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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Shallow Well Church: A Biblical Direction**

Submitted to Dr. David L. Kitchens

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

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The author of this thesis project aims to address the need for the deacons of Shallow Well Church to be trained in first-order doctrines of the Christian faith and the biblical church leadership model prescribed in Acts 6. With the development and implementation of the Deacon Training Manual, the deacons of Shallow Well Church will increase in the knowledge of God and rightly understand the roles of elders and deacons in the local church. Ultimately, through the training and help from God, the church will move from its current denomination which differs in doctrinal beliefs from Shallow Well Church. In addition, the church will move to a biblical leadership model with elders and deacons serving in their biblical roles. The researcher will utilize surveys and a focus group for the current Deacon Board at Shallow Well Church. The purpose of the surveys was to gauge each deacon's knowledge of first-order Christian doctrine and the biblical leadership model. The purpose of the focus group was to receive feedback and ideas from the deacons. Churches with deacons who serve as overseers would greatly benefit from this research project.

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## **Abbreviations**

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

DTM *Deacon Training Manual*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

NDC *Nondenominational Churches*

SWC *Shallow Well Church*

UCC *United Church of Christ*

YCM *Youth and Children Minister*



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The Protestant Church has evolved over the centuries into many denominations as well as nondenominational churches. Doctrinal beliefs vary from liberal to conservative theology and have caused division within the Church of Jesus Christ. Some denominations, at one time more conservative in theological views, have abandoned the authority of Scripture and aligned its views with secular culture. As a result, biblical preaching and teaching within many churches has become a distinction of the past.

### Ministry Context

Shallow Well Church (SWC) was founded as a Congregational Christian Church in 1831. Over a century later, a merger occurred between multiple denominations that resulted in a new denomination, the United Church of Christ (UCC). This entity proclaimed, “The birth of the United Church of Christ, celebrated June 25, 1957, provided both the event and the institution for members of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church who for nearly twenty years had labored to be responsible to the vision of unity that is shared by all who profess Christ as Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

SWC is located in Sanford, North Carolina (Lee County). Originally a farming community, the greater Sanford community is now home to several manufacturing companies

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<sup>1</sup> Louis H. Gunnemann, *The Shaping of the United Church of Christ: An Essay in the History of American Christianity* (New York: United Church Press, 1977), 8.

and other corporate locations. As a result, many employees relocated to the Lee County region, primarily in upper management positions. Farms are still operating and attract migrant workers who come from Mexico. Economically, the median household income is \$46,915 with an 18.2 percent poverty rate. Racially, Sanford is primarily Caucasian, African American, and Latino-Hispanic.<sup>2</sup>

When the Congregational Christian Church merged to form the United Church of Christ, SWC embraced the change due to denominational loyalty. SWC trusted that the new denominational leadership would make the right decision in creating the merger. In the years since that merger, the doctrinal beliefs of the UCC took a liberal shift. The UCC does not view the Bible as the inerrant, infallible, divinely inspired Word of God. As a result, the UCC is now one of the most liberal denominations in modern Protestantism. This includes the celebration of same-sex marriage, full inclusion of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle, and ordination of openly gay clergy. These radical changes are unknown to most of the SWC congregation since UCC churches are autonomous and can function under the local UCC church's doctrinal beliefs.

The initial UCC statement of beliefs was more theologically orthodox than its current. First and foremost, it affirmed the authority of the Scriptures as the ultimate rule of faith and practice. However, upon further reading of UCC history, one statement of faith stood out and was the catalyst for the future decline of orthodoxy: renewing faith. This tenant states that each generation is responsible for re-thinking its beliefs as God's Word unfolds and conditions change.<sup>3</sup> This statement endorses progressive revelation. Biblical truth transcends time and God has revealed what His people need to know through the Word (Jesus Christ and the written

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<sup>2</sup> "Sanford, North Carolina," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanfordcitynorthcarolina/PST045219#qf-headnote-a>.

<sup>3</sup> J. Dudley O'Connell, booklet to author, March 24, 2021.

Word). It is apparent through the history of the UCC that seeds were planted for a pseudo-biblical theology.

SWC primarily consists of white, middle-class families. Due to its founding as a community church, many of the members are related to each other. These family ties are strong, and therefore family loyalty is a priority. This loyalty, although admirable, can cause strife in the life of the church. For example, if the church leadership considers excommunicating at the conclusion of church discipline a member who is part of a large, generational family, the likely result will not be favorable for all involved. This action could lead to a mass exodus of members, a decline in giving, or other harmful activities.

Local missions are a tradition of the church. SWC is very generous in helping local ministries and non-profits who care for the Sanford community. Each month, specific food items are collected at the church and delivered to the local food bank. Another target for help are local schools. SWC has several teachers and they share the needs of the classrooms. School budgets are always lean and there is little or no funding for basic school supplies. SWC helps this need by collecting items based on the teachers' recommendations. As a result, many underprivileged students receive much-needed school supplies. Teacher appreciation meals are another way SWC ministers to the educators that often feel unappreciated. These and other special collections are a blessing to the community. However, one lacking component is evangelism. Like many churches, evangelism is not a priority at SWC. The church, in its generosity, is no different from secular organizations if it does not share the gospel. SWC also hosts fun family days at two low-income housing developments. Teams travel to the neighborhoods and set up activities for children and provide meals. Unfortunately, these events to reach the community are not bridges

to gospel proclamation. In sum, SWC does a lot for the physical needs of Lee County but not the spiritual needs.

The lack of evangelism goes along with a historical lack of discipleship. Except for a few ladies' small group studies, there has not been an emphasis on biblical discipleship. For decades, the sermons were more topical, thus not generating a thirst to increase in the knowledge of God. Most men in the church are not active in teaching roles because there is no biblical understanding of the roles of men and women in the church. The only men's "ministry" opportunities are either doing church maintenance or the monthly men's fellowship, which resembles a chat group more than a discipleship group. This is certainly not exclusive to SWC, but the men of SWC must step up and be the leaders of home and church that God has called them to be. From the pastor's perspective, this is a daunting task. However, there must be the belief that expository preaching and teaching the Word of God will produce transformation in men's hearts and minds. Luke's Gospel points to this transformation: "And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened us to the Scriptures?'" (Luke 24:31-32).<sup>4</sup>

In October 2019, the current Youth and Children Minister (YCM) began his ministry. SWC has several youth and children; many of these children are from the aforementioned generational families. Shortly after the YCM arrived, the COVID-19 pandemic began and created a challenge for his assimilation to the church and ministry to the youth and children. He has not attended seminary but does believe God has called him to full-time vocational ministry. Due to the pandemic and the former pastor's transition, the YCM did not receive necessary

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

mentoring yet fulfilled essential duties such as pulpit supply. The current pastor met with him shortly after he began at SWC to learn about the YCM. He explained to the current pastor his desire to learn and has proven to be teachable (mostly). The present pastor began mentoring the YCM, who lives about 45 minutes from the church and is only at the church on Sundays due to his bi-vocational status. Therefore, the current pastor has worked around this challenge by utilizing electronic correspondence and face-to-face meetings. The YCM also lacks administrative and planning skills, so the present pastor is helping with these areas.

The former pastor of SWC served from 1993 to 2020. Although the church experienced several successes during his tenure, such as a 1.4 million dollar building expansion, the issue with the UCC liberal shift was never addressed. The pastoral search committee decided that the next pastor would lead the church's move away from the UCC. The current pastor (also the author) began serving as Senior Pastor on November 15, 2020. During the interviews, the present pastor shared excerpts from the UCC website and other online publications that explained the UCC's stand on matters such as gay marriage. The search committee was mainly unaware of the UCC's affirmation and celebration of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle. For example, "Notwithstanding race, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, class or creed—we all belong to God and to one worldwide community of faith."<sup>5</sup> The committee's response with the previous statement and all others shared was summed up in one phrase: *that is not what we believe*. The current pastor shared that he would preach and teach from the Word of God by preparing and delivering via an exposition of the biblical text. The committee was enthusiastic with this declaration and, after much prayerful consideration, called the current pastor to serve as Senior Pastor.

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<sup>5</sup> "What We Believe," United Church of Christ, accessed August 12, 2020, [https://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_what-we-believe](https://www.ucc.org/about-us_what-we-believe).

With the endorsement of biblical preaching and teaching, the current pastor preaches expository sermons and teaches the Christian faith tenants on Wednesday nights to help the congregation understand the faith. Also, the present pastor shared his thesis proposal with the Board of Deacons. The thesis would serve as a tool to aid the church in its move from the UCC through discipleship beginning with the church leadership.

### **Problem Presented**

The problem is that Shallow Well leadership's doctrinal beliefs do not align with the UCC's statement of beliefs. Over the years, the denomination has embraced liberal theological views that contradict biblical truth. In SWC's current state, the denominational affiliation will detract potential visitors who share SWC's doctrinal beliefs from visiting because the church is still (loosely) affiliated with the denomination. The greatest wedge between SWC and the UCC is biblical authority. Unlike the UCC, SWC leadership believes God's Word is inerrant, infallible, and transformational. The apostle Paul explains, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Faithfully preaching and teaching the text has already inspired the leadership and congregation in a short period because they are hungry for the Word. This strategy will help fulfill the problem's application requirement by building a solid biblical theology through discipleship.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the author in this DMin action research thesis is to educate and equip SWC leadership with the essentials of the Christian faith and the biblical church leadership model. SWC utilizes deacons for church leadership in conjunction with the pastor. The deacons

are in complete agreement that a move away from the UCC is needed. Beginning with the deacons, the pastor will exercise intentional discipleship through teaching biblical leadership. The lessons will stem from a biblical leadership manual that the pastor will produce and all current deacons will receive. This manual will include biblical leadership texts from the pastoral epistles explained through exegesis. Following the explanation, each text will have an application for the reader. The manual will be reproduced and issued to each new deacon that serves on the Board. Educating the deacons on biblical leadership will, in turn, benefit the church because there will be doctrinal continuity with church leadership.

### **Basic Assumptions**

Based on the current Board of Deacons at SWC, they will be open to learning the Christian faith's essentials and the biblical leadership model. In addition, former deacons who have and likely will serve again will embrace the discipleship training. Full participation is anticipated amongst the existing Board and future deacons. The church budget will have to be amended to cover the cost of producing the Deacon Training Manual (DTM). In the meantime, the current pastor will continue to preach and teach expositionally "to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3b). These efforts to teach and preach the Word of God will result in both the leadership and congregation being in one accord theologically. If the church leadership is appropriately educated and trained in the essentials of the faith and the biblical church leadership model, then they will seek to move away from the UCC.

### **Definitions**

The author of this project is concerned primarily with the doctrinal differences between the UCC and SWC. Throughout this project, some terms are used to explain these differences.

Key terms used in this project include church discipline, discipleship, essentials of the Christian faith, excommunication, expository preaching, and progressive revelation.

*Church discipline* is introduced by Jesus in Matt 18: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Matt 18:15-17b). When a church member commits sin, it affects the entire body. Therefore, when known by the church, the corruption must be addressed by the congregation. Just as sin distorts the member, it does the same to the church. Blomberg shares that “only as we re-create intimate community within the local church and networks of accountability among different churches can we hope to apply these verses effectively. But without this application, sin in the church will continue to compromise the unity and testimony of God’s people.”<sup>6</sup>

*Discipleship* is defined as “a challenge to accept and submit to the reign of God and to shape the whole of life accordingly.”<sup>7</sup> Discipleship is a result of intentionality; it must be a priority for Jesus’s Church. Jesus proclaims this as a commandment with the Great Commission. “Go therefore and makes disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20a).

*Essentials of the Christian Faith* or *First-Order Doctrines* are “first-order doctrines (that) represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines

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<sup>6</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 280.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *Here Are Your Gods: Faithful Discipleship in Idolatrous Times* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 124.



represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself. These include the Trinity, the full humanity and full deity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.”<sup>8</sup> These first-order doctrines will be incorporated into the DTM and serve as the basis for discipleship training.

*Excommunication* is defined as “the cutting off or expulsion of a person from fellowship of the church.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus gives instructions on how to execute church discipline in Matt 18, with the final phase of excommunication: “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt 18:17). Although not pleasant, sometimes this last step is necessary to maintain unity in the church.

*Expository Preaching* is one of two main types of biblical preaching, the other being topical. The expositor’s goal is to determine the biblical author’s original intent and apply that truth in the present time. Mark Dever explains, “When someone regularly preaches in a way that is not expositional, the sermons tend to be only on the topics that interest the preacher. The result is that the preacher and the congregation only hear in Scripture what they already thought when they came to the text. There’s nothing new being added to their understanding.”<sup>10</sup>

*Progressive Revelation* is “based upon the conviction that revelation and redemption move along a historical line and that this historical line has a certain character to it . . . there is a progression in Scripture and unless this principle of progression is recognized there can be no clear exegesis of Scripture.”<sup>11</sup> The canon of Scripture is closed; God has revealed to His people

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<sup>8</sup> “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” Albert Mohler, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.

<sup>9</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 62.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 41.

<sup>11</sup> R. G. Turnbull, *Baker’s Dictionary of Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 99.

through His Word. Jesus speaks to this point in Matthew's Gospel: "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:18-19).

### **Limitations**

SWC is a UCC congregation located in Sanford, North Carolina, with approximately 120 active members. SWC has nine deacons that serve a three-year term. Three deacons come off the Board each year and the nominating committee seeks three replacements. Once SWC leadership agrees on a decision for change, the church will have to vote on it. Some congregants will not be in favor of a move from the UCC due to denominational loyalty. The congregation could vote against leaving the denomination or not accepting the proposed choice of denominational direction. If the majority does vote in favor, one result could be the loss of church members. There is no set length of time for the decision to be made for a denominational move; however, church leadership has made this a priority.

