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EDITORIAL

FEATURE ARTICLES

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Editorial: *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, Twenty Years Later

TIMOTHY PAUL JONES

Timothy Paul Jones oversees online learning and teaches in the areas of family ministry and apologetics. Before coming to Southern, he led churches in Missouri and Oklahoma as pastor and associate pastor. Dr. Jones has received the Scholastic Recognition Award and has authored or contributed to more than a dozen books, including *Conspiracies and the Cross: Perspectives on Family Ministry*; and, *Christian History Made Easy*. In 2010, Christian Retailing magazine selected *Christian History Made Easy* as the book of the year in the field of Christian education. He is married to Rayann and they have three daughters: Hannah, Skylar, and Kylinn. The Jones family serves in SojournKids children's ministry at Sojourn Community Church.

Family-Based Youth Ministry was the first family ministry book I ever read.

My first response was to reject family ministry as an utterly ridiculous and impractical idea in my context.

It took two years for the struggles of ministry and the work of the Spirit to change my mind.

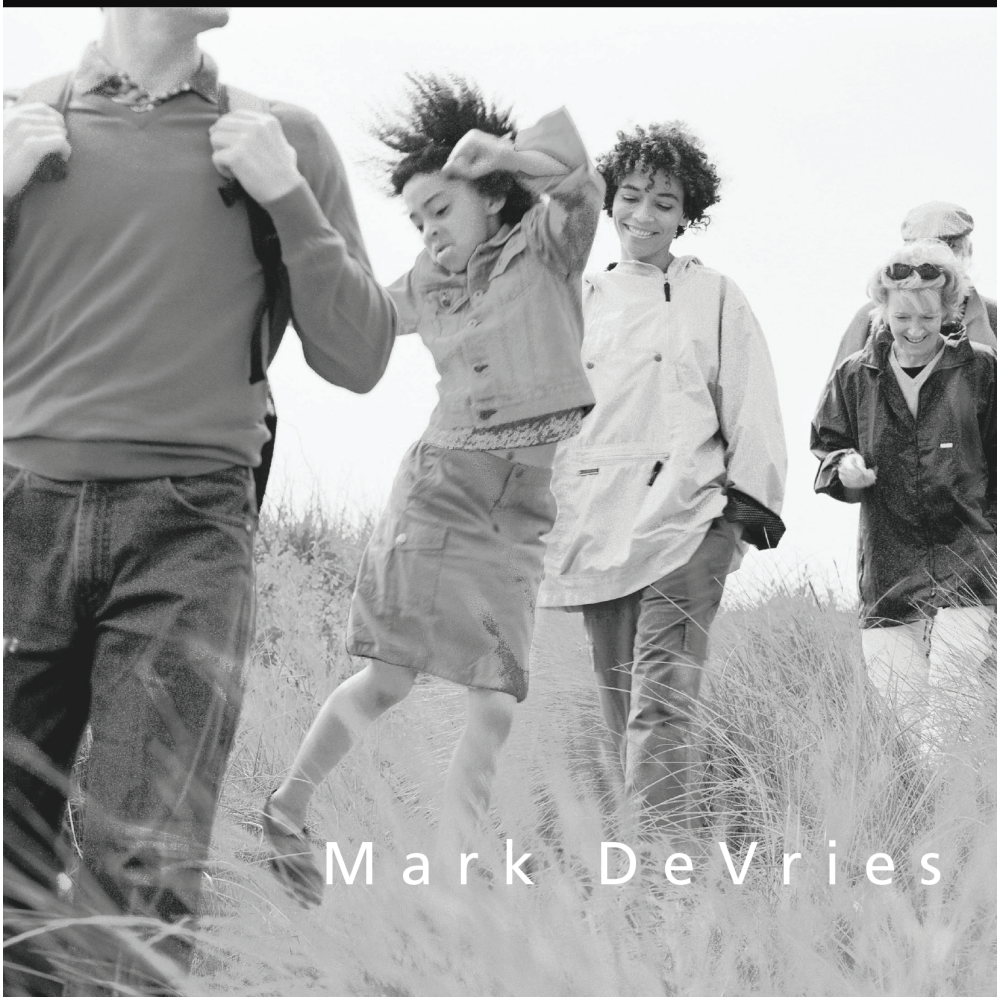
"I DON'T SEE ANY WAY THAT THIS COULD WORK HERE"

In 2002, I was called to oversee children's ministry and Christian education in a growing church. I had spent the previous three years as this congregation's youth minister; now, in addition to my other roles, I oversaw the new youth minister. A few months after the new youth minister arrived, he came into my office carrying a book with a cover that would have looked trendy a decade earlier.

"I've been reading this book," he said, "and I really think we need to look into trying family-based ministry. This is what our students need." He held up his copy of *Family-Based Youth Ministry* and began outlining what he had

FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY

REVISED AND EXPANDED



learned.

"Well, I really like what you're describing," I said once he had finished. "And that's the way things *should* be done in youth ministry. The problem is, in this church, two-thirds of our students come from broken homes, and we just don't have enough intact homes to support this. I'll take a look at the idea, but I don't see any way that this could work here."

Once the youth minister finished the book, he passed it on to me. I read a few bits and pieces of *Family-Based Youth Ministry* and then shelved it. I had completed a bachelor's degree in biblical studies, a master of divinity, and a doctorate in educational leadership—but I had never read a book about family ministry. As such, I did find the book enlightening. Still, I knew this model would never succeed in my context. If God ever called me to serve in an upper-income suburban church, I might use this book—but not here, not in this low-income exurban neighborhood, blighted with methamphetamine labs and abandoned trailer homes. When I was the youth minister, I had tried intergenerational activities with mixed success, but I wasn't willing to turn these ideas into a ministry-wide strategy.

NEW ROLE, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPENNESS

A year or two later, much had changed. Our church's context was the same as it had been for decades, but I had recently transitioned into the role of senior pastor. Looking at the church from this new angle, I was concerned as I saw fault lines emerging between generations. What's more, the church had continued to grow, and it was becoming clear that the ministry staff needed help to be able to disciple people effectively.

One of the many factors that came together that year for me was the recognition that God designed the family to make disciples and model Christ's love for his church. I began to look at the church's ministries from that perspective, and I remembered a book that I had shelved the year before. At the same time, I began an academic bridge program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to turn my doctor of education degree into a doctor of philosophy degree. These seminars provided a context to wrestle with emerging ideas about church leadership.

Over the next three years in that church, I began to implement more and more family ministry practices. As I learned to reflect more effectively on my ministry, these ideas became increasingly rooted in my study of Scripture and theology. By the end, many of the practices were the very ones that metamorphosed into the family-equipping ministry model

described in *Perspectives on Family Ministry* and *Family Ministry Field Guide*. In the beginning, however, most of my ideas came from *Family-Based Youth Ministry,* the very book that I had shelved as impractical a couple of years earlier. As I've conversed with hundreds of family ministry veterans over the past eight years, I have discovered that I am not alone. For many of us, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* was our first introduction to family ministry.

Family-Based Youth Ministry, Twenty Years Later

This year is the twentieth anniversary of the first printing of *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. We've chosen to commemorate this anniversary with a couple of significant research articles focused on ministry to adolescents ("Adolescent Moral Development in Christian Perspective" and "The Function of Short-Term Mission Experiences in Christian Formation"), as well as an interview with Mark DeVries and a few appreciative reflections on the impact of *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. In addition to these features, this issue also includes a broad range of research articles and brief reflections on family discipleship and Christian formation.

Beginning with this issue, *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* will be made available free of charge here: http://www.sbts.edu/resources/publications/journal-of-discipleship-and-family-ministry/. If you prefer a printed journal, don't despair! Print-on-demand versions will continue to be available, and—if you have subscribed to *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry*—we will fulfill your entire subscription.

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An Encouragement to Use Catechisms

TOM NETTLES

Dr. Tom Nettles (Ph.D., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is widely regarded as one of the foremost Baptist historians in America. He came to Southern Seminary from the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. He previously taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of numerous books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory*; *Baptists and the Bible*, which he co-authored with L. Russ Bush; *Why I Am a Baptist*, co-edited with Russell D. Moore; *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*.

Many contemporaries have a deep-seated suspicion of catechisms. In our own Baptist denomination, many would consider the words "Baptist catechism" as mutually exclusive. A popular misconception is that catechisms are used in times and places where inadequate views of conversion predominate or the fires of evangelism have long since turned to white ash. If the Bible is preached, they continue, no catechism is necessary; catechisms tend to produce mere intellectual assent where true heart religion is absent. This concern reflects a healthy interest for the experiential side of true Christianity. Concern for conversion and fervor, however, should never diminish one's commitment to the individual truths of Christianity nor the necessity of teaching them in a full and coherent manner.

In fact, some who profess the Christian faith are so experience-oriented that their view of spirituality makes them antagonistic to precise doctrine. Any attempt to inculcate systematic arrangement of truth is considered either

divisive or carnal. Such convictions may be held in all sincerity and may gain apparent support from selected facts, but suspicion of catechisms as a legitimate tool for teaching God's Word cannot be justified historically, biblically, or practically.

HISTORY COMMENDS THE USEFULNESS OF CATECHISMS

The early church was painfully familiar with the apostasy of professing Christians. Persecution and the continued power of heathen worship practices caused many to lapse and prompted the early church to develop methods of instructing apparent converts before baptism. The period of instruction and catechizing served two purposes: it allowed the candidate (catechumenate) to decide if he still wanted to submit to Christian baptism and gave the church opportunity to discern (as far as human observation can do these kinds of things) the genuineness of his, or her, conversion. Then, after engaging in a period of fasting and prayer with the church, the candidates were baptized. This use of catechisms served as a safeguard for the purity of the church. Men such as Tertullian and Augustine served as catechists within the church. Julian the Apostate (ca. 360) so feared the effectiveness of this enterprise that he closed all Christian schools and places of public literature and forbade the instructing of youth.

With the union of church and state by the end of the fourth century and the gradual development of infant baptism the nature of catechetical instruction changed. The procedure of pre-baptismal catechetical instruction shifted more and more to after-the-fact instruction in preparation for confirmation. In many places it vanished entirely. Mass Christianization of barbarian tribes in the middle ages revitalized the catechetical idea. Charlemagne insisted that each baptized person should know at least the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. This concern then extended to the children of such Christianized tribes. Though minimal, instruction was necessary, and the guarantee for it came from godparents who themselves were required to know the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. As confirmation developed in significance, examination upon the basic points of Christian doctrine became a normal procedure. This kind of practice has led to the impression that catechisms substitute for conversion in some traditions. The golden Age of catechisms emerged in the Reformation. Both Luther and Calvin placed high priority on instruction by catechetical method and considered the success of the Reformation as virtually dependent on the faithfulness of Protestants to this process. In 1548, Calvin wrote Edward VI's protector Somerset:

"Believe my Lord, that the Church of God shall never be conserved without catechism, for it is as the seed to be kept that the good grain perish not but that it may increase from age to age. Wherefore if you desire to build a work of continuance to endure long, and which should not shortly fall into decay, cause that the children in their young age be instructed in a good catechism."

The Heidelberg Catechism and the *Westminster Catechism* have had the most significant impact on Reformed Protestantism. The former, dating from 1562, begins with two questions which establish the format for the remainder of the document.

Q. 1. *What is thy only comfort in life and in death?*

A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.

Q. 2. *How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou in this comfort mayest live and die happy?*

A. Three things: First, the greatness of my sin and misery. Second, how I am redeemed from all my sins and misery. Third, how I am to be thankful to God for such redemption.

The three parts of the catechism which follow are entitled "Of Man's Misery," "Of Man's Redemption," and "Of Thankfulness." Within these sections full question and answer expositions are given of the Fall, the Apostles' Creed, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Perseverance, and Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.

Hercules Collins, a leading English Baptist of the seventeenth century, adopted the *Heidelberg Catechism* as the basis for his 1680 publication *Orthodox Catechism*. Collins, a Baptist, felt that this virtual duplication of the Heidelberg Catechism should strengthen the usefulness of his work, "hoping an Athenian Spirit is in none of you, but do believe that an old Gospel (to you who have the sweetness of it) will be more acceptable than a new." Part of his purpose was to demonstrate basic unity with the larger Protestant community.

Although literally hundreds of catechisms were produced in English in the seventeenth century, the most influential catechisms were those that arose from the Westminster Assembly, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The Shorter Catechism especially influenced Baptist life, as it formed the basis for Keach's (or *The Baptist*) Catechism and subsequently Spurgeon's Catechism. In America, the Philadelphia Association catechism and the Charleston Association catechism were duplicates of Keach's catechism. Richard Furman used it faithfully and effectively.

Several principles appeared to govern the theory of catechisms. One, many catechist believed that catechisms of different levels should be produced. Luther had published two as did the Scottish divine Craig and the Puritan John Owen (Two Short Catechisms). Richard Baxter had three, suited for childhood, youth, and mature age. The Westminster Assembly's two catechisms are will known. Henry Jessey, another of the leading early Baptists, had three catechisms, all bound together, one of which contained only four questions: What man was, is, may be, and must be. John A. Broadus includes sections of "advanced questions"at the end of each respective section in the body of his catechism. This graduated difficulty in catechism rests on the theory that the earlier the stamping on the mind, the more indelible the result.

Two, exact memory is generally considered important. The power of words to substantiate reality enforces the necessity of some precision at this point. "I serve a precise God," said Richard Rogers. Luther instructed those teaching the Small Catechism "to avoid changes or variation in the text and wording." We should teach these things, he continued, "in such a way that we do not alter a single syllable or recite the catechism differently from year to year." Exact head knowledge, however, is obviously not the end of catechetical instruction. Rather, catechizing aims ultimately at the eyes of understanding, heart knowledge. Even in the Westminster Assembly some were concerned that "people will come to learn things by rote, and answer it as a parrot but not understand the thing." The design of the catechism is, under God, to chase the darkness from a sinner's understanding, so that he may be enlightened in the knowledge of Christ and freely embrace him in forgiveness of sin. John Bunyan specifically wrote his catechism, "Instruction for the Ignorant," that God might bless it to the awakening of many sinners, and the salvation of their souls by faith in Jesus Christ. The major purpose of Henry Jessey's "Catechism for Babes" was to give instruction concerning how God

could forgive those who "deserve death, and God's curse," and could still "be honoured in thus forgiving, naughty ones as we are."

Henry Fish, an American Baptist, screwed in tightly the application of each section of his catechism by a poignant rhetorical question sealing discussion of each doctrine. For example, "Are you a believer, or does the wrath of God abide on you for unbelief?"

A catechism written by the English Baptist John Sutcliffe pinpoints this same concern as the goal of catechetical instruction.

To conclude: what do you learn from the catechism you have now been repeating?

I learn that the affairs of my soul are of the greatest importance, and ought to employ my chief concern.

That this has indeed been the result of catechetical instruction quite often is a happy fact. Luther Rice, that great early promoter of missions in America, said this in reflecting on his conversion:

> After finding myself thus happy in the Lord, I began to reflect in a day or two, whether touching this reconciliation with God, there was anything of Christ in it or not! It then opened very dearly and sweetly to my view that all this blessed effect and experience arose distinctly out of the efficiency of the statement made by Christ. That I was indebted wholly to him for it all, and indeed the whole of that luminous system of divinity drawn out in the Westminster Catechism, opened on my view with light, and beauty, and power. This I had been taught to repeat, when a child. I then felt and still feel glad that I had been so taught. A charming reminiscence of one of the children Furman catechized gives a clear picture of the importance he attached to this process and these doctrines. A 1926 edition of In Royal Service quotes the remembrance a grandchild had of her grandmother's experience under Furman.

> We had no Sabbath school then, but we had the Baptist Catechism, with which we were as familiar as with the Lord's Prayer. At our quarterly seasons, we children of the congregation repeated the Baptist Catechism standing, in a circle round the font. We numbered from sixty to a hundred. The girls standing at the south of the pulpit, the boys meeting them in the center from the north, Dr. Furman would, in his majestic, winning manner, walk down the pulpit steps and with book in hand, commence asking questions, beginning with the little ones (very small indeed some were, but well taught and drilled at home). We had to memorize the whole book, for none knew which question would fall to them. I think I hear at this very moment the dear voice of our pastor saying, "A little louder, my child," and then the trembling, sweet voice would be raised a little too loud. It was a marvel to visitors on these occasions, the wonderful self-possession and accuracy manifested by the whole class. This practice was of incalculable benefit, for when it pleased God to change our hearts, and when

> offering ourselves to the church for membership, we knew what the church doctrines meant and were quite familiar with answering questions before the whole congregation, and did not quake when pastor or deacon or anyone else asked what we understood by Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification. Oh, no; we had been well taught...What a pity that such a course of instruction has been abandoned.

Another kind of understanding was necessary also. Couching profound truth of the Great "I Am" in language digestible and understandable for children takes great discipline and concentration. Henry Jessey recognized a deficiency at this point in some of the earlier catechisms for children in that some of the answers contained Latin and Greek phrases. Jessey "desired to see one so plain and easie [sic] in the expressions, as they the very Babes, that can speak but stammeringly, and are of very weak capacities, might understand what they say."

John A. Broadus felt the same tension when writing his "Catechism of Bible Teaching." Reflecting on finishing Lesson 1 entitled "God," Broadus said, "It is, of course, an extremely difficult task to make questions and answers about the existence and attributes of the Divine Being, that shall be intelligible to children, adequate as the foundation for future thinking, and correct as far as they go." Those three guidelines should serve well to judge any catechism. Baptist catechisms have existed virtually since the appearance of modern-day Baptists in the seventeenth century. Typical of early Baptist commitment to catechizing is an admonition that appears in the circular letter of 1777 from the Baptist ministers and messengers assembled at Oakham in Rutlandshire, England.

Our confession of faith and our catechism for the instruction of our young people, are published to the world; and from these glorious principles we hope you will never depart...At present, blessed be God, we believe there is no apparent apostasy in our ministers and people from the glorious principles we profess; but, at the same time, we must in great plainness and faithfulness tell you, that catechizing of children is most sadly neglected, both in private families and in public congregations...

Our honoured brethren, the ministers at Bristol, have lately encouraged the publication of two editions of our catechism,...and we do most earnestly entreat you to furnish yourselves with this excellent compendium of true divinity, and that you would teach it diligently to your children in private, and desire your pastors to instruct them, at least for the summer season, in public.

Cathcart's *The Baptist Encyclopedia* encourages "parents to employ the Catechism in their own homes" because "this neglected custom of the past should be revived in every Baptist family in the world."

Southern Baptists developed catechisms as valuable tools for the religious education and evangelization of slaves. In 1848, Robert Ryland published "A Scripture Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants" and, in 1857, E.T. Winkler published Notes and Questions for the Oral Instruction of Colored People. Each of these catechisms contains fifty-two lessons, one for each Lord's Day of the year.

In 1863, when the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention was founded, one of its first publications was A Catechism of Bible Doctrine, by J.P. Boyce. Within a four-month period in 1864, then thousand of these were printed and distributed. In 1879, Southern Baptists requested J.L. Dagg to write "a catechism...containing the substance of the Christian religion, for the instruction of children and servants..." Evidently this catechism was never completed. When the Southern Baptist Convention was considering the reestablishment of the Sunday School Board in 1891, the first new project it proposed was the publication of a catechism by John A. Broadus. This was printed and used widely and advantageously.

Catechisms have served in several capacities historically. During the early centuries of Christian history they were used for prebaptismal instruction. Later, after infant baptism began to become prominent, they were used to educate the masses baptized in infancy. Charlemagne in particular arranged that catechetical instruction should be given in his era of embarrassing ignorance.

During the Reformation, catechisms met several important and pressing needs. As a type of personalized confession, they helped establish clearly the distinguishing doctrines considered paramount by the reformers. Also, their polemical power assisted in the task of bringing a corrective cordial to the deceptive spiritual sickness propagated by Roman Catholicism. Additionally, they were effective in teaching biblical truth as an ongoing enterprise in cities and countries that adopted the Reformation. Puritans and their heirs utilized catechisms as an evangelistic tool. Baptists, including Southern Baptists, produced scores of catechisms for use in this variety of ways.

We see, then, that like all good ideas, catechisms are subject to abuse, and their evil lives after them. We should not, however, let the good

be interred with their bones, but resurrect it as an effective instrument for a new day of Reformation.

THE BIBLE ENCOURAGES THEIR USE

In addition to the lessons of history, Scripture itself encourages the use of catechisms in our efforts to be transformed by the biblical message. The divine out-breathings which produced Scripture create both an assumption and a purpose which are consistent with this approach to instruction. The assumption is the authority, sufficiency, and consistency of Scripture; the purpose is the increase of spiritual maturity in the children of God.

Examples or models of instruction used by the first-century church abound in Scripture, both in method and content. These make it clear that the use of summaries, readily digestible portions of revelatory truth, make for effective instruction in the church. In addition, implicit admonitions for this form of education are scattered throughout the pages of the Bible and mixed with the models mentioned above.

The catechetical approach should not be used to serve any fascination with systems and abstractions or to puff one's self up with speculative knowledge instead of increased love for God (1 Cor. 8:1). Instead, it is one way that Christians may enhance their ability to use Scripture in accordance with its purpose. Instruction with this kind of precision constitutes an obedient response to the Bible itself and fulfills biblical principles undergirding the process of disciple making.

FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE'S PURPOSE

Preaching, teaching, and meditation (biblical means of spiritual growth) require slightly different emphases in the use of Scripture and accomplish slightly different tasks in conforming us to Christ. Preaching comes in the form of a proclamation, challenging and correcting our thoughts and actions, teaching us of the grace of God in the gospel, and calling us to deeper repentance and obedience. Teaching, no more content-oriented nor less confrontive than preaching, employs a format less monologic and more oriented toward questioning and discussion. Meditation involves extended personal appraisal of one's own thoughts and actions in comparison to the beauty and holy character of God as revealed in Scripture and impressed on the heart by the Holy Spirit.

In each of these, not only does the person who is well catechized have a distinct advantage, the use of a catechetical approach is a basic element of the procedure itself. Those

who have good scripture knowledge gain more from good preaching. If, in addition, they have been trained to see the coherent structure of biblical truth and can define its leading principles, their knowledge of Scripture is more precise and thorough. The consequent benefit from preaching in-creases. More will be said about this in the discussion of practical advantages.

A well-catechized hearer doesn't view the words and ideas of the preacher as isolated fragments of truth; he understands them as constituent elements of the "one faith" which must govern our efforts to achieve "unity in the faith." Matthew Henry, a seventeenth-century Puritan biblical scholar, states, "Catechizing does to the preaching of the word the same good office that John the Baptist did to our Saviour; it prepares the way, and makes its paths straight, and yet like him does but say the same things."

This relationship between preparatory instruction and purity of worship was woven into the very fabric of the history of Israel. The people were commanded to instruct their children in the ways of God. When an Israelite child asked his father, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you?" the parent was to answer with a summary of the mighty works of God for the redemption of the people (Deut. 6:20-25). These acts of God might be more fully expounded in other contexts, but the summary served as a basis of all conduct and worship.

One could conclude that the entire history of Israel was catechetical preparation for Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Of course, it was much more than that. Peter explained what the people observed with the words, "This is what was spoken..." (Acts 2:16) and the explanation was sufficient. His appeal to the attestation of Jesus' ministry by miracles, wonders, and signs (2:22) was consistent with their understanding of God's activity in pivotal redemptive eras of their history (Moses and Elijah). His recitation of the Messianic prophecies through David made immediate appeal to the orientation of his audience. Also, his references to the pouring out of the Spirit did not refer simply to Jesus" promises during his earthly ministry about the coming of the comforter. This would have meant little to Peter's audience. More likely he referred to the coming of the Spirit as the sign of ultimate redemption and the new covenant (Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:27; 39:29; Jeremiah 31:31-34). Peter's announcement of Jesus a both "Lord" and "Christ" met with immediate understanding and conviction. Both words were filled with meaning for the

hearers and the string of evidence he presented pointed to the conclusion they drew.

I am not contending that a strong background of knowledge when combined with a compelling argument always makes a convert. No conviction or conversion will come without the effectual working of the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:19; Col. 2:11, 12). A connection, however, between prior knowledge and proclamation is a part of God's ordained means of salvation.

The same is seen in Paul's sermon at Athens. He appealed to what he knew they had discerned from general revelation and had put within their system of worship (Acts 17:22-29). In a sense, nature and conscience had catechized them.

Also, more quickly than those not so trained, those catechized become capable of preaching and teaching. The appeal of preaching he in proclaiming the new (whether it be insight into content or application) based on known truth. Jesus said, "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). The scribes were the most thoroughly educated people of Israel during the time of our Lord. They were professional students of the law and gathered around themselves pupils to whom they taught the law and the oral tradition which accompanied it, much of which they themselves produced. They taught their students to pass on this content without alteration. Jesus indicates that the person with scribal training, when converted and freed of the idol of human tradition, is capable of teaching others the truths of the kingdom of God. He can understand and communicate how Christian revelation relates to the new challenges the world constantly presents. He gives insight in how one can make fresh applications of the unchangeable truths divine revelation.

Apollos, before he met Aquila and Priscilla, was literally "catechized" in the way of the Lord and was teaching with accuracy the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18:25). Upon receiving more accurate instruction concerning some details, he continued his teaching being of great help to believers and an irrefutable apologist for the faith in public debate with the Jews (Acts 18:27, 28). It was no small contribution to his eventual effectiveness that he was so thoroughly "catechized."

The biblical evidence for the value of catechisms is not derived solely from inference. The specific admonitions of Scripture support the use of this method. "Teach them diligently to thy children" and "talk of them when thou

sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" were the instructions accompanying the second giving of the commandments (Deut. 6). This sort of instruction included memorization of fundamental precepts. The psalmist assumes the existence of this knowledge in his numerous exhortations to meditate in the law of the Lord. No meditation can occur where no content is present; and the more accurate and precise the content, the more edifying and uplifting the meditation.

