in Bible knowledge. The Bible says, “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, the Word is critical for understanding how to walk, talk, and conduct oneself as a Christian in this present world. MacArthur asserts, “The habitual, moment-by-moment safeguarding of the Word of God in a spirit of obedience is the sign of a mature Christian.”<sup>255</sup> Believers must advance in Bible knowledge, faithfully obeying the truth found in the Word, to experience spiritual growth for themselves and the church.

Table 11. Does knowing more about Jesus Christ transform hearts and generate spiritual gifts?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
Yes	46	99%
No	1	1%
Total	47	100%

<sup>255</sup> John MacArthur, *The Keys to Spiritual Growth: Unlocking the Riches of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 70.

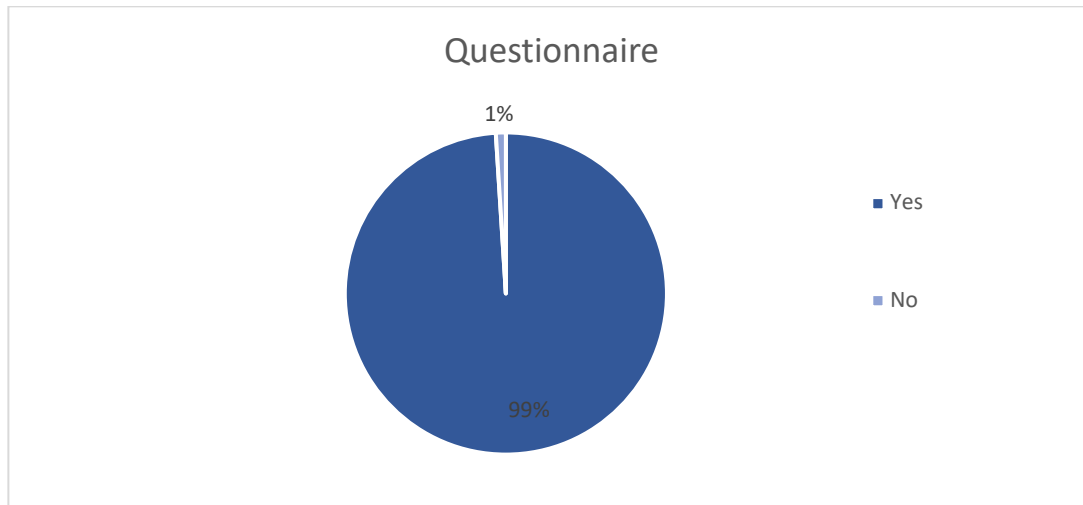


Figure 11. Table 11 Answers.

Indeed, simply knowing about Jesus Christ in mind does not save, but the Holy Spirit propels conviction through knowledge of the Word that transforms the heart and mind. One pastor in the personal interviews affirmed, “I knew about Christ long before I was saved. The gifts come after the heart of a person receives salvation.” The Holy Spirit draws the heart by the conviction of the Word and regenerates those who truly repent, which is a condition of transformation. Through the Holy Word, the Holy Spirit transforms hearts at salvation and generates spiritual gifts in the lives of believers for the people’s good and God’s glory.

Table 12. Can the Holy Spirit, through the Holy Word, breathe new life into the church?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
Yes	47	100%
No		
Total	47	100%

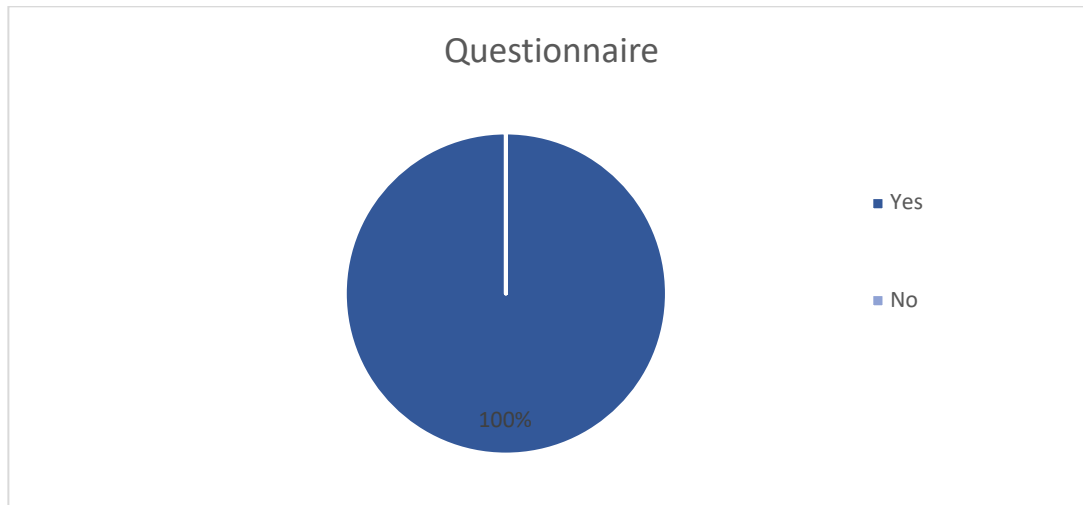


Figure 12. Table 12 Answers.

Once again, even unbelievers acknowledge that the Holy Spirit working through the Holy Word can breathe new life into the church. One pastor emphasized, “The ‘church’ is not dead. It does not need a new birth. But the spirit must be there to have a church meeting. Repentance of individuals will cause the church to thrive.”

Table 13. Are you progressively conforming to Christ’s image in obedience?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	<b>Post</b>	<b>Post</b>
Yes	38	80%
No	9	20%
Total	47	100%

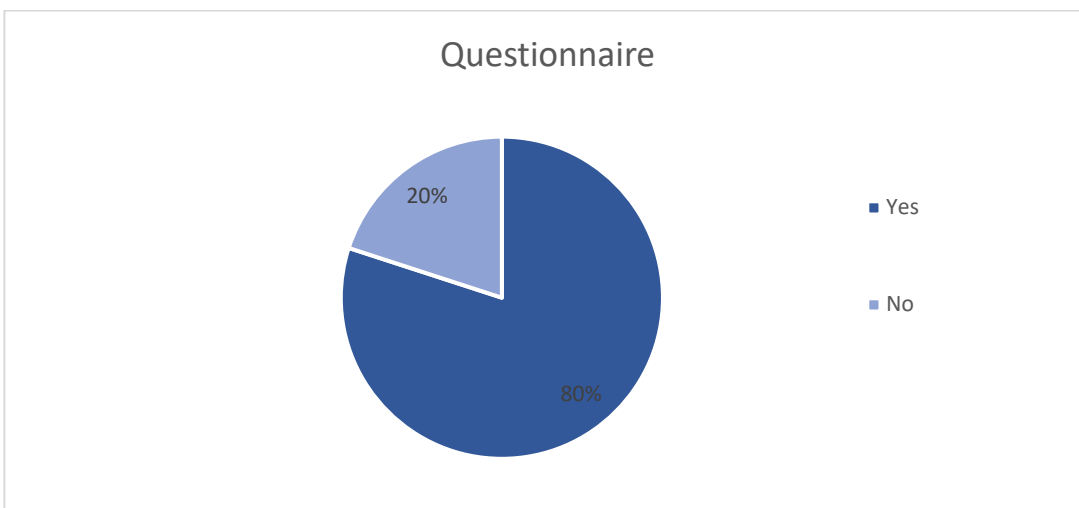


Figure 13. Table 13 Answers.

Table 14. Is your heart filled with love for God and others?

Answer	Participant Count		Percentage
	Post		Post
Yes	45		95%
No	2		5%
Total	47		100%

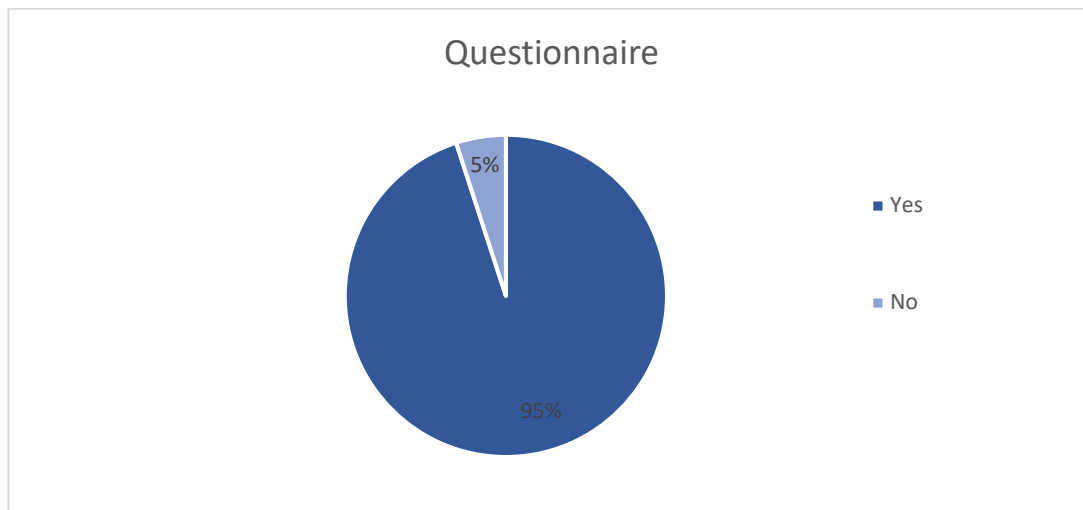


Figure 14. Table 14 Answers.

Indeed, loving God and others is confirmation that an individual has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and adopted into the family of God. The more a person knows about God and His perfect Word, the more they will love. Loving God and others is the greatest of all commandments and the golden rule for life. Believers demonstrate love for God by listening to His Word, keeping His commandments, praying for one another, and loving their neighbors.

Table 15. How much of a desire do you have to grow spiritually?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	20	72%	42%
(B)	Considerably	2	17	28%	37%
(C)	Moderately		10		21%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

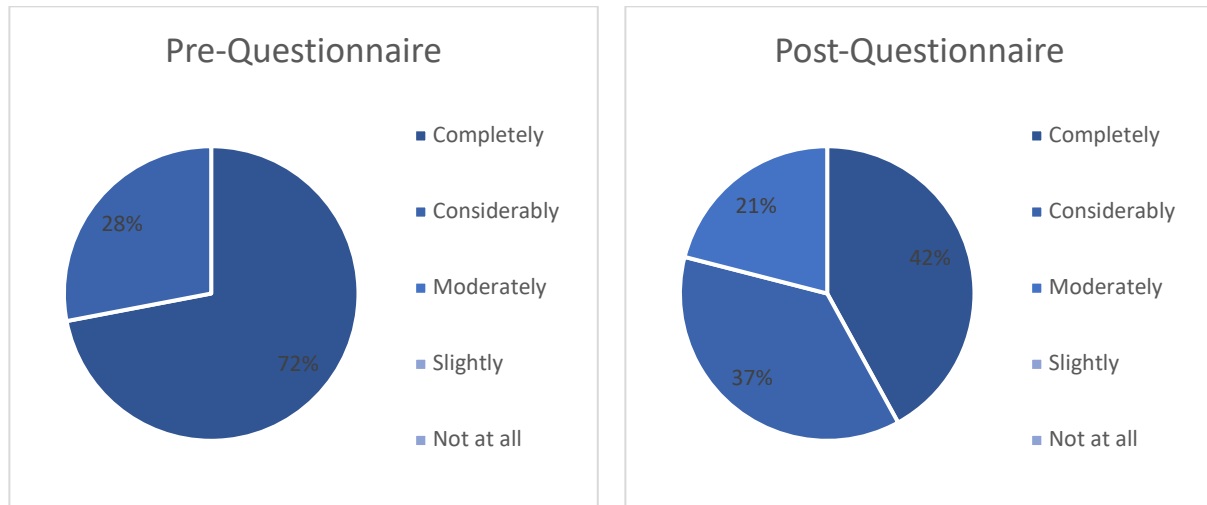


Figure 15. Table 15 Answers.

Table 16. How much does the church currently assist you in your spiritual growth?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	6	72%	15%
(B)	Considerably	2	26	28%	55%
(C)	Moderately		9		19%
(D)	Slightly		1		1%
(E)	Not at all		5		10%
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

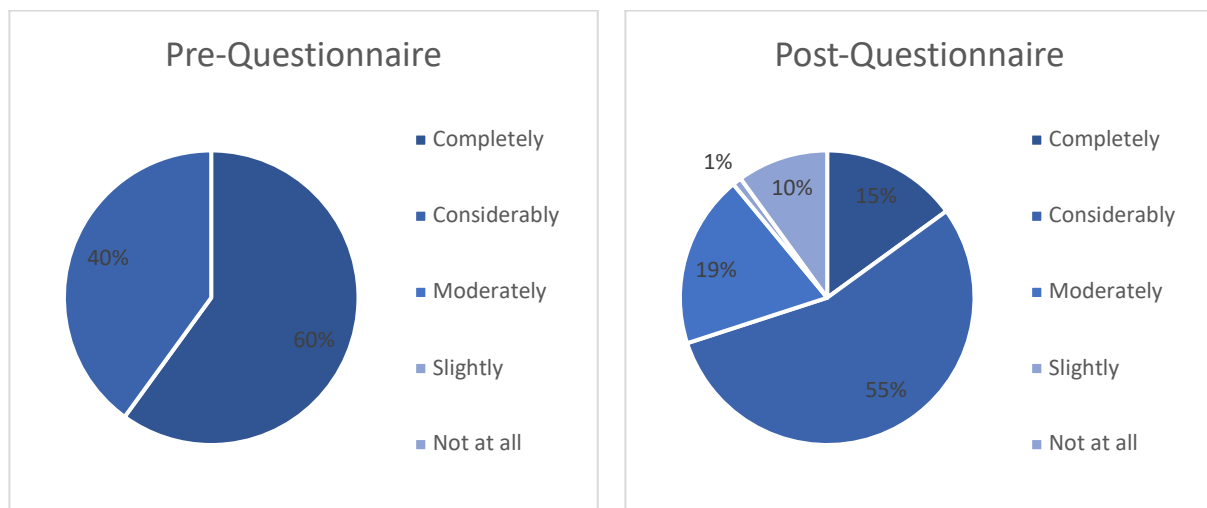


Figure 16. Table 16 Answers.

Table 17. How do you value preaching for personal spiritual growth?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	6	19	85%	40%
(B)	Considerably	1	21	15%	45%
(C)	Moderately		6		14%
(D)	Slightly		1		1%
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

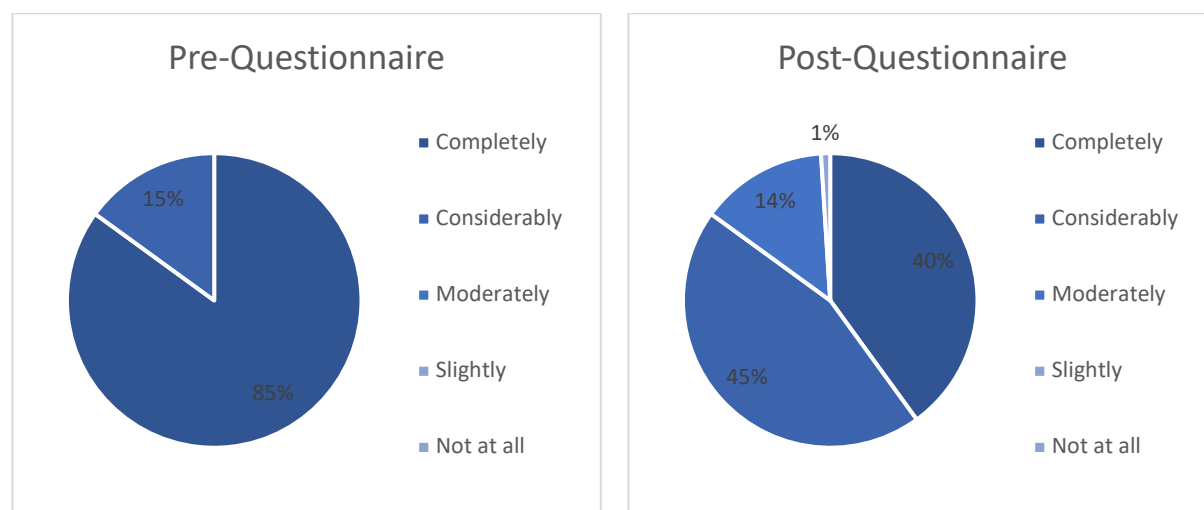


Figure 17. Table 17 Answers.