### **Delimitations**

The DTM will consist of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and the apostle Paul's Pastoral Epistles. Secondly, the training will only be for active and future deacons serving at SWC. The deacons participating in the training will consist of men and women ages 25 to 75. Thirdly, the time frame to complete the DTM and conduct the initial training is one year. Finally, teachings from non-Christian sources are excluded from this study since the author and the church affirm the Bible's authority as God's Word.

### **Thesis Statement**

SWC is at a crossroads in its long tenure as a community church. It is imperative that the entire church leadership group is aligned in its understanding and belief in the first-order doctrines of the Christian faith. This will require the DTM formation, teaching the deacons the first-order doctrines and the biblical church leadership model. If SWC implements the DTM and teaches the deacons, then the church will align with those beliefs through continued discipleship.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Literature Review

Many churches today have or are in the process of moving to a more liberal theological position. One of the main factors for this shift is the rejection of biblical inerrancy. In the words of Towns, “Liberal theology has gutted many churches of their theological distinctives, causing ministers to look for other reasons for their existence.”<sup>12</sup> This is why preaching in pulpits has been watered down to mirror the world’s views instead of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Denominationally speaking, is there still value in being a part of a denomination of churches?

The author of this literature review covers the importance of expository preaching and explores the denominational/nondenominational debate.

### Expository Preaching as Theologically Sound

When considering evangelism and discipleship in the church context, pastors must exercise biblical exposition in their respective preaching and teaching. The central purpose of the preacher is to set forth the meaning and message of the biblical text.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, preaching is a priority in the church and the preacher must believe in God’s Word’s transformational power.

The author of Hebrews describes this power: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper

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<sup>12</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2014), 94, Kindle.

<sup>13</sup> Albert R. Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 48; accessed January 28, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central.

than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Indeed, “the first mark of a healthy church is expository preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all the others should follow. This is the crucial mark.”<sup>14</sup>

Without a biblical foundation in preaching, the message will inevitably move toward a man-focused emphasis and not Christ-focused. However, there is a dual responsibility. The preacher must be faithful in preparation and delivery, but the audience must also be willing to invest by listening. Robinson explains that “[e]ffective expository preaching requires listeners with ears to hear. Since the souls of listeners depend upon it, we must offer our hearers sufficient information so that they can decide for themselves if what they are hearing is indeed what the Bible says.”<sup>15</sup> The apostle Paul shared with the church at Rome that faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ. Preachers must preach that Word of Christ and it is best conveyed through biblical expository preaching.

Expository preaching not only honors the text but also God Himself. Heisler explains this balance: “Inspiration and illumination are part of the total package of God’s revelation to us and must be embraced as a powerful combination. When a preacher begins to question the accuracy and authority of Scripture, you are not offending the ancient historical writers; you are offending the living Holy Spirit who inspired it.”<sup>16</sup> Preachers must not diminish the power of the Holy Spirit in their preaching and teaching. Indeed, there is a commitment to the proper study of the

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<sup>14</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Preaching* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 40.

text that cannot be discounted, yet preachers must rely on God’s Spirit to carry out the transformational work in the listener.

Contrary to expositional preaching are other formats such as topical sermons. In this preaching style, a topic is selected, and various verses are used to make the point. “In topical sermons . . . “preachers draw from a certain text subject, usually stating it in the form of a proposition, and then the text, having furnished the thought, has no further part as a formative force in the plan of treatment pursued in the sermon, but the subject is divided and treated according to its own nature, just as it would be if not derived from a text.”<sup>17</sup>

### Biblical Authority in Preaching

One of the downfalls of Protestant liberalism is the reduction or flat-out denial of biblical authority. For example, “It is popular today to be liberal in doctrine and, consequently, loose in behavior. With eroding standards in the pulpit and in the pew, many preachers are thought to be naive and outdated when they conform to the “wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “May God make us all faithful to the gospel— cost what it may!”<sup>18</sup> The Word of God is foundational for right belief and right living. When the authority of Scripture is questioned, a snowball effect occurs. Historically, questions of biblical teachings occurred and were rejected because the Bible was written long ago. Things are different today; that is, the Bible does not apply to current times. No! God’s Word is eternal; times and circumstances change but not His Word. God’s Word exhorts the reader that “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa 40:8).

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<sup>17</sup> Joel Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching for the 21st Century* (Orlando: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 44.

<sup>18</sup> David Olford and Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 78.

Biblical authority and biblical context go hand in hand. Too many times, a single verse is cited and used to form a singular belief. This is not only wrong but dangerous: “One reason so many cults exist today is because the proponents have deviated from traditional truth by taking texts out of context. We must never take a verse out of context. Often in informal and inductive Bible studies, we take a single verse and try to explain it without regard to its larger context.”<sup>19</sup>

Context is key. It is the expositor’s responsibility to determine the biblical author’s original intent and not deviate from that meaning while considering the whole counsel of God. Malphurs wrote that “it is a reminder that it is imperative, when interpreting a passage of Scripture, that we take into consideration its context. *Most, if not all, bad theology is the result of interpreting passages out of their proper context.*”<sup>20</sup>

### Devaluation of Preaching

The rejection of biblical authority contributes to the devaluation of biblical, expository preaching. Many well-known preachers cater their messages to the views of the world. Preaching doctrines such as sin and hell will not fill up the seats. To accommodate what the majority wants to hear, preaching the Word of God will not suffice. Paul warns Timothy, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim 4:3-4). That time is here, and it will only get worse until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some attribute this low view of preaching to the common opinion of preachers: “Because preachers are no longer regarded as the intellectual or

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<sup>19</sup> Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 44. Italics added for emphasis.

even the spiritual leaders in their communities, their image has changed. Ask people in the pews to describe a minister, and their description may not be flattering.”<sup>21</sup> Professors of preaching are not exempt from this low-view of biblical expository preaching. Eugene Lowry clarified that outside of presenting sermons as narratives, the result will be boredom for the audience. Also, he wrote that “Sometimes an occasion will preclude several of the normative stages of a sermon—even the explicit proclamation of the gospel. As such, these times involve a presentation not properly called a sermon at all—and yet justified. Any pastor will recognize these occasions for witness for what they are and should not be troubled greatly that they become exceptions to the normative principles of preaching.”<sup>22</sup> Is sharing a testimony instead of preaching a sermon inherently wrong? Probably not, but Lowry in the preceding quote does not help the case for biblical expository preaching. How many of his students walked away from a lecture with a lower view of the Scriptures? His endorsement of the New Homiletic, ushered in by Fred Craddock, “has followed in line with its postmodern underpinnings by shifting the authority away from the biblical text to the listener – going beyond the individual to the audience – community approach.”<sup>23</sup> The task of right preaching is an uphill battle. Mark Dever on the faithful preacher:

Preachers are not called to preach what’s popular according to the polls. What good is that? People already know all that. What life does that bring? We’re not called to preach merely moral exhortations or history lessons or social commentaries (though many of those things may be a part of good preaching). We are called to preach the Word of God to the church of God and to everyone in His creation. This is how God brings life.<sup>24</sup>

Preachers must be faithful to the biblical text to rightly preach Jesus Christ.

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<sup>21</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot Expanded Edition: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 93.

<sup>23</sup> Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 52.



## Traits of Denominationalism

Elmer Towns defines denominationalism as “a group of churches with similar doctrinal beliefs, who have similar traditions and backgrounds, who share the same goals in ministry, who desire fellowship to encourage one another, and have organically bound themselves together to establish corporately what they feel cannot be wrought separately.”<sup>25</sup> Protestant denominations are numerous in the Church of Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics can hang their proverbial hat on the fact that there is only one Catholic church. This presents the question of how denominations came into existence. Herbst provides an answer: “But the various groups gathered at Westminster remained at an impasse; they could not agree on one unified model of ecclesiology. As a result, the Dissenting Brethren offered a new idea: denominationalism. The universal Church could remain unified and strong but could be subdivided by denominations that go by different names and models of church government and which all belong to the whole.”<sup>26</sup>

For centuries, denominations have been the means for cooperation between churches in their respective groups. When churches pool their resources together, they can accomplish more. Food collections through the churches help feed the hungry in communities. Participants and donors from denominational churches go on mission locally and globally to help others through service and sharing Jesus. Fellowship opportunities abound for churches to come together for meals, training, Bible study, or other activities. Towns continued:

Modern denominations have established counseling departments to specifically deal with personal problems of the young minister, in addition to technical counseling for church organizations and administration. These departments might include church

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<sup>25</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2014), 31, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup> R. Norton Herbst, “A History of Nondenominational Churches in Denver and Beyond, 1945–2000” (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2018), 22, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

architecture, financing, and printing. Departments and committees commissioned by the denomination also give direction to individual churches.<sup>27</sup>

Denominations can be good platforms for churches to cooperate and serve their community.

However, with all these honorable and even biblical actions, a decline in denominationalism has occurred over the last decades. Towns concluded, “The prospect of a denominational structured revival is questionable, but all things are possible with God. True revival for a denomination can only come through individuals who return to the original purposes of their churches and display first-generation fervency and sacrifice.”<sup>28</sup>

### Criticism of Denominations

Some view denominationalism as a non-biblical entity for appeasing churches who cannot agree on various faith tenets. The late scholar and theologian Richard Niebuhr provided the most scathing commentary one will ever read on the subject: “The division of churches closely follows the division of men into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups. It draws the color line in the church of God; it fosters the misunderstandings, the self-exaltations . . . it seats rich and poor apart at the table of the Lord, where the fortunate may enjoy the bounty they have provided while the others feed upon the crusts their poverty affords.”<sup>29</sup> The social aspect of Denominationalism is one criticism, yet that is not the only one. While denominations promote unity within, others observe the disunity of the system. For example:

Denominationalism does not produce a church that is united as the Father is united with the Son and the Son with the Father. Denominational churches do not dwell in, nor are they indwelt by, one another . . . it is the institutionalization of division. Our friendliness

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<sup>27</sup> Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), 6.

is part of the problem. It enables us to be complacent about defining ourselves not by union with our brothers but by our divisions. Once there were no denominations.<sup>30</sup> The Bible has no reference to denominations unless one twists Jethro and Moses's narrative in Exod 18. Jethro instructed Moses to:

look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you (Exod 18:21-22).

This account has been used to justify congregationalism and denominationalism but is hardly a proper interpretation.

What about the suggestion that denominations dissolve and united communities of faith are generated like the New Testament's house churches? Leithart shared his optimism: "Is it possible that churches could eliminate their denominational affiliations and assemble together as the churches of Christ in a particular place, as one church of many congregations in a single city? We ought to dare. This effort is no more utopian than the more modest aim of establishing communion between denominations."<sup>31</sup> This would require much humility and understanding, something that has contributed to the forming of denominations in the first place.

### Nondenominationalism

For established churches seeking a denominational move or new church plants, the nondenominational path is viable. Herbst declared, "A nondenominational church is an independent, Protestant church that has no affiliation or identification with a functional denomination or confessional tradition."<sup>32</sup> From an established church's perspective,

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<sup>30</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> Herbst, "A History of Nondenominational Churches in Denver and Beyond", 38.

nondenominational status frees the church from denomination requirements, such as ordaining female pastors. Herbst stated:

To be clear, the borders will always be blurry for what constitutes a denominational or nondenominational church. Some churches will straddle the border. One might suggest that “independent Baptist” churches are at the edge of denominationalism with one foot in the nondenominational door. Therefore, when examining specific churches, judgments must be made about what constitutes their most formative identity.<sup>33</sup>

This identity brings up another important point about the denominational debate. Several Southern Baptist Convention churches have either dropped the Baptist name in their advertising or changed the name altogether (i.e., the former Homestead Heights Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina is now Summit Church). Reasons vary, but identity is a significant consideration for church prospects. With “Baptist” on the sign, a church may lose opportunities for guests due to a perceived view of Baptist churches in general. Conversely, a United Church of Christ congregation may be more conservative than most of its sister churches in the denomination. Church plants have more flexibility with their identity. Most modern church plants (of a denomination) do not use denominational branding at all. Without research or actual attendance, church seekers will likely not know the type of church they desire to visit.

Two points of consideration regarding the challenges of denominationally-aligned established churches and plants need to be addressed. For the established church, tradition is a significant factor. Young pastors are often suspicious of these churches because change is often painful or impossible. A move to a more contemporary worship style or comfortable apparel on Sunday mornings are two of the more popular disputes. Church plants of denominations do not share these challenges in general. Their challenge is most often financial; there is no “old

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<sup>33</sup> Herbst, “A History of Nondenominational Churches in Denver and Beyond,” 43.

money” or “memorials” to pull from to keep the church afloat. Denominational support is not adequate because most Protestant denominations are in decline:

In the history of Christianity, God does not revive decayed institutions; He builds new ones. Churches that have died are not brought back to life. Christ threatens the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation, “Repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place” (Rev 2:5). God does not rekindle old lights; He begins new ones.<sup>34</sup>

Both established and planted denominational churches must overcome their respective obstacles.

Similar to denominational church plants are nondenominational churches (NDC). They enjoy the freedom of branding and have no ties to generational traditions: “Protestant trajectory towards nondenominational expressions of church that draw freely on a variety of theological traditions without claiming allegiance to any one in particular. These nondenominational churches are living off the theological capital of more established Christian traditions, including those of denominational Protestantism.”<sup>35</sup> However, without denominational support, finances can be a challenge. In order to cooperate with other churches, NDCs must seek out opportunities with other churches. Some churches are reluctant to cooperate, and that was one of the reasons for the formation of denominations in the first place.

### Church Leadership

Regardless of the denominational status, no church will survive without godly leadership. Malphurs wrote, “the truth is that the church rises or falls on leadership. I would argue that a major reason so many churches are struggling today is that many pastors aren’t leaders. They may also be poor communicators, which is another reason for a church to struggle.”<sup>36</sup> Although

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<sup>34</sup> Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* 102.

<sup>35</sup> Paul M. Collins and Barry A. Ensign-George, eds., *Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 144.