David says, "The unfolding of thy words gives light" (Ps. 119:130 NASB). The word for "unfolding" may mean "entrance" or "opening." Its root often is used metaphorically for "understanding" or, in a phrase, "grasping the true meaning." The illumination of the Holy Spirit alone accomplishes this, particularly as it relates to one's transformation by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). From a human standpoint, however, the purpose of a catechism is to present true contextual understanding of the biblical revelation. It can give significant and enlightening help in the Christian privilege of meditation on the truths of divine revelation, a practice which gives understanding to the simple.

ADMONITIONS AND EXAMPLES

Much of the educational task of the church today is parallel with that of the Levites in Nehemiah's day. When the Israelites were at the threshold of recovering their significance as the people of God, central to this reorientation was the learning of the word of God. Ezra led the scribes and the Levites in intensive sessions with the people: "They read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understanding the reading" (Ezra 8:1-8).

Scripture itself gives clear warrant to the use of external aids in order to enhance and accelerate biblical understanding. The Levites "gave the sense." Preeminently, the preacher serves in that capacity; but providing the same kind of touchstone given by the "rule of faith" in the early Christian centuries, a catechism helps perform the same function. When it has a comprehensive scriptural orientation and is organized logically, a catechism can enhance understanding and give immense help in grasping the sense of Scripture.

Summaries of faith, either in confessional or catechetical form, appear in the New Testament. These are used in situations where strong clear reminders of the distinctiveness of the Christian faith are needed. They serve to exhort, encourage, warn and edify. Bits and pieces of confessions, or perhaps catechetical responses, are very likely present in such passages as

Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Timothy 1:15-17; 3:12-16; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; 2:11-13; and Titus 1:11-14. The faith Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:5, 13 could be the experience of grace of faith. Another and more likely, possibility is that it denote an objective faith, that is a body of teaching. The context seems to favor that understanding. Paul emphasizes the gift of pastor-teacher in verse 11 and, in verse 13, has in mind a doctrinal core around which believers should be united. This is contrasted to the instability of the doctrine characteristic of deceitful teachers in verse 14. At any rate, the words in verses 5 and 6 have an easily memorable form which expressed a foundational and minimal confessional standard for some first-century Christian churches. The simple but clear and exclusive confession could serve as an effective shield of faith against many fiery first-century darts of false teaching.

The phrase "a faithful saying" (literally Faithful the word), in Timothy 1:15 and 3:1 and 4:9, introduces a confessional, or perhaps catechetical formula. The sentences which follow could possibly stand alone as pithy and pregnant epigrams, "one-liner" confessions such as "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." More likely they are part of larger statements as in 1 Timothy 3:16. That particular confession called by Paul "The Mystery of Godliness" begins with a phrase which contains an adverbial form of the word "confess" and literally translates "confessedly great." Idiomatically it means "undeniably." That which is "confessed" with such certainty is a six-article Christological confession.

Apparently, Paul considered this confession a helpful safeguard against the encroachment of heresy, for immediately in 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul warns Timothy about the errors of ascetic dualism. That heresy by implication denies the goodness of creation as well as the reality of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and bodily ascension of Christ into heaven. Paul points to the "words of faith" and the inherently good, noble and praiseworthy doctrine he has been following. He uses the same word to describe the "teaching" (v.6) as he does to describe the inherent goodness of the creation (v.4).

The phrase "words of faith" in verse 6 has a strong verbal relationship to the "faithful sayings" in 1:15, 3:1,4:9, and 2 Tim. 2:11. The first uses the noun form of "faith" and the second uses the adjective form. Conceptually, Paul is making the same affirmation. A "faithful saying" incorporates words which summarize certain truths of the faith; thus, "words of faith" becomes "faithful words", or "faithful sayings." These are in turn identified with "the

sound doctrine" (NASB) Timothy has been following.

Paul is reminding Timothy that spiritual and doctrinal nourishment he received in his early instruction is a strong, and even essential, foundation for an effective ministry with the people of God. Verse 9 then repeats the formula "It is a faithful saying and worthy of full acceptance" that exercising oneself to godliness (v.7) striving and laboring for life now and to come (vv.8, 10) are all part of putting one's hope in the living God "who is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe."

These faithful sayings consisted of the teaching of the apostles and N. T. prophets (the foundational gifts to the church) and served as the Christ-centered guide to the interpretation of the 0. T. Scriptures and as paths to life in the presence of the Living God. In 2 Timothy 1:8, Paul encourages Timothy not to be ashamed of the "testimony of our Lord." The word "testimony" which serves to translate two Greek words contains a rich fabric of meaning. Among the several things that both unite are the following: an event, word, or thing that serves as proof or evidence (John 8:17); a personal conviction about the truth which can not be compromised no matter what the consequences (2 Cor. 1:12); the spoken message about Christ's person and work (1 Cor. 1:16); and, in The Martyrdom of Polycarp, it refers specifically to the martyr's death. In 1 Tim. 2:6 the "testimony" is used as an appositive to "ransom." The death of Christ was thus Christ's personal witness to and irrefutable evidence of the truth that there is one God and that reconciliation is possible only through a mediator who provides an effectual ransom (antilutron). The death of Christ speaks volumes, infinite volumes, about the unique efficacy of the gospel; it is the testimony in God's ordained time. And to that specific testimony that Christ made in his death Paul was appointed a preacher, and apostle, and a teacher. When he speaks of the "testimony of our Lord," therefore, in 2 Tim. 1:8 he has in mind that historical witness of Christ in his passion which is communicated to all generations in the words called the Gospel ("be a fellow-sufferer in the gospel").

John's Angel in Revelation 19:10 speaks of those messengers who "hold the testimony of Jesus." Indeed, the angel continues, the "testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy." Isaiah, when hounded by the false religionists of his day to consult mediums, replied, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn" (Isa. 8:20 NASB).

The testimony of our Lord, or the testimony of Jesus, is the fulfillment of all the prophets. This testimony (marturion) is given a form so that witnesses (martus) may testify (martureo) verbally. An elevated prose portion of that testimony is presented in the words of verses 9 and 10 of 2 Tim. 1: "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but has now been manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who destroyed death on the one hand, and, on the other, brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Timothy also is admonished to "guard the deposit" and follow the pattern or standard of "sound words" given him. This deposit and these sound words he was to entrust to faithful men who would b able to teach others. Paul had already written against those who live in a moral squalor opposed to the "sound teaching which is according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1:10-11). In 1 Tim. 6:3, Pat warns Timothy against those who want to teach other things and will not receive "sound words." Nor will they receive "the teaching" that according to godliness. Instead, they are men who understand nothing and, among other things, are deprived of the truth. He gives similar instruction to Titus that he would select overseers who hold firmly to the sure word which is in accord with "the teaching." This is so they may exhort others in "the teaching, the sound teaching" and may reprove those who oppose them.

2 Tim. 3:14, 15 pictures Timothy as having learned from his grandmother, mother, and Paul's sets of truths stated not exactly in Scripture language but founded upon Scripture truth. In the same vein the writer of Hebrews speaks of the need of some to be instructed in the "elementary principles of the Oracles of God" (5:12). Paul's emphasis on "the teaching," the "deposit," the "sound teaching," the "sound words," and his instruction that it serve as corrective guideline to false teachings, false teachers, an nonessential subtleties creates a form with clearly recognizable features. Thomas Watson and Matthew Henry are convinced that the "form, pattern, standard of sound words" is a type of catechism: "the first principles of the oracles of God."

The apostles and other teachers in the New Testament worked with several clear, concise, verbally friendly confessional and catechetical devices to establish a foundation for the entire teaching ministry. The practice of learning by exact verbal patterns was well established, by divine mandate,

in Jewish culture. A continuance that would not only be natural but an expected response to the divine disclosure of the words of the gospel. Nothing should hinder the conclusion that memorization of the deposit of truth is biblical. The catechism appears to meet this need most acceptably (See Birger Gerhardsson, Memory and manuscript: Oral Tradition and Writt, Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity).

SOLA SCRIPTURA

Some object to catechisms because they fear a tendency to replace Scripture. If viewed in terms of the medieval practice, such a fear might have legitimacy, In addition the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy: produced an implicit creedalism that was opposed by the founder of the pietist movement. While Pietism developed its own set of problems, its renewed emphasis on Bible study was a needed practical application of the Protestant emphasis on sola scriptura. The most consistent practice in Protestantism, however, gives positive relief to this important concern. Spurgeon noted the tendency of this fear and addressed it forcefully:

> If there were any fear that Scripture would be displaced by handbooks of theology, we should be the first to denounce them; but there is not the shadow of a reason for such a dream, since the most Bible-reading of all the nations is that in which the Assembly's Catechism is learned by almost every mother's son [cited in Cathcart, The Baptist Encyclopedia, s.v. Creeds, advantageous).

Matthew Henry, in his "Sermon Concerning the Catechizing of Youth," expressed, a century before Spurgeon, the same confidence:

> Bear us witness, we set up no other rule and practice, no other oracle, no other touchstone or test of orthodoxy, but the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament: these are the only fountains whence we fetch our knowledge;...and far be it from us that we should set up any form of words in competition with it, much less in contradiction to it; or admit any rival with it in the conduct an guardianship of our souls, as some do the traditions of the church, and others I know not what light within. Every other help we have for our souls we make use of as regula regulata - "a rule controlled"; in subordination and subserviency to the Scripture; and among the rest our catechisms and confessions of faith [The Complete Works of Matthew Henry 2 vols. (Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, 1979) 2:159, 160].

Allow a contemporary to testify to the eminently safe and edifying character of a scriptural catechism. In his introduction to his own revised version of Keach's Catechism, Paul King Jewett anticipates this objection with a strong answer:

> It would be anomalous indeed to say that in teaching that the Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice, the catechism is setting itself in the place of Scripture. All that the authors of our catechism have sought to do is to state in a plain, orderly and concise manner what the Scripture teaches. And do we any less in the sermon, which is the very central act of evangelical worship? What is a sermon, or at least what ought it to be, but a clear and forceful statement in the preacher's own words of what the Scripture means?

And if this may be done in a sermon, why may it not be done in a catechism?

CATECHIZING IS PRACTICAL

The practicality of such an exercise can be demonstrated at several points.

First, catechizing forces one to redeem the time. There are many good and helpful ways for parents and children to spend time together. Many parents struggle, however, with finding a means of creating spiritual and biblical discussions with their children. The discipline of catechizing draws parent and child, student and teacher, together in the most helpful and edifying of all activities--the submission of heart and mind to the teachings of the Bible. Other activities may draw the parties together, but time could not be so well spent in any other endeavor. As Matthew Henry affirms, "Your being catechized obliges you to spend at least some part of your time well, and so as you may afterwards reflect upon it with comfort and satisfaction above many other, perhaps above any other, of your precious moments."

Second, catechizing gives the building blocks from which all Scripture can be comprehended. I considered this idea briefly when considering how a catechism is in conformity with the purpose of Scripture. One of the church's most influential and, from a teaching standpoint, successful theologians, John Calvin, saw the truth of this principle and employed it brilliantly. He wrote a catechism to be used in all the homes in Geneva and explains his commitment to this idea in the preface to his 1545 French edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion. He spoke of the benefits to the church of having in writing a treatment "in succession of the principal matters" which comprise Christian truth. Those who took advantage of this benefit will "be prepared to make more progress in the school of God in one day than any other person in three months" since he knows "to what he should refer each sentence and has a rule by which to test whatever is presented to him."

Marion Snapper calls this the Lodestar hypothesis. In the absence of sophisticated electronic equipment, a maritime navigator must focus on

several brilliant and pivotal stars out of the vast and dazzling array of heavenly splendors. The catechism provides these guiding lights. An artist begins learning his gift by observing the forms of circles, triangles, ellipses, squares, and adds understanding of shading, symmetry, and depth. He then combines these into beautiful creations by the skillful addition of detail. A theologian begins with the first basic principles of faith, which if learned well provide the immovable stones which support massive and comprehensive treatments of all the revealed counsels of God.

Though a catechism cannot contain all the beauty of the Scriptures, it may contain "the essentials of religion, the foundations and main pillars" upon which the rest stands. Matthew Henry compares a catechism to a "map of the land of promise, by the help of which we may travel it over with our eye in a little time." A catechism can no more replace the Bible than a map can replace travel. Though a map does not render the smell of flowers, the heat of the sun, the refreshment of a breeze, or the height of a mountain, the serious traveler would never want to be without one. Traveling from Cuckfield to Canterbury or from Gary, Indiana, to Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, a trip can turn into quite a disaster without a good map for guidance. The terrain is not altered to fit the map; rather, the map is carefully designed to show what the terrain is like. Nor does one sit at home admiring the wonderful map, thinking that he has seen the world because he has studied the map. No, the map aids in my travel and even encourages one to it. One gets an overall view of where one is going from the map, and, conversely, the journey even helps one understand the map better. Even so is a catechism to Scripture.

Third, a catechized congregation makes better sermons and better preachers. Thomas Watson says, "To preach and not to catechize is to build without foundation." The writer of Hebrews labored under some debilitating difficulties because his readers were inadequately grounded in foundational theological principles (Heb. 5:11-14). What might the writer have told us about the priesthood of Christ had his addressees been mature doctrinally and well catechized? Even so, if a significant portion of one's regular congregation sees clearly the lodestars of the Faith, more detailed textual exposition becomes possible, if not necessary. Thus, the people are in a position to feed on the sincere milk of the word and the pastoral dimension of feeding the flock of god takes on new and highly challenging dimensions.

Two dangers in this advantage

are to be avoided. One, maturity of understanding in a portion of the congregation must not force one into a weekly display of esoteric interests. While every message must have something to stretch and challenge the mature, it must also speak plainly to the children and the uncatechized. Two, one must avoid the spirit of novelty. A strong foundation must not be interpreted to grant one license to produce cute little doctrinal embellishments of one's own whims derived from hermeneutical oddities and hidden meanings. Such enterprises, in reality, produce only disproportionate, grotesque monstrosities composed of wood, hay, and stubble to be consumed, for they have no coherence or harmony with the foundation, which is Christ. In fact the tendency of the preacher involved in catechetical training with his congregation would be to emphasize the great central truths of the gospel: sin, the cross, atonement, regeneration, repentance unto life, saving faith, justification, the person and work of Christ, the convenantal working of the Triune God in the salvation of sinners.

The fourth practical use of a catechism is its witness to our belief that Scripture is consistent, clear, and can be taught systematically. Popular scepticism towards the possibility of revealed truth produces raised eyebrows and dropped jaws at the mention of "systematic" theology or catechisms of Bible doctrine. Such materials presuppose that the Bible's teachings on any number of subjects can be arranged in such a manner as to present a consistent, non-contradictory picture of that subject. Catechisms may present real problems to those who feel uncomfortable affirming full biblical truthfulness and consistency; but, for those who accept that position as necessary for the Christian faith, catechisms should be not only welcomed but aggressively sought.

Fifth, arising from the Christian's commitment to truthfulness, which includes coherence and non-contradiction, the catechism aids in producing minds which are congenial to logic and analysis. A well-constructed catechism weaves itself into a tapestry of truth. All parts depend upon and are informed by all others. The learner does not see items of information as meaningless and disconnected from reality as a whole. Instead, without eliminating the sense of mystery and intruding on things hidden from our view by God himself, a confidence in the coherence of truth is paramount. Everything begins with God as creator, subsists and maintains its being through divine providence, and ultimately is consumed in the divine purpose to God's glory.

Not only is the created order meaningful, but history is meaningful, and the words used to describe creation and history are meaningful. The God who spoke the world into existence and maintains it by the word of his power, has by those acts vested in written language the possibility, in fact the necessity, of accurate communication. Observe theological procession and analytical integrity of the following series of exchanges.

Q. (20) Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery (Rom. v. 1,2).

Q. (21) Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

AThe sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it (Rom. v.12, to the end; Eph. ii. 1,2,3; James i. 14,15; Matt. xv. 19).

Q. (22) Wherin consists the misery of that estate whereunto man fell?

A. All mankind by this fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Q. (23) Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life (Eph. i. 4,5), did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer (Rom. iii. 20-22; Gal. iii., 21,22).

The fall leads to an estate of Sin and Misery. The two estates are defined and their several parts delineated, and deliverance from sin and misery is introduced. This, of course, leads to a section describing the person and work of the Redeemer. These responses are from the Baptist Catechism used by London Particular Baptists, the Philadelphia Association and the Charleston Association. It is based on The Westminister Shorter Catechism, a cut above most other catechisms, but the advantage under discussion still stands for any well-organized catechism.

Sixth, Godly catechizing may serve to bolster faith in man's conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In 1630, Hugh Peters encouraged parents to catechize their children by reminding them "if ever your poore Infants bee driven to wilderness, to hollow caves, to Fagot and Fire, or to sorrowes of any kinde, they will thank God and you, they were well catechized.' Marion Snapper characterizes this as the "Prison Camp hypothesis." His judgment is that this is about as realistic as "arguing for obesity in anticipation of landing in a Vietnamese prison camp; it is simply too far removed from the realities of life."

Though wildernesses, Fagot and Fire may not be a present threat, persecution and opposition of a different sort is just as real and perhaps more subtly destructive. Biblical views of both God and man undergo incessant bombardment in the educational structure of modern society.

What Christian young person hasn't found himself in the wilderness of a university classroom, or high school room for that matter, wishing he knew concretely the argument for a belief that his parents and his pastor hold dearly. And how many who have only vague impressions of doctrine but no lively and coherent apprehension of them find themselves overwhelmed by the apparent massive scholarship and acute philosophical insights of an unbelieving teacher?

Such an experience tends to isolate "religious" ideas to a corner of knowledge merely mystical and devotional, tangent to reality only at the point of personal value judgments but not considered worthy of the status of absolutes in any sense. Christianity becomes only a matter of private opinion, but certainly not a case to be argued. Catechizing from an early age sensitizes and conditions the person to consider God and his attributes as an essential part of knowledge, indeed foundational for all true learning. In addition, one learns to evaluate man properly both as to his dignity from creation and his intellectual/moral capabilities as modified by the fall. Seventh, catechisms provide the theological foundation to bring reformation, prepare for revival, and avoid fanatical enthusiasm. Reformation is the recovery and propagation of central gospel truth and the ordering of the church--worship, ordinances, officers, and preaching--in its light. Revival is the recovery of love for God and man and results in the establishing of priorities in life on the basis of that love. Enthusiasm, the teaching that special leading and the revelation of truth are given privately to individuals, has been the source of divisive and dangerous error. Catechizing provides a doctrinal and biblical foundation which disarms and disciplines the

tendency toward privatization of religious truth.

Spurgeon sums up the matter as pungently as any advocate of catechisms.

> In matters of doctrine you will find orthodox congregations frequently changed to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and that is because, too often, there has been no catechizing of the children in the essential doctrines of the Gospel. For my part, I am more and more persuaded that the study of a good Scriptural catechism is of infinite value to our children. . . . Even if the youngsters do not understand all the questions and answers . . . yet, abiding in their memories, it will be infinite service when the time of understanding comes, to have known these very excellent, wise and judicious definitions of the things of God. . . . It will be a blessing to them-the greatest of all blessing . . . a blessing in life and death, in time and eternity, the best of blessings God Himself can give.

Those who concur and practice in accordance with such a judgment will find themselves standing in good company and involved in a holy enterprise.

ONE ESSENTIAL ARTICLE

"Do I address one here who imagines that an orthodox creed will save him? I suppose that no one is more orthodox than the devil, yet no one is more surely lost than he is. You may get a clear head, but if you have not a clean heart, it will not avail you at the last. You may know the Westminster Assembly's Catechism by heart, but unless you are born again, it will not benefit you. Did you say that you believe the thirty-nine articles? There is one article that is essential-`You must be born again' (John 3:7). And woe to that man who has not passed through that all-important change." - Charles H. Spurgeon

Adolescent Moral Developement in Christian Perspective

JOHN DAVID TRENTHAM

John David Trentham (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) served for six years prior to as the Young Adults and Missions Pastor and Worship Leader at the First Baptist Church of Mount Washington, Kentucky. He and his wife Brittany are both East Tennessee natives. Dr. Trentham recently published a major study exploring the nature of development among pre-ministry students attending different types of colleges and universities. He is married Brittany and together they have one son, Maddox.

A series of recent and ongoing research studies are exploring the nature and extent of intellectual and ethical maturation among pre-ministry evangelical undergraduates at varying institutional types. This line of research represents the most in-depth analysis ever conducted among this population with regard to epistemological development—i.e., students' maturity in their ways of thinking, reasoning, and judgment, as well as in their personal commitments to ways of living that exhibit a reflective consistency with the biblical worldview. This article highlights a number of prominent and notable common themes identified in the findings of this research as bearing relevance to pre-ministry undergraduates' epistemological development, personal formation, and Christian discipleship. Also, the nature and impact of varying social-environmental conditions among pre-ministry college students is addressed.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The findings and themes presented in this article are drawn from the initial study in an ongoing series of qualitative research studies, in which pre-ministry undergraduates from three institutional contexts were interviewed according to a standardized semi-structured interview protocol. The three institutional contexts included secular universities, confessional liberal arts universities, and Bible colleges. Thirty students, including ten from each context, were interviewed. This study thus served to initiate precedent findings for subsequent studies to augment and deepen lines of inquiry and investigation among this population. Currently, follow-up studies are being conducted in each of the three original contexts, and additionally among pre-ministry undergraduates and evangelicals attending non-confessional liberal arts universities, two-year colleges and universities, and evangelical seminaries.

While the Perry Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development served as an interpretive lens for the study, the researcher introduced the "Principle of Inverse Consistency" as a paradigm for critically interacting with Perry and other developmental theories. Additionally, an original methodological contribution of the study was the design and implementation of a new content analysis framework for identifying and qualifying various elements of epistemological positioning. This framework articulates three categories within which epistemic priorities and competencies may be categorized: (1) biblically-founded presuppositions for knowledge and development, (2) metacognition, critical reflection, and contextualistic orientation, and (3) personal responsibility for knowledge acquisition and maintenance, within community.

In addition to the findings gleaned from this structured analysis, the research yielded a number of prominent, common, and epistemically-formative themes that emerged directly from participants' articulations related to their particular institutional environments. The significance of these themes was determined according to consistent recurrence among interviewees within or across differing institutional types. Relatedly, categories of pre-ministry students' perspectives and positions on various issues germane to the college experience were discerned. These themes, identified in the original study and currently the subject of intentional exploration in the ongoing research, are recounted in detail below.

PRE-MINISTRY UNDERGRADUATES

The body of literature comprised by studies on the topic of undergraduate epistemological development is well-established and wide-ranging. Prior to the initiation of this line or research, however, no study addressed the distinctiveness of varying types of institutions in affecting or promoting epistemological maturity among evangelical students, nor had any study specifically engaged the population of pre-ministry college students with regard to intellectual and ethical development. This population represents a diverse range of college students who experience cognitive maturation, identity-formation, social assimilation, and professional preparation in markedly differing environments, depending on which type of college they attend. Given the formative nature of the college years and the essentiality of environmental factors in human development, the influence of institutional types represents a topic worthy of exploration with regard to pre-ministry undergraduates' worldview, identity, and lifestyle.

Unlike many professions that require mastery of specified disciplines of study on the undergraduate level, there are no specific prerequisite degree requirements for pre-ministry students, regardless of whether or not they enroll in seminary. The result of this is that students preparing for a career in ministry develop their epistemological priorities and values while immersed a number of different institutional contexts—contexts which, by their diverging nature, have unique formational influences and manifestations. This initial study along with its follow-up studies are investigating the nature of these divergences and the resulting effects on pre-ministry students' maturation

SIGNIFICANT RECURRING THEMES

The general findings of the structured content analysis procedures undertaken in the initial phase of this research indicate that overall, epistemological positioning is generally consistent among pre-ministry students from differing institutional contexts. By certain measures, however, positional ratings among institutional groupings are appreciably distinguishable. Extending from the structured analysis protocols, a priority for this series of research studies is the identification of recurring themes that illuminate the impact of differing social-academic environments and cultures on pre-ministry undergraduates' epistemological perspectives and values. Unlike the findings based on the structured analysis, differentiations between the epistemological expressions of participants from varying institutional types are readily apparent

with regard to these prominent themes. The following is a summary of notable themes derived from the initial research study in this series.

THE PRIMACY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The most prominent common theme that voluntarily emerged among participants in this study was the primacy of relationships as the most significant single, formative aspect of the overall college experience. Among multiple instances of coordination, this finding most specifically harmonizes with one of the most prominent and definitive works in higher education literature–Astin's What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited. Astin's extensive, longitudinal study suggests two key realities regarding the influence and impact of relationships during college: the nature of faculty-student relationships strongly affects both the quality of higher education and students' satisfaction and appreciation of their college experience; and, "The student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years." Both of these findings were clearly reflected in this study, though with different emphases according to institutional affiliation.

Following Perry, the researcher began each interview with the general question, "Thinking back through your college experience overall, what would you say most stands out to you? What was most significant to you?" In response to this question, nearly three-fourths of responses were predicated on the primacy of relationships, including eight Bible college students, seven liberal arts university students, and seven secular university students.

While a majority of all participants

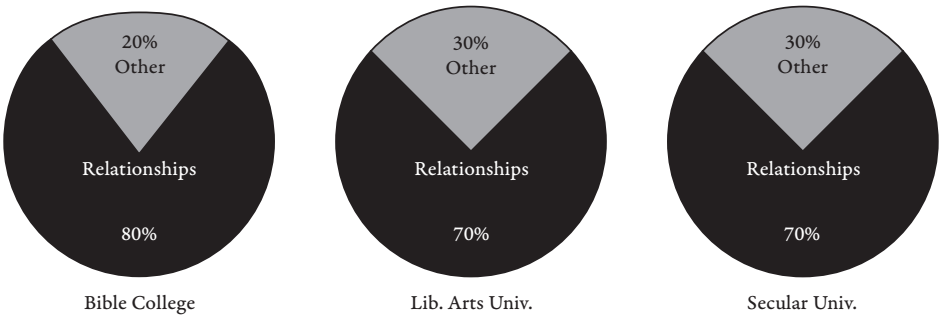

Figure 1 illustrates the striking majorities of students from each institutional context who stated that their college experience was most significantly defined by their relational connections and experiences.

cited the primacy of relationships as the most definitive element of their overall college experiences, differentiations were apparent among sample groupings. Of the seven Bible college students who referred to their relationships as most significant, all but one of them spoke specifically of their relationships with professors. Ashley was a recent Bible college graduate who compared the benefit of the relational connections between students and teachers at Boyce College versus a lack of connection at other schools with which she was familiar or had personal experience.