Table 18. Do you value sound gospel exposition of Scripture in preaching and teaching?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	7	32	100%	68%
(B)	Considerably		10		21%
(C)	Moderately		4		10%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all		1		1%
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

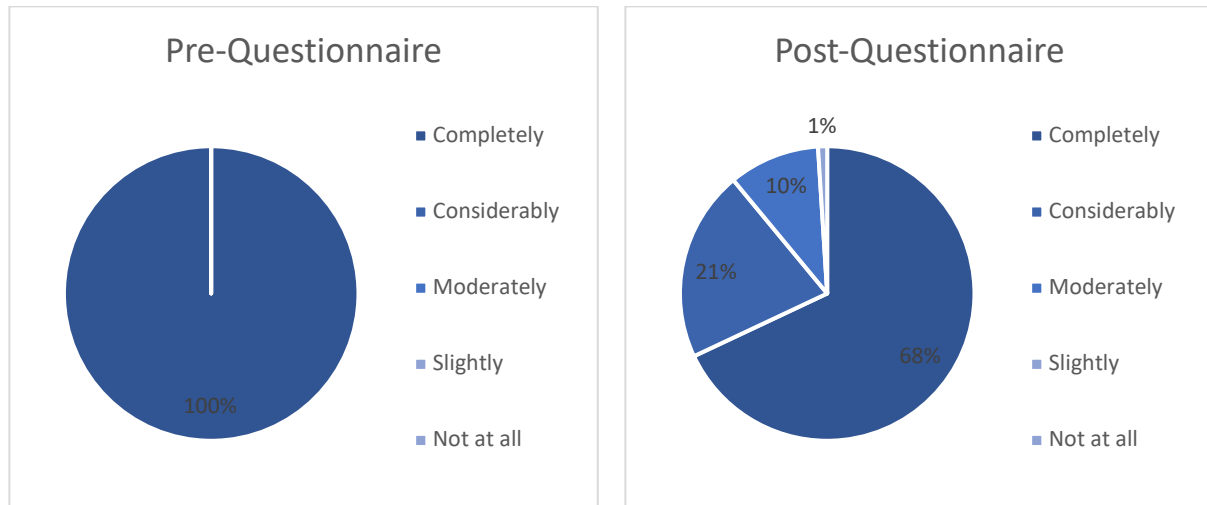


Figure 18. Table 18 Answers.

Table 19. Do you desire to learn more about Jesus, the Bible, righteousness, and sanctification?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	7	29	100%	62%
(B)	Considerably		13		27%
(C)	Moderately		4		10%
(D)	Slightly		1		1%
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

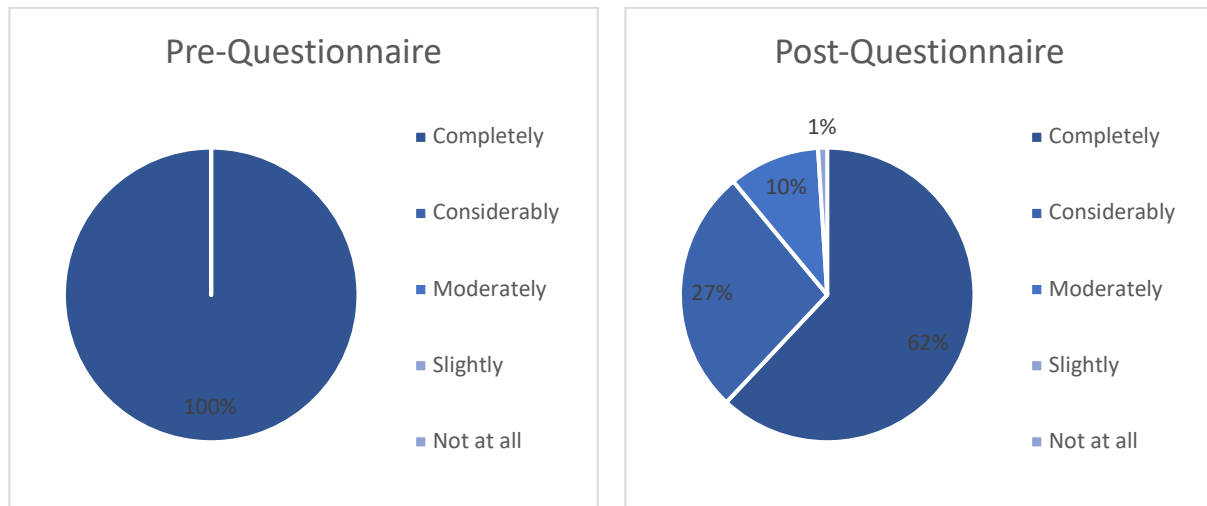


Figure 19. Table 19 Answers.

Table 20. Do you feel Christ-like transformation is possible through expository preaching and teaching?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	25	72%	53%
(B)	Considerably	2	14	28%	29%
(C)	Moderately		5		10%
(D)	Slightly		4		7%
(E)	Not at all		1		1%
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

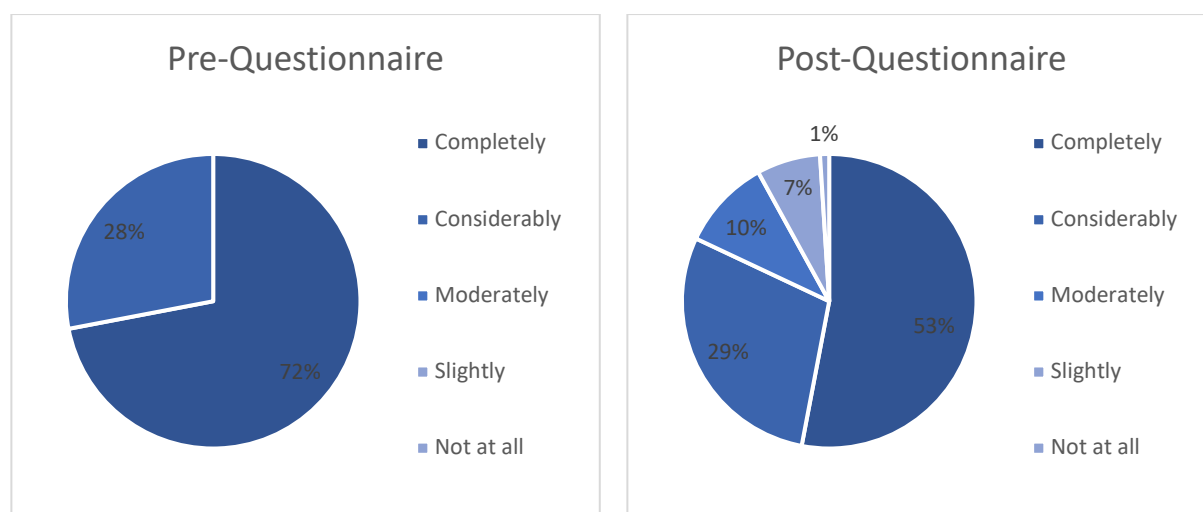


Figure 20. Table 20 Answers.

The participant that answered “not at all” noted that preaching alone will not transform an individual’s heart. Indeed, Christ-like transformation requires the working power of the Holy Spirit, and he uses expository preaching and teaching to draw, convict, and inspire the heart.

Table 21. Do you feel expository preaching and teaching contribute to spiritual formation?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	21	72%	44%
(B)	Considerably	2	20	28%	42%
(C)	Moderately		5		12%
(D)	Slightly		1		2%
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

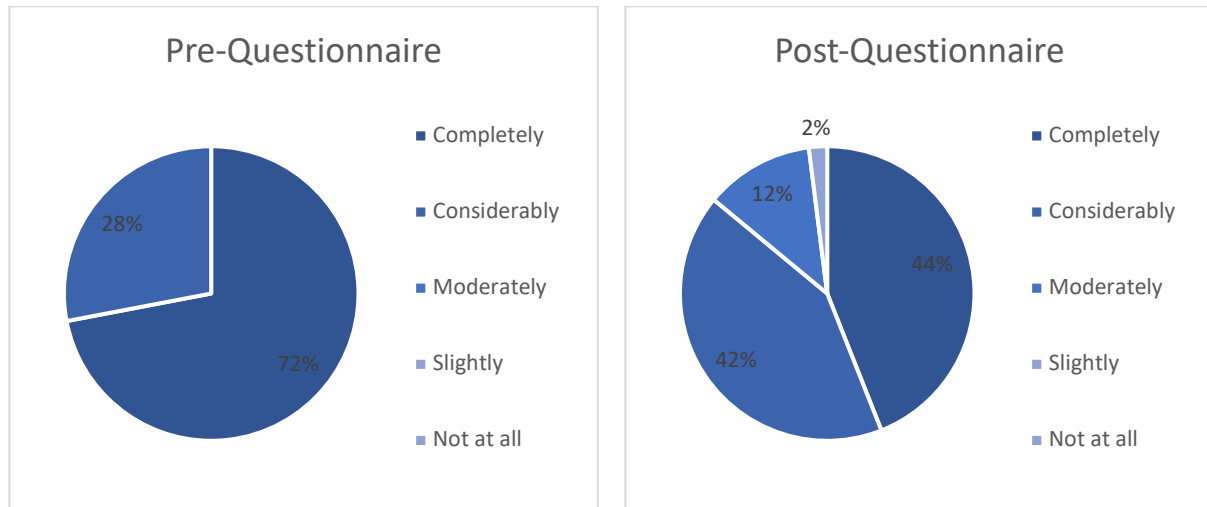


Figure 21. Table 21 Answers.

Table 22. Do you think a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry is the best approach for the church?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	32	72%	68%
(B)	Considerably	2	12	28%	26%
(C)	Moderately		3		6%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all				
Total		7	47	100%	100%

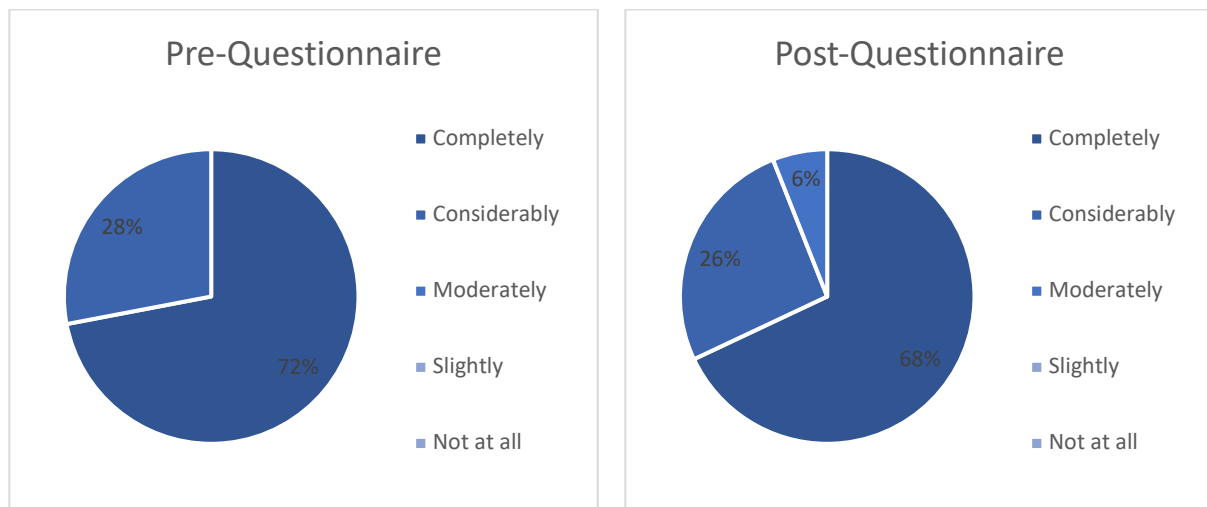


Figure 22. Table 22 Answers.

Table 23. Do you think holding on to biblical beliefs, truth, and faith are important for the church?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	7	42	100%	90%
(B)	Considerably		3		6%
(C)	Moderately		2		4%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

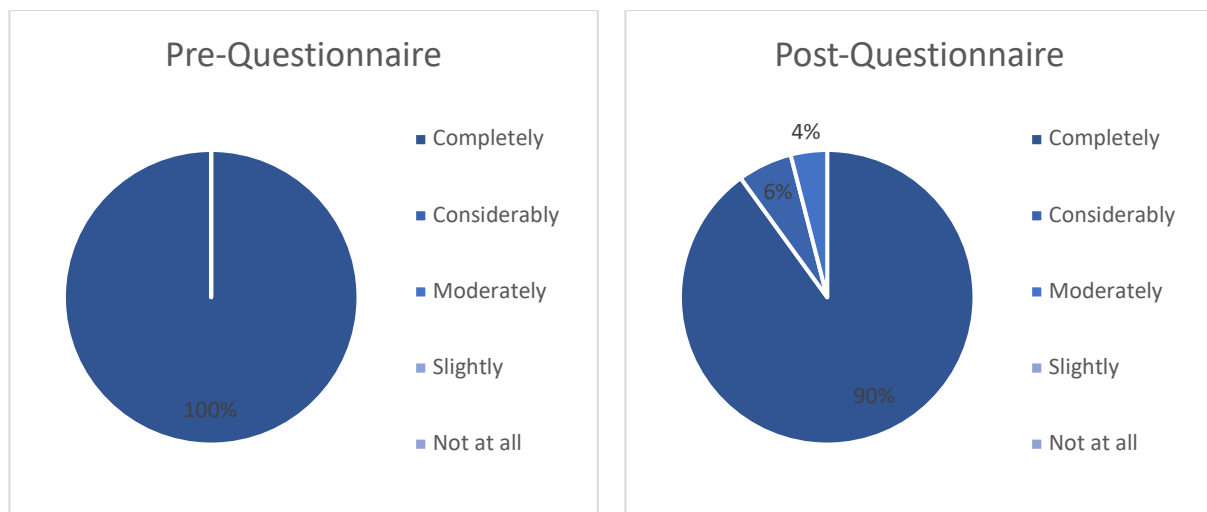


Figure 23. Table 23 Answers.

Table 24. Is preaching and teaching the Word of God essential for a kingdom ministry?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	7	40	100%	88%
(B)	Considerably		6		10%
(C)	Moderately		1		2%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

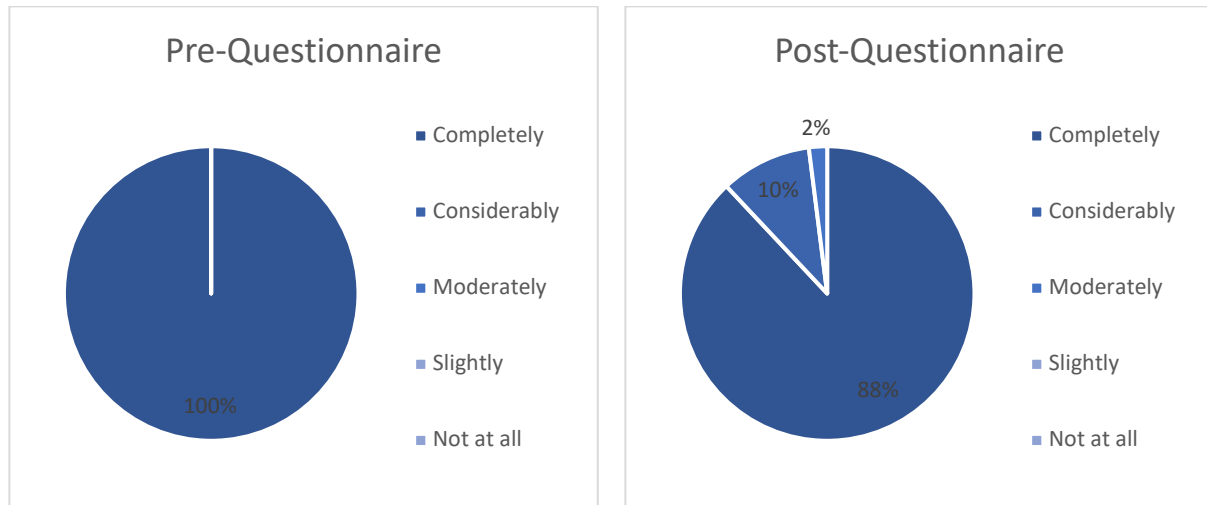


Figure 24. Table 24 Answers.