<sup>36</sup> Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church*, 87.

administration and management skills are essential, nothing is more imperative than rightly preaching God's Word in the church. Collins and Ensign-George said:

Your vision for the church will more likely be biblical if you are preaching through Scripture expositively. As a result, people will be more likely to see that you are setting a biblical course for them and careful to follow Scripture as you lead them. The more clearly you present God's Word, the more likely God's people are to hear the Good Shepherd's voice in yours, and to follow you as you follow Him.<sup>37</sup>

If a church and its pastor will submit to God's Word's authority, the result will be a transformation in the lives of the congregants and a yearning to fulfill the work of God in Christ.

Dever and Alexander wrote that pastors must commit

to preaching, not programs; and that's why we need to be teaching our congregations to value God's Word over programs. Preaching the content and intent of God's Word is what unleashes the power of God on the people of God, because God's power for building His people is in His Word, particularly as we find it in the Gospel (Rom 1:16). God's Word builds His church. So preaching His Gospel is primary.<sup>38</sup>

Leadership in any context is crucial, but even more with the church of Jesus Christ.

### **Theological Foundations**

In Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, he explained that Jesus equips His church with leaders for a purpose: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). Grant Osbourne shared, "The fully equipped saints are then responsible to do the work of ministry. Every member is responsible to work at his Christian walk, and here that productive life is defined as 'service/ministry.'"<sup>39</sup> Jesus provides the leaders, but the leaders are charged to equip the saints for the active ministry of the gospel.

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 40.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Grant R. Osbourne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 129.

David Dockery wrote, “A biblical model of leadership that begins with God must therefore find its behavioral and convictional patterns in Christ the Lord. He is the distinctive, supreme presence and revelation of God in human history.”<sup>40</sup> This may sound obvious from an evangelical perspective, yet churches across the United States often miss this mark. Jesus makes it exceedingly clear that the church is His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Yet churches struggle with an understanding of who oversees Jesus’s church. Jesus is the Head of the church. As a result, a large percentage of evangelical churches utilize leadership models that are not biblical.

For example, many Southern Baptist churches employ a corporate business model in place of the biblical leadership model. The pastor serves as Chief Executive Officer, there is a “Board” of Deacons that serve as Directors, and the congregation functions as voting “shareholders.” This discrepancy is obvious if one seeks out a church in the Southern Baptist Convention that is elder led. Most established churches in that denomination do not understand the office of elder because they do not know what the Bible teaches about biblical leadership of the New Testament church. The biblical leadership model is found in Acts 6.

The elders of the church, who were servants of the Word (preachers and teachers), had a complaint from the widows that they were not receiving the daily distribution of provisions. The elders decided to form a new office, the office of Deacon. In Acts 6:2-4, the elders appointed seven men of good repute to serve in the new role. According to the text, there are two biblical offices of the Church: elders and deacons. The question then is, why are so many churches using other non-biblical leadership models? Acts 6 explains that deacons are to serve the physical needs of the church. Why, then, are many congregations using deacons as leaders of their local

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<sup>40</sup> David S. Dockery, *Christian Leadership Essentials* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 22.

churches and bypassing the instructions laid out in Acts 6? The answer is a lack of equipping the church through discipleship, starting with the leaders.

Discipleship begins with preaching the Word of God. In Colossians, Paul exhorted Christians to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10, NASB). The primary means to increase in the knowledge of God is from expository preaching. Mark Dever explained, “A church in which there is expositional preaching will be a church that is encouraging Christian growth – as we listen to God speaking from His Word into our lives. God’s Word is what we need if we are to grow . . . we need to hear His Word—all of it—preached expositionally, so that we don’t just hear selective themes.”<sup>41</sup> Expository preaching provides the listener with God’s truth as told by the original biblical author (inspired by the Holy Spirit) yet applied to the audience of today.

The expositor must not only subscribe to intense study of the Word of God, but also rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit. Both elements are imperative in the proper preparation and delivery of expository sermons. It is possible that topical sermons do not produce the fruit of the labor like an exposition of Scripture. Heisler added:

Expository preaching respects not only the author’s original intention but also the Holy Spirit’s placement and sequencing of the text. Whereas topical preaching may freely pull verses out of context in order to establish the preacher’s point (albeit a valid one), the careful expositor explains the text in its context and follows the sequence and progression of the Spirit-deposited inspiration.<sup>42</sup>

Many pulpits today lack preaching of the Bible. The authority of God’s Word is replaced with what people want to hear, a “safe” message so not to offend anyone. Olford and Olford

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<sup>41</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 205.

<sup>42</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 22.



proclaimed, “The Battle for the Bible is on, but however hot the debate, we stand on the authority of the Scriptures. Once we are clear on this, we will have no problem in making the Bible the final and only rule of faith and practice. It is sufficient for all our needs.”<sup>43</sup> The gospel is offensive to those who do not understand God: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21).

Another factor in today’s pulpits are false teachers who, instead of preaching the Scriptures, put forth a false gospel. This was an issue for the New Testament church and the apostle Paul wrote extensively about it in his epistles. In his letter to the church at Galatia, he emphatically shared, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:6-8). The Judaizers were Jewish Christians who taught that salvation is through Jesus Christ and Jewish tradition (works), particularly circumcision. Not only did they teach a false gospel, but they also questioned Paul’s apostleship, denying the gospel which he preached and the Galatians had believed.

George explained, “Here at the beginning of the letter he wanted them to realize that the God who called them out of pagan idolatry to salvation and new life in Jesus Christ did so on no other basis than his own good pleasure and gratuitous favor. To forget this is worse than betraying an army or a country; it is to betray the true and living God.”<sup>44</sup> Today, those who

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<sup>43</sup> Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 92-93.

attempt to preach biblical sermons must be prepared for the same opposition that Paul experienced. It comes down to obedience: will preachers choose to honor God or please man? Paul asked, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). Mohler added, “The postmodern world has no need of half evangelists preaching a half gospel to the half converted and leading a halfhearted church. What is needed is a generation of bold and courageous preacher-apologists for the twenty-first century—men who will be witnesses to the whole world of the power of the gospel and who will proclaim the whole counsel of God.”<sup>45</sup> Many people today do not affirm the absolute authority of Jesus Christ and prefer the preacher exercise religious pluralism.

Jesus proclaims His authority in various passages of Scripture, but none as boldly as in John 14: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He alone is the means for sinful humanity to be reconciled to a holy God. Preaching must reflect this truth; in fact, all biblical preaching should exalt Jesus in every sermon. Chapell shared:

As the work of the original creation comes through the spoken word of God, so the work of new creation (i.e., redemption) comes through the living Word of God. James wrote, “He [the Father] chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (Jas 1:18). The phrase “word of truth” reflects the message about salvation and the One who gives the new birth . . . He is the living and enduring Word of God by which we have been born again.<sup>46</sup>

Because of His authority as the Son of God, Jesus is able to save through faith alone in Him.

False gospels are tragic, but so are incomplete or partial gospels. Many congregants who go to church every week will affirm God’s love while negating His justice. Christians must

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<sup>45</sup> Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 5.

subscribe to the true, full gospel story that proclaims God is love but also just. Paul warns in Romans 2, “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom 2:6-8). The doctrine of hell is another stumbling block for Christians and non-Christians alike. The question asked by many is how can a loving God send people to a place like hell? Jesus spoke about hell more than heaven in the Bible. Consider the parable of the weeds. Jesus tells of a field sown with good seed was infiltrated and sown with weeds. His disciples did not understand the parable and asked Him to explain it. He said, “Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:40-42). There can be no sin in the kingdom of God.

Jesus preached the kingdom of God to numerous crowds during His earthly ministry: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:15-16). Preaching was a priority for Jesus because it was one of the main purposes for his coming: “And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, ‘Everyone is looking for you.’ And he said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.’ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons” (Mark 1:36-39). His disciples were present and absorbed all those teachings in addition to the personalized discipleship they received. Matthew’s Gospel “stresses discipleship as following Jesus so as to obey the sum total

of God's commandments as interpreted by and fulfilled in Christ."<sup>47</sup> Even with three years of following Jesus, the disciples still struggled with faith and obedience. After Jesus's ascension, the disciples applied the teachings of Christ, and as a result, the church experienced tremendous growth (through the Holy Spirit). This growth was a direct result of spiritual multiplication. Jesus invested in the twelve. In turn, they (minus Judas Iscariot) invested in others and those invested in others. The decline of the church in the present times can be linked to the lack of this intentional gospel investment. Discipleship is predicated by evangelism. If the church does not evangelize, there is no disciple-making opportunity.

Andy Davis shared that "the work of disciple-making is taught in the New Testament in the language of two journeys: the internal journey of growth into full maturity in Christ and the external journey of evangelism and missions. The idea of the two journeys of evangelism and discipleship is taught throughout the New Testament."<sup>48</sup> True disciples of Christ understand the lordship of Christ. Countless professing Christians cling to the promise of salvation through Christ (as they should) yet not acknowledge His lordship through their words and actions. One cannot accept Christ as Savior and not Lord; the two cannot be separated. Sadly, Christ is accepted by emotion rather than by faith and the understanding that if He is Savior, He must also be Lord. True discipleship means obedience to Jesus Christ, who "God has highly exalted and bestowed on him the name is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). Gordon Fee explained, "As God, Christ poured himself out, not seeking his own advantage. As man—and not ceasing to be God—he

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<sup>47</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 199.

humbled himself unto death on the cross. That this is what God is like is the underlying Pauline point; and since God is in process of recreating us in his image, this becomes the heart of the present appeal.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

If preachers do not preach the right Jesus, then the preaching is in vain. One of the greatest debates in church history is belief in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and was fully human, yet he never committed a sin. Only God is sinless, and since Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, this truth must be emphasized from pulpits. Again, false teachers have wreaked havoc in churches over the centuries with wrong teaching of the proper Jesus. John wrote in his first epistle, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2-3). John, in his Gospel, also affirms the divinity of Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human.

Paul continued Jesus’s discipleship emphasis in his various epistles, such as in his letter to the Philippians. He writes from prison to the church at Philippi about the gospel’s advancement in chapter one. Paul wrote of the importance of the proper perspective in keeping the Philippian church on task and target. He was writing from prison and had experienced the cost of proclaiming Jesus Christ through various trials and tribulations. Paul stated, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my

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<sup>49</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 228-29.

imprisonment is for Christ” (Phil 1:12-13). Melick shared that “rather than detail the hardships he faced, Paul took a divine perspective. He recognized that all events could be redeemed for the Lord’s sake, and he took what advantage he could to continue his mission. The primary concern was that the Gospel goes forward. This happened through adverse circumstances, but as long as it happened, Paul could be joyful.”<sup>50</sup> Paul had joy even in suffering.

The Philippian church endured opposition in the form of persecution, financial challenges, and false teachers. It would have been easy to recant the faith and avoid persecution. However, they knew from Jesus’s teachings that discipleship is costly. Also, Paul’s example was a reminder that they too could have joy amid arduous circumstances. Today’s church must also mirror this commitment to the gospel.

Many professing Christians in the United States would struggle with real, physical persecution because they are not grounded in Jesus’s teachings in the Christian Scriptures. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus clearly explains that if one is to follow Him, he or she must deny themselves and be prepared to suffer. Jesus then makes a stark declaration: “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:27-28). Weber clarified: “If a person does not accept the challenge of true discipleship, he will forfeit both true quality life now and full reward in eternity. There are no gains if a person wastes this life on

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<sup>50</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 70.

himself. Matthew 16:27 confirms the subject here to be rewards rather than deliverance from hell.”<sup>51</sup> Christians must have a kingdom focus to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

True discipleship comes with a cost. Jesus made this clear in Matthew’s Gospel: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt 16:24-26). This goes back to the lordship of Jesus Christ. No one will deny himself and suffer for Jesus if He is not Lord. Notice also that if one is not willing to forfeit their life for Jesus, they are not worthy of the kingdom of God. Blomberg added, “Self-denial does not imply self-abuse or lack of self-esteem. As Jesus’ disciples, believers should have a better self-image than any other people, but it should be based on God’s grace and not their merit. Self-denial does, however, mean putting God and his kingdom priorities first.”<sup>52</sup> When Jesus is Lord then a follower’s priorities will be Jesus’ and not their own.

Being a disciple of Christ makes one a part of the family of God. Jesus was misunderstood in His earthly ministry, even by his own earthly family. In Mark’s gospel this is made clear: “And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33-35). Stein further explained: “From the perspective of the kingdom of God, true relatives are determined not by blood relationships (cf. John 1:13) but by possessing a similar commitment to follow Jesus. Note how the parallel in Matt. 12:49 makes this even clearer by referring to those seated around him as his

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<sup>51</sup> Stuart Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 257.

<sup>52</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 260.

disciples. In Mark, however, this also includes the crowd sitting around him.”<sup>53</sup> With this understanding, disciples of Christ must be active in doing the work of Christ. Active discipleship brings glory to God and grows the disciple in his or her walk with Jesus. Paul explained to Ephesus Christians “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1-3). This “walk” is a continuous walk, not just when one feels like it. The characteristics Paul listed are some of the characteristics of Christ. Effective discipleship produces disciples of Christ who live out their faith in the way they live, not just the words they speak. Yet one cannot discount the need for both right belief and right behavior. Ephesians is divided in half by the two: right doctrine (chapters 1-3) and right living (chapters 4-6). Osbourne noted that “Paul (here) admonishes the Ephesians to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Christian belief comes before Christian living. The mindset must be changed before one’s conduct can follow suit.”<sup>54</sup> Faith of the Christian must be evident in belief and behavior.

Preachers and teachers must not exclude this essential understanding from their teachings to their respective groups. Discipleship is a priority, but it does no good if disciples are not taught to live their lives for Christ and adhere to His commandments. He said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He also said that His disciples are the salt of the earth, but “if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt 5:13). Blomberg explained the text further:

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<sup>53</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 188.

<sup>54</sup> Osbourne, *Ephesians*, 109.