Figure 1. Initial Responses to "What most stands out to you about your college experience?"

> Just being able to come to a college where the professors are investing daily in their students and wanting to genuinely help them through college. Any other college I had been to, it was just like you come, you go, and the professors don't really care unless you come to them. It was just really nice to have that relationship with the professors at Boyce, and know that they aren't just there to teach, but they want to see you grow in your walk with the Lord and in every aspect of the ministry that you're going into.

Of the seven liberal arts university students who cited relationships as the most significant aspect of college for them, a wide range of variation was evident. Students spoke about several different avenues of relational connection, including relationships with professors, mentors, peers or close friends, church, campus life connections, and dating relationships. Jacob commented on the link between the genuine peer relationships he had through his college's residential community and the solidification of his own calling, as well as identification with the body of Christ. He responded in this way when asked by the researcher about how his residential community experiences impacted his life such that he would not have been the same otherwise:

> A big part of it is just realizing different approaches on the Christian life. If I would've stayed at home I would've been around a lot of the same people I grew up with. Being able to come here to college and being thrown into an atmosphere where not only do people have different backgrounds as far as denominations go, but also the fact that I'm a Bible major and a lot of my friends are engineers and science majors. I've always enjoyed science, but how they view and live out their Christian life, what they hope to do and accomplish in life as an engineer or as a business man–it's just a different view that I might have, considering I'm going into full-time ministry. And I think it's really challenged me to step back and reconsider, "Why am I going into full-time ministry? How can I use business and other contexts that I have to best glorify and best help the Kingdom, working together as a community of believers. Just being able to

> talk about differing subjects and even conflicts that we may have, but realizing that we're still the body of Christ and working through it to really understand each other better and understand the issue better.

Responses from secular university students who emphasized the defining significance of relationships in their college experiences all centered on the nature of belonging and developing within authentic Christian community. Some of these responses emphasized relationships with campus ministry leaders in particular, but each focused more broadly on the significance of maintaining a bond of Christian community within the secular university context. Adam spoke about how his active involvement in the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) at his school facilitated his spiritual awakening, development, and discipleship mentality, coming from a non-Christian background.

> The people there (BCM Bible study group) realized where I was coming from, and I told them about my spiritual background, so they held me accountable. They kept me in check in making sure that I was doing fine. They constantly asked me if I was doing okay—wanting to help me out with anything I was having trouble with. And I opened up to them, which is something that I never did with anybody, even in my own family. . . . Since then, I've become a lot more of an outgoing person. I used to be really shy. . . . As I went along in my college career, I started to turn my attention more towards the people around me and how they were developing.

Mentors

Another prominent theme that was intentionally addressed in almost every research interview was the influence and importance of mentors. The researcher asked interviewees whether or not they had a mentor relationship during college, and all but four respondents confirmed that they did. Most commonly in each sample grouping, students' mentors were pastors or ministry leaders. Five Bible college students and five liberal arts university students reported that their mentors were pastors or ministry leaders in their local churches. In contrast, mentors for each the six secular university students who reported having pastoral-type mentors were campus ministry leaders.

Alex was a liberal arts university student whose primary mentoring relationship was with his pastor, but he also reported having mentor-type relationships with some of his peers and teachers. He said this when asked about the sum impact of his mentoring relationships:

> There is just absolutely no way to quantify the impact. There's things that I

think and do that I might not ever know why I did them, but it very well could be because of what I've been taught by those guys, and how I've seen them live their lives. So I think it's just kind of impossible to quantify the sum impact, but I will say that those guys and the relationships that I've been in have forever changed my life. Ask me in 45-50 years if I'm still kicking, and I'll still probably tell you something similar.

Joseph, a Bible college student, also spoke about the overall value and impact of having a mentor during college.

> You can learn so much from a book; you can learn great philosophy from a book; but if you really want to learn practical things, and if you really want to learn real things that can genuinely, directly help you, you really need a mentor to guide you through it. Their wisdom and guidance are invaluable, because they've been through ministry; they've done years of this, so nothing really surprises them. They've gone through it and they've come out the other side. And they know you as well, which is something that a lecture or a book really can't help. They personally know you, your situation, and they know the best way that you could handle something. . . . They can really custom-fit and speak truth into your life.

Jeffrey, a secular university student, emphasized the impact of his mentoring relationship on his holistic development–particularly how the relationship engendered a manner of thinking that is predicated on God's special revelation.

> (Jeffrey) He was my campus minister at the BCM. I can't remember who actually first introduced this idea–the idea of a three-stranded cord of Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas. You have a Paul figure–a guy that invests in you and pours into you, and a Barnabas figure who is right by your side like your best friend, and your Timothy is the person that you pour into and you see a flow or movement of discipleship through that model. And he was really the first Paul figure that I've had in my life–a guy that challenged me. He talked through some tough passages with me, he led me through a lot of things, and he never forced me to think about anything–he let me think more for myself. That was really huge.
> (Interviewer) In what ways did you start thinking more for yourself? What do you mean by that?
> (Jeffrey) Like, trusting in the fact that the same Holy Spirit that is in him and that's in theologians is in me, and I can trust in the Holy Spirit as I should trust in the Holy Spirit to speak to me about Scripture, and let God's Word speak for itself and devote myself to that study.

Some participants reported that their mentors were their college teachers. Among these were four Bible college students and three liberal arts university students. No secular university students reported having mentors who were also their college teachers. One secular university student reported that his primary mentor was one of his peers. Notably,

no participants reported that they had mentoring relationships with one or both of their parents.

Relationship with Teachers

The nature of participants' relationships with their college professors was a theme that provided clear distinctives between students from different institutional contexts. Overall, Bible college and liberal arts university students reported having relationships with one or more of their teachers that were personal, substantive, and dynamic. By contrast, no secular university students reported having a significant personal relationship with their professors. Among Bible college and liberal arts university students, teachers were often referenced as either pastoral influences or personal friends, and sometimes in both respects. Amanda, a Bible college student, said this regarding the pastoral nature of Boyce College professors:

> You learn a lot about living life in the ministry and growing in your relationship with Christ and walking with Christ from the professors at Boyce, because they show it and they talk about it and they lead in that way. I feel like it was very beneficial and influential for my personal walk to be under people who were showing us and teaching us how to walk with Christ. . . . Most of them were very pastoral in nature towards us, and it was really neat to see all the stuff that we were learning working out in the immediate life of a minister, and to know that we weren't just learning something from a book; we were learning stuff that really was being effective in the local church.

Eric expressed his perspective on how having personal friendships with his professors affected his educational experience and personal development.

> At Union there's an underlying, often unspoken, sometimes spoken principle that Christian education is really about more than preparing you to enter into the work force; it's about training you as an individual and directing you to a certain end. And I feel like I got another level of that training because the same people whose job it was to train me in those aspects–when you enter into a friendship-type relationship in addition to the teacher-student one, the same goals are still there, but it is all the more practical and available in the sense that we spend that much more time together, and we talk about whatever comes up in regular activity. I think just the time and the availability make those goals of education happen all the more. There are that many more opportunities to direct the student to those ends.

Purpose of College

Another clear differentiation emerged among participants from varying institutional contexts with regard to their perspectives on the essential purpose of college. The researcher discerned three categories of perspectives that corresponded to participants' attendance at their

respective types of schools.

Students who attended confessional Christian liberal arts universities, by a proportion of 70% of respondents, expressed that the primary purpose of college is thus: to shape one's identity as a person, holistically–to establish a mature, authentic lifestyle and manner of thinking. One Bible college student and no secular university students provided this type of response. Numerous expressions on the part of liberal arts university students articulated this priority. When asked about "how students should change as a result of going through college," Tyler responded in this way: "Their worldviews, their way of thinking, their way of executing their work, their way of studying, their way of handling difficult situations, their way of dealing with people and interacting with people–just all those different aspects of life should've changed for the better. The way they view society, the way they view how they act with their friends." Emphasizing the intellectual-lifestyle objective of college, Jacob said, "College should be a place where you learn how to be a learner." Kevin summed up the "proper" holistic-developmental priority of undergraduate education by referring to his own experience:

> I think one thing college has taught me–particularly a liberal arts college like Union–is learning how to live well, which sounds like a really vague statement. But I've learned the importance of making sure that I'm a well-rounded person, appreciating things like music and art, and engaging myself in different cultural mediums–not just combining myself and my learning into one career or into one specific task, but just growing intellectually in the same way that I'm striving to grow spiritually. So one thing that I would hope that students would learn from college is just to have the proper view of education. Unfortunately, I don't know that all colleges give that.

A secondary theme that emerged among liberal arts university students was that a college education should serve as a means of increasing in knowledge in order to construct a coherent worldview. In recommendation of this prioritization, Thomas said, "A student coming out of high school going into college should end up with a concrete worldview, and should have a consistent philosophy and ideology across the board. What I mean by that is: not pick and choose when to believe certain things; not pick and choose to believe the Bible at times and not at other times."

Bible college students expressed a different priority regarding the purpose of college. According to 70% of participants within this grouping, the primary purpose of college is thus: to gain knowledge that is applicable,

in order to prepare for one's vocation. One secular university student and no liberal arts students expressed this view.

Among the typical expressions that articulated this view was a statement made by Chris, that the purpose of college "is to prepare you for work in the real world of ministry." Also, Joseph stressed that college students should maintain involvement in local church ministry and seek out opportunities to learn from mentors. He articulated the purpose of one's college education in terms of broad, vocation-oriented learning: "Ministry has so many different aspects and so many different elements . . . so you need to learn and take classes and have a working knowledge of every aspect of church and ministry, so you can at least be equipped and it won't be a surprise to you." Anthony, a recent Bible college graduate who also had the experience of attending a liberal arts university, provided a perspective that clearly focused on vocationally applicable learning while also integrating the majority liberal arts view of education:

> I do feel like an ideal college education involves knowledge being imparted–so yes, intellectual growth. Those categories of knowledge need to be created if they're not there, they need to be broadened if they're already there. They need to be challenged and sharpened. But it has to go beyond that. Life-on-life mentoring with professors and mentors is where that knowledge really–where the rubber meets the road and that knowledge can be applied as wisdom. So I would say: transferring of knowledge, life-on-life application of that knowledge such that wisdom is modeled, and then opportunities to apply that knowledge in wise ways oneself. So definitely hands-on ministry–getting messy in the local church. I feel like that is so important for college students to realize. As they're learning these categories, they need to hit the harsh realities of everyday life. And they need to be sharpened and softened–or hardened–with the reality of messy ministry in the local church.

A clear and unique perspective regarding the purpose of college also emerged among secular university participants. Among this sample grouping, 70% of respondents expressed that the primary purpose of college is thus: to "grow up" or mature in personal (self-identity) and practical (self-responsibility) ways; to increasingly exhibit a sense of personal responsibility regarding education and life. While this view represented more than half of secular university participants, no Bible college or liberal arts university students made any expression related to this priority.

Students from five of the six represented secular universities provided statements that reflected the sample grouping majority. Adam, a participant who became a Christian and committed to vocational ministry

during his time at Kentucky State University, said that "a complete, full satisfying college education is one where you find yourself. College is where you split off from everything that you're used to. . . . You can become you in college." Similarly, Lauren said, "My college experience has allowed me to get to know myself. I thought I knew myself before coming to college, but I didn't. I didn't know a lot about myself, and everyday I find out something new, and I'm just blown away!" In his articulation regarding the primary purpose of college education, Cody summarized the connections between personal responsibility, hard work, devotion to the task of learning in general, and appreciation for the educational process. He said,

> A student should gain an appreciation for education. I feel like often middle school or high school students think really dutifully of homework and studying and reading. Because in high school you have homework every night, practically, and you have classes every day for seven hours a day. And in college, usually you get a syllabus that has when your four papers are due and when your four tests are. And you can look at it in a dutiful way, or you can treat it as a job and understand that this is beneficial to you, and you need to read and you need to study and you need to do well. So just having an appreciation for education–I would say that's as important as whatever degree you get. . . . You need to learn to apply yourself, and you need to care and be intentional about whatever you're learning.

Impact of College

The researcher was able to discern multiple common sub-themes among participants across and within differing institutional contexts with regard to the overall personal impact of the college experience. While multiple issues and findings explicated in this research coordinated with the results of Pacarella and Terenzini's comprehensive examination of the effect of the college experience on students, similarities and echoes were most notable in light of these sub-themes. In the most recent volume of How College Affects Students, the authors report that throughout college, "Students not only made statistically significant gains in factual knowledge and in a range of general cognitive and intellectual skills but also changed significantly on a broad spectrum of value, attitudinal, psychosocial, and moral dimensions." Broadly speaking, the self-reports of the pre-ministry students included in this research indicated that the college experience facilitated a period of personal growth and change that was fundamental, holistic, and permanent. It should be noted that in many respects, the nature of the impact of college on students has been documented to be generally consistent over the past half-century.

Pascarella and Terenzini summarize the highlights of this abiding impact for all college students–including (albeit with some inversely-oriented orientations of growth) the participants in this study:

> Students learn to think in more abstract, critical, complex, and reflective ways; there is a general liberalization of values and attitudes combined with an increase in cultural and artistic interests and activities; progress is made toward the development of personal identities and more positive self-concepts; and there is an expansion and extension of interpersonal horizons, intellectual interests, individual autonomy, and general psychological maturity and well-being.

In this research, the most general and common sub-theme–articulated by nearly half of all participants–was the recognition that from the beginning of college to the end, he or she became "a completely different person." This expression was provided by fourteen participants, including seven Bible college students, four liberal arts university students, and three secular university students. Among them was Joseph, a Bible college student who made a clear statement about the fundamental change that he underwent regarding vocational direction, personal maturity, and practical responsibility.

> Oh me, I'm a completely different person! As a freshman, I was really unfocused. Ministry was far-off. I was very immature. I knew I wanted to do ministry, but it was far-off, and I just wanted to enjoy college. . . . When I was 18, it was a great blessing that I was able to go to school for free. I could go full-time, I didn't have to work, so I could just focus on school. I didn't really have to worry about financing. . . . Now I'm working in a bi-vocational position at a church. The church covers about 60% of what I need, and I work another part-time job about 30 hours a week. I'm a lot more focused, I would say. That would be the key difference: I'm a lot more focused; I'm a lot more mature. In regards to, "This is exactly what I want to do"–I wouldn't do anything else. This is my passion. This is my desire. I'm a lot more responsible, a lot more mature, and a lot more focused.

Mark, a secular university student who committed to vocational ministry during college, framed his metamorphosis in terms of a shifting view of himself with regard to his sense of overarching purpose and personal motivation.

> I feel like I'm a completely different person, almost entirely. My mindset was completely different as a freshman. It was just like, "How can I look the coolest? How can I have the most friends and be in the in-crowd? What can I do to advance myself socially?" And now at the end of college, my heart and my mind are more focused on God and what he wants for my life and how I can serve him. So I think it's really a huge difference from "how can I serve myself?" to "how can I serve God?"

The most common sub-theme that was directly relatable to participants' epistemological attitudes and development was evident in multiple students' expressions that the college experience served to confront him or her with what (or how much) he or she did not know. This expression was identified in more than one-third of all research interviews, including five liberal arts university students, four Bible college students, and two secular university students. While a correlation between this expression and epistemological maturity could not be suggested based on the data acquired in this study, it was observed that most students who provided statements that reflected this perspective received positional ratings in the higher ranges of the sample population. Furthermore, these expressions often provided prime examples of Perry's concept of "metathought," or the ability to think about thinking. When asked to elaborate on what he meant by saying that learning was a process of finding out how much he did not know, Robert, a recent Bible college graduate, spoke from his own experience and articulated an implication that addressed the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

> From high school to college you realize, "I was really dumb in high school." That's your first thought. Then you think, "well, maybe I'm dumb now and I just don't realize it." Then sure enough as time goes on you begin to realize that you really do have a lot to learn. So I don't think I have any of this completely figured out at all. So when I say that "the more I learn, the more I realize I don't know," I just mean that I think it's going to be a long walk and a long process for me to get to where I need to go, and it won't end until perfection in the New Creation. I just think that I should be learning to be faithful where I'm at, and trusting that I don't have all the answers. That's been a big lesson for me to learn throughout my college career.

Richard, a recent secular university graduate who also attended a liberal arts university for two years, provided the clearest articulation of this view. He explained how the recognition of his own lack of complete understanding yielded a spirit of humility that enabled him to apply a new perspective and attitude to his interactions with other believers as well as non-believers.

> From my freshman year to my senior year, I really learned how I knew a lot less. When I was a freshman, I was more arrogant–I thought I knew everything, so I didn't need all this. But as a senior I realized how much I didn't know. And so I guess I really learned a lot more humility . . . . Through my years of college, God really showed me how much I didn't know, how much I needed to

> change my own life, and my own personal character flaws that I needed to address. So as a freshman, I was quick to argue, slow to listen, quick to answer, and always all about myself and what I thought was correct. So I was always quick to jump on people if I thought they were wrong on something, because of how much I thought I knew on everything. And now as a senior I really realize how much I didn't know and how much I don't know, and I have just learned to be a lot more humble in my interactions with people, and also in just being more gracious in discussions with people with whom I disagree.

A third clear sub-theme that emerged among liberal arts and secular university students regarding was that a decisive impact of the college experience involved the process of gaining more independence and responsibility in practical matters or personal discipline–i.e., gaining a more mature perspective with regard to entering adulthood and the professional world. Half of respondents within the liberal arts and secular university sample groupings provided expressions that reflected this perspective. Notably, no Bible college students put forth this type of articulation. A typical statement representative of this sub-theme was made by Jacob, a first-semester senior at Cedarville University.

> I would say the biggest point of responsibility I've seen myself grow in is just managing time and relationships. . . . I've realized that the things that I'm going to devote my time to need to be things that matter in retrospect to God's Kingdom and the work that he would have us do as Christians. . . . I think that's probably the biggest thing–being able to step back and look and see which things in life I should keep pursuing, and which things that, although not necessarily wrong, are just taking up time that could be better used elsewhere.

The fourth sub-theme relating to the overall impact of the college experience emerged among an equal number of students from each of the three institutional context groups in this study was the expression of development from a more legalistic or personalistic perspective to a more authentic, personally-committed, and selfless perspective regarding one's faith, worldview and lifestyle. Three students from each sample grouping provided statements that reflected this transition. One of the clearest articulations that represented this sub-theme came from Mark, a pre-ministry student who experienced a faith-transformation while attending the University of Louisville:

> I had a general understanding of the gospel, of who Jesus was–that he died for my sins, that he rose again–but I don't think that there was a relationship there. Because it's not just "I recognize that Jesus exists," it's having that relationship with God. I think that I lacked

> that relationship. I believed that Jesus was the son of God and all those things, but there was no fruit in my life. There was no proof of a changed heart. Being a Christian for me was just like being a good person; like, "If I don't do this, don't do that–Jesus tells me not to do those things, so if I don't do those things I'm a Christian; I don't drink or smoke like all my friends in high school, so I must be okay." That was the mentality I had about Christianity. It was very legalistic. Coming into college changed this idea of legalism to the idea of freedom in Christ, and grace, and a relationship with Christ.

One final sub-theme that also emerged among an equal number of participants from each sample grouping was expressed as a transition from a faith and worldview that was accepted or received from one's parents, church, peers, etc., to a faith and worldview that was personally-invested–i.e., maintaining one's convictions in a responsible manner.

Three participants from each category provided statements that represented this perspective. Among them was Sarah, a liberal arts university student, who related her own self-confrontational experience:

> I had to make a decision: if being a Christian was just something I'd grown up with and something my parents had taught me, or if it was something that I truly and completely believed in. I had to make that decision for myself without anybody there to hold my hand and take me to church, to Bible study, to the BCM where I was going to grow. I had to make the decision to do those things.

Perspective regarding Seminary

One theme that was intentionally engaged by the researcher in almost every interview was participants' perspectives regarding seminary. All responses were assignable to one of two positions, with the exception of one response by a liberal arts university students who articulated a hybrid-view, incorporating both positions.

A clear majority of all participants were classified as having an "idealistic" perspective regarding seminary–the view that seminary is primarily necessary or beneficial for the knowledge and skills that are to be gained there, in preparation for vocational ministry. Every secular university student maintained this perspective, as well as eight of the ten liberal arts university students, and six of the ten Bible college students. Cody, a secular university student, expressed his personal view that seminary would serve as a necessary completion of his ministry preparation on a formal level, after being trained on an experiential level in college. He said,

> It's necessary for me to go to seminary for knowledge. There's too many pastors who don't know why they do what they do. And even me, I'm still figuring it out.

> As a pastor–as someone who is going to teach the Word of God and who is going to serve in the church the way that God has designed Christians to interact here on earth–you need to know the history of the church and you need to know the Scriptures and how the church should be set up–the polity. You need to be able to counsel people. You need to be wise in the decisions that you make and how you lead the church. I feel like I got plenty of ministry experience serving at Campus Crusade and serving at my church through college, but those are things you have to investigate on your own and what you have to be taught and read.

Alex articulated his idealistic view by expressing his hope that his seminary education would share priorities that are in concert with his idea of a liberal arts education–focusing on "expanding horizons" and interacting with ideas in an effort to arrive at a more informed, reflective set of convictions.

> I hope to be challenged. In the same way as Union–I want my horizons expanded. I want to not necessarily arrive at different conclusions, but be exposed to a whole lot of different perspectives along the way to those conclusions. So maybe I go into Southern (seminary) thinking this way about the atonement. I may leave Southern thinking the exact same way about the atonement, but on the other side of Southern, I hope to have been exposed to a lot of different perspectives.

In contrast to the idealistic view, a second categorization of participants' perspectives regarding seminary was the "practical-utilitarian" view–that seminary is primarily necessary because it is a prerequisite for obtaining employment in a career-type ministry position. Among respondents who expressed the practical-utilitarian view, four were Bible college students and one was a liberal arts university student. Most notably, Aaron expressed his disappointment and frustration because of the virtual "requirement" of a seminary degree in order to be considered as a qualified candidate for employment at most local churches.

> I don't think it's necessary (to go to seminary), but it is necessary. It's necessary because churches have such a skewed idea, that you look at almost any requirement, and they require a piece of paper before they think you're qualified to be a pastor. . . . I'll be honest with you, . . . I don't think that seminary, in any way, shape, or form, is going to be very beneficial for me. I would see more of a hindrance than a benefit, in the sense that it's going to steal more time away from the church I'm already serving at. It's going to be rehashing all the exact same things we studied at Boyce. . . . I'm very much aware that not many people will hire me without a degree. So I think our society has made seminary necessary. I think biblically and in reality, it's not, but you're going to be hard-pressed to find a job in ministry without a degree, because it's what everyone wants.

"The Bubble"

One final recurring theme that emerged among a significant number of Bible college and liberal arts university participants was identified as the perspective at the root of a common terminological reference–"the bubble." Nearly half of all Bible college and liberal arts university students included in this study voluntarily used this term in the course of the research interview when discussing the nature of their institutional context. Ashley, a Bible college student who transferred to Boyce college after attending a secular university, referenced the term while acknowledging the danger of losing a real-world perspective within the confines of a strictly evangelical environment. She said,

> They warned us when we came into Boyce about the "Boyce bubble." They said, "You're going to form this bubble and not want to get out into the real world and be around real people." And I've seen that. If I go home for a weekend and I'm around unbelievers it's hard to adjust to that, because you're daily surrounded by believers (at school). So when you're among unbelievers it's hard to adjust. It's almost like culture shock. It's always hard for me, because when I was in a secular college it wasn't that it didn't bother me, but it was nothing to hear girls on my basketball team cuss and swear. And now when I hear those things, it throws me off. In that aspect, I think it's a drawback–if you get so surrounded by believers everyday and it gives you a culture shock when you go into the real world. I think there should be a balance there. Yes, it's okay to be around believers but don't isolate yourself either.

As a liberal arts university senior, Kevin reflected on both the benefits and the costs of his educational environment. He provided this response when asked if he would choose to attend the same type of school again, rather than choosing to experience an institutional context that included a greater diversity of worldviews and confrontational cultural norms.

> Absolutely I would. There's no question about that. For better or worse, Union is the way that it is, and you do miss out on some of those interactions. But at the same time, I'm just extremely grateful for the way that Union approaches learning in general and how it views the intellectual life as something that comes under the authority of Christ. The philosophy that Union has is that learning is something that is ultimately supposed to prepare us to meet God face to face. So that's something that's not going to be the focus at secular universities, where you have more learning to equip you for some type of career or task. I don't think that focus is what it should be. Not to mention, the opposition from professors that you would face, who are skeptical of Christianity, the opposition from other students in the student body, and just the general degenerative environment that unfortunately pervades a lot of

> secular campuses, where you have a lot of temptations and a lot of immorality going on.

CONSIDERING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

A second extension of the structured analysis component of this series of studies is the intentional consideration of the impact of differing social-environmental conditions relating to personal discipleship and formation, life and ministry preparation, and epistemological maturity. To this end, the initial research study in the series analyzed participants' experiences and perspectives with regard to three particular conditions: challenges to personal beliefs and values, interaction with ideological diversity, and exposure to multiple disciplines. A number of distinctive contextual realities and perspectives stemming from students' immersion in their respective institutional contexts were uncovered. For pre-ministry undergraduates, these distinctions are likely to influence the trajectory of personal development, the course of epistemological maturity, and the application of gained knowledge and skills in the practice of ministry.