Table 25. Do you feel the ultimate goal in spiritual growth and development is to become like Christ?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	7	41	100%	88%
(B)	Considerably		3		7%
(C)	Moderately		2		4%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all		1		1%
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

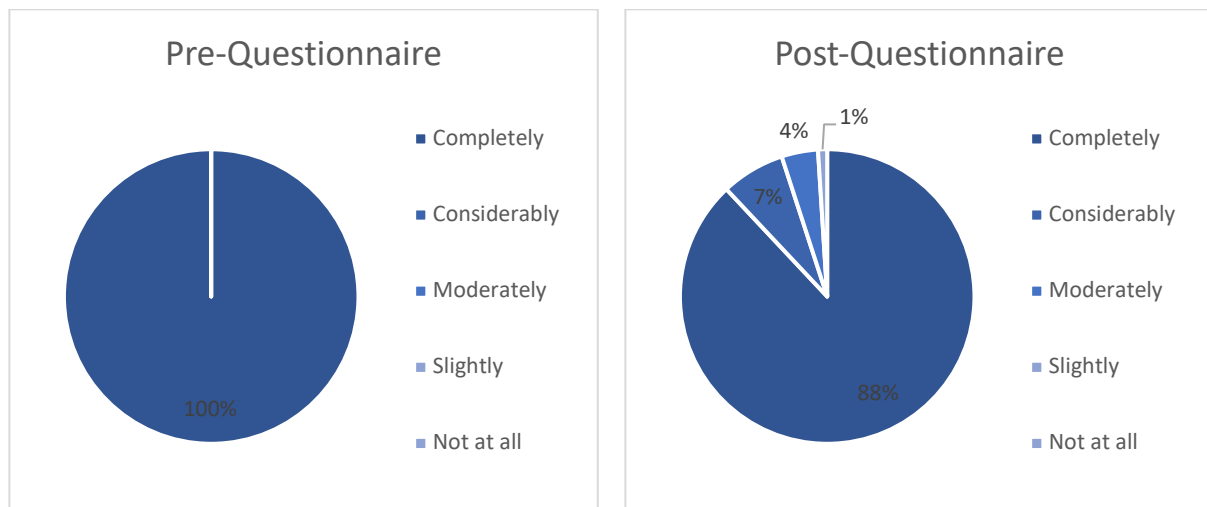


Figure 25. Table 25 Answers.

Table 26. Do you believe the church should have an outward focus in the community?

Letter	Answer	Participant Count		Percentage	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(A)	Completely	5	31	72%	66%
(B)	Considerably	2	13	28%	28%
(C)	Moderately		3		6%
(D)	Slightly				
(E)	Not at all				
	Total	7	47	100%	100%

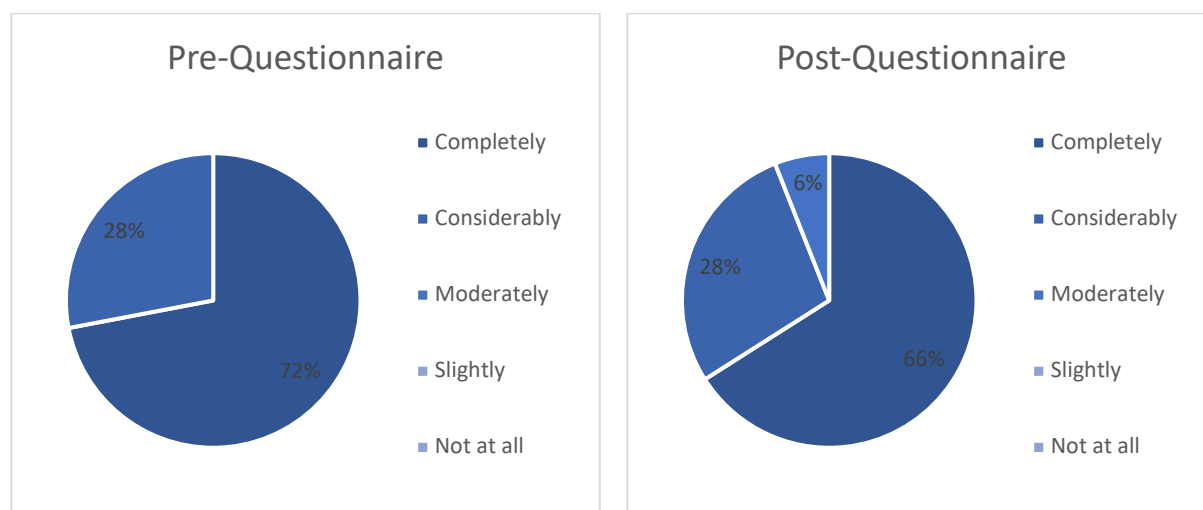


Figure 26. Table 26 Answers.

Table 27. What has the most influence on your aspiration to conform into Christ's image?

Answer	Participant Count	
	Post	Post
The explanation of the Word through preaching	13	29%
The explanation of the Word through teaching	13	29%
The worship service	4	6%
Prayer	8	18%
Private study of Scripture	7	15%
Other	2	3%
Total	47	100%

One of the most interesting “other” answers was seeing the success of others in their walk with Christ. Undeniably, watching dear saints of God walk with the Lord in daily life will influence and inspire other believers to imitate Christ-like behaviors and actions.

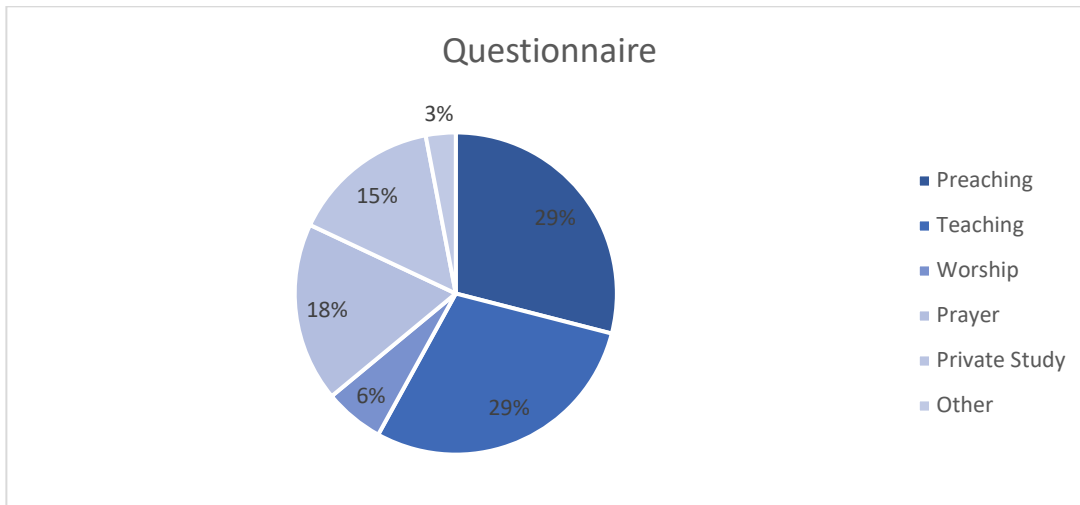


Figure 27. Table 27 Answers.

Table 28. What has greatly increased your desire to pursue Christ, his grace, and his knowledge?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
The explanation of the Word through preaching	10	23%
The explanation of the Word through teaching	12	25%
The worship service	4	5%
Prayer	9	22%
Private study of Scripture	11	24%
Other (Holy Spirit guidance)	1	1%
Total	47	100%

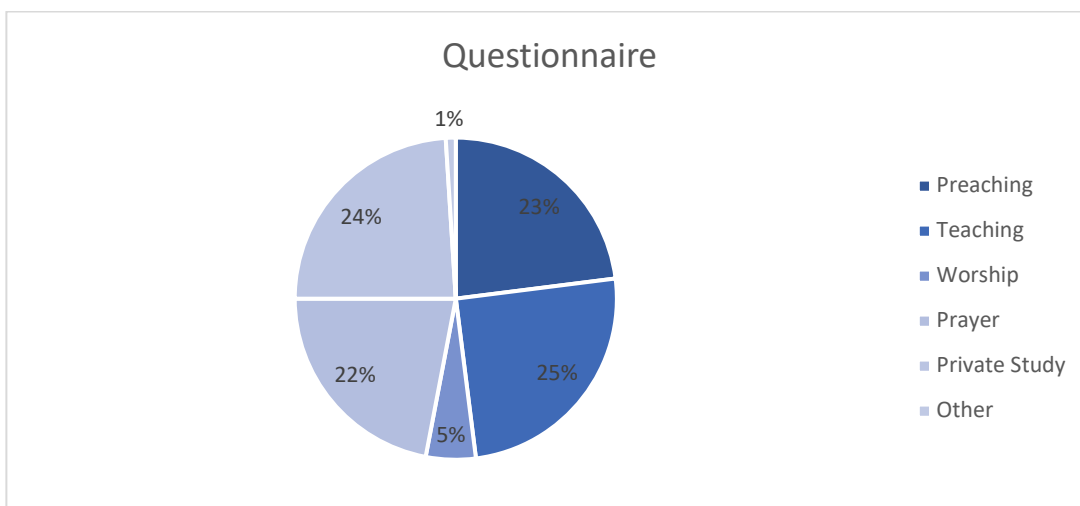


Figure 28. Table 28 Answers.

Table 29. What inspires you to learn to live and love like Jesus?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
The explanation of the Word through preaching	14	31%
The explanation of the Word through teaching	14	31%
The worship service	4	6%
Prayer	7	15%
Private study of Scripture	6	14%
Other	2	3%
Total	47	100%

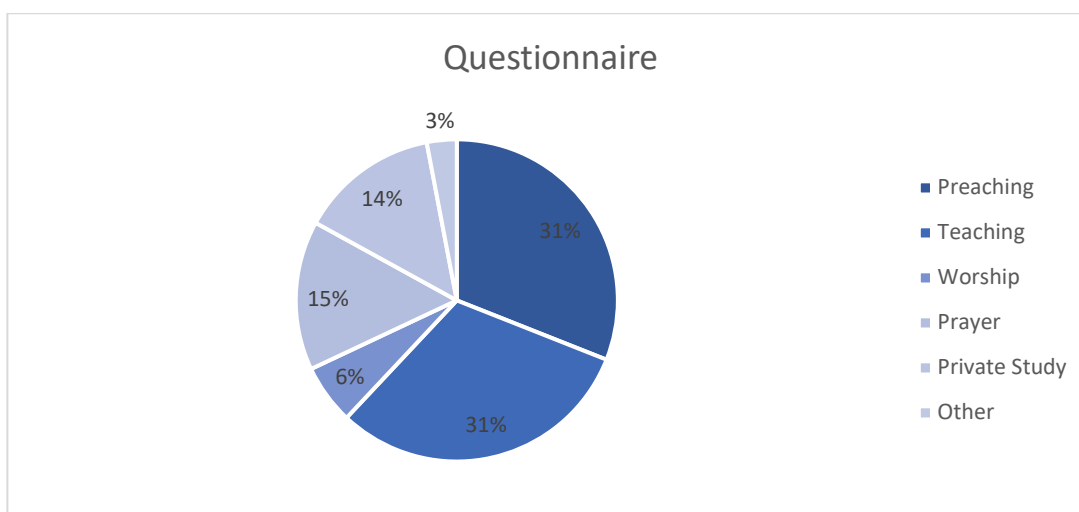


Figure 29. Table 29 Answers.

One participant stressed that the good examples of other faithful Christians inspired them to live and love like Jesus. Family and friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, and other fellow believers with their proper Christ-like behavior encourage those who desire to grow in the Lord. The Bible says, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17). Another participant confirmed that their thirty-year study group had inspired them. The ultimate goal in church growth is for individuals to learn the revelation of Jesus Christ and respond to God’s Word in humble obedience that encourages believers to follow Christ’s perfect example. Christ’s humble obedience on the Cross of Calvary stimulates a heart of gratitude in believers for His great sacrifice, which is the paramount standard for living a Christian life.

Table 30. Over the past year, what has produced the greatest spiritual growth/transformation in your life?

Answer	Participant Count	Percentage
	Post	Post
The explanation of the Word through preaching	14	30%
The explanation of the Word through teaching	10	22%
The worship service	4	6%
Prayer	8	18%
Private study of Scripture	10	22%
Other	1	2%
Total	47	100%

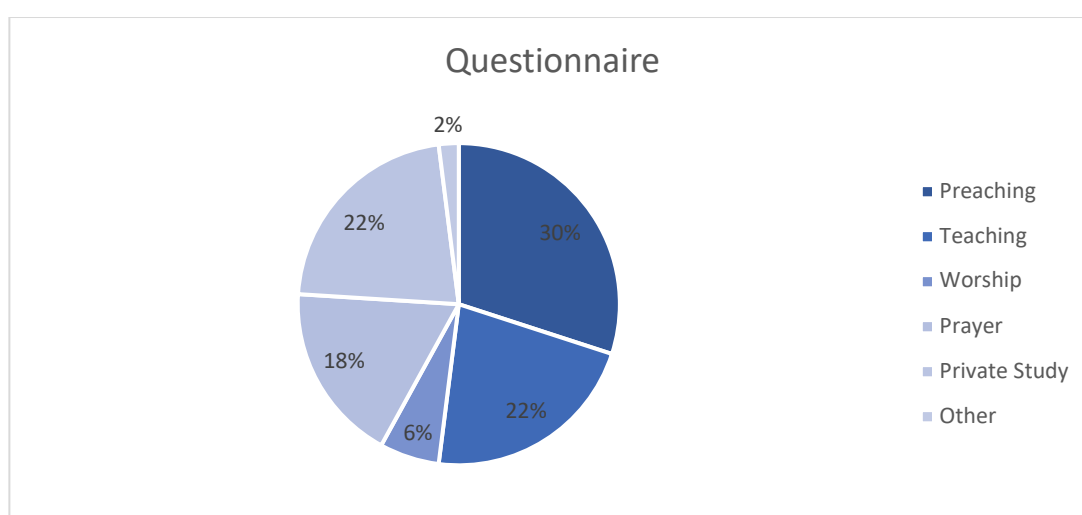


Figure 30. Table 30 Answers.

### Personal Interviews

The researcher conducted some personal interviews with two pastors, a lay member, and a co-worker. All profess to be believers grounded in God's Holy Word. Pastor one is a well-seasoned minister, who has been pastoring about twenty years and has a healthy, vibrant congregation. The pastor declared that personal spiritual growth for him is a process of fasting, studying the Bible, and meditating. He stated, "Fasting is prayerfully seeking God through his Word by separating one's self from the distractions of the world." He mentioned turning off the T.V. and taking the time to study quietly. Bible study is best accomplished by shutting out the

world and focusing on God. Thus, reading and meditating on God's Word will generate greater understanding and knowledge. This private time with God and His Word ultimately produces personal spiritual growth.

The pastor conveyed his thoughts about the COVID-19 situation in America. He contemplates whether God is pruning the church because nearly twenty-five percent of his congregation has not returned since the church was closed last year because of the pandemic. The pastor believes God is weeding out the unbelievers, ungodly, and strengthening the remnant of the church. He emphasized the need to pray for the remnant. Any botanist will support that weak tree growth or dead limbs need pruning back to produce the right amount of growth and fruit. Pruning trees stimulates new growth. God is pruning the church to stimulate new spiritual growth. The disciple Jesus loved declared, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2, ESV). The writer of Hebrews conveys, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb. 12:5-6, ESV). The correction of the Lord is a sure sign of sonship. The pruning or correction transforms the church into a proper vessel that produces Christ-like characteristics and actions for the people's good and God's glory by stimulating new growth.

The church's most incredible evangelical tool is for the unbelieving to see a committed life truly transformed through God's power by His Word and His Spirit. Unbelievers need to hear the truth of God accurately presented through the gospel. That is the essence of expository preaching and teaching to divide the Word of truth correctly. Believers growing in their understanding separate themselves from the world, demonstrating love, mercy, and compassion

to those who perish. The gospel message of Jesus Christ is holy, set apart from the world, and is the gracious mercy of a forgiving God. The Word of God through the Spirit brings new life to the lost, downhearted, discouraged, and declining church.

Pastor two declared the church that recently called him to the pastor has grown from about fourteen to forty in regular attendance on Sunday morning from March to November 2021. Of course, this researcher asked what he thought was the key to the church's growth. The new pastor, who was ordained on 28 November 2021, stressed the importance of obedience in spiritual growth. In Genesis, Noah illustrates obedience and faith in God by following His instructions in building the ark even though it had never rained. MacArthur encourages that Noah worshiped, walked, and worked in faith; he affirms, "You have to worship God if you are going to walk with Him, and you have to walk with Him before you can work for Him. That is God's pattern."<sup>256</sup> Believers who genuinely love the Lord will obey His Word by following His commands, which always results in God's glory and the good of faithful people. MacArthur conveys that Noah's faith is so remarkable because it went far beyond human reason, "His life of faith and obedience may be summed up in two traits. First, he responded to God's Word. Second, he rebuked the world."<sup>257</sup> Pastors and lay members alike have to rebuke the world (in the flesh) and respond to God's Holy Word (in the spirit) for any spiritual growth to occur in the heart soil work of the kingdom. Noah responded to and revered God's Word. Noah persevered in continued obedience for over a hundred years to the seeing of his family saved. They were saved from the wrath of God through divine judgment to come.

---

<sup>256</sup> John MacArthur, *The Keys to Spiritual Growth: Unlocking the Riches of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 61.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

Participant three, the lay member, captured the heart of expository preaching and teaching by insisting that ministers must preach Christ. Thus, ministers must preach Christ for salvation, sanctification, and, ultimately, for glorification. Concerning question three about the most important discipline for spiritual growth, he estimates people mostly fail in prayer, which leads to the declining church. He also confessed that he is not progressively conforming to Christ's image in obedience as he knows he could through the Word. He affirms that Christlike living would be most beneficial in leading the lost to salvation. Participant three communicated Paul's declaration to the Roman church, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). He also conveyed that expository preaching is how the Word of God is heard. He concluded that private study of Scripture confirms expository preaching and teaching.