This phrase refers to the world's response to Christians if they do not function as they should. Believers who fail to arrest corruption become worthless as agents of change and redemption. Christianity may make its peace with the world and avoid persecution, but it is thereby rendered impotent to fulfill its divinely ordained role. It will thus ultimately be rejected even by those with whom it has sought compromise.<sup>55</sup>

The world needs to see the faith of believers in their actions.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Discipleship will succeed through the intentionality of the community of faith. Many churches fail to make disciples because they are not grounded in the Word of God. For example, "A church built on biblical theology is a church that will help its members grow as Christians . . . God's revelation of Himself throughout the Word, throughout history, shows Him to be worthy of our trust for anything He would send our way."<sup>56</sup> Making disciples is necessary and biblical.

Small groups are an effective way to grow in the Christian faith. Due to the larger group size in the corporate worship setting, small groups allow relationships to form and offer opportunities to engage the leader and each other. The desired result is spiritual growth in the group and individual. These discipleship models vary in method, location, date/time, and curriculum. The following is a breakdown of each point previously listed, followed by the author's small-group method preference. Finally, an explanation of how the preferred method will be implemented for the deacons at SWC will be provided.

### **Small-Group Methods**

The two methods of small groups are teacher-pupil and discussion-based. The teacher-pupil method is what many traditional Sunday School classes utilize. Generally, a teacher

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<sup>55</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 102.

<sup>56</sup> Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 206.

prepares and presents the lesson to a class. The classroom layout has chairs lined in rows with the teacher behind a podium or a stand. In this method, the teacher is the primary communicator, and the students tend to listen but not engage each other. This method not only minimizes discussion but also affects a student's preparation. The student is more apt to study ahead of time when he or she knows there will be a chance to participate in a lively discussion with the teacher and fellow students. This method also invites a student to overtake the class through (often) meaningless contributions that have nothing to do with the lesson.

In the discussion-based method, the participants are led by a facilitator who serves as a guide to ensure the lesson material is covered. No one dominates the discussion. The room is set up where the participants are facing each other, such as around a table. This setup allows everyone to be seen when they speak and listen to each other. The teacher-pupil method's advantage is that the leader can present the lesson with little or no dialogue (unless there is an opportunity for questions). In turn, this method helps with time constraints; for example, many Sunday School classes meet before the worship service and must conclude at a specific time. The disadvantage is that some participants might want to ask questions or share personal experiences or thoughts. Time limits and the flexibility of the teacher determine if these are feasible. The advantage of the discussion-based small group is that dialogue is welcomed and (if no one person seeks to dominate the discussion) participants learn not just from the lesson material but about each other. The intimacy and transparency foster strong relationships among the group members. A possible disadvantage is that visitors may not feel comfortable with this level of intimacy, leading them not to return in the future.

On the other hand, that concern is negated if a visitor is greeted with warmth and genuine care from the entire group. Regardless of the method, hospitality is imperative to successful

small groups. The Word of God is the foundation, but Christian love complements the Bible's teachings. Peter wrote that Christians should "[s]how hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Pet 4:9) while the writer of Hebrews warns "not to neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb 13:2).

### Small-Group Locations

The teacher-pupil model is held mainly at the local church of the members. These churches are traditional and meet in classrooms; a particular room is for a specific group. These classrooms are often decorated with items that pay tribute to the history of the class. Many times, they have names for the class, such as "The Fidelis Bible Class." These markings are helpful for new visitors because they can look for the sign in the church's Education Building. These classes generally have many long-term members. These traditions can be problematic if the class is more like a social club that does not desire new members. Therefore, depending on the church, a visitor may prefer the discussion-based method.

Discussion-based small groups can be held at churches or gather at various homes of the group members. Some churches require the group to meet at the facilitator's house for the sake of continuity. Others rotate locations so that there is less pressure on the facilitator to lead and host every time they meet. Another option for this method is to meet at a public location, such as a coffee house or restaurant. However, this can be difficult if one or more of the members are not near the choice of meeting location. All these factors must be considered to ensure a healthy group that does life together in the discussion-based small group setting.

### Small-Group Dates and Times

Depending on the worship service time, teacher-pupil groups are likely to meet before or after the worship service. The groups might be staggered for churches with multiple worship services, with some meeting during the first service and others meeting during the second. These groups might also meet all together in between the services. For example, the early worship service is at 8:00 a.m., the classes meet at 9:30 a.m., and the later worship service is held at 11:00 a.m. The advantage of this method is that the day and times are consistent, making it easier for members and guests.

Discussion-based groups offer more flexibility in days and times. In larger, contemporary churches, the participant can choose a day best suited for their situation. Once the day of the week is determined, the participant connects with a group that meets on that day. However, if a church cannot offer this type of schedule, the downside is that a group that meets on a specific day may not allow some members to attend due to obligations. One of those obligations is children. The group must consider that most young parents will require childcare. Group members could create a rotating schedule that allows all members to be with the group minus the caregivers for that meeting. This plan removes the pressure of accommodating childcare and fosters a culture of teamwork, creating a mentality of service and care in the group.

### Small-Group Curriculum

There are many options of curriculum for both small group methods. Historically, teacher-pupil small groups favor a “quarterly” (published each quarter of the year) booklet with lessons for each week. The teacher receives a specific quarterly as the leader, and the students receive a participant’s edition. Traditional Sunday School classes do not generally deviate from using this type of curriculum because they have used it for years, and the classes are used to

them. The participant quarterlies are intended to be studied before the Sunday School class meeting.

Discussion-based small groups tend to be more creative in their types of curriculums. They may choose a video-based study on a Bible book that includes study guides for each member. Another option is a book study where all the group members receive a copy and read through it independently, then discuss their thoughts or answer questions during group time. Finally, the group may use the Bible as their primary text. They might focus on one book of the Bible at a time or learn what the Bible says about a particular theme, such as giving. The teacher-pupil quarterlies often miss essential context from the passage of Scripture, whereas going through books of the Bible allows the group to absorb all of God's Word.

#### Preference

In conclusion, the better option for making disciples is the discussion-based group. While the teacher-pupil method can be effective, it lacks the discussion-based group's intimacy and is more rigid, much like being back in elementary school. Because of the group's relationships, discussion-based small groups can build on the group time and experience life together. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it."<sup>57</sup> Discussion-based groups offer a better opportunity to focus on God's Word and apply its teachings inside and outside the group.

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<sup>57</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Readers Edition* (Lanham: Fortress Press, 2015), 13.

### Context Implementation

The deacons at SWC will require training on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith and the biblical church leadership model. This discipleship effort will utilize the platform of a discussion-based small group. Once the DTM is completed, it will be taught by the current pastor with an emphasis on group discussion. The results will be a Board of Deacons that is aligned theologically and further grows in Jesus Christ. This cohesiveness will be influential to the entire church as the deacons engage members and visitors alike. As SWC seeks to move in a biblical direction and reach its community for Christ, this emphasis is key.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The DTM is the key resource for the discipleship of the SWC deacons. The following paragraphs contain a description of the plan for developing the manual as well as how the actual training will be conducted. This includes the format of the manual, the method of learning, the process for conducting the training, and the anticipated outcome for the discipleship efforts. In Table 1.1 below, the weekly teaching is laid out:

Schedule	Topic	Location
Week One	The Scriptures	Library
Week Two	Three Persons of the Trinity	Library
Week Three	Justification	Library
Week Four	Biblical Leadership	Library
Week Five	Focus Group	Library

Table 1.1 Training Schedule

### Intervention Design

The intervention plan is to create a DTM to disciple the SWC deacons. The manual will serve a two-fold purpose: to teach the essentials of the Christian faith (first-order doctrines) and

the biblical leadership model (according to Acts 6). The platform for training will be a discussion-based, small-group model led by the pastor. The training will be for all current deacons, ordained deacons that join the church, and newly ordained deacons.

The first step in the intervention plan is to create the DTM. Part one of the manual will cover the primary doctrines of the Christian faith. These include the doctrines of the Trinity, justification by faith, and the Scripture's authority as the inerrant, infallible, divinely inspired Word of God.<sup>58</sup> Part two of the manual will cover the biblical leadership model as seen in Acts 6. The lesson plan overview for teaching both parts is in Appendix A. The DTM is the primary resource for training.

The author's intent for the DTM is to ensure the deacons of SWC understand the first-order doctrines of the faith. As a result, a unified deacon body will encourage the congregation towards the same understanding through their ministry. If, for example, they hear unbiblical thinking on a visitation, they will counter it with biblical truth (the primary doctrine). In conjunction with the weekly preaching/teaching of God's Word, this training will produce change because God's Word will not return empty (Isa 55:11).

Additionally, a biblical understanding of church leadership will be a seed for a future leadership transformation to the biblical offices of elder and deacon. The current leadership structure is much like a corporate business model: the pastor as Chief Executive Officer, the Board of Deacons as Directors, and the congregation as shareholders. With the deacon training and much prayer, the end goal will be that SWC has a biblical leadership model with elders and deacons in their respective, proper biblical roles.

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<sup>58</sup> "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," Albert Mohler, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.



The SWC deacons meet monthly and this training manual/teaching plan will be introduced with a schedule to be determined by the group (deacons and pastor). The discussion-based small-group model will serve as an excellent platform for robust discussion with question-and-answer opportunities. The group will learn about God and His Word, as well as each other. The desired result will be spiritual growth for all participants, including the pastor. The pastor will consult with the Deacon Chair in advance of sharing the plan with the group. The Chair will receive the DTM lesson plan and have an opportunity to review it and ask questions. Once both the pastor and Chair are satisfied, the plan will be presented at the upcoming monthly meeting. The deacons will have to agree to the training; however, no additional church approval will be required.

At the scheduled initial meeting, the pastor will open with a short oral presentation on what discipleship is and why, as leaders, the deacons should participate (although voluntary). Each deacon will receive their own DTM. The meeting's emphasis will be on the importance of a Deacon Board being in unison with the primary doctrines and the biblical leadership model and how the DTM is a tool to achieve it. When the training is completed, they will be ambassadors to the congregation for a proper understanding of these faith tenants. Although this training will not be mandatory, refusal to participate should raise concern if that deacon should be serving on the Board. The pastor will provide the notes and journal section for each deacon in the DTM. Hopefully, these will become personal reference guides for each deacon, a notebook and journal of their thoughts, prayers, reflections, and anything else God lays on their hearts and minds during the training period. The costs for the manuals will not exceed ten dollars each and will be designated to the appropriate church budget line item (a new line item for discipleship will be added for the 2022 budget). The pastor will begin each session with a short, provocative video

clip that ties into the lesson for that session. The clips will be the attention-grabbers and set the tone for the session.

Due to the short tenure of the current pastor, the extent of the biblical knowledge for each deacon is unknown. The deacons are currently reading a church revitalization book assigned by the pastor and answering each chapter's questions via email. At the meetings, they discuss what stood out from the reading and what the takeaways were in the assigned chapter. The participation has been positive. Based on this information, it is highly likely that the DTM and training will also be well received. Also, they are now accustomed to "homework" through the book study, so another learning opportunity will not be new to them.

Once approved, the anticipated start date for the project is in the fall of 2021. Three of the current deacons will come off the Board at the end of the year and it would be best to train not only the current group but hopefully, if time permits, the three new deacons that come on the Board at the beginning of 2022. This is dependent on the Nominations Committee, who are responsible for nominating the three incoming deacons. Each deacon will be asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B) before completing the training. The form includes an agreement for the sessions and the focus group to be recorded (audio). Once permission is received, each deacon will receive an initial written survey to complete, though each submission will be anonymous. The timeline to complete the initial surveys is two weeks. This seemed like a reasonable accommodation since some deacons might be absent for a particular meeting. The average is one absence per monthly meeting based on a twelve-month history. Also, due to the outside obligations of the deacons, this estimate may increase by another week. The initial explanation of the surveys and consent form completion will occur at the monthly deacons' meeting. The next step will be to review the data from the surveys to determine the specific

needs of the discipleship training. The data review will take approximately one week. So, the total time is three to four weeks. The next step in the project will be to start the discussion-based, small-group model for discipleship training.

The desired outcome is to gain a solid understanding of where each deacon stands theologically. This information will be critical to how the discipleship curriculum is taught. For example, if each deacon understands and believes in the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture, the teaching will not have to be as in-depth. If one or more do not understand or affirm this truth, the instruction will reflect this information through a more extensive lesson. According to research by the pastor, there has never been a focused discipleship training for deacons of any kind previously. This results in a possible two-fold scenario: The deacons (some or all) may see this training as valuable and will commit to invest in the opportunity to increase in the knowledge of God (Col 1:10). Conversely, some may reject the training, although this would not be the case based on the pastor's interactions with the Deacon Board.

Before the discipleship training, a written survey (Appendix C) will be issued to each deacon currently serving on the Board. As previously stated, the hope is to capture survey data from the three new deacons who will come on the Board for 2022; this is contingent if the nominations occur within the survey timeline. The data from the surveys will help determine the extent of the discipleship training. For example, if the data shows a lack of proper understanding for biblical elders, the training will require more in-depth teaching of that office. The survey will utilize triangulation in the initial survey questions. The answers should be consistent in the triangulation. However, if the triangulation answers are conflicting, this will require an additional focus on those questionable areas in the discipleship training. Once the training and

focus group are completed, the survey will be re-issued to each deacon and the results will be compared to the initial surveys to determine the progress from beginning to end of the project.

A reflective journal will be utilized as a reliable tool to register the project's progress from start to finish. The journal will serve as a secondary quality assurance tool. Writing out one's thoughts is a process that requires the author to think critically about the project and helps with any new or better ideas, strategies, or improvements for the current project methods. Bracketing out biases and recording the process will help bring to possible light predispositions that may not be evident on the surface. So, writing a journal will give great value to the project's success.

The pastor will address the deacons at a monthly meeting early in the project timeline. He will orally communicate the importance of church leadership to understand the essentials of the Christian faith and the biblical leadership model. After this initial portion, he will explain the need for a survey and what the participants can expect. Then he will explain the training itself, which will consist of the DTM and the teaching schedule. Lesson plans (Appendix D) will be utilized for teaching each week of instruction. Finally, he will describe the end of the training focus group, which will meet to discuss takeaways, thoughts, suggestions, or other pertinent information and answer any questions from the group.