Challenges to Personal Beliefs and Values

The first social-environmental condition explored by the researcher with regard to participants' experiences within their respective institutional contexts was the nature and impact of personal confrontations with worldviews that served to challenge one's own beliefs and values. The division between categorical perspectives with regard to students' experiences was understandably stark. One-hundred percent of secular university students experienced interactions within their educational environments that directly challenged and conflicted with their core, fundamental beliefs. By contrast, no Bible college or liberal arts university students reported such interactions. Sixty percent of participants from both of these sample groupings did report experiencing interactions within their educational environments that posed challenges to their non-fundamental beliefs.

Core, fundamental beliefs. While all secular university students expressed that they had the experience of confronting direct challenges to their core beliefs and values as a result of immersion in their respective institutional contexts, it is important to note that no students reported that they doubted their core convictions as a result. Many did, however, state that engaging with conflicting worldviews served as a means of helping them mature in their own formation and application of the biblical worldview.

Adam addressed his appreciation for these confrontational experiences in this way:

> I definitely value them now, although at the time it was hard to value them. Looking back and thinking about it, it's like, "If not for those things that challenged me, I wouldn't be as confident in what I believe." So because of these controversial things that came up, I was able to realize and fully develop my own opinion on the matters so that I can be more confident in them. I definitely value them, although they challenged me at the time.

More specifically, numerous students described the connection between their interactions with non-Christian worldviews and cultural norms during college, and the emergence of a missional perspective according to which they began to view their ministry calling. Richard, a recent graduate from Western Kentucky University, articulated such an attitude as he spoke about how challenges to his core beliefs and values led to a more self-invested and responsible personal faith and missional attitude toward doubters and skeptics.

> Being exposed to a lot of anti-Christian philosophical arguments, it makes you have to think. It really challenged me in a lot of what I believed. So there was never a point of outright disbelief, like "I'm not entirely sure what I think," or "I'm not entirely sure what I believe." But I had to really rely on God and sort things out: What do I believe myself?– not "How was I raised to think?" or "What did everyone else tell me about how I was supposed to believe?" but "What exactly do I see in Scripture and who is the God that I see that exists, and how does he reveal himself?" So it was really that first year at Western, three years ago, when I went through a time of skepticism. And through that time, God really showed me a lot about how I needed to handle people, and he also showed me a lot about what to say to other people that were dealing with a lot of the same things that I dealt with. It was like God led me through that valley to show and teach me a lot, so that now when I deal with people who are at that place like I was, I know what to say, I know much more how to handle what they're going through.

Non-fundamental beliefs. Among Bible college and liberal arts university students, 60% of respondents reported experiencing challenges to non-fundamental beliefs, but not core beliefs. Among these was William, a recent liberal arts university graduate. He provided a very thoughtful and reflective articulation regarding the experience and benefit of interacting with varying theological and philosophical perspectives while maintaining an openness to having his own perspective revised–within the bounds of orthodoxy.

> There are a lot of incorporations of philosophy that the church throws out very often, even some postmodern ideas,

> or post-structuralistic or whatever you want to call it. And for me, the requirement to engage with those ideas was really good because it made me think about how I have been taught or asked to swallow the pill of just holistically rejecting those ideas. And I think the reality is that there's a lot of good knowledge there, and some ideas that line up with biblical thinking. And I think that that is what some of us might call "common grace." We should not holistically embrace those ideas but dissect them, or, to borrow a term from the times–"deconstruct" them–and realize that conservative ideas hold a lot of good truth, but neither are they holistically true. That led me to think about some maybe academically leftist ideas and pick apart where they might line up with some biblical truths, but also identify where they're dangerous and where they don't

Interaction with Ideological Diversity

The second social-environmental condition intentionally explored by the researcher was the nature and impact of participants' interaction with interfaith dialogue across varying institutional types. More broadly, this condition addressed the extent to which pre-ministry students' were exposed to ideological diversity and the level at which they interacted with competing ideologies, according to their respective college environments. Findings regarding this condition were essentially identical to the previous condition.

Oppositional worldviews. Without exception, every secular university student reported that his or her primary interaction with ideological diversity involved engaging people within the college environment who held oppositional worldviews. Among Bible college and liberal arts university students, one student from each context reported that his primary experience with diverse ideologies during college involved engaging people with non-Christian ideologies. In both of these cases, however, the student's medium of interaction was completely removed from any campus-based context.

Similar to the findings related to the first condition, a common refrain of secular university students with regard to their encounters with diverse ideologies was that those experiences enabled them to establish and apply a missional perspective. One such expression was provided by Cody, who spoke about how his interactions with diverse worldviews served to frame his perspective about his ministerial calling. Regarding the impact of those interactions, he said,

> I would say that the biggest impact it has is that I would have classes with twenty or thirty people, and there might be one other person I know who's a Christian, but there are eighteen others who aren't. And you get to have group discus-

> sions–especially in the Religious Studies program, where every class is discussion based. You get to have lots of discussions and peer-editing papers, and lots of just going and grabbing lunch with people after class and hanging out and inviting guys to come over and watch a movie–all kinds of different stuff. It just gives you a heart for a broken world. It is living in an environment where you have to be missional minded, because 90% of the people around you don't believe in the gospel.

Later in the same interview, speaking of how his default perspective toward non-Christians fundamentally changed, Cody said,

> Before college I had this view of non-Christians–like they had this disease, and I would have to act differently around them and talk differently around them. And it was the same early in college, like I had to have my guard up to lots of friends that I made that were not believers . . . Kind of this leprosy thing. It took a while to be exposed to it enough to realize I have the same leprosy that they do–the same sickness–to not be scared of the fact that they are an unrepentant sinner, but to really embrace the fact that I also was that. There's kind of a level ground there, that I had to almost walk up to, or I guess walk down to–where I thought too highly of myself and I thought that these people were weird and I didn't want to be friends with them; I didn't want to let them into my life; I didn't want to know them. And so being at a secular university really exposes that.

Differing doctrine or ecclesiology. A majority of Bible college and liberal arts university students reported that their primary interaction with ideological diversity in college involved engaging other evangelical Christians with differing doctrinal or ecclesiological positions. Eighty percent of liberal arts students responded in this way, as well as 60% of Bible college students. A typical response among participants from these two sample groupings to the researcher's question, "Did you encounter ideas during college that challenged your own beliefs and values?" was Steven's. He said,

> Yeah, I had a roommate for 3 years that grew up in the Assemblies of God church. I was raised Independent Southern Baptist. So obviously meeting my roommate, we had tons of theological discussions about different ideas. So yeah, I did come into contact with a lot of different beliefs. I even found, after spending some time at some different churches and spending time around the pastors on staff there, a lot people who believe the same thing but emphasize different things. So I always thought that was interesting too. I did get a lot of different beliefs, but nothing that I would've ever broken fellowship over. I would say there was definitely more people that I met that believed similarly to me but placed emphasis on different things.

Exposure to Multiple Disciplines

The final condition explored by the

researcher addressed exposure to multiple disciplines. This condition was not applicable to Bible college students, since their curricula did not include multi-disciplinary requirements. The researcher specifically asked participants from liberal arts and secular universities about the value and perceived benefit of exposure to multiple disciplines. This was in an effort to potentially discern an identifiable relationship between exposure to interdisciplinary studies and pre-ministry students' epistemological maturity. Analysis, however, did not reveal any relationship between encountering or valuing interdisciplinary studies and participants' epistemological positioning. Overall, half of participants from each sample grouping expressed that they felt their experience with multiple disciplines was significant and helpful.

CONCLUSION: RESEARCH APPLICATIONS

The findings and observations discussed in this article are drawn from the first in a series of ongoing research studies that are exploring the variance of epistemological development and maturity among pre-ministry undergraduates according to institutional affiliation. The completion of current and future follow-up studies will serve not only to fill a void in the area of undergraduate development, but more strategically will serve the church by highlighting the idiosyncrasies, benefits, and drawbacks of differing collegiate environments.

This research directly applies to current or forthcoming evangelical college students who have made (or will make) commitments to pursue vocational ministry. This line of research offers a unique aggregate of perspectives, delivered by the first-person viewpoints of pre-ministry undergraduates from multiple schools across differing contexts, regarding the nature of distinctive collegiate environments as it is related to the experiences of evangelical students in general, and pre-ministry students in particular. Students may utilize this research as a tool for introspection, evaluation of their own current college experiences, and diagnosis of their own trends of discipleship and maturation. Considering the implications presented above regarding the environmental distinctions between contexts, current or forthcoming pre-ministry students may gain an awareness of ways in which they should seek to capitalize on the opportunities provided within their own contexts, as well as ways in which they may seek to expand their personal growth and preparedness for ministry by engaging outside contexts. For example, pre-ministry students in secular college environments may intentionally seek

opportunities and methods by which to enrich their knowledge, understanding, and application of biblical presuppositions and key theological concepts and issues—while also taking advantage of the extraordinary opportunities for authentic relational interaction and missional engagement with non-Christians.

In the same way that this research applies to current or forthcoming pre-ministry undergraduates, it also applies to those who advise them and mentor them. Thus, parents, mentors, local church pastors and ministry leaders, campus-based ministry directors, and any others entrusted with influence in the lives of future vocational ministers may utilize this research to inform the wisdom of their counsel.

This research also applies to college teachers, administrators, and student service professionals at higher educational institutions that train future ministers. Teachers may utilize this research to evaluate their effectiveness in facilitating students' intellectual development and overall maturity, as well as their relational connections with students. Such was clearly demonstrated in this study to be key element of pre-ministry undergraduates' college experiences. Student service professionals and administrators at evangelical colleges may utilize this research to review their diagnostic methods of evaluating students' Christian formation, as well as to inform their priorities and practices with regard to encouraging students' personal maturation. Also for higher education personnel, this research may be utilized as an evaluative tool with regard to the formational efficacy of the institution's curriculum design and implementation.

Finally, this research applies to seminary faculty and administrators at institutions that receive graduates from varying collegiate environmental backgrounds. This study provides significant insights regarding the variation of epistemic positions and attitudinal perspectives on the part of current and incoming seminarians according to their respective, divergent collegiate experiences—academically, socially, and culturally. Particularly, these insights may be used to inform seminaries' methods and processes of assimilating and advising prospective and incoming students, as well as new and current students.

ENDNOTES

[1] John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

[2] The full interview protocol is included in the Appendix 5 of Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates."

[3] William G. Perry, Jr., *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). The Perry Scheme proposes that undergraduates and young adults prog-

ress in epistemological maturity by progressing through a series of positions which represent movement away from dualistic forms of thinking in favor of forms that are contextual and relativistic, propelled by decentering encounters with diversity through the college experience. A guiding premise for this line or research is that there is an evident consistency between the pattern of development suggested by Perry and the biblical pattern for transformative maturation unto wisdom through progressive sanctification.

[4] The Principle of Inverse Consistency maintains that a preliminary commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture must be the guiding evaluative premise on which all secular developmental models are assessed. The orderly world is so created by God that secular social science research may accurately observe and identify human developmental patterns and behaviors. The noetic effects of sin are so pervasive, however, that the ability of secular researchers to rightly interpret those patterns is radically limited. Namely due to its anthropocentric disposition, secular social scientific analysis cannot adequately prescribe norms of growth and maturation. Rather than conformity to Christ, positive development is conceived in terms of self-identity or self-actualization. While secular and biblical models may include consistent patterns of maturation, they are oriented toward respectively opposite goals: self and Christ. Inverse consistencies thus exist between the biblical notion of positive maturation and secular developmental notions, which in the the Perry Scheme entails an existentialist form of self-referential identity and commitment.

[5] See Trentham, 128.

[6] The most recent and exhaustive analysis of the influence of the college experience is Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

[7] This is described by Lewin's interactionist equation, B = f (P X E), which is the foundational principle for understanding college student development theory. See Nancy Evans et al., Student Development in College: Theory Research and Practice, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 29.

[8] Epistemological position ratings of interviewees were determined according to evaluation and scoring analysis performed by William S. Moore, director of the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID). The researcher's original content analysis framework, rooted in biblical presuppositions and focusing on epistemological priorities and competencies, confirmed the ratings of the CSID for each institutional grouping.

[9] For instance, in the initial study, among participants who were five years or less removed from high school, liberal arts university students reflected a distinguishably higher collective position of epistemological maturity.

[10] Alexander W. Astin, *What Matters in College?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (1993), 383-98. See also Astin's helpful and succinct summary of the study: Astin, "What Matters in College?" *Liberal Education* 79 (1993), Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 6, 2012).

[11] Personal names of all interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity.

[12] Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 572.

[13] Ibid., 577.

The Function of Short Term Mission Experiences in Christian Formation

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Expectations are always high when it comes to short-term mission experiences. After all, the sometimes multi-year process of identifying where to go, who will go, and how they will get there usually comes to an exhausting, but successful conclusion, complete with video clips and jet-lagged participants. The reentry from the trip commonly brings with it the requisite refrains "I'll never be the same," and "It changed my life." These oft heard phrases are standard fare in the midsummer heat of peak short-term mission season, but they are all-too-often distant echoes, at best, by the time the opening kickoff takes place at your local high school in the fall. Because this lackluster outcome can be mixed with other personal stories of men, women, and children who have experienced sustained change, a fair question that we must pursue is: Can short-term missions experience truly play a significant role in the substantive Christian formation of those who participate?

BIBLICAL MISSION: EXPRESSED FOUNDATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Before directly attempting to estimate the value of STM for Christian formation, it may be helpful to, first, frame the discussion in terms of the biblical rendering of mission. Many times, our notions of what the Bible teaches about mission start, and many times end, with a handful of New Testament texts, but Walter Kaiser argues that this is an inadequate approach to capturing the biblical picture:

> The Bible actually begins with the theme of missions in the Book of Genesis and maintains that driving passion throughout the entire Old Testament and on into the New Testament. If an Old Testament 'Great Commission' must be identified, then it will be Genesis 12:3—'all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you [Abraham].' This is the earliest statement of God's purpose and plan to see that the message of his grace and blessing comes to every ethnolinguistic group on planet earth. The message did not begin there. The basis for it, in fact, went all the way back to Genesis 3:15.

In Genesis 3:15 (ESV), God issues a key post-Fall promise to the serpent:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien note that "Christian scholars have understood this as the protoevangelium, the first glimmer of the gospel." T. Desmond Alexander further clarifies that this promise of "good news" in "the seed of woman" is to be seen as "referring to a single individual and not numerous descendants." The move toward the fulfillment of this promise, then, becomes the key narrative element in the remainder of both the Book of Genesis, as the narrative is structured, and the whole of the Old Testament. The manner in which this fulfillment unfolds is clarified and refined in each of the further promises of the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3) and Davidic (2 Sam 7) covenants.

By the time we reach the end of the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, there are 70 established "nations." It is against this backdrop that the promise to Abram is given in Genesis 12:1-3 (ESV):

> Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

This pledge is not alone in its emphasis on Abraham's offspring being a blessing to all nations, through the Man of Promise, "the seed" of Genesis 3:15. A similar message of Gentile inclusion and engagement with the reality of God is captured in both the texts of Exodus 19:5-6 and Psalm 67. Each of these passages offers an explicit injunction to Israel, and her constituent members, to understand and rejoice in God's inclusion of the Gentiles.

The mission emphasis in the Old Testament is largely on God bringing blessing and restoration to the nations, rather than a far-reaching missionary deployment from among Israel's ranks. However, there are notable exceptions to this: the eschatological sending of messengers in Isaiah 66; Jonah's task; Elijah's ministry to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:8-24); and Elisha's trip to Damascus (2 Kgs 8:7-15). These are unique examples, but they do demonstrate an incipient practice of God sending messengers to the nations, as part of His activity among them. This "sending of messengers" image is more fully developed, and normatively expressed, in the outline of mission in the New Testament.

BIBLICAL MISSION: EXPLICIT STRUCTURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the mode of mission is primarily "by attraction, not by active invitation." Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert note that, "Missions, in the sense of God's people being actively sent out to other peoples with a task to accomplish, is as new as the New Testament." In the New Testament, this God-centered mission is extended and clarified, as the Father sends the Son to accomplish the missio Dei ("mission of God"), by means of the Son's determined obedience to the Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29). This obedience was ultimately pointed toward his willingness to die in the place of his people (Phil 2:8), for the sake of his own exaltation and the glory of the Father (Phil 2:11). After completing this "saving mission," Jesus then sends his disciples to carry out their resultant "commission" (John 20:21).

This "Great Commission," which is sometimes confined strictly to the content of Jesus' teaching to the apostles immediately preceding His ascension (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8), may be thought of more broadly. New Testament scholar Robert Plummer applies this concept, and title, to all passages that address "Christians' obligation to share the gospel with non-believers." Plummer says that in

order for the Great Commission to be rightly understood and expressed, it must be realized in broader terms than simply "explicit imperatives."

He offers an understanding of the theme of the Great Commission that includes: (1) the command to make disciples (Matt 28:19); (2) "the role of God's Spirit in empowering and directing the gospel's spread" (Acts 5:32); and (3) Paul's epistles, for example, which focus on "the gospel as God's dynamic word that inevitably accomplishes his purpose" (Col 1:6). The movement of the gospel into and among the nations of the earth is comprised of all three of these active Great Commission elements.

Disciple-Making and the Great Commission

First, in Matthew 28:16-20, we have the command to "make disciples," which is the nucleus of the apostles' mission. Disciple-making, in Matthew's account, is seen as instruction that is thoroughgoing and rooted in "all things" which Jesus has commanded his disciples. However, it also prizes the importance of the apostolate following the model of Jesus in their teaching. Instructing the followers of Jesus means communicating both "a teaching and a lifestyle." Gospel living may be more caught than taught, as the cliché goes, but it may be that these are to be interdependent. Lifestyle teaches the student, and biblical teaching that "lives," is both understood and integrated into the learner's life.

These Christian disciples are those "who live in community, in fellowship with teachers and with other followers of Jesus." The point of emphasis in this commission is that Christ will build his church globally (Matt 16:18), through the establishment of local congregations, via the missionary work of the apostles and subsequent generations of disciples.

Spirit-Directed Advance and the Great Commission

Throughout the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's emphasis is on the Holy Spirit and his work within the believing witnesses to disseminate the truth (e.g., 2:4, 37-41; 4:8, 13; 6:5, 10; 7:54, 57). While each of these instances displays the work of the believer, as he is empowered by the Spirit, Acts 5:32 contains a nuanced understanding of what is actually taking place. Here, Peter declares: "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Unlike the texts which point to the work of the Spirit in

and through the witnesses, the statement here seems to indicate that the Spirit also bears witness to the truth of the gospel in "direct parallel" to the proclamation of the apostolic witnesses. Bill Larkin comments on these emphases in Acts:

> Luke does not neglect the 'salvation accomplished' portion of the gospel: the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. However, the main focus is on 'salvation applied'—the church in mission taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Luke constantly reminds us that this is the mission of the Triune God. Not only does he send and guide his missionaries (apostles, witnesses to the resurrection, evangelists, believers), but he is directly calling people to himself as his word grows and the number of his people increases.

It is this activity by God, both parallel to and in concert with his "sent ones," which is the power from which the disciple-making effort draws its real strength. His Spirit bears witness to His absolute magnificence, even among those who reject this message, as the extension of His gospel truth accomplishes His stated purposes, eventually among every people group.

Gospel Extension and the Great Commission

In his letter to the Colossian believers, Paul observes that this gospel ". . . which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth" (Col 1:6). Here, the gospel is active in "bearing fruit and growing." As Plummer puts it:

> Paul's understanding of the gospel as God's dynamic word that inevitably moves forward and accomplishes the divine purpose provides a theological basis for the church's mission . . . for Paul, when the gospel is genuinely present in a congregation, he is confident that the dynamic nature of that word will guarantee its ongoing triumphant progress.

As this global mission is carried out, through going, teaching and baptizing, the aspects of disciple-making and the successful establishment of the church, by this "word," are accomplished by the Spirit. This is the active process, and method, that is fulfilling the Great Commission, through and in the local church, to the glory of God the Father.

STM: Definition and Relationship to Christian Formation

If the directive to make disciples panta ta ethne ("of all peoples")

necessitates Spirit-directed gospel extension, and this mandate is given to the church, through the apostles, where do we properly place STM in the landscape of this mission advance? While there is much debate on whether or not all STM experiences may properly be called a "missionary" exercise, the historical proliferation of shorter terms of service, particularly in North America from the 1960's on, seems to indicate that the practice is here to stay.

While missionaries prior to, and during, the twentieth century had no pretense of frequent returns home, if they ever returned, partly because there was no ability to travel with any degree of relative ease. Modern travel has changed that forever. Even many career missionaries who go overseas for a "lifetime" come back on home assignment at regular intervals, and they speak to family and friends almost daily, in some cases, using video communication programs that are now readily accessible.

This means that definitions of, and options for, time frames deployed to the field have dramatically changed as well. Current categorizations vary, but generally long-term, or career, missionary service usually applies to any period of 2 years, or more, in length. Any term that is between 3 months and 2 years is generally labeled mid-term, although some organizations and missiologists categorize these as short-term. These designations are basic guidelines, because deployment terms and expectations are established by each agency, or church.

Some organizations and churches utilize these "levels" (long-term, mid-term, short-term) as steps to what they hope will be progressively longer seasons of service. The principle idea is that the tiered approach allows participants to be involved in mission activity and, progressively, progress to the next sequential step. The operative thought is often that this exposure helps them see what life is like firsthand, and it also allows the agency, or church, to see if the missionary demonstrates the ability to be successful during progressively longer periods of deployment.

It is the grouping of the "shortest" mission trips (3 months or less) that will be, predominately, in view here. The "participants" in view will include Christian children, adolescents, and adults, so the observations will apply, in varying degree, to these distinct but interrelated groups. The following working definition of STM, as

offered by anthropologist Brian Howell will be employed: "short travel experiences for Christian purposes such as charity, service, or evangelism." This accommodating definition will allow for the widest geographic variety of STM experiences, so domestic and international trips will be in view, with primary observational emphasis on cross-cultural experiences.

Some would say that a prioritization of attention toward formational benefits to those who go simply demonstrates that STM of this persuasion should be questioned. This mindset appears to present a false dilemma, as Christian disciples are witnesses and heralds of the King, while they are also concurrently hoping in the gospel, in the midst of a cruciform life of service (Col 1:24-29). This is not to propose that service is the primary indicator of formation, as progressive sanctification in Christ is, chiefly, an inward reality that engenders specific outward evidences (Eph 5:19-21; John 15:10-12; Col 3:1-11; Isa 66:2; Rom 7:14-25; Matt 6:1-3; Luke 9:26; Matt 4:4; 1 John 4:11-18; Eph 6:1-2). The sobering truth is that general "serving" does not have any inherent relationship to formation, or even being in union with Christ (Matt 7:21-23).

When we dig at it deeper and consider the full ordo salutis ("order of salvation"), while paying specific attention to the thread of sanctification throughout, the discipleship value of formational intention becomes increasingly more apparent. Timothy Paul Jones and Michael Wilder provide a helpful definition of progressive sanctification, to further guide our thinking on this point:

> Sanctification is the process of being set apart for God's purposes and restored to the image of God by means of the Holy Spirit's gracious work in the believer's life from regeneration through glorification.

The restoration of the imago Dei ("image of God") is made possible by Christ's finished work. This restoration of God's image entails being renewed in "knowledge" (Col 3:10), so that "we become more like God in our thinking." This restoration is a growing into greater maturity and likeness to Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Paul Barnett's comment on Paul's teaching to the Corinthians, as it is connected to God's ultimate aim in his sanctifying work, is informative:

> Paul makes it clear that we must understand our transformation to be the will of God for us and that we should actively cooperate with him in bringing to reality the eternal destiny for which we were

> predestined (Rom 12:1-2, 28-30). Our transformation is nothing else than a transformation into the moral and spiritual likeness of the now glorified Christ. It is transformation into that Christ-likeness which will be ours in the end time, when he will be the 'firstborn among many brothers' (Rom 8:29).

This progressive transformation, then, is holistic in its scope, with its full realization to be experienced in the eschatological kingdom, such that even now it is a renewing of the whole of the believer, as he conformed further to the image of the one who is the exact image of the Father (Heb 1:3).

If this transformative work is holistic, then an operational summary of Christian maturity might be "a regenerate person's act of living a life that more accurately reflects the glory and image of God in his behavior, thinking, passions, and motivations." If we work from this formational vantage point, in the construction of STM approaches, these short-term experiences may have a substantive role to play in supporting Christian formation.

STM: A CONSCIOUSLY FORMATIONAL APPROACH

There are several philosophical and programmatic norms that can encourage the conscious stitching of STM into the discipleship fabric of church and home. It is not enough to treat mission trips as transformative vehicles, in and of themselves, apart from the ongoing Christian formation understanding and exercise of the local church. Therefore, the approach outlined here will offer philosophies, and street-level practices, which cover ground far beyond the discrete arena of STM trips; however, this material is offered in an attempt to firmly situate the whole of the short-term process within the more foundational portrait of local church formation and discipleship.

The Church and STM: Formative Relationships and Teaching

First, to appropriate short-term missions for Christian formation, we must root the STM approach in formative relationships and teaching, within the local church. Familial, intergenerational, and community emphases are integral to the New Covenant community. Examples of these biblical concepts are: (1) the parental, and particularly paternal, responsibility to instruct and train children (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:5-8; Ephesians 6:4); (2) the intergenerational nature of church community discipleship (e.g., Titus 2:1-10); and (3) the biblical portrait of community as a reconciled people (not

unrelated individuals) to God and each other, by the "mercying" work of the gospel (e.g., 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Formative Relationships for STM

Since all of these relationships are innately related to Christian formation, the particular gravity of familial relationships is of first order significance. Since many of those who engage in short-term mission, in a given annual term, are children and adolescents, the central role of parental direction and influence must be considered.

The training of children is the discrete domain and responsibility of parents, and this instruction, by necessity, includes worldview formation (Deut 6:4-9; Exod 31:3, 6; Deut 34:9; Ps 127:3-5; Prov 1:7). It then follows that the economy of the family is vital to the formative process of children ascertaining and embracing mission perspective and proclivity, as part of this complex of philosophical life perspective. Also, the potential for mission experiences with parents to build into children and adolescents a formative "lifelong impression" is strong. The convergence of family-based biblical instruction, gospel-centered living in repentance and faith, and shared STM experiences provide an environment where ongoing conversation can take place regarding truth and practice. In light of this priority of the home, equipping parents to disciple their children, through and in gospel mission, is a crucial responsibility for the pastoral and volunteer leadership that aspire to capitalize on transformational aspects of STM.