Participant four reiterated that one great benefit to expository preaching and teaching is that the preacher does not randomly pick and choose what to preach. Preaching through the Bible does not allow the minister to skip challenging, complex, or essential verses. By preaching through and explaining a passage of Scripture in context, the biblical principles are declared. Good expository preaching and teaching sermons offer an application of that particular principle for believers to follow. Context is critical and paramount to correctly interpreting and understanding what God intended to convey through His Holy Word. The participant expressed his beliefs about spiritual growth, "The more you know, the more you grow." Albert Mohler asserts, "Clearly, preaching – specifically biblical preaching – is the main strategy God himself ordained for church growth and for leading and feeding his flock. Naturally, it is the one strategy he has always truly blessed."<sup>258</sup> Biblical expository preaching will always be blessed inspiring

---

<sup>258</sup> Albert Mohler, *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 12.

true heart transformation. Thus, expository preaching communicates the whole counsel of God. The Psalmist David declares, “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11). God’s Word will stand the test of time eternally. The Apostle Paul asserts, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). When God’s counsel is clarified and taught in the church, it will illuminate, inspire, and incite spiritual growth in the heart of believers.

### Focus Group Study

The researcher received four consent forms permitting audio recording of the focus group study. The focus group study took place on Wednesday evening, July 14, 2021. The pastor researcher was extremely surprised at the focus group study participation from the church members. The researcher asked a question, and the contributors expressed a desire to be closer to God, work together better by getting involved with missions, and grow spiritually. The researcher received some excellent answers throughout the focus group study. Members discussed ministries that have had kingdom impact at Unity Missionary Baptist Church, such as the preaching ministry, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Women’s evening classes, Women’s Ministry Unit, and expressed a desire to do more. One participant announced that gospel preaching is essentially necessary for the salvation of the lost and the church to experience growth. The pastor affirmed that this open dialog would help cast a vision and focus the church on having a kingdom influence in the community. The primary purpose was to determine what ministries are good at Unity Missionary Baptist Church and unite the church for a kingdom-focused and gospel-centered impact—encouraging the church to continue doing those ministries that have worked in the past and to withdraw from those things that hinder the success

of the mission. The researcher passed out a couple of studies for private discussion. The responses are recorded below.

Question 1: What made you interested in taking part in this study?

Participant 1: "To learn more about the Lord."

Participant 2: "The desire to help my pastor be what he needs to be for the glory of God."

Question 2: What makes you interested in spiritual growth?

Participant 1: "To learn more about the Lord."

Participant 2: "To be closer to God."

Question 3: Do you know what the term "expository preaching" means?

Participant 1: "Preaching the Word of God."

Participant 2: "Yes."

Question 4: What ministry has or had the most Kingdom impact at Unity Missionary Baptist Church?

Participant 1: "Preaching Ministry."

Participant 2: "Vacation Bible School."

Question 5: How would you describe the condition of the church and attendees?

Participant 1: "Fair."

Participant 2: "Backslide, dull, tired, and forgot how to go forward."

Question 6: How would you describe the growth of the church in the last decade?

Participant 1: "Fair."

Participant 2: "No growth – lessened."

Question 7: What vision is burning bright in the church?

Participant 1: "To see the church grow and people come to be saved."

Participant 2: "That the church will regain the oomph it once had!"

Question 8: What is the focus of our prayers?

Participant 1: “Good.”

Participant 2: “For God to send help!”

Question 9: What shortcoming of the church bothers the leadership most?

Participant 1: “Small attendance.”

Participant 2: “The lack of concern for the lost to be saved.”

Question 10: What stories or situations illustrate the guiding passions of the past and present?

Participant 1: “The whole Bible.”

Participant 2: “In the past, there have been other ministries in the church that were productive.”

Question 11: What has God revealed about His purpose for the church?

Participant 1: “Needs growth.”

Participant 2: “There is a need, and he will provide.”

Question 12: What evidence is seen of the Holy Spirit working in the church?

Participant 1: “The good fellowship we have.”

Participant 2: “Our thoughts are united, prayers and concerns.”

Question 13: What are some future concerns for the church?

Participant 1: “To grow.”

Participant 2: “As a whole, we need quality members – those willing to step out and work.”

Question 14: What are your hopes and dreams for the church?

Participant 1: “To grow.”

Participant 2: “My vision is to see it full of people being saved.”

Question 15: Recall how God had blessed Unity Missionary Baptist Church through worship, discipleship, preaching, and service?

Participant 1: “When my granddaughter was saved.”

Participant 2: “Even though we are few, he has blessed us to keep going.”

Question 16: How has group participation changed your understanding of church revitalization?

Participant 1: “It was good; I wish we could have finished it.”

Participant 2: “No group – no plans?”

Question 17: How did group participation influence your spiritual life/practices?

Participants 1 & 2: Left the answer blank.

Question 18: How did personal spiritual growth affect church renewal?

Participants 1 & 2: Left the answer blank.

Question 19: How did expository preaching and teaching affect you?

Participant 1: Left the answer blank.

Participant 2: “It makes me want more and more.”

Question 20: What has enhanced/hindered personal biblical understanding over the past eight weeks?

Participant 1: Left the answer blank.

Participant 2: “Enhanced – I learn from the way our pastor preaches. I love to dig in and get to the bottom. Hindered – to see our people so unconcerned.”

Participant 2 grasped the essence of the condition in the declining church and the urgent need for the reconciling gospel to be preached at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. The answer to question five broke this pastor’s heart, reaching the root of the problem. Thus, understanding the desperate need for church revitalization is why implementing expository preaching, and teaching plans is essential for the church to experience transformational recovery. Rainer and Geiger

assert, “A simple church is a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth.”<sup>259</sup> The pastor researcher is deeply concerned about the church’s spiritual growth, not the number of people attending each service, but their understanding of God’s truth found in the Holy Scriptures. There have been some glimmers of hope for church revitalization during the last couple of months at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Some individuals have demonstrated the desire for spiritual growth through their engagement in the kingdom work.

### **Engagement**

Although spiritual growth and health are not easily measured, the patient observer will discover how individuals engage in spiritual disciplines, interact with each other, and embrace expository preaching. The researcher has acquired good field notes, observations, and reflections to assist anyone desiring church revitalization by keeping an after-action notebook. In the community, people’s involvement at the church, how they act, what they speak, and where they place their efforts demonstrates the condition of an individual’s heart. God is the only source of heart transformation. This section will discuss the pastor researcher’s observations over the past eight weeks concerning people’s engagement while implementing the reconciling gospel program at Unity Missionary Baptist Church.

### **Week One**

The thesis research started on May 16, 2021, at Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Trying to assert control and using COVID-19 as an excuse, a member asked a deacon to stop taking up

---

<sup>259</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 60.

the offering and suggested leaving an offering plate by the back door. The church had stopped taking up offering last year during the height of the alleged pandemic and had just recently started taking the offering back up before this event. Since last December, that concerned member had not attended church services when a teenager tested positive, and the church closed for the two-week quarantine time. On their first Sunday back to church, this member attempted to place demands concerning how the church was operating. The deacon board and pastor decided to continue taking up the offering. The messages preached that week were *Can These Bones Live, I AM the Bread of Life*, and *The Holy Spirit: The Spirit is Life*.

### Week Two

Before starting this reconciling gospel program at the church, there were rumors that some members wanted to close the church's doors, selling the church to divide the money. The Scripture declares, "For the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). This news was extremely hurtful to the pastor. Still, God's grace motivated a sense of urgency in the pastor about preaching to the heart for transformation to occur. This pastor researcher knows this is where God has called him to minister and work on this thesis project. *Rescue Mission: Transformational Recovery Through Expository Preaching and Teaching* could not be more needed than right here and now at Unity Missionary Baptist Church.

This Pentecost Sunday was beautiful, and the church had a young couple visit for their first time after moving to a nearby subdivision. That week, the messages preached were *Personal Need: God Will Hear from Heaven*, *Peter Preaching at Pentecost*, and *Eternal Hope*.

### Week Three

Before Sunday School, the choir leader and his wife left to see another member's grandson baptized at a different church. The pastor is genuinely thankful that God is still in the saving business, but this pulled four members away that day, leaving only eight in attendance for Sunday morning worship. A young member stepped up to lead the choir that morning, doing an excellent job for the Lord. It is encouraging to see young people having a desire to worship and praise the Lord. The messages preached that week were *God's Unspeakable Gift*, and *I AM the Light of the World*. The church had a visiting preacher that Sunday evening. He preached Paul's conversion and prayer in Acts 9:10-11.

### Week Four

Another member sang a solo during Wednesday night service, which complemented the sermon. A couple of individuals were interested in hanging the Vacation Bible School (VBS) sign-up after service. This desire is a sign of spiritual growth. When an individual singer, teacher, preacher, or worker for the Lord steps out in faith following what God has ordained, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe is always there to support, provide, and strengthen His flock. When a person realizes how good God is and what He has done for their everlasting soul in sending His precious Son to the Cross of Calvary for the sins of the world, they will have to praise, honor, and worship the great I AM. The messages preached that week were *Loves Transforming Effect*, *I AM the Door* and *Preaching* in Acts 3:12-26. Only the Holy Spirit can embolden ministers to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with divine authority and saving power. It is terrific when the Sunday School superintendent's and teacher's Scripture verses and teaching thoughts align perfectly with the pastor's message. That is God-ordained.

### Week Five

A visiting preacher preached Sunday night on John 15, proclaiming the True Vine. He commented that the congregation seemed receptive to the Word nodding their heads in agreement with the message. Several individuals responded to the message with a verbal, “Amen.” The visiting preacher preached to the church about bearing good fruit, more fruit, and much fruit for the kingdom. In his message, he declared, “The church is about quality, not quantity, not the number of people, but the amount of fruit.” His statement certainly rings the truth of God’s Holy Word for the church. A member sang two solos, *Did I Mention* and *Because He Lives*; both were perfectly aligned with the message and blessed the congregation. The messages preached that week were *Power Source*, *I AM the True Vine* and *Prayer*.

The devotional theme this week was prayer. On Wednesday evening after the church service, the choir leader asked the church to travel to a neighbor’s house to pray for him because he was having his left leg amputated below the knee the next day. Seven members traveled over to the neighbor’s house and prayed with him. The surgery was successful. That Thursday, the church was going around the neighborhood, passing out VBS flyers, but before the participants split up, a church member reminded the team to pray before they went. The pastor led the team in prayer, and they had a joyous evening handing out flyers.

### Week Six

The piano player was back for the first time after having surgery and an extensive recovery process on Sunday morning. It was sweet to worship with music. The morning message was *Christian Calling*. After the Sunday morning worship service, the church met to plan VBS, which started on July 5, only a couple of weeks away.

Sunday night after service, a member expressed her desire to get involved with missions affirming she would like to hand out backpacks to the homeless in downtown Knoxville, TN. This longing to work for the Lord is undoubtedly an outward focus that all Christians should realize. The pastor invited a young preacher to preach for the Sunday evening service who recently announced his call. The message was this guest preacher's second sermon, and he powerfully preached on the great I AM in Exodus 3:1-15. Only the great I AM, God in heaven, can orchestrate how His preachers deliver His Word through His Holy Spirit. The message went perfectly with the *Rescue Mission* sermon series and the great I AM's of Jesus Christ through the Gospel of John that the pastor of Unity Missionary Baptist Church has been preaching on during Sunday evenings. During prayer request time on Wednesday, a member stated her desire for prayer, "That I might walk closer to the Lord." Her passion thrilled the pastor's heart, knowing that some members were experiencing a desire to walk closer with the Lord. Indeed, a significant transformation from the first week desiring to have her way. God is amazing, and He has a magnificent way of moving when people can see no way. God always shows up on time to deliver His children in times of trouble, heartache, and suffering.

### Week Seven

The messages preached that week were *Salvation*, *I AM the Good Shepherd*, and *A Healthy Fear*. Unfortunately, the pastor missed Sunday morning because of his military commitment to the Air National Guard. They reported that the guest preacher did an excellent job of filling in the preaching that morning. During the Sunday evening service, the pastor was able to preach on the Good Shepherd. The actual shepherd is described as one who loves, cares for, and nourishes the sheep. A good shepherd lives and dies for the sheep under his care and

protection. The Great Shepherd is none other than the Lord, Jesus Christ. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ loves the sheep, dies for the sheep, and unites the sheep.

Wednesday evening's sermon was *A Healthy Fear*. The pastor used the three Hebrew children to illustrate living out a healthy fear and respect for the Lord. Being a great example, the Hebrew children demonstrated in their committed life that they purposed in their heart not to defile themselves with the alluring desires of the world. The pastor asked if anyone knew Hananiah, Mischael, and Azariah, and only one person in the congregation raised her hand. Then he asked who knew Shadrac, Mishac, and Abednego, and everyone raised their hand. The member who had openly expressed her desire to walk closer with the Lord just a week earlier set her purse in her lap toward the end of the sermon, ready to leave. During the choir's closing song, she slipped out the back door.

### Week Eight

The messages preached that week were *An Outward Focus*, and *I AM the way, the Truth, and the Life*. Week eight fell on Vacation Bible School, and the theme for VBS was, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the only way, the only truth, and the only life for salvation, sanctification through one's Christian walk, and for the church to experience revitalization and spiritual growth. The Gospel of John centers on what Jesus said and did in and around Jerusalem to undeniably prove he came from heaven as the Son of God in the flesh full of grace and truth. St. John affirms the purpose of his Gospel, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Life for an individual and the life of the church is only found in Jesus Christ. The pastor asked a visiting preacher, who assisted in teaching the adult

class through VBS, what the secret was to grow the church. He replied, “There is no secret; preach the Word, preach the Gospel, and keep preaching Jesus Christ.”

Indeed, the number of people attending is not a sign of spiritual growth and health, but the attendance of those desiring to grow and become closer, healthier, and more robust in the Lord is a sure sign of progress. Those that are truly redeemed by the blood of the Lamb will continue attending church, loving God and others, proclaiming the good news, and sharing the gospel in the community. This pastor believes that God sent every message to Unity Missionary Baptist Church. When other preachers come and preach the same thought line out of the same books of the Bible without consulting the pastor ahead of time, it leaves no doubt that the Holy Spirit’s enabling power led them. Is the church where it needs to be? No, but through the expository preaching and teaching of God’s Holy Word, this pastor wholeheartedly believes spiritual growth is not only possible but inevitable.

### **Expected Results**

The church can experience life transformation through expository preaching and teaching of God’s Holy Word. Pastors must be faithful to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to see revitalization in the church occur. When sincere and humble preachers declare that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life in John 14:6, they will point the congregation to the only source of regeneration, revival, and restoration. The church of God will always require a Christ-oriented focus to become what God intends, plans, and purposes for the kingdom mission.

This short-sighted pastor researcher expected the preaching program to transform the church in eight weeks. Ultimately, the process of transformation is a lifelong endeavor to conform to the perfect image of Christ, the Savior, and Lord. The spiritual development of

individuals takes considerable time, effort, and resilience. Only the Word of life through the Holy Spirit can transform hearts and minds for the task of imitating the Master. The continual work of the Holy Spirit is to declare that the Word of truth should be heard, believed, and applied to the lives of individual congregation members to build the church. This body strengthening makes it paramount to teach the Word through expositional preaching, so the congregation may hear the Word and respond to the Word's life-changing power. The more one knows, the more one grows. The Holy Spirit will breathe new life into God's people and strengthen the body of Christ in the community.

The researcher, attempting to determine the cause of these unexpected results, was led to a few conclusions. The limited number of people in small churches leads to a false sense of power and control over the church. Vaters confirms passive people in small churches usually do not start that way, "They may become passive after years of hurt, boredom, enabling pastors, or lowered expectations. Either way, controlling church members generally exhibit two traits: no participation and lots of opinions."<sup>260</sup> This trait was evident in the focus group study when some were reluctant to participate constructively but were more than willing to give their opinions. The first rule of advice Vaters offers about domineering people in the church is, "Do not try to out-control them."<sup>261</sup> He asserts, "Trying to control a control freak is like fighting over the steering wheel in a moving car – no one wins, and everyone gets hurt, including the innocent passengers."<sup>262</sup> This pastor will prayerfully move forward with caution but remain faithful to preach God's Word without compromise. One problem this research pastor discovered by implementing this reconciling gospel program at Unity Missionary Baptist Church is that he may

---

<sup>260</sup> Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 112.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 103.

have attempted to move too fast through the process. Vaters warns not to move too fast, “Pastors need to earn the right to be heard. The smaller the church, the more listening matters. Take the time to understand the complex interweaving of a small church’s relationships, culture, and history.”<sup>263</sup> This pastor will slow down, not rush any result taking the time required to build trust. This pastor discovered he did not have the confidence and trust of the people he initially thought he had already established. Vaters robustly emphasizes how to deal with controlling people is to out-love them and out-live them, “Sometimes the answer to dealing with this issue is simple endurance, as in ‘I’m going to hang in here longer than they are. Either until they leave the church (hopefully not), or until I earn their trust.’”<sup>264</sup> Persistence is vital for the pastor facing these types of troubles in the church; persistent prayer, persistent preaching, endless studying, and unwavering love for God, His Word, and His people. This researcher also believes that Unity Missionary Baptist Church is a training ground for the pastor to experience personal transformation.