It is not anticipated that any of the participants will refuse to participate or drop out. However, if either or both occur, the pastor plans to have already included three extra deacons that could go through the training in 2022 when their term begins. Ideally, if the nomination timeline occurs prior to the start of training, then the new deacons could train with the current Board. If they are not nominated in time, this would require the project timeline to be extended. As a result, the pastor is unclear how that delay would affect his academic requirements for the

DMin program. With the new deacons, the total number of current and incoming deacons is twelve (nine current and three new).

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

The Deacon training initiative will begin immediately after the Institutional Review Board approval (See Appendix E). Prior to the training, the pastor will meet with the Deacon Chair to discuss the schedule and decide if the training sessions will be held during the monthly deacons' meetings or create an alternate plan. After the agreement, all deacons will receive and sign the Participant Consent Forms (Appendix B).<sup>59</sup>

Once the preliminary requirements are met, the next step will be completion of the fifty-question survey. The purpose of the survey is to gauge where each deacon is theologically and identify areas of concentration in the study. For example, if multiple deacons miss a specific question, then that will be an indicator of further emphasis in the training session. Conversely, if all deacons correctly answer a specific question, less attention on that theological concept will be required in the training. Thus, the training lessons will address the specific learning needs of the group. One of the key features of the survey is the use of triangulation. Approximately one third of the survey will utilize triangulation. As stated previously, the triangulated questions will help ensure that conflicting answers are covered more extensively in the respective training module.

The Deacon Training Survey will serve as the primary data collection tool for this project. To comply with confidentiality, each deacon will be given an identifying letter (Deacon A, B, C, etc.) and each survey will be marked with its respective letter. A confidential sheet bearing the identity and code letter for each deacon will be kept secure on the pastor's password-

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<sup>59</sup> The Board of Deacons at Shallow Well Church typically has nine members; however, one deacon will be unable to continue his term due to ongoing health conditions.

protected laptop computer. The survey consists of fifty true/false questions, all of which are directly related to the material in the DTM. For the sake of time and fairness, each deacon will be given one hour to complete the survey. The pastor will be present to answer any questions or address any concerns of the group. Once everyone has completed the survey, the pastor will collect them and evaluate each survey using the Master copy which is confidential and secured in a locked container. When evaluating the surveys, the pastor will identify incorrect answers and tally the scores for each survey. If he discovers three or more incorrect answers for one question among the group, that question will be flagged and annotated in the Reflective Journal. Those questions will then be noted for further emphasis in the respective training module. The deacons will not have their evaluated survey returned to them. Instead, the pastor will review the survey to the group as a whole and share the average score of the evaluated surveys. Those questions flagged as missed by three or more deacons will be reviewed with the group so that everyone understands the question(s). Additionally, as previously stated, those questions will require further emphasis during the training sessions.

The DTM is divided into two sections. In Part one, the pastor will cover the essentials of the Christian faith. It is divided into three sections: the Scriptures, the Holy Trinity, and the doctrine of Justification. These three sections form the doctrinal foundation of the training. In Part two, the pastor will cover the Biblical leadership model as explained in Acts 6. Each lesson will utilize the corresponding lesson plan (Appendix D) for continuity between training of groups. Additionally, the pastor will conclude each training module with a discipleship exercise and application.

In Section one of Part one, the pastor will focus on the Scriptures. The primary emphasis is that the Scriptures are the inerrant, infallible, and divinely inspired Word of God. The

Scriptures form a Grand Narrative which consists of five “acts” of the story. The five acts are Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Restoration. Each act will be explained and backed up with biblical references. This is the foundational module of the training. Without a right understanding of God’s Word (and affirming its authority), the rest of the training is useless. The pastor’s teaching goal is to produce a new or enhanced appreciation for God’s Word.

In Section two of Part one, the pastor will explain the Holy Trinity. The primary emphasis is that the Trinity consists of three Persons (God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit) in One God. A thorough explanation of each Person is crucial to achieve a right understanding that the Trinity is not three gods but one God in three Persons. The pastor will examine each Person of the Triune God and verify using the Scriptures as the primary resource in the teaching. The goal of the teaching by the pastor is for each deacon to know and be able to explain the Triune God with confidence.

In Section three of Part one, the pastor will focus on the doctrine of Justification. The primary emphasis is to have a proper knowledge of the means for sinful humanity to be brought back into a right relationship with a holy God. Utilizing the Bible, the group will learn from various Scriptures that salvation is achieved through the work of Jesus Christ, not through good works. Included with this section is a valuable handout entitled “Twelve Great Truths about the Doctrine of Justification” by Danny Akin. This handout (Appendix A) utilizes Rom 3:21-31 as the teaching basis. The goal of the teaching is for each deacon to understand not only the doctrine of Justification but also be able to explain this truth to others in their personal and group evangelism opportunities. This includes church members who SWC Deacons cannot assume have a right understanding of how one is saved. They must be certain.

In Part two of the training, the pastor will emphasize the Biblical leadership model prescribed in Acts 6. The text lays out two distinct offices of the church: elders and deacons. This is the primary emphasis of this training portion. As a helpful resource, a handout with an expositional outline of Acts 6:1-7 (Appendix A) will be given to each deacon. The goal of the pastor's teaching is for each deacon to not only understand the two offices of the church but also the respective roles of each office. The deacons will also learn how both offices complement each other in the church's ministry.

Upon completion of the required training modules previously stated, the final week of training will be a focus group. Although each module of training will include the opportunity for discussion, this specific time will afford the deacons a time of reflection and anticipation.

Possible discussion questions might include the following:

- How did the training affect my overall understanding of the Christian faith?
- Was the training valuable and a proper use of time?
- What are some implications of the training regarding the church as a whole?
- What impact could the training have for those outside of the church?
- How has the Biblical Leadership Model influenced my view of our current church leadership model?
- Should this training be extended to others in the church? The church as a whole?
- If the deacons believe the leadership model needs to be addressed or changed, how does that happen?

In addition to these and other questions that might be presented, the focus group will also serve as platform to determine the overall spiritual health of the church. The pastor anticipates the training will produce positive change in the deacons and the church.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The pastor received IRB approval and was cleared to proceed in the training of the SWC deacons. At the next deacons' meeting, all deacons were present and signed the Participant Consent Forms (Appendix B) with no reservations or concerns. Next, the deacons completed the True/False (fifty questions) Deacon Training Survey (Appendix C). Table 1.2 below shows the incorrect number of answers for each deacon as well as their overall score. The last row denotes the average incorrect answers and average score.

<b>Deacon</b>	<b>Incorrect Answers</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Deacon A</b>	0/50	100/100
<b>Deacon B</b>	7/50	86/100
<b>Deacon C</b>	3/50	94/100
<b>Deacon D</b>	7/50	86/100
<b>Deacon E</b>	12/50	78/100
<b>Deacon F</b>	7/50	88/100
<b>Deacon G</b>	10/50	82/100
<b>Deacon H</b>	6/50	88/100
<b>TOTALS</b>	Average 6.5/50	Average 87.75/100

Table 1.2 Deacon Training Survey Data

Five of the fifty questions were answered incorrectly three or more times by the group. Of the five questions, only one pertained to the biblical church leadership model. The remaining four questions dealt with primary doctrines of the Christian faith. The incorrect questions are listed on the chart below. The most frequent incorrect answer was question thirteen (incorrect five times). The remaining four questions were marked incorrect three times apiece.

Question Number	Question	Correct Answer
6	The Bible teaches that everything was created through Jesus Christ.	True
13	The Trinity is three Gods in one Person.	False
16	Jesus was born of a virgin but partially human.	False
17	The Old Testament teaches that a Savior will come through the seed of Eve.	True
29	The office of Deacon was created to oversee churches.	False

Table 1.3 Deacon Training Survey Most Frequent Incorrect Answers

### **Implementation of the Deacon Training Manual**

With the Deacon Training Surveys completed, training began using the DTM. No deacons were absent from the training throughout the Training Schedule (Table 1.1). Week one's training focused on the Scriptures. The objective was to understand the Bible as the source of

truth for Christians. The pastor followed the Teaching Plan (Appendix D) and presented the material. There was robust discussion and several questions posed. Once the training was completed, the pastor encouraged the deacons to complete the Discipleship Lesson and the Prayer/Reflections sections. Overall, the first session was an encouraging start for all involved in the training. The training session was closed with prayer.

Week two's training focused on the Holy Trinity. The objective was to gain a better understanding of the Triune God consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There were no deacons absent from the training. Once again, the Teaching Plan was utilized, and the lesson was well received. This was evident from the number of comments and questions. The pastor encouraged the deacons to complete the Discipleship Lesson along with an exercise of writing out a prayer to God. The session concluded in prayer.

Week three's training introduced the doctrine of Justification. The objective was to define and gain a better understanding of the doctrine. All deacons were present for this module and the pastor utilized the Teaching Plan. He also passed out *Twelve Great Truths about the Doctrine of Justification* by Danny Akin (Appendix A) to use in conjunction with the lesson plan. Justification was a topic that produced high interest and the training session garnered the most discussion to date. This enthusiasm was uplifting for the pastor and was a source of encouragement. Once again, the deacons were asked to complete the Discipleship Lesson and the Prayer/Reflection section. The pastor closed this session with prayer.

Week four's topic was the biblical church leadership model as prescribed in Acts 6. Of all the topics covered to date, this was the topic that could have produced pushback from the deacons. This is because the current leadership model of SWC places deacons as the main governing body of the church. However, the result was extremely positive. For example, the

week four training session had the most discussion to date. One reason might have been that the deacons were more comfortable with the material and each other. When the deacons learned from Acts 6 the roles of pastors and deacons, they realized that their emphasis had to be on serving the church body. The pastor explained that they were so busy doing tasks that were not in their biblical role, they neglected the needs of the congregation (visitations, prayer, and needs-based ministry). Another eye-opening portion of the training was the explanation by the pastor of churches utilizing a corporate business model for leadership (including SWC). Using a white board, the pastor shared the following illustration found in Table 1.4.

<b>Biblical Model (Two Offices)</b>	<b>Corporate Model</b>
<b>Pastor – Preaching/Teaching of God’s Word</b>	<b>Pastor – CEO</b>
<b>Deacons – Serve the Church</b>	<b>Board of Deacons – Board of Directors</b>
_____	<b>Congregation – Shareholders</b>

Table 1.4 Biblical and Corporate Church Leadership Models

The pastor emphasized that, for decades, many churches have utilized the corporate model for church leadership. The question that was given to the pastor was simply, why? According to Mark Dever, “In many Baptist and Congregational churches, however, a number of spiritual functions, typically the domain of elders, have been assigned to the deacons . . . and (deacons) have evolved into a kind of executive and financial board for the church, particularly in congregations that no longer have boards of elders.”<sup>60</sup> As previously stated, SWC was

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<sup>60</sup> Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 231.

founded as a Congregational Church. According to Dever, it makes sense that the current leadership model is not aligned with the Acts 6 model due to tradition. Unfortunately, this is a clear example of tradition being elevated above Scripture and precisely why the pastor has employed a biblical emphasis since his arrival. The Acts 6 handout (Appendix A) was given to each deacon and the pastor gave a short expository sermon using the outline. He then encouraged the deacons to complete the Discipleship Lesson and closed in prayer.

The focus group, which garnered many good points of discussion, produced two major steps forward (in the author's opinion) for the deacons and SWC going forward. First was the impact of the provided training and the need for continued training going forward. Historically, the deacons met bi-monthly unless a need arose to meet inbetween scheduled meetings. In 2021, they decided to meet monthly due to several matters and to accommodate the deacon training once approved. When the Deacon Chair asked the group if they wanted to revert to the bi-monthly schedule, the consensus was to continue a monthly meeting schedule. The stated reason from the group (as a whole) was that they realized that they needed to honor the biblical role of deacon by focusing on the needs of the church. In addition, by the suggestion of a deacon, the group desired to incorporate a time of training into every meeting going forward. One of the ideas was more biblically based, discipleship training. This training, along with the current Sunday sermon series on the Gospel of Mark, will work together to further solidify the development of the SWC deacons.

Due to project time constraints, the pastor was unable to reevaluate the deacons using the Deacon Training Surveys. The initial surveys served the greatest need in determining where each deacon was doctrinally regarding the essential tenants of the faith and the biblical leadership model. Although the new evaluation scores would be helpful when compared to the previous

scores to gauge improvement, the focus group results far exceeded what the new evaluations would have indicated. For the pastor, the desire of the deacons to serve in their respective biblical role *and* increase in biblical knowledge far surpassed his expectations. This was no doubt the work of the Lord, a testimony to His honoring a desire to lead His church according to His Word. With that understanding, the pastor must continue to work hard in his studies and reliance on the Holy Spirit for expository preaching and teaching. Breidenbaugh shared, “They (preachers) must work harder now more than ever to explain the Bible’s message to an audience ignorant of the theology of the Scriptures. Preaching in the twenty-first century demands that preachers be both theologically attuned and culturally aware.”<sup>61</sup> As SWC continues to move in a biblical direction, it is imperative the Word of God always be prioritized first by the leadership and the church to follow.

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<sup>61</sup> Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 38.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the author in this DMin action research thesis was to educate and equip SWC leadership with the essentials of the Christian faith and the biblical church leadership model. A DTM was produced and used by the pastor to train SWC deacons. The results of the deacon training included an increased knowledge of the Christian faith and a desire to continue monthly discipleship training, as well as a right understanding of their role in the church. The motivation for this project was to not only to help SWC but other churches as well who need to refocus on the Bible. The following sections will focus on how the project helped SWC and how it could help other churches. These churches include established churches seeking revitalization or replanting as well as new church plants. Finally, the author will share the next steps for SWC's biblical direction.