The related ability of parents to share these formative training opportunities with pastoral leaders and trusted adult volunteers, actually provides an opportunity to surround a student with supportive relationships. This benefit is also true for STM participants of any age, as supportive as local church-based relationships that exist before, during, and long after the brief field experience will best serve to shape the whole of the person. The biblical undergirding for this multi-relational, community oriented approach is, in part, that formation was intended to take place in the context of community.

The individual family is intended, then, to prioritize relationship to his redeemed people (God's family), as they are adopted brothers and sisters reconciled to God and to one another, through the work of the Son (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:14-22; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9). Mission is a constituent element of what it means to be a doxologically-

motivated local church, so living as a part of this reconciled people is most foundationally driven by this God-centered impulse (Col 3:12-17). Therefore, a local church intent on understanding and actively promoting the role that parents, leaders, and other disciples play in the lives of one another avails itself of discipleship and mission engagement processes that can best achieve these relational goals, as parents and pastoral leaders shepherd children and adults.

The church must not only support these individual believers in short-term mission experiences, but it must also think well about its own cultural values related to mission prayer, direction, strategy, training, sending of personnel, and funding. Entailed in the taking on of a "mission culture," will be a local emphasis on community engagement with the gospel, as well as, optimally, the identification of a specific people group, or region, for ongoing support and partnership.

This approach, again, allows STM to be one piece in a broader formational process to invest in long-term outcomes (e.g., short to long-term deployment progression for missionaries, sustained prayer through the formative years for children, and sacrificial generosity toward the missionary work among the same people group by families). This longitudinal approach allows STM to be consistently cast within the larger picture of Christian formation, locally (in the ministry of the supporting church) and globally (in the ministry of the missionaries and church among the adopted people group or region).

Formative Teaching for STM

The formational process would also include the church's identification of a well-defined mission curriculum, which is more comprehensive than preparatory training materials for specific short-term trips. When identifying and developing curriculum for mission emphasis, it may be helpful to think in terms of three essential categories: (1) biblical and theological instruction; (2) historical and philosophical instruction; and (3) cultural and anthropological instruction.

These three domains are listed in order of primacy, as biblical teaching and preaching, that inform and direct parental, pastoral, and small group-based dialogue and discovery learning exercises are crucial to STM preparation and sustainable bearing on student lives. Scripture is the rule and standard by which we must judge all other experiences and realities. The biblical plumb

line is the only means by which we may faithfully ensure that the epistemological basis of the one being formed is scripturally-moored. This approach allows for a biblically-informed perspective on historical and cultural issues in mission, rather than starting with the issues of culture and historical interpretation.

This curricular scope can be seen in the following example, based on teaching Psalm 67. If, in teaching the Psalm to the participants, the teacher emphasizes the primacy of this prayer's hope in God for the peoples of the earth to worship and glorify God, as the pinnacle outcome for mission and life, you can also canvas textual markers that demonstrate this theme throughout the Canon of Scripture (e.g., Isa 43:6-7; Jer 13:11; John 12:27-28, 17:24; Rom 3:25-26; Eph 1:4-6; Rev 21:23).

Since the "nations" here are "people groups," a teacher might also describe to them what it means for these ethno-linguistic groups to be without the gospel, giving them details about their number and place in the world. This approach enables participants to see where the exclusivity of Jesus and the state of sinful humanity come to bear on their view of global reality. This perspective can be informed by, and properly placed within, the scope of the metanarrative of Scripture as well, so that the participants understand where this material relates to creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

At this point, offering biographical sketches of missionaries to one of these groups can round out the intentional progression from biblical, to philosophical, to cultural instruction, in one teaching session. This type of approach allows the participant to not only understand the session content, but also begin to think in this holistic manner himself.

This inclusion of historical and philosophical study, informed by theological foundations, is supportive to formational approaches to STM. Considering how the church has understood and expressed cross-cultural mission, through the centuries, can both challenge and inform missionary disciples. Expecting disciples to have a "global vision" is no new standard, and emphasizing this through the study of church history, historical theology, and missionary biography can reinforce the biblical reality that Christ is keeping his promise to build his church, across generations (Matt 16:16-18).

This historical and philosophical study can also support a proper understanding of worldview

development, as well as the effort to identify and contrast philosophies that run counter to orthodox Christianity, which can offer STM participants basic logic and philosophy instruction as well as an introductory apologetic background.

Mission education that is wed to STM involvement will also need to assist participants in understanding how and why people live, act, and interact, within their culture the way in which they do, from a biblically-rooted anthropological perspective. This brings the discipline of anthropology back to its genesis, since it was originally conceived as a way to "understand people from a theological perspective," which is key to effective cross-cultural ministry. Understanding, even in elementary terms, the nature of culture and man will, ideally, give STM participants the ability to begin to wisely navigate cross-cultural situations with greater wisdom.

As mentioned above, the formative relationships of parents and pastoral leaders are critical in formational STM experiences. The reason for this is not the role they play in staffing the relatively brief field-based trip, but the God-ordained placement in the totality of the formational approach, by virtue of their parenthood or pastoral leadership. As comprehensive instruction takes place, it can travel in, or be reinforced through, intentional dialog with parents, family, leaders, and other STM participants.

The Church and STM: Formative Processes and Practices

To achieve maximum formational benefit, we must also root the STM approach in formative processes and practices, within the local church. Establishing processes and uniform practices demonstrates a deliberate and focused intention toward growth. This is in keeping with the commands given for Christians to actively advance in sanctification (John 14:23; 15:2, 4, 7; 1 John 1:7; 3:3; Rev 2:25; 3:11). These efforts are inseparable from the positional sanctification that believers maintain, in Christ, because of his imputed righteousness. Christian formation, then, is the Holy Spirit's work to "bond us to the Son in love." Because we are being conformed to the image of Christ, an element of the Spirit's ongoing work is to also train us to be active in wisdom and discernment (Heb 5:14).

Formation and Wisdom

Therefore, one of the salient needs for an STM philosophy is that it

lend itself to encouraging those in Christ, through the teaching of parents and leaders, to actively exhibit and intentionally seek humble wisdom (Prov 8:32-36; 11:2; 16:16: 19:8). Simply stated, wisdom is clearly hearing and acting on God's Word. The pursuit of wisdom is both found in Christ (1 Cor 1:24, 30; 1 Cor 2:7-8), and it is empowered by Jesus, the incarnate wisdom of God (Matt 11:2-4), as Christians are called to: (1) receive wisdom as a divine gift (James 1:5-8; 3:13-18); (2) fear God and trust God's wise provision (Job 12:13; Prov 9:10; Isa 40:28; Rom 11:33); (3) make decisions wisely, in keeping with biblically-prescribed ethics (Col 1:9-10; Rom 3:31; 8:3-4; 1 Cor 7:19; 1 Thess 5:21; Gal 6:2-5; Rom 12:2; 14:22-23); and (4) teach, and be taught, wisdom to "from one generation to the next" (Deut 4:5-6). Across all segments of STM preparation, deployment, and the return home, functional wisdom is to be sought and taught, so that maturational hope would be in view (1 Cor 3:1-4).

Formation and Wisdom through the STM Cycle

The short-term mission trip is, generally, viewed as consisting of three progressive segments: (1) pre-field preparation; (2) on-field engagement; and (3) post-field reflection. This "linear" manner of looking at STM has been critiqued, because in western thinking, this enables us to see that we have "accomplished something." This certainly can be an indicator of culture guiding perception; however, distinguishing each of these aspects of STM approach from one another can also be quite helpful. This effort can enable more cogent thinking about the manner in which these segments of STM relate to one another, as well as to the ongoing teaching and praxis of the church.

If we view the pre-field, on-field, and post-field aspects as cyclical, as opposed to linear, the STM process may be harnessed as an essential means of forming disciples. From this perspective, "the stages of STM preparation, deployment, and reentry into our own culture, are part of what God is doing to shape us and those to whom we minister cross-culturally, rather than a rare and isolated vacation from the norm." This cycle would mean that disciples are always in preparation for their next STM, on the field, or going through the post-trip process, which leads progressively into the next STM experience.

Pre-Field Process and Practice

In considering pre-field formational

practices, the following common elements may be required: (1) application; (2) fundraising; (3) cultural research; (4) mission book review; (5) team service projects; and (6) training meetings. In each of these areas, the emphasis is placed on the development of the participant, particularly as it is related mission awareness and preparation.

An STM application may include: (1) a written account of their conversion and spiritual journey; (2) reasons for interest in the trip; (3) any health concerns; and (4) personal references. These applications give the leader an initial assessment as to the participant's maturity, written expression, reputation with others, and fit for the specific STM team. Garnering prayer and financial support for an STM requires guidance, for many participants. There are basic principles of financial stewardship and sacrificial generosity that can be emphasized, in the process of raising funds, just as Paul did with both churches in financial hardship (Phil 4:10-20), and churches in a stronger financial position (2 Cor 8:1-9:15). This practice is part of the reality of mission deployment, for many of those who are engaged in mid and long-term placement. Their agencies, or independent ministry structures, require them to raise financial support. Understanding a little bit about this process gives STM participants a more realistic view of this dynamic, while it also provides an understanding of the ability to partner through praying and giving.

Mid-term and long-term missionaries must, by necessity, study the culture to which they are going, in order to maintain biblical fidelity in their thinking and carefully contextualized practices (1 Cor 9:19-23). This balanced approach is necessary because Participants can perform abbreviated cultural research, along with reviews of mission texts, or missionary biographies, which can begin to inform their thinking about missiology, before the on-field experience.

Finally, the use of service projects and training meetings is vital to gauging, and developing, participant preparedness for STM deployment. These mandatory, shared experiences set expectations, build camaraderie, and provide the best preparation for the team. These meetings should begin several months before mobilizing short-term. Training meetings include some of the aspects above (e.g., presentation of research, tips on raising support), with the addition of logistical

information (e.g., passports, travel, immunizations, etc.), and team Bible study and prayer.

On-field Process and Practice

Intentionally shaping the on-field portion of the STM for participant formation can be assisted through several practices. First, although it seems counterintuitive to some pervasive mindsets about STM goals, a significant task for many short-term teams should be to spend time with indigenous peoples, specifically those who are in Christ (assuming that the STM is in an area where a church has been established). Because formationally-oriented short-term experiences are largely focused on learning, and "getting your feet wet," it is helpful to think through the degree to which participants can "learn from," or "learn with" nationals.

A second on-field practice is Bible study, which is accompanied by, and informs, prayer. Biblical texts and metanarrative themes, force the thoughts and prayers of participants in a Godward direction. Study topics should scaffold participants to assess the new culture, and any prominent ideas, in light of the biblical material. The hopeful intent would be that the Bible would shape their thoughts, which in turn shapes their prayers, as this a helpful lifelong practice for all believers.

While debriefing is, many times, reserved for the return home from a short-term trip, daily debriefing on-field can provide a real-time barometer of how the team is processing their experience, individually and corporately. The requirement of a daily journal entry can greatly assist in this process, as well as in the post-field debriefing sessions. The need for daily, focused debriefing is highlighted because the effort to utilize STM in the service of Christian formation, while many times serving in cultures hostile to biblical Christianity itself. This reality will require participants to be learners of the culture, while they are in the culture. This deferential attitude, wisely tempered with instruction on the avoidance of cultural practice that might be ethically or morally compromising, must be emphasized in pre-field training and continue to be reinforced on-field.

While the on-field portion of the STM cycle is the shortest, it will likely be the most emotionally and physically intense. Because of this strain, this time can also be distressing, in muted or more pronounced measures, depending on the participant. Well-prepared parents and leaders can best support

STM participants through the post-field process and practice.

Post-Field Process and Practice

Although it is an integral phase in STM, the post-field timeframe is often the most neglected, when it comes to capturing the value of the experience toward formative outcomes. By the time you step off of the plane, the work seems finished, when in fact it has just begun. Several key practices that can maximize the formational impact of these trips are assessment through debriefing, reporting to supporters, and post-trip service projects.

Assessment needs to take place within the relationships participants have with parents, mentors, and leaders. However, the "re-entry" period, needs to include several specific relational venues. First, leaders should schedule "re-entry meetings," which allow participants to meet with parents, if a child or student, and leaders to reflect on their experience and gain guidance and direction. Second, leaders can hold "debriefing meetings." These include both individual and team meetings, in which the team leader, or pastoral leader, leads guided discussions about the experience, with the intent to move participants toward the next appropriate developmental step. Finally, "next step meetings" can integrate the participant's personal observations, team discussion, and leader(s) insight. From this collective information, a next steps plan can be established and executed in concert with all of the influence connections (parents, leaders, team, church). These post-field steps enable the student to continue mission thinking, while pointing them toward the next cross-cultural action or behavior.

Prebriefing (pre-field) and debriefing (on-field and post-field) processes are crucial to the optimization of mission service and outreach as a preferred means of formative development. Quality debriefing can provide a piece of the necessary discipleship scaffolding for participants in STM to develop wisdom. If wisdom, as mentioned already, is a chief indicator of Christian maturation and growth, debriefing provides an environmental practice which allows participants to better move from simple knowledge of their experiences, to understanding why these things are so, and finally to a wise apprehension of how they might act, biblically, in light of these experiences.

Upon their return, participants will also want to communicate with those that supported them. This not only informs those who

have prayed and given, but it can also strengthen the students' understanding of, and commitment to, mission outcomes. The resultant encouragement that they may receive from some supporters can also help to undergird their commitments.

Along with the ongoing debriefing and recounting of experiences, participants need to also be involved in similar cross-cultural service at home. Mission principles and practice have to live and breathe as they do, where they are, and wherever they may go. The distinction here is that, as was the case in preparing them to go, when they return home, service projects act as a continuation of what has taken place. Ideally, this hands-on exercise, then, becomes another step in their pre-field progression to the next short-term deployment.

In an approach to STM that is rooted in Christian formation and Great Commission understanding, the pre-field, on-field, and post-field movements must be understood in light of, and made subordinate to, a broader formational framework. The off-field elements of short-term mission are crucial to a formational approach, as these are the means to establish true understanding and wisdom, in regard to the STM trip itself.

CONCLUSION

Formative, lasting change may happen as a result of isolated short-term mission trips. However, an approach that demands a more robust view of STM, informed by Christian formation through the church and home in philosophy and method, may provide an optimized approach for families and churches alike. If wisdom is granted by God, the STM participant may develop greater gospel understanding of himself, his family, the church, the lost, the world, and how each of these point to the immeasurable worth and glory of God. If that is achieved, then perhaps the doxological criteria that Jonathan Edwards offered to a missionary society gathering more than 200 years ago will, in some sense, have been met: ". . . the glory of God, a regard to his honor and praise in the spread of the gospel, ought to be the governing motive in all missionary exertions and the animating principle in the breast of missionaries."

ENDNOTES

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[4] John Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 221-23. Also see John Sailhamer, "Genesis," in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 55-56.

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[11] Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 140-41.

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[15] Ibid.

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[18] Eckhard Schnabel, *Jesus and the Twelve*, vol. 1 in *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 355.

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[20] William Larkin, "Mission in Acts," in *Mission in the New Testament*, ed. William Larkin and Joel Williams (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 177.

[21] Ibid., 185.

[22] James Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 85.

[23] Plummer, "The Great Commission in the New Testament," 9.

[24] DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?*, 62.

[25] For an historical overview of the development of short-term missions philosophy, terminology, and use in relationship to longer-term service personnel see Brian Howell, *Short-Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 69-101. Within this discussion, Howell notes that simultaneously advances in air travel technology, global air travel infrastructure, and a spike in disposable income, from the late 1960's through the 1980's correlate to the growth in STM.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Enoch Wan and Geoffrey Hart, "Complementary Aspects of Short-Term Missions and Long-Term Missions: Case Studies for a Win-Win Situation," in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, ed. Robert Priest (Pasadena: William Carey, 2008), 65-66.

[28] Empirical data is mixed in establishing a strong correlation between short-term deployment and long-term engagement in longitudinal studies. For example, see Scott Moreau, "Short-term Missions in the Context of Missions, Inc." in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions*, ed. Robert Priest (Pasadena: William Carey, 2008), 1-34.

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[35] Michael Wilder and Shane Parker, *Transformission: Making Disciples through Short-Term Missions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 118-19.

[36] Gary Parrett and Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 412. Parrett and Steve Kang emphasize a comprehensive approach to Christian formation, within the context of the church as New Covenant community. The writers note that "three great tasks" of the church, historically and contemporarily, have been worship, formation, and outreach, which are interrelated and overlapping.

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[44] Tom Telford, *All-Star Missions Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 133-34.

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[48] Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), xvi.

[49] David Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 111. Livermore offers his theory of "Cultural Intelligence," which provides a framework specifically designed to assist STM participants in becoming more adept at navigating cross-cultural experiences with understanding. See also David Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

[50] Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton: Cross-

way, 1997), 411. Demarest outlines these practices as "abiding in Christ (John 15:4, 7), walking in the light of God's presence (1 John1:7), holding fast to their Christian profession (Rev 2:25; 3:11), purifying themselves from sin (1 John 3:3), continuing in Christ's teaching (John 14:23; 15:7), and submitting to providential discipline (John 15:2)."

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[59] Donald Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001), 34-35.

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Perceptions of Spiritual Formation Among Nontraditional Seminary Students

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Higher education, while never a completely stagnant field, is experiencing what has been called a 'flurry' of changes in recent years, driven mainly by technology. The technology of inexpensive computers, high speed internet, and high quality multimedia educational delivery systems have allowed for increased flexibility in higher education so that students can easily take courses and earn degrees from colleges and universities that are in different cities, states, or even countries through means of nontraditional education. As one writer has noted, we are in the midst of a "distance-education boom" that is taking place, with the main reason being "a convergence of AV hardware, networking, and collaboration software technologies that collectively enable teachers to deliver good interactive online education." Along with online education, another form of nontraditional education has grown in popularity, that being hybrid education.

Both online and hybrid forms of nontraditional education owe their existence to modern technological advancements.

Theological seminaries are also experiencing effects from the 'boom' of distance education. Nontraditional education courses have become increasingly available in seminaries throughout the country. Though there are challenges with theological institutions of higher learning using nontraditional education, more schools are starting to see the potential it offers. Yet, this potential is tempered by the reluctance of some institutions The reluctance stems from a variety of issues.

A major issue that causes reluctance among theological schools is the fear of "emphasizing convenience over quality." This fear of being promotionally driven has given rise to much of the criticism among schools that are weighing distance education options. A second issue that is raised among schools considering, or that are engaged in distance education, is that there can be too great a focus or "undue emphasis" on the delivery system or technology and too little focus on the contribution a learned faculty member can bring or on the importance of involving the student adequately through the learning experience. While these first two issues can be true of any higher learning a final issue that comes with distance education particularly deals with theological education. Hines, et. al. notes that theological education requires "mutual nourishment of faith and intellect." Theological seminaries exist for more than academic knowledge, they must involve spiritual formation. Spiritual formation has been and is a critical component of Christian higher education, a philosophy that is seen in the accreditation standards by both the Association of Biblical Higher Education and the Association of Theological Education. A seminary that uses nontraditional education courses is charged with the responsibility of taking this into account. Thus, they have to approach distance education with a dual purpose of academic excellence and spiritual growth, both of which ultimately are to aid the local church. Nontraditional theological education "must incorporate expectations of ministry to enhance the study of theology." While these challenges exist, seminaries are nonetheless utilizing nontraditional education.

The Association of Theological

Schools ruled in 2012 that seminaries may offer accredited Master of Divinity degrees through nontraditional means. According to the Educational and Degree program standards, seminaries may offer courses or whole degrees through extension centers , "exclusively online" , or through "a blend of intensive classroom and online instruction," which is also known as hybrid education. Schools now have the freedom to offer more accredited masters level degree programs to students seeking ministry preparation through nontraditional means.

This research was conducted with the purpose of studying students who choose to attend seminary through a nontraditional means of online, hybrid, and extension centers. Specifically, exploring the relationship between mentoring and the spiritual formation practices of seminary students taking part in nontraditional theological education.

The students researched for this article included 1380 students from three evangelical seminaries. Each student was enrolled in master's level programs and attend class through nontraditional means of online, hybrid, and or extension centers. The participating students were surveyed on their mentor and spiritual formation practices while students at seminary.

MENTORING AND MINISTRY PREPARATION

The concept of mentoring transcends time. While the modern idea of mentoring dates back to Homer's Odyssey , the practice develops through-out the pages of Scripture. From Moses and Joshua, Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, mentoring is a biblical practice and was the "way of life in Bible times."

In our modern world, the literature on the subject of mentoring has been somewhat staggering over recent decades, as an extensive amount of scholarship developed in this historic discipline. The result of this emphasis is that the value of mentoring has been recognized in many fields and industries, and "cuts across all academic disciplines, professions, and contexts." The value is seen through positive impacts in areas of career growth, training, development, and retention.

Mentoring has also, over the past decade, been studied in depth as it relates to theological education. These studies have shown that there is value in a mentor relationship for seminary students, as it aids

in "forming and transforming the character, values, abilities, and thoughts" of seminary students. Additionally, these relationships aid in forming students into ministers , and they have a valuable impact on the development of students while they are in school. Mentoring that occurs while in seminary, research has shown, also can have a positive impact on students once they graduate and begin serving in the ministry field. Pyeatt has found that as a student is more thoroughly mentored, his likelihood of retention in the ministry is increased. Yet, there has been little to no research among the importance of mentoring in relation to the spiritual formation practices among nontraditional seminary students.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MINISTRY PREPARATION

There have been a plethora of evangelical definitions given for spiritual formation. Many theologians and Christian educators have suggested definitions to help understand the concept. Dallas Willard defines spiritual formation as the "Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself." Stranger defined spiritual formation as the "intentional and systematic process of growing into the image of Christ through obedience to the Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit in our total personality." Davis argues that spiritual formation is essentially made up of three parts or elements. Spiritual formation is first, a process. He writes: "attaining complete spiritual maturity is a lifelong process". Secondly, it is God working in a believer as an "act of grace in the believer's life." Thirdly, it is human effort working with the Holy Spirit or "cooperation with the Holy Spirit." To synthesize Davis, spiritual formation is a process to become spiritually mature that involves God working in a believer and man cooperating with God.

This research, in studying evangelical seminaries, sought to use a working definition that is theologically inline with the biblically faithful view-point of the schools that were involved. It also sought to have a definition that takes into consideration the explanation of spiritual formation given in the latest ATS General Institutional Standards. These standards describe spiritual formation as a student's "growth in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness."

Taking both of these concerns, as well as the literature on the subject, into consideration, this article defines spiritual formation using Whitney, as "the biblical process of being conformed inwardly and outwardly to the character of Christ." Whitney's definition aptly describes spiritual formation as being a process that has a goal of Christian's whole being reflecting Christ.

Theological seminaries themselves have a vested interest in the spiritual formation of their students. Spiritual formation has long been seen as a vital aspect of Christian Higher Education. From the beginning of higher education in the United States, a student's spiritual formation has been crucial. Major institutions such as Yale were founded with a goal of having every student to "know God in Jesus Christ and answerably lead a Godly, sober life." Columbia, likewise was formed so that students would "know God in Jesus Christ and to love and serve him in all sobriety, godliness, and righteousness of life with a perfect heart and useful knowledge." In modern Christian Higher Education there is a specific emphasis on "the importance of developing students spiritually as a part of their preparation for life after college."

Spiritual formation is a vital component of accredited theological education. ATS requires that in basic graduate degrees that are geared towards ministerial leadership (M.Div., and M.A.) the program must contain a spiritual formation component. Specifically, the requirement states that "the learning outcomes shall encompass the instructional areas of religious heritage, cultural context, personal and spiritual formation, and capacity for ministerial and public leadership."

Theological Seminaries themselves also see this as a component of their roles in training pastors. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, for instance, lists Spiritual Formation as one of their Core Competencies. Other evangelical seminaries (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, etc.) have a similar emphasis of the importance of spiritual formation among their students. Spiritual formation is seen as a vital component to the mission of seminaries as they train pastors due to the fact that it is "requisite to a life of pastoral leadership."

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

While one cannot fully measure a student's spiritual formation

from the outside, research on this topic has focused on a student's self-perceived formation through participation in spiritual disciplines. These studies have examined the participant's self-perception of spiritual formation along with the subject's participation in certain spiritual disciplines or practices. The focus on specific practices or spiritual disciplines are used in these studies to "measure a person's involvement" in activities that "lead to desirable change" and "spiritual development." Measuring spiritual disciples is an effective means because "spiritual disciplines are a catalyst for spiritual formation." Not only are they a catalyst for spiritual formation, but they "reveal a believers commitment to spiritual growth." It is in light of this research background, this article focuses on student participation in spiritual formation practices or spiritual disciplines.

Whitney describes spiritual disciplines as "those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth." He goes on to describe spiritual disciplines as being a "catalyst," a "channel," and a "means," of spiritual growth and formation. Willard argues that practicing the spiritual disciplines is essential to a person's spiritual formation. He argues that spiritual disciplines are an "absolute necessity" if one is going to have a "full, grace-filled, Christ-like life."

There have been many authors that have given lists of biblical spiritual disciplines. These lists all seek to highlight biblical activities for the purpose of fostering spiritual formation. The disciplines are meant for use in spiritual formation, and are not an end in themselves. As Dallas Willard writes: "the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves. The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, praying, hymn singing, frugal living, and so forth." The spiritual disciplines can aid a Christian in the spiritual formation process. Thus, this article uses Whitney and Willard and offers the definition of spiritual formation practices as biblical activities and disciplines that are used for the purpose of spiritual growth and formation.