### **Personal Transformation**

The pastor is learning of his helplessness and dependence on the Lord, strengthening his prayer life and study habits along the way. During VBS, the pastor taught the boys class from sixth grade and up; it was a wonderful time of study with those young men. He taught about Creation, Jesus’ birth, Jesus’ miracles, and the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The boys’ memory verse to repeat out loud in front of the congregation was, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The teacher quoted

---

<sup>263</sup> Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 112.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 113.

the first part of the verse, one boy quoted the second part of the verse, and another boy quoted the third part of the verse. It is sincerely a blessing to be called and to have the opportunity to teach the Word of God, for there is no better news than the good news of salvation found in the only Savior, Jesus Christ.

The pastor had invited a guest preacher to preach the commencement service Friday evening. While traveling home from work Friday evening, the pastor prayed for the service, the lost, all the children and teachers attending, and for the Lord to have the message speak to him directly. The guest preacher opened that night by reading John 1:1-5, 9. The sermon powerfully cut straight to the pastor's heart, reiterating how Jesus is the light and that Christians are supposed to reflect his marvelous light in their everyday walk, talk, and life. The message perfectly aligned with the theme of this thesis project by the guest preacher preaching on the need for the congregation to regularly attend services, learn the Word of God, and grow spiritually along the way. Indeed, this powerful message thrilled the pastor's heart attempting to follow closely to the Lord and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in leading the church in spiritual growth and health. The encouraging word directly from the Lord blessed everyone. It helped by inflaming the pastor's passion for the church, which invigorates the desire to truly inspire and lead Unity Missionary Baptist Church in a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused kingdom expansion ministry for God's glory.

A member sent the pastor a text message the day following VBS, which stated, "I know the way is rough sometimes but continue to hang in there, and I do believe that our church will grow. And you will grow with it. It is a season that we are going through. The other side of this season will be great. I believe!" Words cannot express the heartfelt gratitude this pastor feels from the encouragement in this text message. God will build His church. God will grow pastors

along the way. God will send the encouragement that all His children require when they need it. Rainer and Geiger address, “We are God’s building, God’s spiritual house. He first built us (created us). He then bought us back (redeemed us) with His own blood. Next, He moved in. He took up residence in our lives. And He is not done. He continually works on us. He is constantly redecorating. Continual transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>265</sup> Conforming into His perfect, glorious image is the sanctification process that takes time, prayer, study, and persistence. The Holy Spirit molds and shapes his children into what they are supposed to be: a reflection of God’s love and compassion. Croft asserts, “A courageous pastor loves deeply when he embraces his own brokenness before the Lord. A broken pastor who knows he is broken will show compassion differently than a pastor who does not acknowledge his own brokenness. One shows compassion. The other shows pity.”<sup>266</sup> This pastor truly understands that without God, he is nothing. Croft encourages new pastors to “Faithfully preach the word, sacrificially love the people, and not change anything for a while.”<sup>267</sup> With the strength of the Lord, this pastor will endeavor to preach the gospel, love the flock, and not simply change anything for the sake of changing something. But maintaining the status quo will not lead the church to a great revival and the regeneration it desperately needs. This humble pastor shares in Paul’s gratitude, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim. 1:12). Croft asserts, “I have come to a deep conviction that the word of God was enough to breathe life into a church, unify it, and build it – even an existing church that appeared to have little to no life left in it.”<sup>268</sup> God’s breath extinguishes death; He will breathe

---

<sup>265</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 60.

<sup>266</sup> Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 125.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

the breath of His Holy Spirit into His church bringing new life. Building the kingdom is His end goal. The means to accomplish His purpose is through the preaching of His Word and persistent prayer. God has a storehouse full of spiritual blessings, just waiting on His children to ask.

While finishing this thesis project's chapter four and studying for an upcoming message, God gently reminded this pastor that he had not asked for God to build Unity Missionary Baptist Church. All the planning, researching, preaching, and time thinking about what to do, how to do it, and when to do it will not accomplish anything without asking God to intervene. The Scripture asserts, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jas. 4:2). It hit this pastor like a ton of bricks, realizing the essential need to simply ask God to build the church by boldly coming to the throne of grace to receive the Lord's precious promises. When one asks for a result, God graciously gives the source, Himself. Through the workings of the Holy Spirit, God will supply every need of His church: powerful preaching, God-honoring worship, Christ-filled teaching, and fruit for the kingdom. God has ordained every believer's redemption by grace through faith in Christ's perfect work at Calvary. Like salvation, God has ordained the building of His church, but the means is obedience and preaching the gospel. How wonderful to be part of God's means in His perfect plans to achieve His perfect ends, which are to save the lost, heal the broken, comfort the hurting, and strengthen His dear children as they strive to conform into His image. This pastor's prayer for the church, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy precious name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, please forgive our sin, assist the church in forgiving others, do not lead the church into temptation, but deliver it from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen." The request of this humble servant is that the Father would build Unity Missionary Baptist Church, strengthen the pastor to follow the leadership of the Holy

Spirit, study to show himself approved, boldly proclaim the truth, and advance the kingdom for the Lord's honor and glory.

### Conclusion

Spiritual growth is the continued practice of taking in God's Word, believing, and responding in obedience to live and love like Jesus. This Christlike holy living will manifest spiritual fruit that multiplies the kingdom. Spiritual transformation and growth are a sanctification process requiring intervals of reflection to recognize and see development. For example, looking at a garden through a window for a couple of hours in one day will not reveal any progress, but looking back at the garden in a couple of weeks will illuminate the growth. It can take up to a couple of months or more for seeds to produce fruit, depending upon the amount of water and sun it receives during the growing season. Jesus Christ is the wellspring of water that gives everlasting life (John 4:14). God's Word is essential to salvation, growth, and eternal life for those who believe. MacArthur asserts, "Spiritual growth has nothing to do with time. Maturity in the spiritual realm is not measured by the calendar."<sup>269</sup> Some Christians live twenty or thirty years and remain spiritual infants. In a few years of solid biblical study, some new Christians may become spiritual adults growing in grace and knowledge. Whitney asserts, "People may attend church worship faithfully, serve the Lord in and through the church eagerly, give to the work of Christ's kingdom generously, and desire to live Christianly in every aspect of their lives - and yet, year after year, demonstrate little evident growth in godliness."<sup>270</sup> Living in

---

<sup>269</sup> MacArthur, *Keys to Spiritual Growth*, 14.

<sup>270</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 278.

godliness is a continual submission to the Father's will in humble obedience to His Word conforming into Christ's perfect image. MacArthur emphasizes spiritual growth is critical,

Call it what you will: pursuing righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11), being transformed (Romans 12:2), "perfecting holiness" (2 Corinthians 7:1), pressing toward the goal (Philippians 3:14), or being built up in the faith (Colossians 2:7). The goal is the same for every Christian: to be "... transformed into [the Lord's] image ..." (2 Corinthians 3:18). Spiritual growth is not mystical, sentimental, devotional, psychological, or the result of clever secrets. It comes through understanding and practicing the principles that are given in the Word of God.<sup>271</sup>

Believers learn and understand Christ's perfect work and person through studying the Bible, which is the divine revelation of Jesus Christ. The more believers know, the more they grow. Looking back over the years, the seasons of growth will be obvious to the faithful Bible student. Taking in the water of life and the "Son" shine from the Holy Word will manifest spiritual growth that is evident in the lives of believers.

---

<sup>271</sup> MacArthur, *Keys to Spiritual Growth*, 16.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research project was to lead the declining church in a reconciling gospel program that enflames revitalization in the congregation, passion for God's Word, and cultivates fruit for the kingdom. Transformational rescue is God's sovereign grace and mercy through Jesus Christ's supreme sacrifice. God's grace freely grants redemption, sanctification, and glorification to all who hear, believe, and respond to His Holy Scripture and Holy Spirit. The objective was to prime Unity Missionary Baptist Church for the recovery process, not only to revive and survive but to thrive in spiritual growth and health for the people's good and God's glory. The premise of the research project was an eight-week reconciling gospel program of expository preaching and teaching that causes the church to experience revitalization, sanctification, and flourish in the community. The project started with a pre-questionnaire to establish a baseline for change. The current research pastor preached and taught eight weeks of expositional sermons and small group discussions and distributed forty-eight daily devotional verses to invigorate the congregation toward transformational recovery. The researcher then dispensed the post-questionnaire to measure any change, initiated personal interviews, and conducted a final focus group study. Presented in chapter four of this thesis project are the results. The ultimate goal is to escort the congregation to a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry through the expository preaching and teaching of God's Holy Word. Revitalization will manifest through the Holy Spirit's breath of new life, bringing everlasting heart restoration.

Expository preaching and teaching that produces attention to biblical doctrine is theologically grounded, magnifies the Word, centers on Christ's person and work, explains the

text, applies sacred principles, and calls for a response that will cooperate with the Holy Spirit ushering lasting change.<sup>272</sup> The everlasting transformation will occur when God's Holy Spirit saturates the believer's heart through God's Holy Word. When the Holy Spirit indwells the individual believer, he moves in and renovates the dwelling place, the new Christian's life. Dever asserts, "By listening and following God's Word, we image and display God's character and glory, much like a king's ambassadors."<sup>273</sup> Hearing and responding to what the Word commands, instructs, and corrects is an indispensable element in the Christian walk, conforming to Christ's image. The more one knows about the Word, the more they grow and reflect the Savior's light. Displaying Christ-like attitudes and behaviors grounded in love will make a difference in the church and community. The waning church stands in desperate need of spiritual revival that ultimately transforms hearts and changes lives. The primary motivation of this thesis project was to cultivate spiritual growth and church revitalization at Unity Missionary Baptist Church.

When it seems that all hope is lost, let this pastor proclaim Jesus Christ. The Divine Rescuer will provide His field team of ministry agents with everything needed to prevail against enemy forces in accomplishing His kingdom agenda. The Holy Scripture affirms, "God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Phil. 4:19-20). God's breath of the Holy Spirit supplies everything needed to experience church revitalization. The Holy Spirit is the fresh breath of new life, spiritual growth, and holy consecration. God revitalizes the church through His Holy Spirit

---

<sup>272</sup> Stott asserts, "Preaching is a 'manifestation,' *phanerosis*, of the truth which stands written in the Scriptures. Therefore, every sermon should be, in some sense, an expository sermon. We are to preach 'the word of God,' and nothing else." John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1961), 24.

<sup>273</sup> Dever, *What is A Healthy Church*, 49.

and Holy Word to accomplish His purposes. The good news of the Gospel must be preached and taught for individuals to receive salvation, grow in sanctification, and ultimately be glorified at the triumphant return of Jesus Christ. When the blessed Savior and Lord of all returns on that Shekinah glory cloud, all things will be eternally new. Indeed, surrendering to the Holy Spirit's leadership is vital in any church, especially in the expository preaching and teaching of the gospel for the good of the people and the glory of God.

### **Compare Information**

The information gleaned from studying *Small Church Essentials* has impacted the pastor's vision for the church, strengthening and encouraging him to continue. The book addressed having a vision for the church and employing God's image that He has already inspired in the Scripture, which is a good starting place. The Bible says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self" (Matt. 22:37-39). This passage is known as the Great Commandment and is undoubtedly at the forefront of how the church should follow God's perfect vision for fulfilling His kingdom agenda. This project's research has revealed that Unity Missionary Baptist Church still needs improvement regarding loving God and others.<sup>274</sup> When the congregation loves as they should, healing occurs in the body of Christ after splits, hurts, and loss. When the assembly loses family members because of disputes in the church, it harms the kingdom effort. Sick and dying churches have already "left their first love" (Rev. 2:4). The pulpit must exalt the name of Christ by

---

<sup>274</sup> Ross asserts, "The loss of vision, of zeal, of 'fire in the belly,' of passion for godliness, of love for others, of ministry and mission are always reflective of a loss of love for Christ. Churches that need to be revitalized most assuredly need to be taught their 'first love' once again (Heb 5:11-14)." Michael F. Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church Through Your Pulpit* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 81.

expository preaching and teaching that is Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused. Therefore, the pastor is compelled to declare that the Holy Word clearly instructs, encourages, and commands love for God and others in the Christian walk.

The Great Commission to “Go” in Matthew’s Gospel is not a suggestion but undeniably a direct command from the Savior to make disciples of all nations. Cronshaw emphasizes, “‘Discipleship’ is about inviting people to become and grow as followers of Jesus, and thus be carriers and partners of the mission of God.”<sup>275</sup> Jesus Christ expects his followers to know the Truth, live the Truth, and share the Truth. Thus, growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, living according to His image, and sharing the gospel with others will expand the kingdom. The researcher’s observations reveal that Unity Missionary Baptist Church is not as inviting and mission-minded as the pastor initially thought. The inflexible older congregation lacks the outward focus required to fulfill the call of discipleship. Rainer asserts, “Goal-setting can make a church future-oriented rather than tradition-bound.”<sup>276</sup> The indifferent attitude of “us four and no more” simply does not meet the mandate that Jesus Christ emphasizes in His command to go unto all the world with the gospel.

The pastor will continue proclaiming the truth about inviting visitors and the importance of sharing the good news with others. Building the church is the greatest calling. Rainer asserts, “God has called you to build His house. He has promised His hands will complete it.”<sup>277</sup> When signs of new life and growth appear, it strengthens and encourages the pastor to remain steadfast in the expository preaching and teaching of God’s Holy Word in hopes of encouraging the congregation to share their faith, testimonies, and the good news of salvation. Whitney explains,

---

<sup>275</sup> Cronshaw, “Revitalization Consultancy Models,” 318.

<sup>276</sup> Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 268.

<sup>277</sup> Rainer, *Scrappy Church*, 115.

“New Testament evangelism as communicating the gospel. Anyone faithfully relating the essential elements of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ is evangelizing. Evangelism occurs whether the words of the gospel are spoken, written, or recorded; delivered to one person or to a crowd.”<sup>278</sup> Whether the pastor is preaching, the Sunday School teacher is teaching, the worship leader is singing, or the lay member is telling the story of Jesus Christ, it is evangelism. Empowered by the Almighty, believers cannot fail when aligned with His will and obeying His commands. The Lord amazingly promises, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Christ, with that promise, comforts and inspires His disciples to make disciples for His honor and glory. Christ supplies the necessary elements, the Word and Spirit, for church revitalization, evangelism, and kingdom mission to succeed.

Whitney and Henard agree that two essential ingredients for church revitalization are the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.<sup>279</sup> This researcher found that those who listen, believe, and respond to Bible teaching through the Spirit desire to live and love like Jesus. As people better understand the Word, they eagerly listen and yearn for expository preaching and teaching of Holy Scripture. Participant 2 affirmed this by communicating that as the pastor expounded the Word, their knowledge and understanding increased, and they desired more of God’s Truth. When an individual grows in the Word, God’s demonstration of love transforms their heart, producing a greater aspiration to learn and understand more. The Holy Scripture is God’s revelation of himself, salvation, and the future. God’s Word and Holy Spirit convict the heart and call for a response. The deeper someone comprehends God’s Word through His Holy Spirit, the better they can respond to circumstances of loss, brokenness, and trouble in general. Increasing

---

<sup>278</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 120.

<sup>279</sup> Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 2.

biblical knowledge supports the longing individual to resist sin, temptation, lusts of the flesh, and spiritual death. Being the divine source, God will satisfy every need through His heavenly storehouse. Therefore, the priority in preaching must be delivering the message indwelt by the Holy Spirit for the congregation to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ is the content of all Scripture, and the church must reflect His glorious light to the world.

### Framework Reflection

In light of God's tremendous transforming power in the church, believers must uphold His glorious Word. God's Word is inerrant, "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5). The divine Creator who spoke this world into existence declares the Truth for His children through His Holy Word. Most participants agree God speaks through His Word and breathes the breath of life through His Holy Spirit. Even unbelievers think God can produce fruit in the lives of believers.

The prophet Isaiah declared, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken" (Isa. 1:2). Therefore, when God is speaking, everyone better listen. God's Holy Word is authoritative, sufficient, and holds infinite value. The Holy Scripture is enough for every need and must be preached and taught to realize the awe-inspiring grace of salvation found in the Word. The Bible is sufficient and "able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). The immeasurable value of Scripture is found in Paul's words to young pastor Timothy, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Scripture is sufficient and able to perfect men of God by making them "thoroughly furnished unto good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). Through the Holy Spirit, the Holy Bible can bring one to

salvation, perfect one in good works, and offer assurance in hope for the future. The pastor must faithfully convey the Word's authority, sufficiency, and infinite worth while holding on to God's promise of eternal life, delivering the great message of hope.