### **Shallow Well Church**

SWC is at a critical stage in its long history. Like many churches, attendance numbers are down for various reasons. First, there are many older, faithful members who physically cannot attend in person. Some have passed away; in the last two years alone, SWC has lost over twenty members to death. COVID-19 impacted church attendance with two new categories: those with underlying health conditions and those who are now accustomed to worship at home via live streaming. Although these reasons are concerning, they are not the greatest challenge. The author believes that the lack of young families at SWC is the greatest impediment. SWC has no families with parents under the age of thirty years old. This statistic is not exclusive to SWC; the age

group known as Gen Z are the result of more and more unchurched families. The older congregants at SWC and other churches grew up in church and church attendance was a priority in their upbringings. However, the lack of younger families points to a lack of emphasis in evangelism and outreach. The pastor has stressed to the deacons the need for intentional outreach. As a part of the current church leadership, they along with the pastor must set the example for the rest of the church.

Discipleship must be an ongoing emphasis for any church and it starts with the leadership. Jesus invested in the twelve (and others) who, in turn, made disciples of Christ and they made disciples of Christ and so on. The result was the spread of Christianity “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). So, to follow the example of Jesus, SWC needed to make a commitment to first train the leadership. As stated before, because the deacons serve in a governing role, it was necessary to ensure they were on the same page theologically. This project began that task; the DTM content was taught, but the work is ongoing. The deacons now understand that they are not just to be leaders but also spiritual leaders. Therefore, training is not enough. The training must bear fruit in further spiritual growth amongst the congregation and beyond. That includes ministering to the spiritual needs of the congregation through discipleship and sharing the gospel through outreach in the Lee County community, carrying out the Great Commission to “[g]o therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20). Ultimately, the desire of the pastor is for SWC to move to the biblical leadership model as prescribed in Acts 6. However, change takes time. Therefore, patience and reliance on the Lord must be utilized. A good leader should always seek to leave his or her post



better off than at arrival. It may not happen in the current pastor's tenure, but the seeds are planted to move the SWC leadership model in a biblical direction as prescribed in Acts 6.

The author's research supported his belief that biblical inerrancy fuels biblical expository preaching, which produces change in the church. When seeking a new pastor, those entrusted with the task of the search made gospel proclamation through God's Word a priority. SWC has not always had such an emphasis. Recently, one member told the pastor that he had never seen so many people bring their Bibles to church. That is a testimony to the thirst for God's Word and the need for continued expository preaching. With the deacons having been trained in the first-order faith essentials and the continuance of biblical preaching, the hope is that SWC will be known in the community as a biblical church. Mohler shared, "Expository preaching begins with the text and works from the text to apply its truth to the lives of believers. If this determination and commitment are not clear at the outset, something other than expository preaching will result."<sup>62</sup> The greater number of church members who affirm biblical inerrancy, the greater the witness of SWC will be to the Lee County community and beyond.

One possible result of the research is that one or more of the SWC deacons will aspire to receive formal theological training through a Bible college or seminary. If SWC moves to the Acts 6 model, there will need to be men who are biblically qualified to be elders. Although the Bible does not require formal training (Jesus's disciples did not receive a formal education), it is desirable if one is going to preach and teach. More specifically, expository preaching and teaching does not just happen. It requires a combination of intense study, use of a skillset, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Heisler proclaimed, "How we handle the Spirit's inspiration is directly related to our view of the Bible. The higher our view of Scripture, the more careful we

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<sup>62</sup> Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent*, 47.

are to maintain authorial intent and to unpack the Spirit's work in its biblical context and framework."<sup>63</sup> The pastor hopes that one or more of the few men participating in the current Wednesday night Bible study will build on the biblical interpretation foundation through continuing education. Instead of Bible college or seminary, this could be an opportunity for the pastor to be a mentor and invest further in those men.

Another result could be a shift from physical needs-based ministry to more spiritual needs-based ministry. Helping the needs of the community is necessary and good. However, the opportunities must be used to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Grudem adds, "This evangelistic work of declaring the gospel is the primary ministry that the church has toward the world. Yet accompanying the work of evangelism is also a ministry of mercy, a ministry that includes caring for the poor and needy in the name of the Lord."<sup>64</sup> The Deacon Training, Wednesday night Bible studies, and expository preaching will contribute to a biblical mindset for the SWC in terms of not only caring for the needy physically but also spiritually.

### **Established Churches**

Like SWC, many Protestant churches employ a corporate leadership model (see Table 1.4). The challenge for pastors of established churches is tradition. Jesus warned of placing tradition over the Word of God. He said, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" (Mark 7:8-9). In the opinion of the author, the corporate model for church leadership is a direct example of the church seeking to mirror the world's ways; in this case, the method for governing the church. As a result, many churches use

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<sup>63</sup> Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 867-68.

the non-biblical title of “board” of deacons. Using this language makes a clear association with a corporation’s Board of Directors, thus indicating a governing role. Grudem said, “It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine.”<sup>65</sup> The Bible contains the God-given roles for both offices of the church.

For the established church’s pastor, the tradition of a corporate church leadership model is especially difficult to handle. Young pastors could be tempted to initially make sweeping changes in their church’s leadership structure which could result in failure and dismissal. Experienced pastors might be inclined to seek other opportunities at churches with biblical leadership models. The use of patience and trusting in the Lord is the key. For churches with deacons who act as overseers, the DTM would be of great service. Instead of an overhaul effort, it is best to work with what you have been given to develop the deacons. They must be on the same page theologically. That is why the DTM has a focus on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Through expository preaching, intentional training, and fervent prayer, the hope is that the deacons will grow in Jesus Christ and yearn for His Word. That will make the other main emphasis (the biblical leadership model) easier for them to understand because Acts 6 makes clear the two offices of the church. Only God can change hearts. Trust His promises to provide: “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). God is able if the church is willing to follow Him.

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<sup>65</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 920.

## **Church Plants**

The advantage for church plants regarding leadership models is they enjoy a fresh start. Davis explained, “The advantages of church planting seem obvious: the freedom to establish the church from the beginning, according to the ‘recipe’ the church planters have embraced; the freedom to write the constitution and bylaws . . . freedom from the power struggles and corrupt history that characterize a dying church.”<sup>66</sup> There are no set traditions (outside denominational), so the biblical leadership model may be implemented without pushback. Depending on the ministerial experience and theological soundness of the elders, the DTM could be used to ensure cohesiveness of first-order doctrinal understanding amongst the group. In addition, the lesson on Acts 6 could be a positive refresher for the biblical leadership model.

Church plants with biblical leadership models in place might assist established churches as “living examples” of the Acts 6 model. This is especially important for established churches seeking to revitalize or replant. The attractiveness of church planting is appealing to young pastors who have heard horror stories of established churches and seek church planting as a “safe” option. Church plants are necessary, but so is the need to help dying churches. Sharing a visual biblical leadership model would be a great help to the established church and serve as a beautiful picture of cooperation instead of competition.

## **Next Steps**

During the project’s timeline, the Lord used expository preaching and discipleship training to move SWC from the UCC to nondenominational status. The findings of the research were invaluable in making a case to church leadership and the congregation to make a change.

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<sup>66</sup> Davis, *Revitalize*, 33-34.

To the pastor's surprise, there was minimal pushback at all approval levels. Ultimately, SWC voted unanimously to leave the denomination.

With the UCC move behind the church, one next step is to produce a statement of beliefs that starts with the authority of Scripture and includes (at minimum) the same faith essential taught in the DTM. This statement of beliefs will serve two purposes: to inform prospective visitors and educate the current church body (discipleship training and the new member information class). The statement will be posted on the church website and incorporated into the church constitution to ensure easy reference for members and visitors alike. This foundational document will also be added to the DTM to complement the training and will be a resource to ensure doctrinal cohesiveness.

Another next step involves continuous biblical training and a move to the biblical leadership model of Acts 6 at SWC. The pastor leads an ongoing Bible study at SWC from January to May and September to December each year. In the fall of 2021, the pastor led a series on effective Bible reading. The average attendance was twenty and the training was well received. The follow-up study began in January of 2022 with the topic of biblical interpretation (an introductory hermeneutics course). The attendance declined slightly due to a couple factors: the length of time (sixteen weeks) and fear by some of it being too difficult. Nevertheless, the pastor is grateful for the dedication and commitment by what is now the core group.

The only drawback is the lack of men in the group. In each week of the study, the number of participating men is less than twenty percent. While the pastor is thankful for the women participants, it raises concern that if men will not even attend a Bible study, how can they be in leadership roles such as elders? According to Davis, this challenge must first be addressed through prayer. Davis said, "He [Pastor] should especially be seeking like-minded men who

could be future leaders in the effort at church renewal . . . These gatherings are the beginning of the plurality of elders in that church, if that church has never had that biblical pattern of leadership before.”<sup>67</sup> Fortunately, there are some godly men at SWC who the pastor will seek out as Davis advised. This is not to discount the importance of women in church ministry. Women have always played a pivotal role in church history. SWC ordains women as deacons and the pastor takes no issue with it. However, the pastor does affirm that the office of Elder should be exclusive to men. When seeking a Senior Pastor, SWC has never considered a woman. It would be more difficult, in the pastor’s opinion, for SWC to move to the Acts 6 model (elders and deacons) than having only men serve as elders if the change was made. The combination of the men’s prayer group, discipleship training, and expository preaching will be necessary ingredients for a future move to an elder-led church. The pastor is willing to exercise patience in this matter and, even if the change does not happen in his tenure, the seeds will be planted for change under the guidance of his successor.

A third next step is evangelism training. SWC has never offered formal evangelism training of any kind in the past. With the increased knowledge of God through the various biblical emphases, the members will gain confidence in their evangelistic encounters. However, the main resource for evangelism is the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Spirit will be our Advocate. He said, “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). With the growth of the Lee County area in the next few years, God is bringing a mission field to SWC. SWC needs to be ready for

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<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Revitalize*, 178.

those encounters now, not waiting for new residents to arrive. There are currently plenty of lost people in the community who need to know the love of God through the gospel of Jesus.

A fourth next step is to build relationships with other churches, parachurch groups, and missionaries. With the departure from the UCC, SWC has no denominational ties. Currently, SWC joins a few other local churches two times a year for an ecumenical, combined worship service. Although it is a good practice to worship with other congregations, the efforts could better benefit evangelism and missions. The pastor plans to meet with leaders from other local churches soon to seek faithful partners for fruitful partnerships. We are in an age where churches are more interested in competition than cooperation. Many churches today do not have a Kingdom focus. They want things their way, not God's way, though many do not even recognize it because it "has always been this way." With such an internal focus, the external opportunities will not come to fruition. Therefore, it is important to partner with churches who see the world through a Christological lens.

Parachurch groups are another opportunity for partnerships. SWC has several police, fire, and other emergency personnel in the congregation. The pastor serves on the Board of Directors for Emergency Chaplains, Incorporated. This Christ-centered chaplaincy ministry supports local first responders with spiritual needs while caring for the victims of crime, fire, and other emergency situations. Lee County is a target area for Emergency Chaplains to recruit new chaplains and volunteers. SWC is highly supportive of emergency personnel, so a partnership seems viable. However, like other partnerships, SWC must pray for God's will in this situation and other possibilities to partner.

In addition, the pastor serves as a chaplain in the United States Air Force Reserve. Although there are limitations for churches to partner with military chaplains, there are ways that

a local church can help minister to military personnel. The pastor's military status could be a bridge for SWC to partner with the chaplains at Fort Bragg and Pope Army Airfield, which are both approximately thirty miles from the church. This partnership would require a needs assessment from the military chaplains at those installations and learn how SWC can help with taking care of our nation's military members.

Partnerships with missionaries are another possibility. As a missionary, Paul wrote about the need for churches to partner with missionaries. He said, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:3-6). Currently, SWC supports one missionary family in Africa. This is a good start, but there are many other missionaries who depend on financial support to continue in their respective mission fields. Not only can SWC give, but there are many opportunities to go and serve. Short term mission trips with partners are an excellent way to gain a heart for others. These can be across the world or around the corner from SWC.

### **Final Thoughts**

The authority of God's Word is the foundation of a church that honors the Lord Jesus Christ. The author thanks God for a church that desires to increase in the knowledge of God through the Scriptures. This emphasis must continue so that SWC moves forward in a biblical direction. God created the Church to be the means of gospel proclamation to a lost world. He desires all to be saved. God can use SWC to carry out that desire, but it will take intentional efforts by everyone in the church. The research proved to be invaluable for recognizing the areas



of need and how to address those needs. It is up to SWC to grow in Christ and be the church that God intended, to the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but now has been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (Rom 16:25-27).

May Shallow Well Church continue to be faithful in its biblical direction to the glory of God.

## Appendix A

### DEACON TRAINING MANUEL LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

*Part one of the DTM will cover the Christian faith essential doctrine:*

**Section one pertains to the Scriptures (the Bible). The main points of this section are as follows:**

a. The Bible was written by man via the Holy Spirit (divinely inspired); the Spirit (God) is the author.

b. The Bible is inerrant: this means it is without error.

c. The Bible is infallible: this means it is true; therefore, it cannot be false. It is the Word of God.

d. The Bible has a primary theme: salvation, with its subject Jesus Christ, whose name is salvation (Yeshua). The Grand Narrative of Scripture is Creation-Fall-Incarnation-Resurrection-Restoration. Jesus Christ is the agent of all five acts of this narrative.

- Creation: John 1 explains that all things were created through Him (John 1:3).
- Fall: Gen 3:15 (*protoevangelium*) tells of God making way for sinners to be reconciled to Him through a Seed (Jesus) of the woman, Eve.
- Incarnation: The Word became flesh (John 1:14) and was born of a virgin via the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:20-23).
- Resurrection: Jesus was crucified and physically died on the cross. He rose from the dead on the third day before His ascension to the Father (Luke 24:44-51).