For this research, Thayer's list of 10 spiritual disciples was used, along with her Christian Spiritual Practices Profile. Thayer's 10 disciplines are Prayer, Confession, Evangelism, Worship, Bible Study, Fellowship, Stewardship, Service, Examen of Conscious, and Meditation. Thayer then groups these 10 disciplines into four spiritual discipline modes as seen in

the chart below:

Table 1
CSPP MODES and Descriptions

Spiritual Mode	Description	Spiritual Practice
Transcendent Scale	Growing through a relationship with God. This assesses a person's relationship with God. There are 16 questions for this scale, from 3 primary and 3 secondary spiritual practices.	Primary: Prayer Repentance Worship Secondary: Service Stewardship Exanen of Conscience
Vision Scale	Growing through participation with the Word of God. This assesses a persons Involvement with the Bible. There are 12 questions for this scale, from 2 primary and 2 secondary spiritual practices.	Primary: Bible Reading Meditation Secondary: Stewardship Woship
Reflection Scale	Growing through critical reflection. This assesses a person's participation in critical reflection of culture and one;s own life. There are 10 questions for this scale, from 1 primary and 2 secondary spiritual practices.	Primary: Examen of Conscious Secondary: Bible Reading Stewardship
New Life Scale	Growing through relationships with others. This assesses a person's participations in relationships with others. There are 12 questions from this scale from 4 primary spiritul practices.	Primary: Evangelism Fellowship Service Stewardship Secondary: None

These disciplines were used to measure a student's involvement in spiritual formation practices and to determine what relationship, if any, is found between mentoring and involvement in these practices.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In order to effectively investigate the research purpose, this study used a quantitative approach. Quantitative research was chosen for this project for a number of reasons, one of which is that much of the research in the field of mentoring is "qualitative as opposed to quantitative," especially in the "theological realm of mentoring." The trouble of "finding quantitative data for supporting the use of mentoring relationships in developing church leaders" is a significant motivator to use that research design in this project.

Research Participants

The study surveyed students from three evangelical seminaries who were enrolled in master degree programs, and attended course through online, hybrid, and/or extension centers. The three schools that participated in the research were all located in the southeastern United States. All three schools are regionally accredited and two of the schools have ATS accreditation. The total nontraditional student population of the schools was 8875 at the time of the survey.
Each of the three schools sent an email inviting their students to take part in this survey. If a student decided to participate, they went to the survey, which was hosted by Survey Monkey. Out of the 8875 students who were invited to participate, 1510 students logged into the survey site. Of the 1510 who logged in, 1380 students chose to continue past the informed consent page and actually take the survey.

The survey consisted of three parts, a demographic section, the Principles of Adult Mentoring Survey (PAMS), and the Christian Spiritual Practices Profile (CSPP). If a student reported having a mentor, he or she would complete all three parts, if the student did not have mentor, he or she would only complete the demographic section and the CSPP.

Research Instrument

The PAMS was developed by Cohen to be a self-assessment instrument for mentees who were in a higher education environment. The PAMS consisted of 55 Likert-type questions that sought to measure six functions of the mentoring relationship, these include: relationship emphasis,

informative emphasis, facilitative dimension, confrontive emphasis, mentor model, and student vision. These six dimensions are formed by behaviors that Cohen describes as 'required' for a successful mentorship. Each of these six dimensions is scored individually, and a final score assessing the overall effectiveness of the survey is then calculated. Each of the questions is given five choices for the student to select, and each of the choices are given a point value.

The answers that are available in the Likert format are: Not Effective, Less Effective, Effective, Very Effective, and Highly Effective. Each of these choices are then assigned a point value as follows Not Effective = 1 point, Less Effective =2 points, Effective = 3 points, Very Effective = 4 points, and Highly Effective = 5 points. Each of the points are then tallied from the overall survey and an overall score is given to measure the overall effectiveness of the mentor relationship.

The PAMS scale has been tested by researchers for both reliability and consistency. Simmons notes that, "the reliability coefficient for the entire scale revealed an alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of .9490." Likewise, the individual emphasis' reliabilities are as follows: Relationship Emphasis - .77; Information Emphasis - .79; Facilitative Focus - .67; Confrontive focus - .81; Mentor Model - .78; Student Vision - .86.

The CSPP, developed by Thayer (1996), this instrument studies a Christian's participation in the spiritual formation process through involvement in spiritual formation practices. It does not seek to determine a threshold whereas one becomes spiritually mature once they reach a certain score, but is built upon the notion that involvement in disciplines and spiritual formation practices can result in a crucial catalyst for spiritual growth and formation. The CSPP examines if one is involved spiritual formation practices, which can lead to involvement in the spiritual formation process . As Thayer herself notes, the CSPP is used to measure someone's self-reported "intensity" in the spiritual formation process, it "does not purport to assign a level of achievement or maturity." The research that the CSPP is built on shows that involvement in the ten spiritual disciplines the more likely it is that spiritual formation is taking place.

The CSPP takes spiritual disciplines and applies them to a

theory of spiritual development that is based on a person's learning – their grasping and transforming. The ten spiritual disciplines should lead to a person to experience desirable change, especially spiritual formation. Thayer summarizes the CSPP as being "based on a theory of spiritual development that recognizes the redemptive work of God in every mode of spiritual development. The Holy Spirit is present in the process of each mode and can transform the person through the learning that occurs."

Studying a student's participation in spiritual formation practices is an important indicator of a Christian's willingness and desire to grow spiritually. Based on the literature, the study of spiritual formation practices is appropriate and helpful, as these are the God ordained means by which "one engages God and others" , and are "indicators" of one who is on a "journey of faith" into "deeper transformation into Christlikeness."

The CSPP is comprised of fifty Likert-type questions. The first section measures the frequency of involvement in ten spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of conscious, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship. The Likert-type scale that is used is a six point scale that ranges has the following response: N = Never, VR = Very Rarely, R = Rarely, O = Occasionally, F = Frequently, VF = Very Frequently. Thayer then gave each selection a numerical value: N=0, VR=1, R=2, O=3, F=4, VF=5.

Thayer places the ten spiritual disciplines into four spiritual dimensions that were developed using Kolb's experiential learning theory. Thayer defines these spiritual dimensions as spiritual modes or scales. To determine a CSPP score the point values of each answer are added together. From this, each particular discipline can have an overall score and a mean score. The four scales can also have a total and mean score based on the totals of the disciplines within the scale. To determine how much participation a student is engaged in, Thayer places the students into two groups based on their scores: strong intentional participation and weak intentional participation. For a student to have strong intentional participation their mean score for the discipline or the Scale is at 4.0 or higher; a weak intentional participation is a 3.99 or lower mean score. A strong intentional participation shows the student is actively engaged in the spiritual

formation practice, while a weak intentional participation shows the student has weak intentional participation in the spiritual formation practice.

For the purposes of this research, the mean scores of each of the four scales, as well as the total overall score for the entire CSPP, are calculated and analyzed in the Research Questions. Also, the Research Questions in this article recognize this this is perceived involvement in spiritual formation practices, due to students anonymously self-reporting on their own perception of living out these practices and disciplines.

The CSPP has been found to have both high reliability and validity. The high reliability of the CSPP comes from its internal consistency: the coefficient alphas for the four spiritual modes into which the ten disciplines fall range between .84 and .92. The Transcendent Scale has a coefficient alpha of .92, the Vision Scale has a coefficient alpha of .89, the Reflection Scale has a coefficient alpha of .84, and the New Life Scale has a coefficient alpha of .90.

The survey was open for students to participate for a total of eight weeks from the day the students were invited by their respective schools to take the survey. The first survey was taken on May 22, 2013. The survey was closed eight weeks later on July 17, 2013. The data analysis of the survey responses was done using SPSS statistical software.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to guide the research purpose, this article will briefly describe the demographics, then focus on four research questions that the author developed for the study. The four questions are:

1. What portion of students report a mentoring relationship as a part of his or her ministerial training?
2. What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?
3. What, if any, is the relationship between involvement in spiritual formation practices and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?
4. What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and involvement spiritual formation practices?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following analyses the results from the 1380 nontraditional seminary students who took part in this research. The research findings will discuss the demographic data which includes age, years a Christian, and the student populations involvement in nontraditional theological education. After the

demographic information, this section seeks to answer the 4 RQs that were raised by the research problem.

Demographics

There are three pieces of demographic information that came out of the study that were of note. These were the age of the students, the length of time they self-identified as a Christian, and their specific involvement in nontraditional education.

In the age range of the students who attend seminary through nontraditional means and participated in this survey, the largest group of students were aged 25 to 35, making up 32.17% of the survey takers. This was followed by, in order, students aged 46 to 55 at 25.43%, then students aged 36 to 45 at 24.57%, then students aged 55+ at 14.42%, and finally students aged 18 to 24 at 3.43%.

Students were also asked how long they have been a Christian. A large majority, 84.67%, of the students self-identified as being a Christian for more than 10 years. This is followed by 12.34% of students who self-identified as being a Christian for 5 to 10 years. Students who self-identified as being a Christian for 3 to 4 years made up 1.97% of the population, and students who self-identified as being a Christian 1 to 2 years and less than 1 year made up .80% and .22% of the survey population, respectively.

The final demographic statistic is concerned with the student's participation in nontraditional education. This particular demographic examined the particular populations of students who participated in each of the individual types of nontraditional education (online, hybrid, and extension center), and how many students utilized more than one type of nontraditional education.

Of the students who participated in the study, 1,310 students took courses online, 157 students took courses through a hybrid model, and 83 students took courses through an extension center. These numbers do add up to more than the 1,380 survey takers, and is due to the fact that students took courses through multiple platforms. However, as the students answered this question dealing with the types of nontraditional education they were involved in, three students quit the survey, bringing the total survey takers to N=1,377. The rest of the Tables for the demographic section will reflect the new N =1,377 number. Using cross tabulation, the following Tables 2 to 6 below give detailed information into the participation into various learning delivery systems.

Table 2
Participation in Online Courses

Participation in Online Courses	Number	Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01)
Yes	1310	95.13
No	67	4.87
Total	1377	100

Table 3
Participation in Hybrid Courses

Participation in Hybrid Courses	Number	Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01)
Yes	157	11.40
No	1213	88.60
Total	1377	100

Table 4
Participation in Extension Center Courses

Participation in Extension Center Courses	Number	Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01)
Yes	83	6.03
No	1291	93.97
Total	1377	100

Table 5
Participation in only one form of nontraditional education

Students who Participation in Only 1 nontraditional education platforms	Number	Percentage based on N=1377 (rounded to the nearest .01)
Online Only	1194	86.71
Extension Center Only	18	1.31
Hybrid Only	35	2.54
Total Students who only use 1 plateform	1247	90.56

Table 6
Participation in multiple forms of nontraditional education

Students who Participation in multiple nontraditional education platforms	Number	Percentage based on N=1377 (rounded to the nearest .01)
Online and hybrid Only	65	4.72
Online and Extension Center Only	8	0.58
Hybrid and extension center Only	14	1.02
Online, Hybrid and Extension center	43	3.12
Total Students who only use 1 plateform	130	9.44

The above tables give information as to student involvement in the three forms of nontraditional education (online, hybrid, and extension center). Of the 1,377 students who responded, 90.56% or 1,247 students used only 1 platform for their nontraditional theological education, compared with 9.44% or 130 students who used multiple platforms.

In detailing the students who used one platform 1,194 of the total 1,377 students (86.71%) used only online classes as their sole delivery system. Likewise, 35 of the 1,377 students (2.54%) used only the hybrid delivery system, and 18 of the 1377 (1.31%) used only extension centers.

Among the students who used

multiple forms of nontraditional education, there were four combinations possible: online and hybrid only, online and extension center only, extension center and hybrid only, and all three forms of nontraditional education. For online and hybrid courses, 65 students (4.72%) reported participating in these platforms. Eight students (0.58%) used online and extension center only, while 14 students (1.02%) reported using hybrid and extension center classes only. There were 43 students (3.12%), of the total population who reported using all three of the types of nontraditional means for their theological education. Now, the focus of the article will shift to answering the research questions raised.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What portion of students report a mentoring relationship as a part of his or her ministerial training?

To answer RQ1, the author analyzed student responses to demographic question 11 of the survey, which asked, "Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary?" In response to this question, 1377 of the 1380 answered the question, with 571 or 41.68% of the students saying they did or do have a mentor while enrolled in seminary, while 799 or 58.32% of the students said they did not have or do not have a mentor as a seminary student (see Table below).

Table 7
Question: "Do you have , or have you had a mentor while enrolled in seminary?"

I have or have had a mentor while enrolled in seminary	Number	Percentage Total (rounded to the nearest .01)
Yes	578	41.98
No	799	58.02
Total	1377	100

Research Question 2: What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and each of the individual types of nontraditional education?

This question sought to determine what, if any, relationship existed between mentoring and the student's involvement in specific types of nontraditional education. In other words, did the way a student attended seminary have any relationship to their involvement in mentoring?

In order to effectively answer this question, two steps were taken. First, each student was grouped into the specific combination by which they

reported taking nontraditional classes. This led to seven combinations by which a student could take a class (see Table 8 below). Then, the student's answers to both question 11 from the demographic section of the survey and their overall scores on the PAMS were analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference among the various combinations of nontraditional education.

Table 8
Mentoring Involvement per each nontraditional possibility

Do you currently have or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary	All Types	Online Only	Online and Hybrid	Online and Extension Center	Hybrid Only	Hybrid and Extension Center	Extension Center Only	Total
Yes	21	482	38	4	16	6	11	578
No	22	712	27	4	19	8	7	799
Total	43	1194	65	8	35	14	18	1377

Given the information in Table 31, a Chi-Square was performed on the data to determine if there is any statistical significance between the seven different nontraditional scenarios and their involvement in mentoring. The results of the Chi-Square showed that the relationship was not statistically significant, $x^2(6,N=1377) = 12.47$, $p=.052$, with the Critical Value was below the necessary 12.59 and the p value is above .05. Thus, to answer RQ2, there is no statistical difference between the type of nontraditional education a student is involved in and their involvement in mentoring while in seminary.

Table 9
Chi-Square for All Nontraditional Possibilities

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.474[a]	6	.052
Likelihood Ratio	12.294	6	.056
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.617	1	.057
N of Valid Cases	1377		

Secondly, mean scores were calculated, and an ANOVA was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the seven groups. The mean PAMS scores of the students and the categories they fell into are as follow: students who took all three types of nontraditional education had a mean PAMS Score of 208.83, which is in the Very Effective category. Students who used Online Only had a mean score of 197.22, a score that is in the Effective category. For students who used a combination of Online and Hybrid, their mean score was 189.86, a score in the Less Effective category. Students who used a combination of Online and Extension Center had a mean score of 198.50, a score that places that groups mean score in the Effective category. The students who attended seminary through Hybrid courses only had mean PAMS score of 192.80, which is in the Less Effective category. For students who attended through a combination of Hybrid and Extension Centers, their mean PAMS score was 195.00, a mean score that fall into the Effective category. Students who used only Extension Centers had a mean score of 162.67, a mean score that places them in the Not Effective category. The ANOVA test to compare the means of these scores showed no statistically significant difference, $F(6,482) = .925$, $p=.477$. This result shows that while the scores may have a wide range, there is no statistically significant difference between the seven groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Table 10
Mean Scores of PAMS by Nontraditional Delivery System

Type of Delivery System	Mean Score of PAMS	N	Std. Deviation
All Types	208.8333	18	34.89522
Online Only	197.2153	418	44.79135
Online and Hybrid	189.8571	21	40.67836
Online and Extension Center	198.5000	4	49.08836
Hybrid Only	192.8000	10	38.49618
Hybrid and Extension Center	195.0000	6	33.24455
Extension Center Only	162.6667	6	56.65216
Total	196.7909	483	44.24141

Table 11
ANOVA of Mean Scores of PAMS by Nontraditional Delivery System

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10872.253	6	1812.042	.925	.477
Within Groups	932547.627	476	1959.134		
Total	943419.880	482			

In conclusion to RQ2, among the students who attend seminary through the various nontraditional delivery systems, there is no statistically significant difference among the groups in relation to either being mentored nor the self-perceived quality of the mentorship through scoring of the PAMS.

Research Question 3: What if any, is the relationship between involvement in spiritual formation practices and each of the individual types of nontraditional education? In response to RQ3, the researcher used student responses to the CSPP portion of the survey and analyzed them based on their participation

in nontraditional education. The CSPP results in four Spiritual Modes, with each mode having a mean score. The Spiritual Modes are: Transcendent Scale, Vision Scale, Reflection Scale, and New Life Scale. The descriptions of these scales can be found up in Table 1. For RQ3, the mean scores for the 4 Scales will be analyzed among the different nontraditional scenarios, as well as the mean overall scores of the CSPP.

The Total Average Score of the CSPP ANOVA shows no statistical difference between involvement in the individual types of nontraditional education and reported involvement in spiritual formation practices, $F(6,1222) = .365$, $p=.901$. For the individual scales of the CSPP, there was no significant difference found in the Reflection Scale, $F(6,1222) = .366$, $p=.882$; the Vision Scale, $F(6,1222) = .296$, $p = .952$; and in the New Life Scale, F96,1222) = 1.1213, $p = .297$. However, the ANOVA revealed that in the Transcendent Scale, there was a significant difference, $F(6,1222) = 2.250$, $p= .036$. This data indicates that among the scales and total average score, only the Transcendent Scale contains a statistically significant difference, with a p value of below the .05 level necessary for statistical significance at a 95% confidence interval.

A Bonferroni post-hoc was performed for the significant difference in the Transcendent Scale and showed the significance is located between the online-only ($M=4.14$, $SD=1.78$) and Online and Hybrid groups of students ($M=4.064$, $SD=1.73$), with the significance of this pair being, $p=.029$. Thus, the students who. took online-only classes had a statistically significantly higher score on the Transcendent Scale than those who took a combination of hybrid and online courses, There rest of the pairings in the Bonferroni led to no statistical levels of significance. The tables below have the scores and ANOVA.

Table 12
Mean Scores by Spiritual Mode and Specific Type of Nontraditional Educational Participation.

Type of Delivery System	Mean Score transcendent scale	Mean Score Reflection Scale	Mean Score Vision Scale	Mean Score New Life Scale	N
Ally Types	4.094 - Strong	4.402 - Strong	3.961 - Weak	3.397 - Weak	34
Online Only	4.142 - Strong	4.417 - Strong	3.970 - Weak	3.472 - Weak	1072
Online and Hybrid	4.064 - Strong	4.272 - Strong	3.925 - Weak	3.620 - Weak	52
Online and Extension Centers	4.050 - Strong	4.406 - Strong	3.903 - Weak	3.833 - Weak	6
Hybrid Only	4.122 - Strong	4.246 - Strong	3.904 - Weak	3.492 - Weak	32
Hybrid and Extension Center	4.079 - Strong	4.344 - Strong	3.875 - Weak	3.327 - Weak	14
Extension Center Only	4.023 - Strong	4.341 - Strong	4.019 - Strong	3.878 - Weak	13
Total	4.134 - Strong	4.402 - Strong	3.965 - Weak	3.481 - Weak	1223

Note: Strong = Strong Intentional Participation; Weak = weak Intentional participation 82

Table 13
ANOVA for Table 12

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Transcendent Scale	Between Groups	2.403	6	.401	2.250	.036
	Within Groups	216.521	1216	.178		
	Total	218.924	1222			
Reflection Scale	Between Groups	.650	6	.108	.396	.882
	Within Groups	332.159	1216	.273		
	Total	332.809	1222			
Vision Scale	Between Groups	.421	6	.070	.267	.952
	Within Groups	320.250	1216	.263		
	Total	320.672	1222			
New Life Scale	Between Groups	4.439	6	.740	1.213	.297
	Within Groups	741.928	1216	.610		
	Total	746.367	1222			
SF SAVG	Between Groups	.471	6	.078	.365	.901
	Within Groups	261.015	1216	.215		
	Total	261.486	1222			

In conclusion to RQ3, there was no statistically significant difference between the combination of nontraditional delivery systems and spiritual formation practices among the total average score of the CSPP. In other words, there was not a relationship between involvement

in spiritual formation practices and the type of nontraditional theological education.

When the four scales are broken down individually, there was also no significant difference among the Vision, Reflection, or New Life scales. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the means found in the Transcendent Scale. This was located between online only and those who used a combination of online and hybrid courses. There was no relationship between type of nontraditional education and spiritual formation practices, except online only students scored statistically significantly higher than students who took a combination of online and hybrid course.

Research Question 4: What, if any, is the relationship between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices?

The final RQ sought to determine if there was any relationship between mentorship and a student's involvement in spiritual formation practices. For this question, the students were not broken down into specific involvement in nontraditional education, but were analyzed by their involvement in a mentorship and their answers to the CSPP. The goal of this question was to determine if there was correlation between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices among all nontraditional students.

To answer RQ4, a T-test was used to compare the mean spiritual formation practice scores of students who were mentored as compared to students who were not mentored in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the groups. Furthermore a Pearson's Correlation was also utilized to determine correlation between having a mentor and score on the CSPP.

Once the T-test was run, the information indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the CSPP Total Average Scores of students who had a mentor verses those who did not. The mean of the total average CSPP Score of students who did have a mentor was 4.07, while the mean score of those who did not have a mentor was 3.95 (See Table 14 Below). These scores indicate that the average mentored students score is in the Strong category of the CSPP and the averaged non-mentored student is in the Weak category of the CSPP. There is a statically significant higher CSPP score for students who were mentored ($M=4.07$, $SD = .491$) than students who were not mentored ($M=3.95$, $SD = .439$), $t(1221) = 4.501$, $p = .000$ (See Tables 14,15 below).

Table 14
CSPP Total Average Scores

	Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CSPP Total	Yes	445	4.0749 - Strong	.49121	.02329
AVG	No	778	3.9521 - Weak	.43949	.01576

Table 15
T-Test Statistics for CSPP Total Average Scores for Table 14

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	T-test for Equality Means			
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
SFS AVG	Equal variances assemed	.011	.915	4.504	1221	.000
	Equal Variances not assumed			4.370	842.728	.000

Table 15 Cont'd
T-Test Statistics for CSPP Total Average Scores for Table 14 continued

Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
.12287	.02728	.06935	.17639
.12287	.02812	.06768	.17805

Among the four scales of the CSPP, a T-Test was also done to determine if there was a statistically significant different between the mentored and non-mentored groups. The Reflection scale showed no statistical significance between the mentored group (M=4.15, SD = .613) and the non-mentored group (M=4.13, SD=.462), t(1221) = .680, p=.496. The Transcendent Scale also showed no statistical significance between the mentored group (M=4.42, SD=.433) and the non-mentored group (M=4.39, SD=.417), t(1221) = 1.319, p=.187.

The Vision Scale did have a statistically significant difference between students who were mentored (M=4.05, SD=.521) and non-mentored students (M=3.92, SD=.501), t(1221)=4.310, p=.000. The New Life Scale also had a statistically significant difference between students who were mentored (M=3.678, SD=.730) and non-mentored students (M=3.37, SD=.788), t(1221) = .018, p=.000. Below shows the means scores and t-tests of the four scales of the CSPP.

Table 16
Mean Scores of CSPP Scales Based on Involvement in Mentoring

	Do you currently have, or have you had, a mentor while enrolled in seminary?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
RO	Yes	445	4.1488 Strong	.61302	.02906
	No	778	4.1277 Stong	.46198	.01656
CE	Yes	445	4.4242 Strong	.43312	.02053
	No	778	4.3910 Strong	.41732	.01496
AC	Yes	445	4.0493 Strong	.52110	.02470
	No	778	3.9190 Weak	.50135	.01797
AE	Yes	445	3.6775 Weak	.73033	.03462
	No	778	3.3706 Weak	.78833	.02826

Table 17
T-Test for Mean Scores of the Phases of the CSPP based on Mentor Involvement

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reflection Scale	Equal Variances Assumed	6.465	.011	.680	1221	.496
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			.631	734.996	.528
Transcendent Scale	Equal Variances Assumed	.669	.414	1.319	1221	.187
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			1.306	896.314	.192
Vision Scale	Equal Variances Assumed	.227	.634	4.310	1221	.000
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			4.265	895.209	.000
New Life Scale	Equal Variances Assumed	5.576	.018	6.726	1221	.000
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			6.867	983.410	.000

Table 17 Cont'd
T-Test for Mean Scores of the Phases of the CSPP based on Mentor Involvement

Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
		Lower	Upper
.02110	.03102	-.03976	.08197
.02110	.03345	-.04456	.08677
.03317	.02515	-.01617	.08251
.03317	.02540	-.01669	.08303
.13030	.03023	.07099	.18960
.13030	.03055	.07034	.19025

Finally, a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was calculated among the average total score on the CSPP and the four scales. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for the total average is a significant correlation (r= -.128, N=1223, p=.000). This indicates that there is a correlation between being mentored and one's perceived spiritual formation through involvement in spiritual formation practices based on answers given on the CSPP.

A Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was also calculated on the four individual scales of the CPSS as well. The Pearson Correlation statistic for the Transcendence scale and answer to Q11 of whether or not the student has a mentor was (r=-.038, N=1223, p=.187), indicating there was no correlation between having a mentor and their score on this CSPP scale. The Pearson Correlation for the Reflection Scale was (r=-.019, N-1223, p=.496), indicating there was no correlation between being mentoring and their score on this CSPP scale. The Pearson Correlation for the New Life Scale was (r=-.189, N=1223, p=.000), which shows there was a statistical correlation between being mentored and having a higher score on the New Life Scale of the CSPP. The Pearson Correlation for the Vision Scale was (r=-.122, N=1223, p=.000), demonstrating that there was a statistical

significant correlation between being mentored and their score on the Vision Scale of the CSPP.

CONCLUSION

There are students who are choosing to use nontraditional educational delivery methods to complete their seminary training, this data shows over 1000 of whom that is the case. With this new reality, questions come about how students are properly trained. This research focused on two such concerns of seminary training, mentoring and a student's involvement in the spiritual formation process through spiritual formation practices. This research found that those students who were mentored reportedly were more involved in spiritual formation practices than those who were not mentored. The conclusion of this article will focus on the relationship between the two, which was addressed in RQ4, and how that impacts both the seminary and the local church.