The overwhelming majority of participants felt that expository preaching and teaching would contribute to spiritual formation. Indeed, the Word is significant in the hearts and lives of believers. MacArthur affirms, "If you really believe in God and in His Son, there should be evidence of it in the way you live, in the things you say, and in the things you do."<sup>280</sup> There should be a desire to learn more about God conforming to His Son's likeness. The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). A healthy reverence for God's Word is the foundation of spiritual growth, and knowledge of sacred text provides strength through understanding God's declaration. The Holy Scripture affirms, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:7-9). Therefore, the Word of God is perfect transforming souls, hearts, and lives to make one wise unto salvation, illuminating understanding, and the gospel truth that endures eternally. The evidence in the lives of believers is their obedience to the Word, which demonstrates Christlike living. Living and loving like Jesus in community exhibits God's revelation in daily life. Thus, displaying how to learn the Word, live the Word, and proclaim the Word for the kingdom's expansion. During this thesis project, the Lord has graciously encouraged and taught this pastor some critical lessons.

---

<sup>280</sup> MacArthur, *Keys to Spiritual Growth*, 60.

### **Lessons Learned**

The pastor is primarily responsible for preaching and teaching the Holy Bible with genuineness, sowing the seed of Truth, and telling of God's precious mercy and grace. Through God's grace and mercy, He bestows salvation, sanctification, and glorification unto His children generously. The Apostle Paul affirms in the Scripture, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). Therefore, the minister can only be held accountable for faithfully preaching and teaching the Word of Truth, God's Holy Bible. God is dependable and trustworthy to bring the increase. Individuals are then responsible for hearing, obeying, and responding to God's Holy Spirit and Holy Word that He sends through His ministers. Ministers and pastors that stay true to God's Word through expository preaching and teaching will not answer for those who choose not to listen, hear, or respond to the glorious message, which is the good news of Jesus Christ. When faithful ministers do what only they can do, preach and teach the Word in demonstration of the Spirit, God will do what only He can do, transform hearts and lives.

The pastor is absorbing that pleasing God, expositional preaching and teaching of God's Word, and following the Holy Spirit's leadership causes everything to turn out for good. The pastor's skill as a sower is irrelevant to the seed. The Word of God stands as the authority, trustworthy, and firm throughout the ages. God's Word will not return void. The real issue with the church is the condition of individual hearts to hear the Word. True hearing leads individuals to respond in action by applying God's Word in all areas of life. As in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:5-8, there are four different kinds of soil or hearers. There are four responses to the seed or Word: indifferent, emotional, worldly, and good ground. No matter how effective the sower preaches, some individuals will not hear what He has to say, indifferent to the Word. Some

individuals are emotional hearers taking in and quickly forgetting the sermon. Some individuals are worldly hearers, not even listening because the cares of the world have their attention. Some individuals are the excellent soil having a heart to listen, taking the Word as authoritative in their life, and applying what they have heard for their good and God's glory. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of genuine believers desire to hear, know, and follow what the Scripture says. Therefore, the pastor must keep sowing by remaining faithful in the expository preaching and teaching of the gospel for the remnant, the loyal few, to flourish.

This pastor is learning to love people as God commanded. Helms emphasizes, "If you want to become a biblical expositor, know this: a prerequisite for preaching is a growing and godly passion for people. Learn to know and love the audience God has given you."<sup>281</sup> Indeed, this current pastor acknowledges the necessity to love the congregation where the Lord has placed him. Jesus taught and restored Peter on the Sea of Galilee before sending him out to proclaim the gospel to the world. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Lovest thou me?" (John 21:15-17). If ministers love him, Jesus' point is clear: they will preach the Word to His people with a growing affection for Jesus Christ and His people. If they love Jesus, ministers will humbly, faithfully, and obediently follow His commands and will. Helms asserts, "And so, I say to all of you who would desire to preach messages for Christ: Do you love Jesus? Do you really love him? Then manifest your love for him by feeding and tending those for whom he died. Learn to love people."<sup>282</sup> To truly love Jesus Christ is to feed God's flock by preaching and teaching His extraordinary message of salvation, sanctification, and ultimately glorification through His Word to exalt Christ with the total praise He richly deserves to win the hearts of the listeners. Helms

---

<sup>281</sup> Helms, *Expositional Preaching*, 90.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

asserts, “It will take the Spirit of God to apply the Word of God to the people of God.”<sup>283</sup> The pastor must demonstrate deep affection for God and his people to successfully feed the flock and sow the seed by delivering good expository sermons that produce fruit for the kingdom’s expansion agenda.

This pastor is learning to ask. Helms asserts, “Since the goal of sermon application is completely repentant hearts, and since only God can bring about this goal, preachers must approach the application portion of our preparation on our knees. We must be familiar with heart prayer.”<sup>284</sup> The minister will discover that constant, sincere prayer to the Father always leads to the right Scripture passage and succors understanding the text to prepare best and deliver the sermon. Michael Ross argues, “Pastors must themselves awaken to the real challenge of revitalizing the Church through the use of the means of grace, and primarily through the preaching of God’s Word accompanied by prayer for holy manna (Acts 6:4).”<sup>285</sup> Prayer is essential in the preparation and preaching of the sermon. Prayer is necessary for the convicting Holy Spirit to draw people to the altar of repentance. Prayer is a critical part of the means God employs to accomplish His purposes in the Christian life. The Bible says, “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (Jas. 4:2). This pastor is learning to ask God to build His church, fill the congregation with His Holy Spirit, send help the church urgently needs, and bless individuals with spiritual growth and health. Paul says, “Pray without ceasing” (Thess. 5:17).

---

<sup>283</sup> Helms, *Expositional Preaching*, 103.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>285</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 17.

## Results Applied

As a whole, the American church today stands in desperate need of spiritual revival. The church will discover that the biblical approach to recovery is God's primary means to accomplish His kingdom mission. Whether a church is healthy or declining, they ultimately require Jesus Christ, His divine Word, and Holy Spirit. It is high time that congregations awake and take the Word, Christ, and holiness in their lives (Rom. 13:11) seriously. The results of this thesis project demonstrate an overinflated perception in the church of their status and desire for spiritual growth. Therefore, the results unveiled the deep necessity to broadcast the Holy Scripture to the congregation for revitalization, regeneration, and restoration to transpire. Martyn Lloyd-Jones communicates the church's primary task, and the Christian minister is the preaching of God's Word.<sup>286</sup> For rebirth to arise in the church, pastors must preach the Truth with conviction. Ross stresses, "The idea of asking for 'holy manna' from above seems foreign to a generation of preachers reared in an age of Church growth methodology and pragmatic church programming."<sup>287</sup> An empowering belief is knowing that God works through the agent of humanity to bring man to salvation in Jesus Christ and renew a slumbering, sin-sick Church.<sup>288</sup> God empowers His ministers with His Spirit to proclaim the Truth of His Word so that the lost sheep receive rescue and the sickly are healed. Ross asserts:

God works through His ordinary means of grace with extraordinary power when these normal means of grace are baptized with the unction of the Holy Spirit. Worship, preaching, prayer and fellowship can be empowered by God the Spirit so that sinners are converted, the lethargic are enlivened in soul and the Church is revived.<sup>289</sup>

---

<sup>286</sup> Lloyd-Jones asserts, "Essentially I mean that the moment you consider man's real need, and also the nature of the salvation announced and proclaimed in the Scriptures, you are driven to the conclusion that the primary task of the Church is to preach and to proclaim this, to show man's real need, and to show the only remedy, the only cure for it." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 37.

<sup>287</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 11.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 13.

The results disclosed that one hundred percent of the people in the church recognize the value of sound gospel exposition of Scripture in preaching and teaching. Thus, pastors must preach the Word with Spirit and power in all churches and settings for the soul's transformation.

To God be the glory in all things. Every congregation is fighting the battle of spiritual warfare. The flesh and devil will take every opportunity to drag people down, causing them to think only of their desires instead of humbly surrendering to follow Christ's perfect example and will. Selfishness and pride are the prime sources of turbulence in the church. Some people are so self-absorbed, wanting everything their way, which is the direct opposite of how Christ demonstrates perfect love and self-sacrifice for others. Dever and Alexander affirm,

God is satisfied in Himself – He does not need us, and He is uppermost in His own affections. Yet God is not exclusively self-absorbed. He wants His Gospel to go to the nations, not just remain within certain geopolitical confines. Heaven will be a place where every tribe, tongue, people, and nation will be represented around the throne of God. And this great variety will glorify Him all the more.<sup>290</sup>

God is glorified when sincere pastors remember and preach who is actually in control of the church: Jesus Christ. John Stott asserts the obligation of pastors, "Humble and self-forgetting we must be always, but diffident and apologetic about the gospel never."<sup>291</sup> God is glorified when preachers boldly stand firm and proclaim Jesus Christ. God, who transforms hearts and lives, is actively involved in the process of sanctification through His Word and His Spirit to change people's eternity.

Applying expository preaching and teaching at Unity Missionary Baptist Church has led to three new couples joining Sunday evening services: a deacon and his wife from another Baptist Church, a pastor-elder and his wife from a Privative Baptist Church that do not have a

---

<sup>290</sup> Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 197.

<sup>291</sup> Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, 29.

Sunday evening service at their church, and an elder from the Presbyterian Church that also does not have Sunday evening services. All these individuals love the Lord and desire to hear God's Word declared through sound expository preaching that encourages, uplifts, inspires, and offers glorious hope in a troubled world. When the Word of the Bible speaks, God speaks to His people. MacArthur asserts, "If we neglect consistent, serious study of God's Word, our spiritual growth will be stunted."<sup>292</sup> The Lord's prophet proclaims, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). MacArthur confirms, "Jeremiah consumed the Word of God, and it brought him great joy."<sup>293</sup> True believers of all ages, hungry for the excellent food of the Word of God, are full of joy, experience great satisfaction, and grow spiritually. Future hope leads to a desire for researching to understand how God employs His Spirit to inspire preachers to boldly proclaim the gospel, stand against sin, refocus the congregation, and lead the church in recovery.

### **Future Research**

Future research could explore how to encourage pastors to passionately preach the precious Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit to see the church revitalized. What causes the pastor to lose hope after a couple of years? Individuals who are indifferent, emotional, and worldly hearers of the Word, meaning their heart is not right to receive the Truth, hinder the church. These same individuals discourage pastors who are sincerely trying to obey God's command to feed the flock. On the other hand, individuals who are receptive to the Word, hear, respond, and follow Christ's ordinances are the prime motivation to continue expository

---

<sup>292</sup> MacArthur, *Keys to Spiritual Growth*, 142.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

preaching and teaching God's Holy Bible faithfully. The pastor must love all congregation members equally because they are God's children. Church revival is possible, but only through the Word and Spirit transforming hearts and lives into the image of Christ. Individuals who hear, believe, and respond in faith should be encouraged with the Word to make disciples. Rainer and Geiger assert, "Encountering Jesus and His disciples in the gospels provides a snapshot of a simple discipleship process. In the Gospel of Luke, three distinct phases emerge: calling, building, and sending. These three phases are sequential and are designed to move the disciples toward greater levels of commitment."<sup>294</sup> The Word and Spirit complete the drawing work of the soul, which results in an individual coming to faith in Christ and building a saving relationship that invigorates the heart toward sharing the good news with others. When individuals are regenerated, the church will experience revitalization. Ross defines revitalization as "The process whereby a church is refocused on its mission of both evangelism and nurturing, and renewed in its efforts to minister to others so that numerical, spiritual and organizational growth occur and are sustained."<sup>295</sup> This inspires pastors to lead the church in this refocusing work toward a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry for the kingdom.

Further research should direct into examining what instigates controlling attitudes in church members. The ultimate answer is sin. People will do what they want, and they will spend time on what matters to them. Greater affluence gives people options that hinder their spiritual growth and faithfulness to the church. Money provides opportunities: kid's activities, travel, and simple pleasures detract from the kingdom expansion effort. Stott conveys the necessity to remember the nature of human beings in Christian understanding and asserts, "It is under

---

<sup>294</sup> Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 161.

<sup>295</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 21.

Christ's yoke that we find the rest he promises, not in discarding it (Matt. 11:29-30)."<sup>296</sup> In the beginning, God created humankind with the moral responsibility and freedom to lovingly obey His Word.<sup>297</sup> Paul claims man's trouble is that his, "Understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:18-19). When individuals hear the Word, learn of Christ, and are taught the Truth found in Jesus, they are transformed into a new person by the renewed spirit of their mind (Eph. 4:21-23). Changing from a controlling person to a loving servant puts on the new man, "which after God created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

In his opening chapter entitled "The Primacy of Preaching," Llyod-Jones declares, "To me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. If you want something in addition to that I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching."<sup>298</sup> If preaching is the greatest need in the church, it stands to reason that it is the greatest need in the world today. When expository preaching and teaching declines in the church, the belief in the authority of Scripture languishes, producing a low opinion of the Truth. Addressing attitudes in the church, Llyod-Jones asserts, "As belief in the great doctrines of the Bible began to go out, sermons were replaced by ethical addresses and homilies, and moral uplift and socio-political

---

<sup>296</sup> Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, 34.

<sup>297</sup> Stott asserts, "According to the first two chapters of Genesis, God created mankind male and female to be both morally responsible (receiving commandments) and free (invited but not coerced into loving obedience). We cannot therefore acquiesce either in license (which denies responsibility) or in slavery (which denies freedom). Christians know from both Scripture and experience that human fulfillment is impossible outside some context of authority. Freedom unlimited is an illusion. The mind is free only under the authority of truth, and the will under the authority of righteousness." Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 17.

talk, it is not surprising that preaching declined.”<sup>299</sup> Preachers must stand firm on the authority of Scripture and proclaim the Bible’s great truths to the people before any fundamental heart transformation emerges. The preacher must guard against the form and delivery of the sermon being more important than the substance of the message. Jesus Christ must always be the focus, for he is the substance of all great preaching and teaching. Pastors must study, pray, and meditate on the Word so they may burst through with the Truth. The Gospel enflames and emboldens their heart for the sake of the gospel.

Ross expounds that many churches are not experiencing either growth or effectiveness in ministry, avowing, “In fact, recent statistics show that numerical growth among evangelical churches, liberal churches, and Catholic churches is in decline.”<sup>300</sup> Although numerical growth is not necessarily a sign of spiritual health, the spiritually growing and healthy church will experience progress because sincere believers will attend regularly. Vaters stresses, “Some churches need a spiritual ICU. But too often, we tell hurting, broken churches to start acting like their strong, healthy siblings. Or we tell them to get bigger, assuming that bigger equals healthier.”<sup>301</sup> Intensive care for unhealthy churches begins with giving the church time to rest, feed the Word, and fellowship together, building relationships and trust. Vaters conveys that there are seasons when churches need rest more than they need exercise, “For example, instead of doing less hands-on pastoral care, a severely unhealthy church will probably need a lot of direct, pastoral TLC.”<sup>302</sup> Thus, learning to love God’s people and implementing a preaching plan

---

<sup>299</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 21.

<sup>300</sup> Ross affirms, “Over the last twenty years, and in general since the mid-1930’s, church membership has dropped. Likewise, church attendance has leveled to 40-42% of the population since 1939. The writer proposes that part of the problem in the loss of members and the stagnation of church attendance is the result of poor preaching.” Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 20.

<sup>301</sup> Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 114.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

is vitally important for the unhealthy church pastor. Ross emphasizes, “Those men who will not prepare long-range plans for preaching will more than likely limp along with the same day-to-day problems that contributed to the need of revitalization.”<sup>303</sup> The goal of planned preaching is for the church to experience true and lasting heart transformation. Lloyd-Jones emphasizes, “What is it that always heralds the dawn of a Reformation or of a Revival? It is renewed preaching. Not only a new interest in preaching but a new kind of preaching.”<sup>304</sup> New preaching is proficient by a minister who has been called, changed, and compelled to dispense expository sermons from God to His people. The preacher must be confident in the Lord’s authority and ability to supply transformation and recovery. Lloyd-Jones affirms, “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire” and that the chief end of preaching is “to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.”<sup>305</sup> Expository preaching and teaching empowered by the Holy Spirit through ministers passionate about delivering the Holy Word will revive the church and bring glory to God.

### **Conclusion**

This research has demonstrated that expository preaching and teaching of God’s Holy Word is the only glimmer of hope for churches to experience everlasting transformation. Determined to see the church grow in health and strength into a vibrant powerhouse for God, expository preaching and teaching must rise to prominence. Power in the pulpit begins on the knees of the faithful preacher and regains influence through the Holy Spirit when the sermon is

---

<sup>303</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 60.

<sup>304</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 31.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

delivered. The Word of God is, in and of itself, always alive and relevant (Heb. 4:12).<sup>306</sup>

Paramount is the solid, systematic, and didactic preaching of the whole counsel of God that will bring about the revitalization the church desperately requires. While expository preaching is indispensable, transformation takes the individual from a hearer to a doer of the Word awakening new life, fresh vitality, and a fruit-filled ministry.