- Restoration: Jesus will return, His Kingdom will be consummated, and there will be a new Jerusalem with King Jesus sitting upon the throne (Rev 21:1-5).

**Section two explains the Triune God, One God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.**

- a. God the Father is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all-present, He is everywhere).
- b. God the Son is Jesus Christ (John 14:10-11). Fully divine, he took on humanity (Phil 2:6-8) being fully human. By grace through faith in Him alone (Eph 2:8-9, John 14:6), sinful humanity is brought back into right relationship with God.
- c. God, the Holy Spirit, is the divine Spirit of God. He enters the believer at regeneration and is the “helper” (John 14:26) for all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

**Section three explains humanity and its fallen condition (sin), thus the need for a Savior (Justification).**

- a. God created humanity in His image (Gen 1:26) with the first man, Adam. God said it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18) and created the woman, Eve. God gave them dominion over the Garden. Because man is created in God’s image, we have a distinction over the other created beings. Although God cares for all His creation, humanity can have a personal relationship with God.
- b. The serpent (Satan) deceived Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7). God had instructed them not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, lest they die. The serpent said they would not die, so they ate the fruit. Because they disobeyed God, sin entered the world and all humanity was cursed.

c. God provided the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 3:16) in Jesus Christ. When a person confesses their sins and acknowledges Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9), she is justified in the eyes of God. Sin no longer separates one from God because of the atoning work of Christ (salvation).

(Handout)

**Twelve Great Truths about the Doctrine of Justification (by Danny Akin, President,  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary).**

**Romans 3:21-31**

- |       |  |          |
|-------|--|----------|
| I.    | Justification of sinners cannot be obtained by good works.                     | 3:21     |
| II.   | Justification of sinners was promised to us by God.                            | 3:21     |
| III.  | Justification of sinners results in a right relationship with God.             | 3:21-22  |
| IV.   | Justification of sinners is only through faith in Jesus Christ.                | 3:22, 28 |
| V.    | Justification of sinners is something every person needs.                      | 3:22-23  |
| VI.   | Justification of sinners is by grace through redemption of Christ.             | 3:24     |
| VII.  | Justification of sinners is possible through a blood satisfaction.             | 3:25     |
| VIII. | Justification of sinners in Christ demonstrates God's righteousness.           | 3:25-26  |
| IX.   | Justification of sinners through Christ excludes any personal boasting.        | 3:27     |
| X.    | Justification of sinners through Christ is something God provides for all.     | 3:29     |
| XI.   | Justification of sinners through Christ is a testimony to the oneness of God.  | 3:30     |
| XII.  | Justification of sinners through Christ established the goodness of God's law. | 3:31     |

*Part two of the DTM will cover the Biblical leadership model as explained in Acts 6:*

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore,

brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:1-6, ESV).

The text lays out two offices of the church: elders and deacons. According to this passage, elders are the church leaders that minister (preach and teach) the Word of God. The qualifications for elders are provided in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Since this training is specifically for deacons, it is important to emphasize their biblical role. To rightly teach the biblical office of Deacon, the following teaching outline will be included in the DTM and taught by the pastor. The qualifications for deacons are provided in 1 Tim 3:8-13.

One of the beautiful gifts the Lord gave the early church is the ministry of the deacon. In Acts 6, we find the deacon’s birth: its instigation, its initiation, its integration, and its inspiration. (Handout)

### 1. THE DEACON’S INSTIGATION (VERSES 1-2)

- Unity in the early church was a challenge due to cultural differences between Greek-speaking (Hellenist) dispersed Jews and the Aramaic-speaking native Jews. Language may have been a factor in the overlooking of the Hellenist Jews in need of provisions. This may have worked against unity as well.
- Overseeing physical needs kept the elders from the complete focus of their primary task: preaching the Word. That is not to demean the importance of serving; it emphasizes priorities and needs (spiritual and physical). Allowing this neglect to continue would cause division in the church.
- **Application:** The deacon’s *instigation* is to maintain *unity* in Jesus’ church.

## 2. THE DEACON'S INITIATION (VERSE 3A)

- “Therefore” points us back for emphasis of the need to address spiritual and physical provision.
- The need for the Seven to be chosen arose from the growth in the church. These seven were:
  1. Of good reputation: those viewed by the church as trustworthy and who exercised integrity.
  2. Full of the Spirit: those who live by the practical transforming work of the Spirit.
  3. Wisdom: a result of the Spirit's work is a grasp of proper knowledge and living.
- **Application:** The deacon's *initiation* requires a good reputation, being continually *Spirit-led* in Jesus' church.

## 3. THE DEACON'S INTEGRATION (VERSES 3B-4)

- Notice this office was created for service, to help with the needs of the church.
- Understand role! The deacon's task allowed for the elders to concentrate on their task of gospel proclamation through the Word.
- **Application:** The deacon's *integration* is achieved through *service* to Jesus' church.

## 4. THE DEACON'S INSPIRATION (VERSES 5-7)

- Notice four great results of creating this office:
  1. The whole gathering was pleased.
  2. The Word of God increased continually.
  3. The number of disciples multiplied greatly.
  4. Many Jewish priests became obedient to the faith.

- **Application:** The deacon's *inspiration* leads to great results for Jesus' *Church* and *Kingdom*.

## Appendix B

**Participant Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** Shallow Well Deacon Training

**Principal Investigator:** Eric Burmahl, Pastor, Shallow Well Church

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an ordained deacon (current or former) of Shallow Well 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.

**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to train the Deacons of Shallow Well Church in the Christian faith essentials and the biblical leadership model. The training will provide an opportunity for all the deacons to gain a proper understanding of the application of self and to the church.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Please commit to attending all of the one-hour sessions for the training period.
2. Please attend the end of the training focus group where we (pastor and deacons) will discuss the training and reflect on what God has done during our time together.



**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are a greater understanding of the Christian faith essentials and the biblical leadership model.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

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

**How will personal information be protected?**

Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes (e.g., Deacon A, B, C, etc.) All surveys, interviews (if applicable), training sessions, and the focus group will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- 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.
- Interviews/focus groups 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.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Shallow Well Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

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.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Eric Burmahl. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at \_\_\_\_\_ or email \_\_\_\_\_. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Kitchens, at \_\_\_\_\_.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

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

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you agree 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 of 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.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

## Appendix C

**Deacon Training Survey**

Please answer the following statement as True or False (T or F is fine). This survey is open-Bible, but please do not seek other resources for your answers.

1. Biblical inerrancy means that the Bible is without error. Answer: \_\_\_\_
2. The Bible was written by man with no inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Answer: \_\_\_\_
3. Biblical infallibility is the belief that not all of the Bible is true. Answer: \_\_\_\_
4. The Bible is applicable to all areas of a person's life. Answer: \_\_\_\_
5. Being fully divine, Jesus was also fully human and sinless. Answer: \_\_\_\_
6. The Bible teaches that everything was created through Jesus Christ. Answer: \_\_\_\_
7. The Bible is totally trustworthy. Answer: \_\_\_\_
8. The omniscience of God means that He is all-knowing. Answer: \_\_\_\_
9. Faith in Jesus alone is the means for sinful humans to be reconciled (brought into a right relationship) with a holy God. Answer: \_\_\_\_
10. The Holy Spirit is a Person of the Trinity, but not equal to the Father and the Son.  
Answer: \_\_\_\_
11. As a Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ (the Son) is omnipotent. Answer: \_\_\_\_
12. God is omnipresent; therefore, He is everywhere. Answer: \_\_\_\_
13. The Trinity is three Gods in one Person. Answer: \_\_\_\_

14. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “The Helper.” Answer: \_\_\_\_
15. The Bible has errors. Answer: \_\_\_\_
16. Jesus was born of a virgin but partially human. Answer: \_\_\_\_
17. The Old Testament teaches that a Savior will come through the seed of Eve. Answer: \_\_\_\_
18. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, He will be born of a virgin. Answer: \_\_\_\_
19. God is not everywhere. Answer: \_\_\_\_
20. The Holy Spirit dwells in all believers in Jesus Christ. Answer: \_\_\_\_
21. The only way to be saved is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Answer: \_\_\_\_
22. What distinguishes humanity from other created beings is that they are created in God’s image. Answer: \_\_\_\_
23. Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve’s son, Seth. Answer: \_\_\_\_
24. In order to have a relationship with God, one must place their faith in His Son. Answer: \_\_\_\_
25. God created humans because He needs them. Answer: \_\_\_\_
26. The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit with no human involvement. Answer: \_\_\_\_
27. There are two offices of the Church in the Bible: Deacons and Committees. Answer: \_\_\_\_
28. Elders are pastors in churches over the age of 60. Answer: \_\_\_\_
29. The office of Deacon was created to oversee churches. Answer: \_\_\_\_
30. The qualifications for elders are provided in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Answer: \_\_\_\_
31. Justification of sinners results in a right relationship with God. Answer: \_\_\_\_
32. Being a good person will allow a person entrance into Heaven. Answer: \_\_\_\_
33. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. Answer: \_\_\_\_
34. Elders are one of the two church offices explained in Acts 6. Answer: \_\_\_\_
35. Justification of sinners through Christ is something God provides for all. Answer: \_\_\_\_

36. The office of Deacon was created to serve the needs of the Church. Answer: \_\_\_\_
37. Christianity is monotheistic. Answer: \_\_\_\_
38. Only parts of the Bible are true. Answer: \_\_\_\_
39. Justification of sinners is something every person needs. Answer: \_\_\_\_
40. The need for a once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world was Jesus' earthly purpose.  
Answer: \_\_\_\_
41. Jesus was a great teacher and prophet, but not divine. Answer: \_\_\_\_
42. God created humanity to be in a relationship with Him. Answer: \_\_\_\_
43. Justification of sinners cannot be obtained by good works. Answer: \_\_\_\_
44. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. Answer: \_\_\_\_
45. Humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation. Answer: \_\_\_\_
46. Deacons have a unique role in the ministry of the church through service. Answer: \_\_\_\_
47. The term "elder" is synonymous with an overseer, pastor, and bishop. Answer: \_\_\_\_
48. Faith in Jesus Christ and good works are necessary for salvation. Answer: \_\_\_\_
49. Jesus Christ is a created Being. Answer: \_\_\_\_
50. We can disregard the Old Testament because we are a New Testament church. Answer: \_\_\_\_

Appendix D

**Lesson Plans**

**Shallow Well Church Deacon Training**

**Part I**

**Cover Sheet**

**LESSON TITLE:** Week One: The Scriptures

**RESOURCE PERSON:** Pastor

**TEACHING METHOD:** Informal Lecture/Guided Discussion

**REFERENCES:**

1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*

**STUDENT PREPARATION/READING ASSIGNMENT:** None

**PRESENTATION TIME:** 1.0 Hours

**Part IA**

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand the Bible as the source of truth for Christians: its characteristics and theme.

**POINTS:**

1. The Bible was written by man via the Holy Spirit (divinely inspired); the Spirit (God) is the author.
2. The Bible is inerrant: this means it is without error.
3. The Bible is infallible: this means it is true; therefore, it cannot be false. It is the Word of God.

4. The Bible has a primary theme: salvation, with its subject Jesus Christ, whose name is salvation (Jeshua). The Grand Narrative of Scripture is Creation-Fall-Incarnation-Resurrection-Restoration. Jesus Christ is the agent of all five acts of this narrative.

**LESSON OUTLINE:**

- a. The Bible was written by man via the Holy Spirit (divinely inspired); the Spirit (God) is the author.
- b. The Bible is inerrant: this means it is without error.
- c. The Bible is infallible: this means it is true; therefore, it cannot be false. It is the Word of God.
- d. The Bible has a primary theme: salvation, with its subject Jesus Christ, whose name is salvation (Yeshua). The Grand Narrative of Scripture is Creation-Fall-Incarnation-Resurrection-Restoration. Jesus Christ is the agent of all five acts of this narrative.
- e. Discipleship Exercise

**Part II**

**Teaching Plan**

**Introduction**

**ATTENTION:** (Video Clip) The statement that the Bible is totally true is a bold statement to an unbelieving world. Our understanding of God's Word will help us when questioned by others.

**MOTIVATION:** The Word of God is the means to know God.

**OVERVIEW:** For the next 50 minutes, we will learn and discuss the Bible, specifically, these points:



1. The Bible was written by man via the Holy Spirit (divinely inspired); the Spirit (God) is the author.
2. The Bible is inerrant: this means it is without error.
3. The Bible is infallible: this means it is true; therefore, it cannot be false. It is the Word of God.
4. The Bible has a primary theme: salvation, with its subject Jesus Christ, whose name is salvation (Yeshua). The Grand Narrative of Scripture is Creation-Fall-Incarnation-Resurrection-Restoration. Jesus Christ is the agent of all five acts of this narrative.

This lesson is an informal lecture, so I invite your comments and questions along the way.

**TRANSITION:** Turn in your Bible to 2 Tim 3:16-17. Would someone read it, please?

### **Body**

1. The Bible was written by man via the Holy Spirit.
  - We read in 2 Tim that Scripture is God-breathed, the work of the Holy Spirit.
  - Turn to 1 Pet 1:25, and someone, please read it. Here we read that God's Word is eternal.
  - Now go to 2 Pet 1:20-21, and someone, please read it. These verses complement 2 Tim 3:16-17 that the Bible was the work of the Spirit.
2. The Bible is inerrant: this means it is without error.
  - Would someone read Matt 5:17-18, please? Jesus fulfills the promises of Scripture.
  - Question: If we serve a perfect God, why do many believe that His Word has errors?
  - Follow-up question: If the Bible had errors, could we trust it?
3. The Bible is infallible: this means it is true; therefore, it cannot be false. It is the Word of God.

- Would someone please read John 17:17, please? What does sanctify mean?
- Turn to Ps 19:7-10. Someone, please read it. Let's explore these characteristics of God's Word in depth.

4. The Bible has a primary theme: salvation, with its subject Jesus Christ, whose name is salvation (Yeshua). The Grand Narrative of Scripture is Creation-Fall-Incarnation-Resurrection-Restoration. Jesus Christ is the agent of all five acts of this narrative.