Research Application—Seminary

This is important as it gives further evidence to the importance of having seminary students engaged in a mentor relationship. From this research, it can be seen that among these students, having a mentor did aid in promoting spiritual formation practices, yet, less than half of students were involved in a mentorship. As nontraditional education becomes more prevalent in the future, seminaries must strive to aid in connecting their off-campus students to mentor opportunities. The best place to find these opportunities is in and through the local church. Nontraditional education may help to further connect and strengthen the relationships between seminaries and local churches, as there will be greater dependence as some students move away from the brick and mortar choice for their seminary training. The local churches will give the seminaries greater reach to connect their students to pastors for purposeful mentorships that will aid in the spiritual growth of their students.

Research Application—Local Church

This research also has potential application to local church members and pastors as well. The field of Christian higher education carries with it an "underlying goal" of "Christian transformation and spiritual growth." The goal of spiritual growth is also applicable and necessary to the local church. In fact, Lawson argues that one of the goals of that which is learned in the field of Christian Education is to use the information for "positive transformative growth in the church." Given the importance of the local

church, this research has at least two potential applications for the local church based on its findings with regard to spiritual practices and spiritual formation.

The first application for the local church is based upon the findings of RQ4, which found that there was a positive relationship between mentoring and involvement in spiritual formation practices as measured in the CSPP. Mentoring, is biblically important and can be seen in examples that range from Moses and Joshua to Paul and Timothy. A local church could embrace a mentoring program that in turn has the potential to aid in the spiritual formation of its members. Paul, in Titus 2, gives instruction regarding this:

> But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (Titus 2:1-8, ESV)

Scripture and research both indicate the importance of quality mentoring for spiritual growth. A church could have a program, either formal or informal, where those who are mature in the faith can meet regularly with those who are immature or new in the faith, and have them walk the younger believer through the basics of the Christian life: such as how to read the Bible, prayer, and evangelism training. As the research also indicates, even those who are more mature in their faith can benefit from a mentor. A culture of mentoring would be valuable in any local church.

A second application of the research for local churches is in regards to the focus of spiritual formation practices. Seminary students, both those who were mentored and those who were not, had scores that were in the Strong category in the Transcendent and Reflection scales, which had disciplines like prayer and worship. Yet students who were mentored and those who were not both scored in the Weak category in the New Life Scale, which primarily emphasized disciplines of evangelism and fellowship. While many factors could influence these findings, the application for local churches would center on a diligence to teach and to encourage participation in many spiritual disciplines.

Also, for the pastor of the local church, it is helpful to constantly examine one's spiritual discipline practices in order to ensure well-roundedness and faithfulness to " the God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness."

This conclusion gives a summary of how seminaries and local churches can benefit from this research, and there are no doubt other applications that could be found. Applications that could focus on accountability for students in their spiritual growth, increased emphasis on student's seeking out mature believers by which to be mentored, and the need for local churches to take a more active role in aiding the spiritual growth of seminarians.

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Perspectives on Christ-Centered Family Disipleship

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In this article I will argue that Jesus has given believers a "key" that promises to help them glorify God in their families. It is a priority that is plainly spoken, but one that is easily missed when well-meaning Christians sinfully put their family above God. Though this "key" may at first seem to be at odds with loving our families in a way that glorifies God, it will be shown that only by loving Christ in a way that looks like hate towards our families can we actually glorify God in loving our families.

From two passages in the Gospels, I will show how Jesus' call to discipleship, "to hate [one's] own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters" is the key to glorifying God in family relations. While the Bible does not guarantee that our discipleship will result in the conversion or improvement of our families—sometimes it promises the opposite (Matt 10:34–35)—God's Word does promise that when Christians abide as true

disciples, God will produce fruit in their lives (John 15:5, 7–8), often with positive effects on their family.1

THE KEY

The key to glorifying God in the family is found in two parallel passages.

> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-38)

> If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

For those who care about the family, these words seem shocking. Since the family was God's idea, we might expect Jesus to say something more like this: "If anyone comes to me and does not love his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters cannot be my disciple." Or, "Whoever loves father, mother, son or daughter is qualified to serve in the church."

After all, why would Jesus want disciples who hate their family? Certainly, the church searching for a family minister would be greatly concerned if they heard an impressive candidate say: "Yes, to answer your question, I hate my parents, my children, and even my wife."

Context must be taken into consideration, but even then, Jesus' words are shocking! They demand an explanation, but not at the expense of missing the force of his hyperbole. Indeed, if we explain away his words too quickly we neuter their power to produce fruit in our lives and Christ's presence in our homes.

What we need to see is how Jesus esteems family relations, especially with children, and then to see how this call to hate mother and father, child and wife fits into the larger framework of Christian discipleship and family relations. Therefore, in the following section, I will examine Jesus' positive sentiments towards children. Then, I will show how these two statements from the Gospels clarify the way believers glorify God in their earthly families. Last, I will show how this principle can be applied in life through two personal illustrations.

THE TREASURE OF CHILDREN

In the Gospels, it is evident that Jesus placed special importance on receiving children.2 Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the way Jesus interacted with them.3 Therefore, before considering the temptation children can create for doting

parents, we must consider how Jesus himself loved children.

Matthew 18:1–4

In a section of Matthew's Gospel that considers "life under kingdom authority," Jesus confronts the arrogance of his disciples.4 Matthew records,

> At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (18:1–4)

In this encounter, Jesus calls a child to himself. He puts him in the middle of the disciples as an example of the kingdom. He does not ostracize or belittle him.5 Instead, he warmly commends the child as a model of Christian discipleship, saying "unless you turn and become like this child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."6

It is important to note that Jesus does not mean citizenship in the kingdom depends on being childish or be uninformed (cf. 1 Cor 14:20).7 Rather, childlikeness is a matter of humility: "Whoever humbles himself like this child in the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 4). He recognizes the humble, dependent nature of children, and he says that this is the kind of posture we must adopt to enter God's kingdom. We must forsake self-reliance, self-exaltation, and humbly rest in the arms of our loving father.8

Steeped in the traditions of Israel, Jesus' view of children reflects that of the Old Testament, where on numerous occasions God's people describe themselves as children before God. For instance, in 1 Kings 3:7 the regal Solomon says, "I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties." God hears this prayer and blesses him with wisdom, wealth, and power. Clearly, Solomon is not a gullible and needy child. He is a mighty king. But before the Lord, he recognizes his child-like dependence. In fact, it was his failure to retain this posture that cost him and his sons the kingdom.

> Likewise, Psalm 131 says:
> O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
> my eyes are not raised too high;
> I do not occupy myself with things
> too great and too marvelous for me.
> But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
> like a weaned child with its mother;
> like a weaned child is my soul within me.
>
> O Israel, hope in the LORD
> from this time forth and forevermore.

What a beautiful picture of the Christian. No longer crying, wres-

tling, and fighting their heavenly father, but resting, comforted, suckled and secure. The dependence of an infant on his mother pictures our dependence on God the Father.9

With Jesus, it is apparent that he delights in this child as a reflection of humble trust. In his dependent humanity, he displays a beautiful reality that can only be sustained and enjoyed at length in God's heavenly kingdom.

Matthew 19:13–15

Something similar transpires in Matthew 19:13–15:

> Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' And he laid his hands on them and went away.

While Jesus' disciples rebuke the people—presumably parents—who brought their children to Jesus, Jesus rebukes his disciples.[10] He commands his disciples to bring the children to him. Again, he compares the children to those who will inherit the kingdom. To be clear, his comparison does not affirm that all children are saved or citizens of the kingdom. It does indicate that followers of Christ must be absolutely dependent on the Father, just like little children.[11]

More than that, Jesus' words carry the weight of what he had said earlier in Matthew 18:5–6: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Thus, in these two passages (Matt 18:1–6; 19:13–15), Jesus shows the way he treasures children. He models before us how we should treat children. He doesn't neglect them, look beyond them, or get upset by their presence. He neither ignores them nor considers them a nuisance. In fact, "Jesus had a great interest in children," something we should not overlook.12 Morris highlights the significance of Jesus' love for children:

> It is not easy to think of Muhammad as concerned for little children, or Gautama the Buddha. But the Gospels make it clear that there were often children around Jesus. He observed their games (11:16–17), spoke of them in his teaching, and clearly was genuinely interested in them.[13]

Indeed, being informed by the Old Testament, Jesus considers children a blessing from the Lord (cf. Pss 127, 128). At the same time, with eyes fixed on eternity, he sees in them glimpses of his coming kingdom (cf. Zech 8:5). He esteems their humble dependence on their superiors as a typological model of the citizens of his own kingdom. As

Christ-followers, we too should love children like Christ did.

Loving Children Like Christ Loved Children

When we behold the next generation, we must let the gospel inform our love. We must see in them two things at once: They are image-bearers created by God for his glory (Isa 43:6–7), and they are sinners whose nature offends God (Eph 2:3) and whose unbelief invites his wrath (John 3:36). Therefore, to love them like Christ, we must do more than simply express kindness; we must share with them the gospel of the kingdom.14

Practically, we must ask ourselves: What can I do to introduce this child to the love of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can I walk before her so that she can see a model of God's fatherly love or Christ's sacrificial service? How can I tell him about the Son of God who died for sinners like him? Created by the same maker, we have an onerous privilege to share Christ with the next generation (Ps 78:1–8). In this sense, our love for them must be more than sentimental; it must be Christ-like. While we cannot save them by our actions or even by our faithful disclosure of the gospel, we must believe that God desires that all children would come to a saving knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). We must share the gospel with them in sincere hope that they will one day trust Christ.

In contrast to a world of adults who look to improve their image among their peers or increase their status among superiors, the followers of Christ reach down to the little ones, receiving children, adopting children, having children, and looking for ways to lay down their lives for children. As Jesus loved them, so must we. And still, in all our counter-cultural efforts to prize children, we must beware of an insidious temptation that can poison the very love we have for our children, making an idol of them.

The Temptation of Making Children an Idol

If it is a ubiquitous fact that Jesus loved children, what follows may seem impossible or at least counter-intuitive. The key to loving our children best is loving Christ so much that by comparison our love for them looks like "hate" (Luke 14:26). This kind of language is, of course, hyperbolic, but overstated as it may be, Jesus knew what he was doing with his words when he compared his disciples love for him with their love for their loved ones.

As we have seen, Jesus loved children, and yet, in order to stress the importance of our commitment to God as his disciples, Jesus said,

"Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. If you do not hate your own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters . . . you cannot be my disciple." Why does he say that? Let me suggest two reasons.

First, Jesus is the most central person in the universe.

Ephesians 1:10 says that all heaven and earth are united in Christ, and in his hyperbole found in Matthew 10 and Luke 14 Jesus stresses his own centrality.15 He is not simply any son; he is the Son.16 He is the archetypal Son, the one through whom every family derives its name (Eph 3:14), the one who perfectly embodies and reveals the Heavenly Father (Matt 10:27).Therefore, he makes no apologies for his Lordship. In speaking of his mission to the earth in Matthew 10:34–36, he clarifies his purposes:

> Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

These are the words that precede Jesus' insistence that his disciples must love him so much that their allegiance to their families looks like hate. Only by prioritizing him, can his disciples enter the kingdom. And only by loving him most can his followers actually learn to love their families. As Peter Schemm has noted, "The Christian household, while important, must never become more important to us than the church or the kingdom of Christ. Such a belief would undermine the primacy of the gospel of Christ and oppose the plain teaching of Jesus."17

This is the key to a life that glorifies God: the triune God must be our greatest love. He must be our greatest possession, our greatest thought, our greatest song, our best friend, our wisest counselor. He must be our all in all, such that in our families Christ retains the position of highest authority and greatest value (cf. Matt 13:44–46). While we cannot guarantee the material or emotional "success" of our families, through unswerving faithfulness to God in Christ we can glorify God in our families. By abiding in Christ and being a faithful witness to him, God can always be glorified in our homes—regardless of the present circumstances we experience.

Second, Jesus tells us not to make family an idol.

When God made the world, he called it good. When he introduced

the first family—Adam and Eve—he called it very good (Gen 1:31). It is of this goodness that Jesus warns us. In a world without sin, this command—hating your loved ones—would be unnecessary. It is only necessary in a Genesis 3 world. The fall has taken the "very good" gift of family and turned it into an object for idolatry.18

This makes great sense. The greatest idols are the gifts that most closely resemble God and his goodness, and few things possess the potential to take our heart away from God like the relationships intertwined in a family. Pressing the point further, after Christ, godly parents, loving wives, and faithful children make some of the best gifts God can give. And accordingly, they become some of the most enslaving idols.19

What makes this teaching so hard is that it is honorable to put family first. Many churches are built on how they care for the family. Paul condemns the man who fails to care for his family (1 Tim 5:8). Yet, such a constant pursuit of family, if it is not watched carefully, can quickly turn Jesus into a family's servant, instead of their Lord.

As much we want to focus on the family, we must focus on the Father and the Son first. Unless we seek them first and above our own families, we will never be the son or daughter, the mother or father, the brother or sister that God calls us to be.

So here is the counter-intuitive truth Jesus gives to his followers: if you want to love your family, you must hate your family. And by hate, I mean what Jesus means. Your love for and commitment to Christ must be so superlative, that everything else looks like hate.20

More importantly, to faithfully shepherd one's children or bear witness to Christ in the context of the family, a family member (be it a parent, child, sibling, or cousin) must put Christ ahead of their family. As long as a son, a mother, or a brother remains more important—as indicated by one's schedule, decisions, commitments, and customs—Christ will have no place in the family. But for those who are willing to put Christ ahead of their family, there is great reason to believe that he will impact the family for good.

PUTTING CHRIST FIRST: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

By itself this teaching is difficult. Even if we can understand it cognitively, the emotional ties we have with family can make it seem unbearable to choose Christ at the expense of family. Moreover, in the matrix of faith and family, it may be difficult to see what it looks like to

keep Christ at the center. For that reason we are helped when we can imitate the faith of those who have gone before us (cf. Heb 13:7).

A Son Choosing to Suffer for Christ's Sake

First, Richard Wurmbrand tells of the terrible and wonderful account of a father and son who suffered together for the sake of Christ. He writes,

> A pastor by the name of Florescu was tortured with red-hot iron pokers and with knives. He was beaten very badly. Then starving rats were driven into his cell through a large pipe. He could not sleep because he had to defend himself all the time. If he rested a moment, the rats would attack him.
>
> He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The Communists wished to compel him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly. Eventually, they brought his fourteen-year-old son to the prison and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor said what they wished him to say. The poor man was half mad. He bore it as long as he could, then he cried to his son,"Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beating anymore!" The son answered, "Father, don't do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words, "Jesus and my fatherland.'" The Communists, enraged, fell upon the child and beat him to death, with blood spattered over the walls of the cell. He died praising God. Our dear brother Florescu was never the same after seeing this.[21]

When I read that in 2001, years before I had sons of my own, tears collected in my eyes. But now with three small children, it takes on greater weight. I can only imagine the father's horror to see his son beaten for his faith in Jesus. And yet, what tearful joy to know that the son he had raised to know Christ would spend eternity with their Lord.

Wurmbrand's story reminds us of the murderous activity of the evil one. It should make us pause to pray for Christian parents and their children in places like Syria, Sudan, Iraq, and North Korea. In those countries, violence is done to Christian families that we in the West may never know. But just the same, in experiencing such familial loss in this world, they teach us what real gain is—life in Christ in the family of God.

> Father, I pray for our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church and for their leaders. At times is seems as though evil is winning the day. Strengthen these believers, encourage them, and grant miracles of provision and deliverance. Cause the gospel to spread like wildfire. In their homes strengthen fathers and mothers, and grant repentance and faith to their children. Give them so much joy, peace, and love that their persecutors will be convicted and fall down and worship you.

> In these hard places, let your fatherly love be seen in the parents who tenderly raise their children to love Christ more than life itself. Amen.[22]

When we consider the source Florescu's son's courage, we have great reason to believe that he witnessed parents who loved the Lord more than life itself (Ps 63:3). In Communist Romania where the whole civilization was trained to deny God and hate the Bible, this boy had seen his father love Christ first and foremost. Therefore in his father's moment of weakness, his son stood strong in his faith—faith that was empowered by God's grace but faith that had also been modeled by his father (cf. 2 Tim 3:14–15).

To most Western Christians such a vision of family seems remote and unwelcome. But in light of eternal glory, this story speaks volumes about genuine faith. To see a child choose Christ in the face of death is to be deeply challenged by this fact: the sufferings of this age are light and momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory. Oh, that more fathers, under God's gracious hand, would instill in their children such a singular passion for Christ.

A Parent's Choice to Love the Savior More Than Her Child's Salvation

Closer to home the command to love Jesus more than one's own family was reiterated to me earlier this year. A mother and father came to my office broken-hearted about their adult child. They yearned for the salvation of their child and his family, and were grieved by the lifestyle choices they had seen them make. Like any parent who worried about and prayed for the salvation of their children, this couple expressed a deep belief in God, the gospel, heaven and hell.

However, as we talked, it became apparent that in the midst of pleading for God to work in their family, they had put their children's salvation and their well-being ahead of God himself. Functionally, their children had consumed their thoughts, and even as they prayed for their salvation, their love for God had languished. Bitterness had poisoned their hearts making generous love to their children almost impossible. While doing so much good for their children, they had come to a place where they could do no more because their sole focus had been on their family.

As strange as it sounds, liberation came for them when they realized that they needed to repent of their focus on their children's salvation and to return to the Savior. Why? Because as Jesus' words in Matthew 10 and Luke 14 tell us, as long as a

man or woman loves their mother and father, husband or wife, sons and daughters more than Jesus, they are not worthy of his companionship. Even more, those who put their families first will be unable to love and serve and witness to their families for Christ. In a word, idolatry becomes impotence when love for family displaces love for God.

THE KEY TO GLORIFYING GOD IN THE FAMILY

The key to glorifying God in our families is loving Christ so much that by comparison everything else is of little importance. Our love for Christ should be in full color, while our love for the world is in black and white. Christ's love for us should overwhelm us so much that when we are hurt by others, we have resources to love in return. Our amazement with his forgiveness is what enables us to forgive others. And God's unconditional acceptance of us in Christ is what empowers us to continue to love others, by not abandoning them and continuing to point them to the center of the universe, Jesus Christ.

In summary, the family is not ultimate. God is. Jesus did not come to save your family. He can save your family and we should pray that he would, but he might not. This is the sobering but necessary effect of believing Jesus' words in Matthew 10:34–39: He did not come to bring peace but a sword. Part of the Christian's surrender is the liberating process of giving children, spouse, siblings, and parents to the Lord, and trusting him with them.

In loving God and our families, we must come to know and embrace the fact that just as the universe is centered around the Sun, so all life is centered around Jesus Christ. History exists for him. Families exist for him. Therefore, when Jesus came to earth, he came to save his family, not ours. As he says in Mark 3:35, his brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers are any and all who do the will of God. In this sense, Jesus is a family man, but ultimately the gravitational pull of his family aligns itself with the eternal purposes of the triune God.

Sometimes this means he will redeem and restore an entire family. Other times, he will draw his sword down the middle, splitting it wide open. Why? It is hard to know. He has his good and perfect reasons, but this side of glory they are hidden. As with earthly families, children are not always privy to the decisions of their fathers. But that does not mean that the Father cannot be trusted. Just the opposite: God offers to all the chance to be a part of his family—if you are willing to put him first (Matt 6:33) and stop racing around

to all your families needs at the expense of Jesus (Luke 10:38–42).

As strange as it may sound: The key to a family that glorifies God is not getting God's help to prioritize your family; the key is living out your life in the family of God. If you prioritize that family relationship, God will become your trusted Father and Jesus Christ will become your elder brother who will enable you with his Spirit to live and love in a way that resembles the triune God. God will move in your heart and your home to do all he wants to do in your family. This is the good news of the gospel, and it is the key to being a disciple who glorifies God in your family.

ENDNOTES

[1] On the relationship between putting Christ first and its impact on familial strife, see Timothy S. Lane, *Family Feuds: How to Respond* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008).

[2] Although not centering his ministry on children ("children *per se* were not at the heart of Jesus' priorities"), "Jesus placed special importance on receiving with kindness and hospitality the least important members of society: children" (S. C. Barton, "Child, Children," in *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 101–02).

[3] Ibid., 100–04.

[4] D. A. Carson, *Matthew,* in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 395.

[5] Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 460) distinguishes the difference between modern feelings about children and society's sentiments in Jesus' day: "In modern Western societies children are often seen as very important, but in first-century Judaism they were not . . . In the affairs of men children were unimportant. They could not fight, they could not lead, they had not had time to acquire wisdom, they could not pile up riches, they counted for very little." Certainly, Jesus' illustration with the child does not make Jesus the equivalent of a braggadocious suburban father. From first to last, Jesus was kingdom-centered. Nevertheless, by using the child's humble and dependent nature as a model for heavenly citizenship, he endows the child with inherent worth, something out of step with his ancient culture.

[6] Carson rightly observes, "The child is held up as an ideal, not of innocence, purity, or faith, but of humility and unconcern for social status" (*Matthew,* 397).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew,* The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 190–91.

[9] On the use of feminine imagery for God, see John Frame's helpful discussion, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 107–115.

[10] In Jesus' day Hebrew parents would often bring children to rabbis for blessing (Carson, *Matthew,* 420).

[11] David L. Turner rightly observes, "Jesus does not choose a child out of a sentimental notion of the innocence or subjective humility of children, since children may already exhibit in seed form the traits Jesus speaks against here. The childlike character trait that is foremost in the simile of becoming like a child is [objective] humility." He then elaborates, "Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they consistently model humility.

Rather, children have no status in society; they are at the mercy of adults. Similarly, repentant disciples admit that they have no status before God and they depend solely on the love of the heavenly Father" (*Matthew* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 435–36).

[12]Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* 486.

[13]Ibid.

[14]A tremendous example of how to share the gospel with children can be found in J. C. Ryle's sermons to children (*Boys and Girls Playing and Other Addresses to Children,* ed. Don Kistler [New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1881; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996]).

[15]Jesus does something similar when he speaks about the poor in John 12:8: "For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

[16]"No mere man has the right to claim a love higher than that for parents or children; it is only because he is who he is that Jesus can look for such love" (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* 268).

[17]Peter R. Schemm, Jr., "Habits of a Gospel-Centered Household," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective,* ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 191–92.

[18]Timothy Keller (*Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* [New York: Riverhead, 2009], 204) gives a representative list of ten possible idols. One category he lists is "relational idols," which he defines as "dysfunctional family systems of codependency; 'fatal attractions'; living your life through your children." Although importing terminology and concepts from the realm of psychology, this category well-describes the kind of family idolatry outlined here. To change only one of his prepositions, as a pastor I see a great deal of Christian parents idolizing their children by living their lives *for* their children. Without denying any Christian doctrines or affirming any heresies, parents dedicate years (if not decades) prioritizing their children over God. While such praxis is normal among many parents, it is a sinful form of idolatry.

[19]"We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god [i.e., an idol], especially the very best things in life" (ibid., xix).

[20]"*Loves* [in Matthew 10:37] is a significant word; it points to the warmest affection. Jesus does not bid his followers love their parents or their children (nor, on the other hand, does he forbid warm affection in the family). He simply assumes that family members will love one another. But he is concerned that they must not value their attachment to the members of their families so highly that he is pushed into the background" (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* 267–68).

[21]Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 1998), 34.

[22]An adaptation of "A Prayer about God Overriding Our Unbelief," in Scotty Smith, *Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel-Centered Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 138.

Appreciative Reflections on the Impact of "Family-Based Youth Ministry"

I first read *Family-Based Youth Ministry* by Mark DeVries when I was just a couple of years into ministry. As a 20-year-old student pastor, that book shaped my thinking in crucial ways. In those early days, I was well-intentioned, but I had in my immaturity developed a subtle bias against parents. I saw the problems with the parents, but I had thus far failed to see them as part of the solution. When I read these words, I was convicted: "There is no such thing as a successful youth ministry that isolates teenagers from the community of faith." Twenty years later that message still shapes the way that I approach Next Generation ministry in the church. I'm grateful for the spark that Mark helped ignite (along with others) that has grown into a movement of churches who take seriously the call to connect the church and home for the glory of God and as conduits of the gospel.

Jay Strother, Contributing Author to *Perspectives on Family Ministry and Trained in the Fear of God*,
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When you hear the words "Youth Ministry", one of the first names that one thinks of is Mark Devries. I can honestly say that for my life and the lives of many other youth ministers, few people have had the impact on us and on youth ministry over the last 20 years than Mark. I do not know Mark personally, but his books and his seminars have been a breath of fresh air to me and to my ministries at FBC, Houston, Tx. and Travis Avenue BC, Ft Worth, Tx. and now at Southwestern Seminary as a Professor of Youth Ministry. Thanks is not enough to convey my thoughts on Mark!

Johnny L. Derouen, Ph.D., Associate
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Theological Seminary,
Ft. Worth, Texas

In 1986 I co-authored a book called *Ministry with Youth and Their Parents*. But back then, trying to move youth ministry more in the direction of the family was like shouting on the beach during a hurricane. Then along came *Family-Based Youth Ministry* by Mark DeVries. That was the match that fell in the gasoline. This seminal book started the broader conversation that continues to grow today. A smartphone seems like a simple idea . . . unless no one has ever thought of a phone that could contain a powerful computer. True visionaries think thoughts others have not had. Some of the nuances of ministry with families came first from Mark. Those thoughts seem almost omnipresent now, but someone had to think them first. And Mark did.

Richard Ross,
Professor of Student Ministry,
Southwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary,
Ft. Worth, Texas

JDFM Forum: An Interview with Mark DeVries About *Family-Based Youth Ministry, Twenty Years Later*.

Mark is a 36-year veteran of youth ministry, having served for the last 28 years as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author or co-author of a number books, including Family-Based Youth Ministry and Sustainable Youth Ministry. Mark is the founder or co-founder of a number of ministry enterprises, including Ministry Architects, the Center for Youth Ministry Training, Justice Industries, and Ministry Incubators. Mark has three grown children and lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

1. WHY DID YOU WRITE *FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY*? TELL US ABOUT THE PROCESS BY WHICH THIS BOOK CAME INTO EXISTENCE.