God will build His church despite fallen flesh that contents within this walk of life. Jesus authoritatively and boldly affirms, “I will build my church; and the gate of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone upon which all things construct, that firm foundation. He unites his people together for the common purpose of building the community of believers. Jesus Christ affirms that the church unquestionably belongs to Him. He is the stronghold upon which all promises stand secure unto His children. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe powerfully promises that not even the devil, death, or darkness will prevail against or conquer His church. Thus, ministers must trust in the divine supremacy of the Truth that Christ has all power and authority in the church, and he will make spiritual growth and revitalization possible. Through His Holy Spirit and expository preaching of God’s Word, the flock can experience renewal, regeneration, and revival that is desperately essential to the church’s survival, spreading the gospel, and loving others in the community.

Why is the Bible important? Why is the expository preaching of God’s Holy Word so critical? Because the Word is the only source of divine Truth and the only agency in the world today that is God’s instrument for transformation. The Bible is God’s written Word to His children and is highly profitable in all circumstances. Through expository preaching, the Holy Word saves, the Word sanctifies, and the Word brings about spiritual recovery for those who

---

<sup>306</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 74.

hear and respond in faith. God's Word sufficiently supplies biblical doctrine, knowledge of Christ, basis of faith, free salvation, spiritual growth, and every need. Thus, to grow spiritually is to experience the "growing pains" of rebuke, reproof, chastisement, correction, and instruction for righteousness that the Word delivers. Therefore, to venerate the Word of God is paramount in the hearts, minds, and lives of Christians. Through the Holy Spirit, the Holy Word powerfully regenerates and matures believers into vessels of honor for God's glory and purpose.

God will breathe new life into His church through His Holy Word and Holy Spirit. The primary mission is to faithfully preach and teach the Word of Truth through sound exposition empowered by the Holy Spirit for believers to experience life-changing transformation. The Word is the only source of Truth that convicts of sin, forewarns of judgement, rescues the sinner, purifies the believer, and gives the hope of eternal life. This pastor's prayer to the Father is for Christ to use him as part of the means emboldening the expository preaching and teaching of the Holy Word through the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's glorious will and purpose. Ross confidently insists, "Spiritual men believe that the conversion of the lost and the sanctification of the saints are the primary goals of the ministry, the aim of preaching, and concern of the church."<sup>307</sup> May God powerfully stir the dry bones at Unity Missionary Baptist Church and help the congregation understand the Truth, live the Truth, and share the Truth. The church should respond and apply the Word of Truth with a genuine heart of gratitude for God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Jesus Christ's love never fails and brings the change necessary to realize transformational recovery. May this humble pastor remain prayerful and faithful in light of Christ's glorious return, leaving the abundance of fruit in the capable hands of the Almighty.

---

<sup>307</sup> Ross, *Preaching for Revitalization*, 144.

Only believe, leaving the results to God. Ultimately, God's children will revive, survive, and thrive for the church's edification, Christ's honor, and God's eternal glory.

## Bibliography

- Ackerman, John. *Spiritual Awakening: A Guide to Spiritual Life in Congregations*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994.
- Allen, Michael. *Sanctification*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017.
- Akin, Daniel L., Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage. *Engaging Exposition*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Akin, Daniel L., David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds. *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- Arthurs, Jeffrey. "True Preaching is Biblical Preaching." *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 17, no. 2 (2017): 17-18. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS*, EBSCOhost.
- Barth, Karl. *A Shorter Commentary on Romans*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.
- Breidenbaugh, Joel. *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching for the 21st Century*. Monee, IL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016.
- Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Vol. 1. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014.
- Callen, Barry L., and James B. North. *Coming Together in Christ: Pioneering a New Testament Way to Christian Unity*. Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1997.
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Cheyney, Tom. *The Seven Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization*. Monee, IL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016.
- Clifton, Mark. *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.
- Croft, Brian. *Biblical Church Revitalization*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016.
- Cronshaw, Darren. "Revitalization Consultancy Models: Australian Church Case Studies." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19, no. 2 (2015): 317-45. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS*, EBSCOhost.

- Davis, Andrew M. *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *What is a Healthy Church?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.
- Dever, Mark, and Greg Gilbert. *Preach: Theology Meets Practice*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012.
- Dever, Mark and Paul Alexander. *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.
- Dorsett, Lyle W. *A Passion for Souls: The Life of DL Moody*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003.
- Henard, William D. *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.
- Henard, Bill. *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Helm, David R. *Expositional Preaching*. Wheaton, IL: 9Marks, 2017.
- Hindson, Ed. *Trusting God When Times Are Tough*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.
- Ishola, Solomon A. "Multi-Dimensional Approach to Church Growth." *Practical Theology (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos)* 12 (2019): 1–17. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS*, EBSCOhost.
- Jamieson, Bobby. *Built Upon the Rock: The Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Keller, Timothy. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2016.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Luther, Martin. *Commentary on Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003.
- Paul, Shalom M. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012.
- Piper, John. *Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity*. Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2015.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015.
- Piper, John and Justin Taylor. *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.
- MacArthur, John. *John 1-11 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew 16-23 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Keys to Spiritual Growth: Unlocking the Riches of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *1 & 2 Thessalonians MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2002.
- Marshall, Colin and Tony Payne. *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*. Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2009.
- McDill, Wayne. *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006.
- McIntosh, Gary L. *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
- Meyer, Lester. "Luther in the Garden of Eden: His Commentary on Genesis 1-3." *Word & World* 4 (1984): 430–36. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials PLUS*, EBSCOhost.
- Michelen, Sugel. *From and Before God: A Practical Introduction to Expository Preaching*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019.
- Mims, Gene. *The Kingdom Focused Church: A Compelling Image of an Achievable Future for Your Church*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003.
- Mohler Jr, R. Albert. *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- Morgan, Tony. *The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017.

- Pettit, Paul, ed. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death*. Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *High Expectations*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Scrappy Church: God's Not Done Yet*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Book of Church Growth*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1993.
- Rainer, Thom S., and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Reeves, Michael. *Spurgeon on the Christian life: Alive in Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Reid, Alvin L. *Revitalize: Your Church Through Gospel Recovery*. Columbia, SC: Gospel Advance Books, 2017.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Ross, Michael F. *Preaching for Revitalization: How to Revitalize Your Church Through Your Pulpit*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006.
- Rummage, Stephen N. *Planning Your Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a One-Year Preaching Calendar*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2002.
- Russell, Bob and Rusty Russell. *When God Builds a Church: 10 Principles for Growing a Dynamic Church*. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2000.
- Scazzero, Peter and Warren Bird. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Commentary on Hebrews*. Vol. 36. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.

- Smith, Steven W. *Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2009.
- Stetzer, Ed and Mike Dodson. *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can, Too*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1961.
- Stringer, Ernest T. *Action Research*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2014.
- Strong, James, John R. Kohlenberger, and James A. Swanson. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Sumney, Jerry L. *Colossians: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- Toon, Peter. *Justification and Sanctification*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018.
- Towns, Elmer L., John N. Vaughan, and David J. Seifert. *The Complete Book of Church Growth*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981.
- Tozer, Aiden W. *The Pursuit of God*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015.
- Vaters, Karl. *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018.
- Vines, Jerry, and James L. Shaddix. *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999.
- Warren, Robert. *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church*. Wiltshire, England: Church House Publishing, 2012.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*. Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.
- Wilson, Jared C. *The Gospel-Driven Church: Uniting Church Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Wolcott, Harry F. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009.

### Appendix A: Pre-Questionnaire

1. What kind of things do you currently do to enhance spiritual growth? (i.e., Bible reading, spiritual gifts, evangelism, and/or etc.)
2. How would you rate your personal understanding of God's truth? (i.e., baby, child, young adult, mature adult, senior adult)
3. What do you feel is the most important discipline for spiritual growth? (i.e., Praying, Bible reading, worship, serving, evangelism, or etc.)
4. How much does the church currently assist you in your spiritual growth?
5. Do you feel spiritual growth is a process of taking in the truth of God's Word and growing on the basis of believing and responding to that truth?
6. How do you demonstrate Christ-like transformation in daily life? (i.e., harmony in your home, patience with others, compassion for the needy, desire to evangelism unsaved people, etc.)
7. How would you rate your perceived status of spiritual growth? (i.e., declining, unhealthy, neutral, healthy, flourishing)
- 7a. How would you measure your spiritual growth currently?
8. How much of a desire do you have to grow?
  - (a) Completely
  - (b) Considerably
  - (c) Moderately
  - (d) Slightly
  - (e) Not at allPlace answer here \_\_\_\_\_.
9. How do you value preaching for personal spiritual growth?
  - (a) Completely
  - (b) Considerably
  - (c) Moderately
  - (d) Slightly
  - (e) Not at allPlace answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Do you value sound gospel exposition of Scripture in preaching and teaching? (Sound gospel exposition is theologically correct or orthodox explanation of the Bible in context centered on Christ's life and teachings as good news.)

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

11. Do you desire to learn more about Jesus, the Bible, righteousness, and sanctification? (Righteousness is imputed to those who place faith in Christ's atoning work on the Cross of Calvary and sanctification is a spiritual growth process.)

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

12. Do you feel Christlike transformation is possible through expository preaching and teaching? (Expository preaching is systematically preaching through a text of Scripture explaining the meaning intended for the original audience revealing biblical principles for everyday life.)

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

13. Do you feel expository preaching and teaching contributes to spiritual formation?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

14. Do you think a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry is the best approach for Unity Missionary Baptist Church?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

15. Do you think holding on to biblical beliefs, truth, and faith are important for the church?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

16. Is preaching and teaching the Word of God essential for a kingdom ministry?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

17. Do you feel the ultimate goal in spiritual growth and development is to become like Christ?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

18. Do you believe the church should have an outward focus in the community?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

Place answer here \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix B: Post Questionnaire

1. What kind of things do you currently do to enhance spiritual growth? (i.e., Bible reading, praying, exercise spiritual gifts, evangelism, and/or etc.)

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

2. How would you rate your personal understanding of God's truth? (i.e., baby, child, young adult, mature adult, senior adult)

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

3. What do you feel is the most important discipline for spiritual growth? (i.e., Praying, Bible reading, worship, serving, evangelism, and/or etc.)

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you demonstrate Christ-like transformation in daily life? (i.e., harmony in your home, patience with others, compassion for the needy, desire to evangelize, Christ-centered focus, etc.)

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

5. How would you rate your perceived status of spiritual growth over the last three months? (i.e., declining, unhealthy, neutral, healthy, flourishing)

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you feel spiritual growth is a process of taking in the truth of God's Word and growing on the basis of believing and responding to that truth?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you feel the expounding of God's Word through preaching and teaching leads to better understanding and personal spiritual growth?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you deeply desire to search diligently for knowledge and understanding in God's Word?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

9. Does the truth found in the Bible produce fruit in the lives of believers?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you have more Bible knowledge now than you had three months ago?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

11. Does knowing more about Jesus Christ transform hearts and generate spiritual gifts?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

12. Can the Holy Spirit through the Holy Word breathe new life into the church?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

13. Are you progressively conforming to Christ's image in obedience?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

14. Is your heart filled with love for God and others?

(a) Yes

(b) No Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

15. How much of a desire do you have to grow spiritually?

(a) Completely

(b) Considerably

(c) Moderately

(d) Slightly

(e) Not at all

16. How much does the church currently assist you in your spiritual growth?

(a) Completely

(b) Considerably

(c) Moderately

(d) Slightly

(e) Not at all

17. How do you value preaching for personal spiritual growth?

(a) Completely

(b) Considerably

(c) Moderately

(d) Slightly

(e) Not at all

18. Do you value sound gospel exposition of Scripture in preaching and teaching?

(Sound gospel exposition is theologically correct or orthodox explanation of the Bible in context centered on Christ's life and teachings as good news.)

(a) Completely

(b) Considerably

(c) Moderately

(d) Slightly

(e) Not at all

19. Do you desire to learn more about Jesus, the Bible, righteousness, and sanctification?

(Righteousness is imputed to those who place faith in Christ's atoning work on the Cross of Calvary and sanctification is a spiritual growth process.)

(a) Completely

(b) Considerably

(c) Moderately

(d) Slightly

(e) Not at all

20. Do you feel Christlike transformation is possible through expository preaching and teaching? (Expository preaching is systematically preaching through a text of Scripture explaining the meaning intended for the original audience revealing biblical principles for everyday life.)

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

21. Do you feel expository preaching and teaching contributes to spiritual formation?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

22. Do you think a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, and fruit-focused ministry is the best approach for the church?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

23. Do you think holding on to biblical beliefs, truth, and faith are important for the church?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

24. Is preaching and teaching the Word of God essential for a kingdom ministry?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

25. Do you feel the ultimate goal in spiritual growth and development is to become like Christ?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

26. Do you believe the church should have an outward focus in the community?

- (a) Completely
- (b) Considerably
- (c) Moderately
- (d) Slightly
- (e) Not at all

27. What has the most influence on your aspiration to conform into Christ's image?

(Preaching – more formal setting listening to ministers proclaim God's Word to a congregation.  
Teaching – more intimate setting listening, asking questions, and interacting with a Bible instructor in Sunday school class or a small group.)

- (a) The explanation of the Word through preaching (i.e., sermons)
- (b) The explanation of the Word through teaching (i.e., Sunday school, small groups)
- (c) The worship service
- (d) Prayer
- (e) Private study of Scripture
- (f) Other

If other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

28. What has greatly increased your desire to pursue Christ, his grace, and his knowledge?

- (a) The explanation of the Word through preaching
- (b) The explanation of the Word through teaching
- (c) The worship service
- (d) Prayer
- (e) Private study of Scripture
- (f) Other

If other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

29. What inspires you to learn to live and love like Jesus?

- (a) The explanation of the Word through preaching
- (b) The explanation of the Word through teaching
- (c) The worship service
- (d) Prayer
- (e) Private study of Scripture
- (f) Other

If other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

30. Over the past year what has produced the greatest spiritual growth/transformation in your life?

- (a) The explanation of the Word through preaching
- (b) The explanation of the Word through teaching
- (c) The worship service
- (d) Prayer
- (e) Private study of Scripture
- (f) Other

If other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Questionnaire**

### **Participant Prospective**

What made you interested in taking part in this study?

What makes you interested in spiritual growth?

Do you know what the term “expository preaching” means?

What ministry has or had the most Kingdom impact at Unity Missionary Baptist Church?

How would you describe the condition of the church and attendees?

### **Controlling Passions**

How would you describe the growth of the church in the last decade?

What vision is burning bright in the church?

What is the focus of our prayers?

What shortcoming of the church bothers the leadership most?

What stories or situations illustrate the guiding passions of the past and present?

### **Personal Reflection**

What has God revealed about His purpose for the church?

What evidence is seen of the Holy Spirit working in the church?

What are some future concerns for the church?

What are your hopes and dreams for the church?

Recall some ways God has blessed Unity Missionary Baptist Church through worship, discipleship, preaching, and service.

### **Transformation**

How has group participation changed your understanding of church revitalization?

How did group participation influence your spiritual life/practices?

How did personal spiritual growth affect church renewal?

How did expository preaching and teaching affect you?

What has enhanced/hindered personal biblical understanding over the past eight weeks?

## Appendix D: Sermon Series

### Week One

Text: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Title: *Can These Bones Live: All Hope is Not Lost*

#### Outline

Introduction: What possible good can come from such an effort? So much time has passed, the bones are so dry, and they are not even connected to one another.

1. The church can trust God to use His ministers to prophesy restoration.
  - a. The word *prophesy*, preaching by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is used seven times in the passage.
2. The church can trust God to picture restoration.
  - a. The Holy Spirit breathes new life into the church.
3. The church can trust God to purpose restoration.
  - a. To know that He is the Lord, and He has spoken and performed redemption.

Conclusion: This powerful vision is the Lord's response to the hopelessness and despair of His people. For the people of God, hope is never gone for the Lord, Jehovah, is our strength and breath. The church can see revitalization if the Word is preached and the people listen, heed, and obey.

### Week Two

Text: 2 Chronicles 7:14

Title: *Personal Need: God Will Hear from Heaven*

#### Outline

Introduction: God's remedy for the waning church. God has promised in His Word if His children would come to Him in humble prayer confessing their sin, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse them from all unrighteousness.

1. Man's greatest problem.
  - a. Sin.
  - b. Pride.
  - c. Lack of humility.
2. God's remedy, "If my people, which are called by my name" (2 Chr 7:14).
  - a. Humble themselves to come before His throne.
  - b. Pray, confessing: "I need help," "I cannot save myself."
  - c. Seeking His face by turning from their wicked ways.
3. God's tremendous promise.
  - a. Hear from heaven.
  - b. Forgive their sin.
  - c. Heal their land.