- Creation: John 1 explains that all things were created through Him (John 1:3).
- Fall: Gen 3:15 (protoevangelium) tells of God making way for sinners to be reconciled to Him through a Seed (Jesus) of the woman, Eve.
- Incarnation: The Word became flesh (John 1:14) and was born of a virgin via the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:20-23).
- Resurrection: Jesus was crucified and physically died on the cross. He rose from the dead on the third day before His ascension to the Father (Luke 24:44-51).
- Restoration: Jesus will return, His Kingdom will be consummated, and there will be a new Jerusalem with King Jesus sitting upon the throne (Rev 21:1-5).

5. Discipleship lesson.

**READ:** Josh 1:8 and Ps 1

Read and fill in the following:

- In both passages above, God promises his blessing upon those \_\_\_\_\_ on His Word both day and night.
- Deut 8: 2, 3. God was testing His children so that they might learn that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 3)

- Matt 4:4. Jesus overcame the devil by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- John 8:31. Some Jews had become new believers he told them that they must \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to be truly His \_\_\_\_\_
- Acts 17:11 – The Berean believers were more noble than the Thessalonians believers  
because they \_\_\_\_\_

#### **APPLICATION:**

- Jesus says His Word is as essential to life as daily food. And the path to being a true disciple is by “continuing in or holding to” His Word.
- Can I honestly say I am continuing in His Word today to the extent I need to?  
 Yes  No
- If not, and you have no plan of Bible Study, would you consider reading Psalm 1 and Luke 14 every day this week?  Yes  No

#### **PRAYER AND REFLECTION**

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## **Conclusion**

**SUMMARY:** We have learned about the Bible as the source of truth for Christians: its characteristics and theme.

**REMOTIVATION:** I hope the exercise was valuable in accessing your commitment to God's Word. If it is everything we learned tonight, why would we not invest our time in it?

**CLOSURE:** Let us pray.

## **Shallow Well Church Deacon Training**

### **Part I**

#### **Cover Sheet**

**LESSON TITLE:** Week Two: The Trinity

**RESOURCE PERSON:** Pastor

**TEACHING METHOD:** Informal Lecture/Guided Discussion

**REFERENCES:**

1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*

**STUDENT PREPARATION/READING ASSIGNMENT:** None

**PRESENTATION TIME:** 1.0 Hours

### **Part IA**

**OBJECTIVE:** To gain a better understanding of the Triune God: The Father, Son, and Spirit.

**POINTS:**

1. God the Father is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all-present, He is everywhere).
2. God the Son is Jesus Christ (John 14:10-11). Fully divine, he took on humanity (Phil 2:6-8) being fully human. By grace through faith in Him alone (Eph 2:8-9, John 14:6), sinful humanity is brought back into right relationship with God.
3. God, the Holy Spirit, is the divine Spirit of God. He enters the believer at regeneration and is the “helper” (John 14:26) for all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

**LESSON OUTLINE:**

- a. God the Father
- b. God the Son
- c. God the Holy Spirit
- d. Discipleship Exercise

**Part II****Teaching Plan****Introduction**

**ATTENTION:** (Video Clip) We worship and serve one God. So do Muslims and Jews. What is the difference since Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are all monotheistic?

**MOTIVATION:** The answer to this question is essential, particularly when discussing the Trinity with others.

**OVERVIEW:** For the next 50 minutes, we will learn and discuss the Trinity, specifically, these points:

1. God the Father
2. God the Son.
3. God the Holy Spirit
4. Discipleship Exercise

This lesson is an informal lecture, so I invite your comments and questions along the way.

**TRANSITION:** Turn in your Bible to Exod 3:14. Would someone read it, please?

### **Body**

1. God the Father is omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnipresent (all-present, He is everywhere).

- God is the creator to all, but Father to believers. What is the difference between being “fatherly” and a “Father?”
- Turn to 1 John 3:1 (READ). What is the wonderful reminder in regard to the Father?
- Because the Father is God, He is eternal, as are the Son and Spirit.

2. God the Son is Jesus Christ (John 14:10-11). Fully divine, he took on humanity (Phil 2:6-8) being fully human. By grace through faith in Him alone (Eph 2:8-9, John 14:6), sinful humanity is brought back into right relationship with God.

- Turn to John 14:10-11 (READ).
- Turn to Phil 2:6-8 (READ).
- Turn to Eph 2:8-9 and John 14:6 (READ).
- Question: Why does the world reject the truth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Why does the world balk at absolutes (John 14:6)?

3. God, the Holy Spirit, is the divine Spirit of God. He enters the believer at regeneration and is the “helper” (John 14:26) for all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

- Turn to John 14:26 (READ). Why do many Christians prioritize the Father and Son but give less regard to the Holy Spirit?
- What is your understanding of being Spirit-led?

4. Discipleship lesson.

**READ:** Matt 22: 34-40, John 14:31

➤ Read and fill in the following:

Deut 6: 4-9: In verse 5 God’s children are commanded to love God with \_\_\_\_\_, and with \_\_\_\_\_, and with \_\_\_\_\_; then in verses 6-7 they are to teach them to their children when we \_\_\_\_\_ at home; when \_\_\_\_\_; then further, in verse 8, they were commanded to \_\_\_\_\_ and are finally in verse 9 to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Matt 22:37: Jesus calls this commandment the first and greatest commandment but links it to a second, verse 38, which is \_\_\_\_\_ and says that upon these two commandments hang all \_\_\_\_\_

John 14:31: Jesus wants the world to know that He \_\_\_\_\_

**APPLICATION:** Jesus is teaching us that we have no greater vocation in life than be a lover of God. This was His goal (John 14:31). A good way to remember the Great Commandment is to: Love God **Completely**, Ourselves **Correctly**, and Others **Compassionately**.

Write out a prayer, being ruthlessly honest with yourself and God. State whether you are fully committed to loving Him with all your being; and if not, why. Consider committing (or recommitting) yourself to the Supreme Goal in life.

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**Conclusion**

**SUMMARY:** We should now have a better understanding of the Triune God.

**REMOTIVATION:** When we reflect on the Triune God’s awesome nature and attributes, we can be certain that He loves us and is able to care for us.

**CLOSURE:** Let us pray.



## Shallow Well Church Deacon Training

### Part I

#### Cover Sheet

**LESSON TITLE:** Week Three: Justification

**RESOURCE PERSON:** Pastor

**TEACHING METHOD:** Informal Lecture/Guided Discussion

**REFERENCES:**

1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*

**STUDENT PREPARATION/READING ASSIGNMENT:** None

**PRESENTATION TIME:** 1.0 Hours

### Part IA

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand the doctrine of justification.

**POINTS:**

1. God created humanity in His image.
2. The serpent (Satan) deceived Adam and Eve.
3. God provided the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world.
4. Rom 3:21-31 on Justification.

**LESSON OUTLINE:**

- a. Creation of humanity
- b. Fall of humanity
- c. Jesus Christ

- d. Rom 3:21-31 (Handout)
- e. Discipleship Exercise

## **Part II**

### **Teaching Plan**

#### **Introduction**

**ATTENTION:** (Video Clip) We are in a world that is pluralistic and diverse in beliefs. It is imperative that we, as followers of Jesus, understand salvation in the Christian faith.

**MOTIVATION:** The world needs to know what is true about not only the Godhead but also the means for sinful mankind to be in right relationship with Him.

**OVERVIEW:** For the next 50 minutes, we will learn and discuss the doctrine of Justification, specifically, these points:

1. Creation of humanity
2. Fall of humanity
3. Jesus Christ
4. Rom 3:21-31 on Justification
5. Discipleship Exercise

This lesson is an informal lecture, so I invite your comments and questions along the way.

**TRANSITION:** Turn in your Bible to Gene 1:26. Would someone read it, please?

#### **Body**

1. God created humanity in His image (Gen 1:26) with the first man, Adam.

- Turn to Gen 2:18, and someone, please read it. God said it was not good for man to be alone and created the woman, Eve.
- God gave them dominion over the Garden.
- Because man is created in God's image, we have a distinction over the other created beings.
- Although God cares for all His creation, humanity can have a personal relationship with God.

2. The serpent (Satan) deceived Adam and Eve.

- Turn to Gen 3:1-7 (READ).
- God had instructed them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die.
- The serpent said they would not die, so they ate the fruit.
- Because they disobeyed God, sin entered the world, and all humanity was cursed.

3. God provided the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world.

- Turn to John 3:16 (READ). Salvation is through Christ alone through faith.
- Turn to Rom 10:9 (READ). When a person confesses their sins and acknowledges Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are then justified in the eyes of God.
- Question: What is justification by faith?

4. Let's look at Rom 3:21-31 (Handout).

5. Discipleship lesson.

**READ:** Acts 1-2

**Read and fill in the following:**

- Acts 1:8 – The disciples received the power of God when: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rom 8:9 – If someone does not have the Holy Spirit, he/she \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rom 8:6 – For a disciple to experience “life and peace” his mind must be \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Gal 5:16-22 – The way to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh and experience the fruit of His Spirit is \_\_\_\_\_
- I John 1: 5-10 – To walk in the Spirit is to “walk in the light as He is in the light... If we “walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth.” This means the disciple of Jesus moves from darkness to light by:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 8) and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 9)
- I Thess 5:11 – Disciples are not to walk alone. They are to encourage \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and build-up \_\_\_\_\_

### **APPLICATION:**

Am I living with some sin or harboring some bad feeling toward someone that is keeping me from being filled with the power and fruit of the Holy Spirit?

Yes  No

Am I willing to risk sharing this concern with a brother or sister disciple of Jesus?

Yes  No

Is there some sin I need to confess to God right now?  Yes  No

Will I believe God that I possess His Spirit (Romans 8:9) and will keep in step with His Spirit this week? And keep in step with His Spirit this week and thereafter by His grace?

Yes  No

#### PRAYER AND REFLECTION

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#### **Conclusion**

**SUMMARY:** We should now have a better understanding of the doctrine of Justification.

**REMOTIVATION:** It is imperative that we articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ rightly to a lost world. Therefore, we share from God's Word about the only means of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ.

**CLOSURE:** Let us pray.

## Shallow Well Church Deacon Training

### Part I

#### Cover Sheet

**LESSON TITLE:** Week Four: The Biblical Leadership Model

**RESOURCE PERSON:** Pastor

**TEACHING METHOD:** Informal Lecture/Guided Discussion

**REFERENCES:**

1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*

**STUDENT PREPARATION/READING ASSIGNMENT:** None

**PRESENTATION TIME:** 1.0 Hours

### Part IA

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand the Biblical Leadership Model as prescribed in Acts 6.

**POINTS:**

1. The Office of Elder: Qualifications and Roles
2. The Office of Deacon: Qualifications and Roles

**LESSON OUTLINE:**

- a. Elders
- b. Deacons (Handout)
- c. Discipleship Exercise

**PART II**  
**TEACHING PLAN**

**Introduction**

**ATTENTION:** (Video Clip) Everyone here will agree that church leadership is important. However, church leadership must also be biblical.

**MOTIVATION:** In order to advance Christ's Church, we must understand how He has structured its leadership. This comes down to offices and roles.

**OVERVIEW:** For the next 50 minutes, we will learn and discuss the Biblical Leadership Model, specifically, these points:

1. Acts 6 Sermon (See handout)
2. Office of Elder: Qualifications and Roles
3. Office of Deacon: Qualifications and Roles
4. Discipleship Exercise

This lesson is an informal lecture, so I invite your comments and questions along the way.

**TRANSITION:** Listen to what God's Word says about church leadership (Acts 6 Sermon).

**Review**

1. Office of Elder: Qualifications and Roles
  - Turn to 1 Tim 3:1-7, and someone, please read it.
  - Turn to Titus 1:5-9, and someone, please read it.
  - Now let's go back to Acts 6. What is the primary role of elders?

## 2. Office of Deacon: Qualifications and Roles

- Turn to 1 Tim 3:8-1,3, and someone, please read it.
- Now let's go back to Acts 6. What is the primary role of deacons?
- One of the beautiful gifts the Lord gave the early church is the ministry of the deacon.
- In Acts 6, we find the deacon's birth: its instigation, its initiation, its integration, and its inspiration (Acts 6 Birth of the Deacon handout).

## 3. Discipleship lesson.

**READ:** Luke 14

Read and fill in the following:

- Luke 14:25-27 – Large crowds were following Jesus. In verse 26, He turns to them and says that anyone who does not hate his \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, yes even his \_\_\_\_\_ and does not carry \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 27); cannot be his disciple.
- Luke 14: 33 – Here He says that no one can be His disciple who does not \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To be a disciple of Jesus is to believe He is the Lord of heaven and earth and the Supreme Owner of everything in it. This includes us, His children, who He bought by the price of His precious blood (1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pet 1: 18, 19). In other words, the true disciple of Jesus owns nothing. He or she is but a trustee of their time, talent, and treasure. To be His disciple is to put Christ above: Others (vs. 26), Self (vs. 27), and Things (vs. 33).



**APPLICATION**

- Do I *really* believe Jesus owns it all, myself included?  Yes  No
- Can I honestly say to myself I have put God before my own self?  Yes  No
- If not, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Can I honestly say I've made a commitment to put Jesus above all my self-interests?  
 Above all others and above all possessions?  Yes  No
- If not, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER AND REFLECTION: (What am I learning from this lesson today?)**


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**Conclusion**

**SUMMARY:** We should now have a better understanding of the Biblical Leadership Model.

**REMOTIVATION:** When we commit as a church to lead as God's Word prescribes, Jesus will bless it, and we bring Him glory.

**CLOSURE:** Let us pray.

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## **IRB Approval**

September 16, 2021

Eric Burmahl

Lester Kitchens

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-242 DMIN IRB Application Process

Dear Eric Burmahl and Lester Kitchens,

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 project 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:

(2) 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 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 [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**