Conclusion: Solomon's prayer is wonderfully answered with a great promise. God will hear His children's cry for repentance, forgiveness, and healing. The promise is especially powerful considering the original audience, the remnant of Jews who had returned home from their Babylonian captivity. A promise of restoration would have given them great hope.

### Week Three

Text: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Title: *God's Unspeakable Gift*

#### Outline

Introduction: Paul's mind is on the Cross of Christ. Although he teaches a powerful lesson on being a cheerful giver concerning monetary charitableness, He affirms believers are enriched by God's gracious unspeakable gift of abundant salvation through Jesus Christ. This alone should ignite a heart of thankfulness toward the Holy Provider, God.

1. God loves a cheerful giver and is a gracious giver.
  - a. The depths of God's love cannot be understood.
  - b. The grace of God is beyond comprehension.
  - c. The supply of God is immeasurable.
2. God's glorious gift.
  - a. John 4:10, the gift of God is salvation.
  - b. Acts 2:38, the gift of the Holy Spirit.
  - c. Romans 6:23, the gift of eternal life.
3. God's gift brings gratitude.
  - a. Psalm 116:12-13, God's benefits.
  - b. Glorify God for a great profession.
  - c. Be subject unto the gospel of Christ.

Conclusion: Paul states that when someone shows grace to others by giving, God replenishes the grace so that the one sowing bountifully may reap bountifully. No matter how generously one gives to others it pales in comparison to the generosity of God, who gave His only begotten Son. The free gift of salvation should continually produce awe and gratitude.

### Week Four

Text: John 21:12-19

Title: *Loves Transforming Effect*

#### Outline

Introduction: Jesus invites the disciples to a breakfast He has prepared. John writes this wonderful reminder that Jesus Christ has risen, and the resurrection is reality. This third manifestation of Jesus to the disciples is an experience filled with love, service, and compassion.

1. Jesus lovingly invites.
  - a. Divine invitation.
  - b. Divine supply.
  - c. Divine restoration.
2. Jesus lovingly inflames.
  - a. Do you love Christ?
  - b. Preach the gospel, share the good news.
  - c. Deny yourself, live obediently.
3. Jesus lovingly instructs.
  - a. Glorify God in following.
  - b. Glorify God in preaching.
  - c. Glorify God in death.

Conclusion: Jesus powerfully restores Peter in front of the disciples. This loving transformation effects Peter profoundly by encouraging his preaching and emboldens witness for Jesus Christ.

## Week Five

Text: Colossians 1:18-22

Title: *Power Source*

### Outline

Introduction: Are you plugged into the power source of healing found only in Jesus Christ the Savior? The power source is the reconciliation work of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary.

1. Christ's superiority and supremacy over the church.
  - a. Creator of the cosmos is the head of the church.
  - b. He is the source and power of the church.
  - c. He is originating cause of life in the church.
2. Christ has all the fulness of the Father.
  - a. *Fulness* means the sum or total.
  - b. *Dwell* means to reside, to live or stay as permanent resident.
  - c. Affirms Christ's deity as the second person of the Holy Trinity.
3. Christ makes reconciliation possible.
  - a. Through the blood of His cross.
  - b. Christ is the source, substance, and sustainer of peace.
  - c. The Mediator presents believers holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable.

Conclusion: If the church experiences reconciliation, individuals will have to focus on Christ the power source by receiving salvation, obeying His commands, and uniting in fellowship with love. Jehovah is everlasting strength. Trust God to grant reconciliation and peace through His power source, Jesus Christ the Savior.

## Week Six

Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Title: *Christian Callings*

### Outline

Introduction: What kind of church would God be happy with or proud of? One that is thankful, obedient, genuinely converted, increasing in faith, growing in love, and persevering in hope with a kingdom attitude for the everlasting gospel and expansion work.

1. God's church is made up of those genuinely converted.
  - a. Regenerate church.
  - b. Redeemed church.
  - c. Believing church.
2. God's church is one that increases in faith.
  - a. Real faith.
  - b. Faith that works.
  - c. Greater faith.
3. God's church is one that is growing in love.
  - a. True love.
  - b. Increasing love.
  - c. Genuine love for God and others.

Conclusion: The true believers will escape everlasting destruction and rest assured in their persevering hope that God will liberate His children, looking forward to eternal life with God in heaven.

## Week Seven

Text: 2 Corinthians 7:1

Title: *A Healthy Fear*

### Outline

Introduction: A healthy fear of the Lord is absolutely essential to having a right relationship with God. Fear of the Lord helps believers grow in respect, reverential awe, and admiration of God's holy attributes. God, please help the church grow in fear, knowledge, wisdom, and confidence.

1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7).
  - a. Fear connotes extreme reverence, respect, and awe.
  - b. Fear is recognizing our complete reliance on God.
  - c. Fear brings humility and a willingness to listen.
2. Better is little with the fear of the Lord (Prov 15:16).
  - a. A happy heart feasts on the joy of the Lord.
  - b. A happy heart feasts on the fear of the Lord.
  - c. A happy heart feasts on the love of the Lord.
3. By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life (Prov 22:4).
  - a. The Holy Spirit motivates believers to fear the Lord.
  - b. The Holy Spirit motivates believers to seek His rich incentives.
  - c. The Holy Spirit motivates believers to teach others about His rich incentives.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit gives greater peace of mind, purity from filthiness, and holiness when one fears the Lord. Sanctifying our hearts, minds, and souls cleaning all sin with a healthy fear and reverence for God.

## Week Eight

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

Title: *An Outward Focus*

### Outline

Introduction: The key to Matthew's Gospel is the Great Commission. A healthy church will have an outward focus demonstrated by love for God and others. The resurrected Christ appears to the disciples in Galilee, and commissions them to go preach and teach the gospel to all nations.

1. The church can trust in Christ's sufficient power.
  - a. He is the Divine Creator and Sustainer of the universe.
  - b. He spoke everything into existence.
  - c. All power is given to Christ in heaven and earth.
2. The church can trust in Christ's commands.
  - a. Go make disciples of all nations.
  - b. Preach the gospel and baptize new believers.
  - c. Obey every command with love.
3. The church can trust in Christ's eternal presence.
  - a. Christ promised to never leave or forsake His children.
  - b. By going with them always, even unto the end.
  - c. His presence means protection, power, and peace.

Conclusion: As the apostles, ministers today will never be alone when they preach. Jesus promised to be with them in power and spirit. The Holy Spirit through the Holy Word ushers in everlasting heart transformation in those who believe the gospel message.

## Appendix E: Small Group Studies

### Week One

Text: Acts 2:22-24

Theme: Gospel

Connection to revitalization: Peter preaching at Pentecost.

The gospel is the message of the good tiding of Jesus Christ and His supreme sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary once and for all. Jesus' life, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you" (Acts 2:22). Jesus' death, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Jesus' resurrection, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24). Christ's death brings forgiveness, and His resurrection brings new life.

### Week Two

Text: Acts 2:1-4

Theme: The Holy Spirit

Connection to revitalization: Christ sends the Comforter.

As He promised, after the ascension Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit unto the church as a comforter, guide, and strength. According to the Strong's concordance the Holy Ghost is referenced more in the book of Acts than all the other books of the Bible combined.<sup>308</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit is then vitally important to the early church and Christians today who desire to grow by His power to become the health church God intends for His people.

### Week Three

Text: Acts 6:7

Theme: Bible

Connection to revitalization: The Holy Spirit breathes new life through the Holy Word.

The first deacons were chosen to lead the church and care for the people. Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit is listed first among the names of these deacons. The apostles were far more concerned with the internal quality of the men's hearts than with their outward appearance. The Holy Spirit brings everlasting heart transformation through His power and the Holy Word. The Word of God increased, and the Lord continued to multiply the church greatly because of obedient faith.

---

<sup>308</sup> James Strong, John R. Kohlenberger, and James A. Swanson, *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 707.

### **Week Four**

Text: Acts 3:12-26

Theme: Preaching

Connection to revitalization: The Cross changes everything.

Peter preaches to the crowds at the Temple that the Jewish people should repent for crucifying the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Did the Romans crucify Christ or was it the sins of everyone? Quick reference list of sermons preached in The Acts of the Apostles: Acts 2:14-40, 3:12-26, 4:5-12, 7, 8:5, 10:28-47, 11:4-18, 13:16-41, 14:3-7, 15:7-11, 15:13-21, 16:31, 17:22-35, 20:17-35, 22:1-21, 23:1-6, 24:10-21, 26:2-23, 28:17-20. Every sermon is Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused for the kingdom expansion work, which was igniting in those early Christians and has spread worldwide today.

### **Week Five**

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Theme: Prayer

Connection to revitalization: Church explosion through preaching.

God added to the church about three thousand new believers, who devoted themselves to the gospel message in fellowship teaching others and praying for God's help, strength, and salvation of the lost. Because of their pure heart and steadfastness in the faith the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. This is the prime example of church revitalization and growth found in the Scripture. Christians working together in unity for the good of the people and the glory of God.

### **Week Six**

Text: Acts 4:1-4

Theme: Faith

Connection to revitalization: Holy boldness by faith.

The apostles prayed by faith to receive boldness from the Lord, and He granted that empowering to them to boldly preach and teach, which ultimately lead to an enormous number of individuals being saved, because of their great faith. Faith is the number one quality to have because a person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is the full assurance in the heart that God is who He says He is and is able to do what He says He will do.

### **Week Seven**

Text: Acts 17:18

Theme: Hope

Connection to revitalization: Intimate relation with the divine Creator.

Paul on his second missionary journey found an altar with the inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23). To emphasize his point that God is more personal than all idols, Paul affirmed God is the divine Creator and people are His creatures. The resurrection of Jesus Christ assures believers that one day they will rise again. This blessed hope is certain for it is by Jesus Christ that one lives, moves, and has one's own being. For believers are His dear children and will never be forsaken once grafted into the family of God.

## Week Eight

Text: Acts 20:24

Theme: Love

Connection to revitalization: Christ's loving sacrifice secures believers.

The word love is not in the book of Acts, but the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a prevalent theme throughout the book. The Scripture says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Certainly, Paul preached the gospel of Christ as the only way to heaven, which believers, "have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Are we as Christians responsible to lay down our lives and take up the cross for the sake of the gospel?

## Appendix F: Daily Devotionals

### Week One

<b>Text</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Connection to Revitalization</b>
1. Rev 14:6	Gospel	Preach the gospel
2. Mark 8:35	Gospel	Sacrifice for the gospel
3. Matt 11:5	Gospel	Christ preached His own gospel
4. 1 Tim 1:11	Gospel	Faithful ministry/glorious gospel
5. Rom 10:15	Gospel	Glad tidings of good things
6. 2 Cor 4:3	Gospel	The lost need the gospel

### Week Two

<b>Text</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Connection to Revitalization</b>
1. Rom 8:26	Holy Spirit	Power to save, heal, and revitalize
2. John 16:13	Holy Spirit	Comforter and guide into all truth
3. Acts 2:38	Holy Spirit	Power to invigorate new believers
4. Luke 16:15	Holy Spirit	God knows one's heart
5. Isa 11:2	Holy Spirit	Spirit of wisdom and understanding
6. 1 Cor 2:13	Holy Spirit	The Spirit teaches

### Week Three

<b>Text</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Connection to Revitalization</b>
1. 2 Tim 3:16	Bible	All Scripture is by inspiration
2. Mark 12:10	Bible	Jesus is the head corner stone/builder
3. Luke 4:21	Bible	Scripture is always fulfilled
4. Acts 8:32	Bible	Scripture about Christ
5. Rom 10:11	Bible	Whosoever believeth is not ashamed
6. Jas 2:8	Bible	Scripture inspires loving neighbors

### Week Four

<b>Text</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Connection to Revitalization</b>
1. Matt 4:17	Preaching	Jesus began to preach
2. Luke 9:60	Preaching	Commanded to preach
3. Isa 61:1	Preaching	Lord anoints preaching
4. Rom 10:15	Preaching	Must be called to preach
5. Mark 2:2	Preaching	Preach the Word
6. Acts 8:5	Preaching	Preach Christ/share the gospel

### Week Five

<b>Text</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Connection to Revitalization</b>
1. Job 15:4	Prayer	Bring one's prayer before God
2. Job 16:17	Prayer	Pure prayers
3. Ps 4:1	Prayer	Appeal for God to hear
4. Matt 21:13	Prayer	Church is a house of prayer
5. Matt 21:22	Prayer	Prayers answered by believing
6. Jas 5:6	Prayer	Effectual fervent prayer avails much

**Week Six****Text**

1. Acts 14:27
2. Matt 6:30
3. Col 2:5
4. Eph 3:17
5. 2 Cor 5:7
6. 1 Pet 5:9

**Theme**

- Faith  
Faith  
Faith  
Faith  
Faith  
Faith

**Connection to Revitalization**

Faith of the Gentiles/church growth  
Trust God to clothe the believer  
Joy over the steadfastness of faith  
Indwelling of Christ by faith  
Walk by faith, not by sight  
Afflictions advance faith

**Week Seven****Text**

1. Ps 16:9
2. Ps 39:7
3. Titus 3:7
4. Rom 8:24
5. Heb 6:18
6. 1 Pet 1:13

**Theme**

- Hope  
Hope  
Hope  
Hope  
Hope  
Hope

**Connection to Revitalization**

Rest in hope  
Hope is anchored in the Lord  
By grace obtain an eternal hope  
Saved by hope  
God is a refuge of hope  
Hope in the revelation of Christ

**Week Eight****Text**

1. John 13:35
2. John 15:13
3. Prov 10:12
4. 2 Sam 1:26
5. Matt 5:44
6. Luke 10:27

**Theme**

- Love  
Love  
Love  
Love  
Love  
Love

**Connection to Revitalization**

Love demonstrates discipleship  
No greater love than Christ gave  
Love covers all sin  
Brotherly love  
Love one's enemies  
Commanded to love God and others

## Appendix G: Permission Request Letter

January 24, 2021

Members

Unity Missionary Baptist Church

Dear Members:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Rescue Mission: Transformation Recovery through Expository Preaching and Teaching and the purpose of my research is to lead the waning church in a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused ministry for the good of the people and the glory of God.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your church to invite them to participate in my research study. Participants will be asked to complete a pre- and post-questionnaire, listen to expository sermons, join a small group study, read daily devotions, and participate in a concluding focus group. 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 the researcher's email address: [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Rev. Allen Mayes  
Pastor

## Appendix H: Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Members:

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree with an Expository Preaching and Teaching Cognate. The purpose of my research is to lead the church in a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused ministry for the good of the people and the glory of God, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be eighteen years of age or older, and members of Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a pre- and post-questionnaire (fifteen minutes each), listen to eight sermons (one each week), join a small group study (meet once a week), read forty-eight daily devotions (six each week), and participate in a concluding focus group (one forty-five-minute session). It should take approximately nine weeks to complete the procedures listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

In order to participate, please complete the attached pre-questionnaire and return it by placing it in the provided envelope. Please attend all regular services provided by Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Contact me at [REDACTED] for more information.

A consent document will be given to you one week before the focus group. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the focus group.

Sincerely,

Rev. Allen Mayes  
Pastor  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix I: Consent

**Title of the Project:** Rescue Mission: Transformational Recovery through Expository Preaching and Teaching

**Principal Investigator:** David A. Mayes II, Pastor, Unity Missionary Baptist Church

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be eighteen years of age or older, and a member of Unity Missionary Baptist Church. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

The purpose of this study is to guide Unity Missionary Baptist Church in spiritual revitalization and growth by gaining a greater understanding of God's truth. To lead the church in a Christ-oriented, gospel-centered, fruit-focused ministry for the good of the people and the glory of God. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a pre- and post-questionnaire taking approximately fifteen minutes to complete, which will remain anonymous by placing the unsigned and answered questionnaires into an inter-office envelope.
2. Listen to eight expository sermons over the course of an eight-week reconciling gospel program.
3. Join small group discussions during this same eight-week period studying the gospel, Holy Spirit, Holy Word, preaching, prayer, faith, hope, and love.
4. Read six daily devotionals a week over the course of this eight-week program.
5. Ask a few to participate in a final focus group reflecting on the eight-week journey. The researcher will collect the information needed for the study through the anonymous questionnaires, field notes, and a focus group that is audio recorded.

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are how to be postured for spiritual growth and health in the church. Learn to live and love like Jesus in community. Benefits to society include the community being able to acknowledge the church is moving in the right direction by helping those in need, sharing the gospel, and demonstrating the love of God to the world through service. The church will make a difference in the community by displaying Christ like characteristics in their attitudes and behaviors through their everyday walk of life where they work, play, shop, and eat outside the church building.

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

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant questionnaire responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

- The focus group study will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

The researcher conducting this study is David Allen Mayes II. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Scott Maze, at [REDACTED].

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, [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED].

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 2, 2021

David Mayes  
Eric Maze

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-577 Rescue Mission: Transformational Recovery  
Through Expository Preaching and Teaching

Dear David Mayes and Eric Maze,

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 does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason: Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision 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 non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

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