So many youth workers, including myself, were heartbroken over the disconnect between kids who participated in youth group and those who continued to live out their faith for a lifetime. It set me on a search to discover the key factors that lead to lifelong discipleship. I met for a few days with my dear friend and seminary classmate, Larry Coulter, one of the most creative pastors I know, to sketch out the outline of a book. During that week, we met with a young man named Walt Mueller who was in the early stages of a ministry he was calling "Headfirst," which after being confused for a birthing center, changed its name to the Center for Youth Ministry Training. What was clear in many, many conversations and studies is that parents played an unparalleled role in the faith formation of

teenagers. Like most first time authors, I got my fair share of rejection letters, until a friend who had published with InterVarsity Press made an introduction for me.

2. WHAT HAVE BEEN THE PRIMARY CHANGES YOU'VE OBSERVED IN YOUTH MINISTRY SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY?

I am delighted to see the ways that youth ministry has grown up. Though still true in some places, fewer and fewer churches are looking for the relational savant to lead their ministries. Popularity with kids is important, but I'm grateful that more and more churches are realizing that they can't build a ministry on "hip." I've been delighted to see the growing anchoredness of youth pastors who seek out deliberate spiritual direction, who read more than the latest Christian fad book, who are actually integrating research, theology, and discernment.

At the same time, as the noise of marketing has become louder and louder and the options for teachers have multiplied dramatically, it has been easy for families to jettison regular involvement in the life of the church. This has led youth pastors to spend more and more time "marketing" their ministries through texting, email, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest. We've now got incredible resources, but the sheer volume can be overwhelming to the normal youth pastor.

When I first started out, there were a handful of churches doing mission trips. But over the last decade or so, the "mission-trip industrial complex" has become a multi-million dollar business, raising the obvious question of whether the overwhelming cost of "spiritual tourism" and "service learning" is worth the investment. I am gladdened to see a deeper conversation around these issues, even though I feel certain it will effect the way we do ministry and missions in my church 10 years from now.

3. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE PRIMARY CAUSES OF THE SURGE OF INTEREST IN FAMILY MINISTRY OVER THE PAST DECADE?

The National Study of Youth and Religion along with the Sticky Faith project have both made the unequivocal (re-)discovery that no one influences the faith of adolescents like their family—for better or for worse. Add to this cocktail the fact that many, many churches are seeing their own extinction on the horizon, and they want to do whatever they can to recalibrate their ministries not only to lead young people to stay in their church but to lead them to lifelong discipleship. Since David Kinnaman's book UnChristian came out, we have been more and more aware that this generation of young adults is not, by

and large, coming back to church as they move into young adulthood as previous generations have.

With the rampant and growing isolation of youth into their own generational ghetto, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* has stood as a guardrail for churches who feel compelled to simply go along with the culture and isolate and abandon youth within the church in the same way the culture done. One other factor—whenever we see leaders on all sides of the theological spectrum saying the same thing—from Richard Ross at Southwestern Seminary to Kenda Dean at Princeton to Kara Powell and Chap Clark at Fuller, as well as Doug Fields and Mark Yaconelli—it may just be a sign that the Spirit is at work, moving in a wave that is larger than a single ideology.

4. IF YOU WERE TO WRITE FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY TODAY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY DIFFERENTLY?

The one corrective I would like to bring to most teachers of family-based youth ministry is this: The modern nuclear family, as we know it and often teach it, is a far cry from the biblical family. The biblical family, though not monolithic, was much more of an extended family, with lots of adults pouring into young people, rather than mom and dad feeling the total weight of responsibility (think Jesus' parents' journey away from Jerusalem and not even noticing that their 12 year old was missing for an entire day).

If our goal is to create mature Christian adolescents, then maybe we should focus only on moms and dads. But our goal is not adolescent disciples. It is adult disciples. And adult disciples are shaped, as they move into adulthood, not simply by their parents' faith. When I asked groups of adults, "How many of you had at least one person in your life, outside your mom and dad, who had as much or more influence on your faith than your parents did?," always more than half the room raises their hands. An exclusive focus on the faith maturity of "teenagers" during their teenage years can be short sighted.

5. WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN YOUTH MINISTRY?

I'm beginning to believe that we are getting better and better at training youth pastors for positions that will, by and large, not exist in 20 or 30 years. The full-time youth pastor (and perhaps even the full-time pastor) may go the way of the dinosaur as the "death tsunami" of those who have historically given so generously to the church die off. I'm concerned that we are now training people for a way of doing ministry that may not be possible. I think it's possible that we can do things in the next 20 or

30 years to be prepared for this shift, but I'm afraid that most churches will be totally surprised and paralyzed in a few decades when these changes happen. (By the way, I'd be happy to be wrong about this. If I am, and we're ready for it, all the better. But if I'm right, it's time to start re-imagining the economics of ministry while we've still got time).

6. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR COUNSEL TO A YOUNG PERSON TODAY WHO SENSES A CALL TO YOUTH MINISTRY?

I would praise God to hear of one more kindred spirit in this work. I would remind him or her that Mike Yaconelli was right, that youth ministry is a "suffer-calling." Don't get into it if you don't want your heart broken. I would also plead with them, "above all else," to invest in and guard their own hearts by finding coaches and counselors who can keep them growing. Sadly most people in ministry, not just pastors, haven't learned much of anything in the past decade. They may read a book or two each year but nothing changes in them or their ministries. And change seldom happens unless we increase our capacity—not just our skill, but more importantly, our capacity to love, to persevere, to cling to the strength that is only found in the joy of the Lord.

On a practical level, I would encourage them to start a little side business that can eventually support their ministries. My prediction is that if a normal youth pastor spent 5 deliberate hours building a little side business, in ten years, that business would be able to fund his ministry if (and when) the church runs out of money.

7. WHAT BRINGS YOU THE MOST JOY AS YOU LOOK AT THE IMPACT OF FAMILY-BASED YOUTH MINISTRY OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS?

It brings me great delight that the Spirit has used the principles of Family-Based Youth Ministry in all kinds of churches, all kinds of schools, all kinds of families. Though I am a Presbyterian pastor, these principles have rung true among the Mennonites and the Roman Catholics, among the United Methodists and the Southern Baptists, and just about everything in between.

That God would use a goober like me to point to what our God seems to be doing on the horizon is evidence that God's sense of humor and delight in using his children to do things they cannot do.

But my great delight continues to be having the chance to see young people from our ministry step alongside, no longer as recipients of ministry but as partners in the gospel with those who have been their great cloud of witnesses for so many years.

Book Reviews

Before you Hire a Youth Pastor: A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding the Right Fit. By Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Ranking. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2011. 124 pp. $7.99.

The search for a youth pastor can be a tedious one. While many churches have a plan in place for replacing their departing youth pastor, often times, those plans are executed ineffectively, and can even lead to the wrong hire. Thankfully, youth ministry experts Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin have put together a book to prevent those unfortunate situations. In Before You Hire a Youth Pastor, the authors put forth extremely practical tools and advice for moving the pastoral search process forward in a way that honors God, empowers laypeople, and guides a church toward the right youth pastor hire.

DeVries and Dunn-Rankin consider all aspects of the youth pastor search process, such as selecting the correct members for a search committee, settling on a theological vision for youth ministry, establishing a search timeline, analyzing resumes, interviewing candidates, asking the proper questions, and everything in between. They provide examples of searches that have gone both well and poorly and provide practical advice that will help the desperate youth pastor search committee.

The authors agree that searching for a youth pastor can be a difficult venture, and their hope is that they can enable churches to find the right youth pastor in a manner that is efficient, effective, and ends with the proper person(s) in ministry leadership. Helpfully, the authors make this process step-by-step (38 steps to be exact), and leave no stone unturned. They include numerous appendices of sample job descriptions for both full-time and part-time staff, a candidate tracking sheet, a sample rejection letter, guidelines for interviews, and many others. These appendices comprise almost half of the book, and will no doubt save search committees time and stress. While it may appear that DeVries and Dunn-Rankin advocate a "cookie-cutter" approach to the search process, they understand that not all churches are in the same place theologically, financially, or administratively. They are sensitive to the ministry needs of all churches, and go to great lengths to help committees move the search process along smoothly.

As leaders of Youth Ministry Architects, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin have several years of combined experience in the field of youth ministry. They readily understand the needs of churches and youth pastors alike. DeVries has authored a number of similar works, such as Family-Based Youth Ministry and Sustainable Youth Ministry that come alongside youth ministers in the journey to effective youth ministry practices. The present text is no different, and is an extraordinarily practical, punchy, and quick read. The authors refrain from technical jargon, giving the book an exceptionally readable quality. While its intended audience is lay people who need guidance on moving through the search process, potential youth pastors will benefit from understanding the thought process of those on the other side of the search. It will certainly help search committees avoid the potholes that generally plague the search process. I strongly recommend that every church, even those with thriving youth pastors, add this book to their collection.

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The Indispensable Youth Pastor: Land, Love, and Lock In Your Youth Ministry Dream Job. By Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin. Loveland, CO: Group, 2011. 173 pp. $15.99.

There is no lacuna of books written about the call to ministry, but books on the call to youth ministry are few and far between. Even more rare are books that discuss the implications of that call to youth ministry; specifical-

ly, how to find a ministry position and flourish in one's work. The Indispensable Youth Pastor is one that fills this gap and more. Mark DeVries and Jeff Dunn-Rankin take the potential youth pastor on a journey from discerning the call to youth ministry, to finding the perfect ministry position, to becoming an indispensable youth pastor.

In the beginning of their book, the authors seek to help service-minded people discern a call to full-time vocational youth ministry. From there, the authors spend considerable time on the process of finding a youth ministry position. DeVries and Dunn-Rankin offer priceless advice about this process: the need for a sturdy résumé, securing good references, nailing interviews, and dealing with search committees. Next, the authors deal with "locking in" your ministry position. Their goal in this section is to "help you keep your job for as long as you and God had in mind were called" (57) and to help a youth pastor become "indispensable."Again, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin offer wisdom on issues, such as listening to the needs of youth and the congregation as a whole, understanding healthy growth, exceeding expectations, dealing with parents, the art of "woo," and much more. Finally, the authors explain how to maintain ministry enthusiasm after many years of youth ministry service. The book's final pages include two appendices related to the youth ministry search process.

The present text serves as a companion text to *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor* (Group, 2011), which explores the youth pastor search process from the perspective of a church committee. The two should be read together in order to bring a fully-orbed picture to the process of matching the right personnel with the right ministry position.

The Indispensable Youth Pastor covers a lot of ground with regards to life in youth ministry, such as identifying the call to youth ministry, networking, being on the same page as the senior pastor, and much more. While the authors do not depend on scholarly sources or data to strengthen their advice, their leadership in Youth Ministry Architects enables them to speak with quite a bit of authority in matters related to seeking youth ministry positions and thriving in youth ministry. They offer plenty of anecdotes from their own time in youth ministry, as well as stories from those with whom they have interacted over the years. With many years of combined youth ministry experience and working with churches, DeVries and Dunn-Rankin have authored a text that belongs on the shelf of every youth minister, from serious volunteer youth workers to veteran youth pastors.

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Croft, Brian and Cara. ***The Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family through the Challenges of Pastoral Minis***try. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 176 pp. $16.99.

Calvin Miller wrote a book that spoke to the plight of shepherding among evangelicals: its title, "O Shepherd Where Art Thou?" The Crofts have, in large measure, written the same for the pastor's family. Shepherding has fallen on hard times—both in the church and in the home. Pastors are shepherds; husbands are shepherds; fathers are shepherds. Pastors with families must be shepherds—thrice over. The church needs books like this; ministerial families pray for books like this.

A number of aspects of this book require praise. First, the correct overarching paradigm for ministry, both to the flock and the family, has been upheld, namely, shepherding. A pastor is fundamentally a shepherd. Against the American proclivity to elevate preaching as the defining duty of a pastor, Croft has rightly held both public and private ministry under the umbrella of shepherding (cf. Acts 20:20 & 20:28). Any pastor discharging less is a hireling (John 10:11-15).

Secondly, Croft has rightly placed the problem within the soul (45, 49). A pastor's problem is not ultimately the demands external to him. "In the heart of every pastor is an innate wiring, a tendency to fulfill his desires and meet the demands of life in broken, selfish, and sinful ways" (43). It is only that which comes out of the heart that defiles a person (Mark 7:20-23). Even sinful people (or circumstantial suffering) can at best only squeeze out what was already within. Croft refuses to diminish the death of Jesus for anything less than sin (see below). Therefore, he points pastors to the only solution, namely repentance (52). Pastors, like all believers, need a redeemer, not a therapeutic healer (cf. Titus 2:14).

Thirdly, the sections urging pastors to pastor their children are helpful and practical. For example, Croft rightly holds children accountable for their response, while admonishing pastors to not exasperate them (138-39) and then gives five concrete ways to prevent parenting by absentia (141ff.).

One facet of the work remains enigmatic, however—how to respond to Cara's running commentary. At times, her insertions were insightful, while at others awkward. Assuming the Crofts complementarians, Cara would be writing to the spouses of pastors in a book that is principally

addressed to the pastors. Furthermore, in light of Cara's preference for works of fiction rather than systematic (85), one wonders how to respond to her practical theology. Finally, the Appendix delineating Cara's depression seemed out of place in a book about pastoral ministry.

Two other limitations also bear mentioning. First, Brian rightly decries sinful desires while failing to eliminate "felt needs" theology (cf. 55). He laments pastors who, "Rather than...believing that God will meet his needs, he tries to meet his own needs for acceptance, significance, approval, and friendship" (45, cf. 74). To permit a "needs mentality" is to ensure slavery—to the very problem Croft bemoans. "'Needs' or 'rights' lead irresistibly into fear of man. We've seen that whatever you think you need, you come to fear" (Ed Welch, *When People Are Big and God is Small*, 87).

Moreover, one should not go to God to get those inordinate desires unmet by others. Martha tried the same and was rebuffed by Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Welch again, helps here:

> She knew that the answer was not to turn to Christ to meet her felt need. That would have made Jesus her personal talisman or idol. Instead, her answer was to put to death her selfish desires and to learn to fear God alone. As a result, her question began to change. It was no longer "Where can I find my worth?" but "Why am I so concerned about myself?" It was not "How can God fill my needs?" but "How can I see Christ as so glorious that I forget about my perceived needs?" (Welch, 233)

Clarity is desperately needed when countering the wisdom of the world that has crept into the church.

Secondly, real help for the problems astutely identified lies within reach—but untapped. The pitfalls uncovered could be better avoided through a paradigm of ministry more collegial than hierarchical. A hierarchy allows "the counsel of my associate pastor" to be ignored by the senior pastor (140). Associates do not hold seniors accountable. An equal, however, cannot be avoided. If all pastors were generalists, discharging all duties equally (including preaching), then all would be humbled by the calling, not just "senior pastors" (cf. 60) and each pastor could spend time with the church, counseling etc. (79-80) and with family during the worship service (166)—and perhaps even some of the temptations like the "great fear and anxiety" of becoming a senior pastor's wife, not experienced when merely an associate pastor's wife, could also be checked (cf. 155).

The church should demand all her pastors read and heed books like this. Books like these are vital—but more is needed. May the Croft's keep refining and reworking a thoroughly biblical pastoral ministry to glorify The Shep-

herd and Overseer of our souls.

Jim Fain, Ph.D.
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Rod & Staff Ministries
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Harney, Kevin G. ***Organic Outreach For Ordinary People: Sharing Good News Naturally***. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009. 256 pp. $14.99.

All Christians are called to be salt and light to a dark and dying world, yet many professing believers cringe at the thought of evangelizing. There is no doubt that evangelism is difficult, yet true followers of Christ understand that God has commanded us to evangelize the lost. For those who have been convicted to be obedient to the Word of God, pastor-author, Kevin Harney, has written this book to encourage us to reach out and share the good news of Jesus naturally. His focus is on ordinary people engaging in natural conversation and sharing God's love and grace (16). Harney has written a practical book to help us grow in our desire and ability to evangelize the lost.

Harney writes in a useful manner using a simple, yet effective outline. The book is divided into three parts. In part one (pre-evangelism), he builds a foundation based on having a heart for God. Because we are image bearers of Christ, our motivation for reaching the broken and lost must be shaped by the love that God has for His people. In part two, Harney "investigates some of the different ways that we can be part of God's amazing work of scattering and watering the seed of the gospel" (89). In this section he challenges us to reach out and connect with unbelievers regularly. Part three speaks of the ultimate work of salvation through the outreach of God's people. The author leaves no misunderstanding—salvation is a work of God alone, in the heart of man. He reminds us that the credit is not ours, yet the Holy Spirit works in and through us to accomplish God's plan of salvation.

This book contains a wealth of information, however, two points stand out. The first is prayer. For outreach to be effective, we must begin with a high view of God and have a total dependence upon Him, and we show this dependence by being prayerful people. Harney has beautifully described the image of prayer by announcing, "We unleash heavenly power when we pray for lost people. When God's people pray, heaven shakes, strongholds are broken, and power is unleashed" (97, 99). The author leaves no doubt that to make a dramatic change and impact on our evangelistic outreach, the Holy Spirit will have to be intimately involved. We must be engaged in prayer on a consistent basis if we are to

be tools that God uses to bring people into His kingdom. Harney teaches us several ways to engage in prayer to experience afresh the grace of God. One method I immediately placed into my own prayer time was 'Triple-Five Prayers' (101).

The second point is interaction with the lost.Throughout the book, Harney presents questions to invite us into a deeper spiritual conversation with non-believers. Harney rightly offers warnings to Christians to periodically check their motives to ensure that they are (1) operating from a pure desire to be salt and light in the world, and (2) that they are influencing people with the truths of the gospel, and not allowing themselves to get sucked back into sinful living. The author offers many suggestions for providing a conduit so that unbelievers can come together naturally with followers of Christ and engage in the regular activities of life. Additionally, each chapter ends with a practical section of questions designed to challenge the reader in their own personal growth.

One weakness that I see in this book is that when Harney speaks of the gospel message he leads off with the good news of God's love, rather than the person's need to be poor in spirit and thirsting for righteousness because of the sin that separates him from God (Matt. 5:3-6; Isa. 59:2). To be fair, he never disregards these truths; they always flow right behind God's graciousness and love. However, I am under the conviction that nobody can fully understand the powerful grace that is the gift of God's love unless they know exactly how bad their need for a Savior is. The gospel message includes, and is predicated on several factors, not just one. (1) A warning about sin and the consequences of sin (John 16:8; 2 Thess. 1:8-9). (2) God's solution for sin—the good news of the gospel (Rom. 3:21-26; Eph. 2:1-9; 2 Cor. 5:21). (3) Finally, it includes the clear call to repent (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:1-5; Acts 17:29-31; Rom. 1:16). We are not interested in simply satisfying the outward desires of people's lives. The full gospel message is one that has the power to transform lives from the inside out, and we should never neglect offering the full gospel.

This book was written for the person who is ready to thoughtfully and prayerfully step up his evangelism and be a beacon of God's grace and love. The author concedes, "Evangelism is not about a magic formula. It is about the power of God and the faithfulness of His people, people like you and me. We scatter the seed, but He brings the growth" (149). If we desire a closer relationship with God, we have to get ourselves out of our comfort zones and engage in the world as salt and light. I highly recommend this book.

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James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 2nd Edition
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012, 193pp. $21.99.

Would you classify much of the Bible teaching at your church as little more than "poor lay preaching?" If you were honest, how would you describe the teachers under whom your people sit week after week? Is their material full of biblical content, but dry, disjointed and unconnected to real life? Or, is their teaching illustrative and witty but touching upon the Scripture only long enough to glean only the smallest seeds of truth? Perhaps you are a pastor or lay-teacher who feels like you fit into one of these two categories. Whatever the case, whether you are a pastor hoping to cultivate a strong teaching ministry in your church, or a lay-teacher struggling to communicate the truths of God's Word in a way that is both useful to students and faithful to the text, Wilhoit and Ryken's Effective Bible Teaching has much to offer you.

The authors, James Wilhoit, professor of Christian Formation at Wheaton College, and Leland Ryken, professor of English at the same institution, are convinced that poor Bible teaching can be remedied. "The premise of this book is that it is possible to diagnose with precision what goes well and what goes poorly in the classroom. It is also possible to prescribe a cure for every ailment" (14). The hope that one's teaching can transition from dull and lifeless to stimulating and fruitful is a welcome encouragement for many teachers of the Bible, I'm sure.

Wilhoit and Ryken are persuaded, however, that in our attempts to correct instances of unfruitful teaching in our churches we have looked "too much at the teacher and not enough at the educational process and the content" (15). While not ignoring this "human component" completely—Chapter 4 is dedicated to discussing the traits of an excellent teacher—the authors concentrate their efforts on what is taught more than on the one who teaches it. Their aim is to help instructors craft textually grounded, theologically insightful, well-organized Bible studies that not only convey spiritually nourishing truth in a compelling manner, but also motivate students to think, study and learn on their own. Many good teachers may regularly accomplish the former, but only an excellent teacher will find consistent success in the latter. Indeed,

the notion that genuine learning is self-motivated learning is a principle that underlies the entire book.

> We must never forget that all true education is self-education. No teacher can make students learn, a fact that is ignored in contemporary approaches to education that pamper students and ask teachers to shoulder the entire responsibility for education....Students need to be engaged, not infatuated, and that is why we emphasize learning-centered education. Our focus must be on fostering and promoting deep and significant student learning (31).

In order to promote this kind self-motivated learning, Wilhoit and Ryken find great value in facilitating Inductive Bible Studies where students are encouraged and expected to interact with, ask questions about, and formulate their own judgments about the biblical text at the guidance of the instructor. This approach to Bible teaching is distinguished from Directed Bible Studies. Although the various components of the teacher's preparation are the same under each approach, what happens in the classroom is notably different. "A directed study replaces group discovery with the leader's sharing of his or her insights into a passage. Inductive study is radically democratic. It gives every member a vote. Directed study lets the leader do more of the talking" (110). Wilhoit and Ryken do not mean to imply, however, that inductive Bible studies are always advisable. Some groups are too large while others are too unfamiliar with the material to benefit from an inductive approach. In such cases, the teacher should implement a directed study method so that the students will be exposed to educated teaching rather than the collective ignorance of the other students.

Regardless of how you might assess the validity of the inductive method for conducting Bible studies or whether or not you believe it would work in your particular setting, the principles outlined by Wilhoit and Ryken will serve as reliable tools to help you adequately prepare and present faithful and stimulating Bible teaching. I shall mention a few.

Perhaps most important among the principles discussed by the authors is their exhortation to "come to grips with the text" (17). In order to avoid drifting into the comfortable territory of one's hobbyhorses or to keep from waxing eloquent on theological issues not related to a given passage, teachers must draw their lessons from the text itself. Yet, remaining tethered to the text is not enough. "To teach a passage effectively, a teacher must be able to communicate a sense of its unity" (59). In order to grasp a passage's unity, one must

identify its genre—is it narrative, exposition, poetry?—and locate the "big idea" of the passage. Accurately identifying the genre guards one from wrongly interpreting the passage. Discerning the main idea keeps the teacher from missing the conceptual forest for the exegetical trees. Both practices help "impose a unity" on the passage that will help the teacher and his students better understand the biblical text.

In fact, because Wilhoit and Ryken are convinced that proper interpretation depends upon one's ability to classify the kind of literature they are studying, they discuss the matter of genre in multiple places throughout the book, dedicating two chapters to specific genres: narrative (Chapter 13) and poetry (Chapter 14). Even in the chapter devoted to helping the teacher recognize and convey the main idea of a passage (Chapter 6), Wilhoit and Ryken give several examples of what this looks like as the teacher comes in contact with the Bible's various genre.

The authors also outline several indispensable principles for sound biblical interpretation (see Chapter 8). Among these is the reminder to "operate on the premise that the Bible is God's revealed word, inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore without error" (92). Keeping this foundational premise in its rightful place helps the teacher properly reverence Scripture as he works his interpretation of various texts.

A second principle a teacher must keep clear in his mind is that "the biblical canon...is an organic whole in which the parts fit together harmoniously" (93). Unfortunately, as it relates to the work of interpretation, the authors understand this principle chiefly in precautionary terms: "Accordingly, one should interpret individual passages in an awareness of what is said elsewhere in the Bible. In the case of difficult or obscure passages, the interpreter should give precedence to biblical passages where the doctrine is clear" (93). The canon acts as a set of guardrails to keep the teacher from driving into a doctrinal ditch as he handles tough passages.

There is more, however, that should be drawn from this principle; namely, that Scripture's nature as an "organic" document implies that much theological and pastoral treasure can be quarried from understanding how various themes, doctrines and types unfold over the canon and find fulfillment and development as God's plan of redemption is revealed in greater and greater detail. Although Wilhoit and Ryken mention the progressive nature of Scripture on the following page (94), they do so only to offer

a general reminder that teaching in the Old Testament is often clarified in the New.

The implication, then, is that, while incredibly helpful, Wilhoit and Ryken's book should not be the only book that Bible teachers read in their quest to grow in effectiveness. Books other than those that delineate the mechanics of biblical interpretation and the methods of teaching should find their way onto the teacher's reading list; works of biblical theology in particular. An effective teacher will not only be able to deal rightly with a given passage, he will also be able to place that passage within the grand narrative of the biblical storyline and show his people how the truth of that particular text relates to Christ and unfolds (or has unfolded) over the canon. In short, an effective Bible teacher will be able to show his students how the whole Bible fits together with Christ at the center. And when students really see this, their desire to learn will be insatiable.

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Personal Organization for the Sake of Fruitful Ministry[1]

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Some people may think it weird or merely the sign of an obsessive personality, but I get butterflies when I walk into an Office Depot. Even the thought of notebooks, filing cabinets, planners, and binders gets me excited. Oh for more sticky notes and file-folders with reinforced tabs! And, for those who think I am stuck in a bygone era of space-devouring paper goods: yes, I love Evernote and Pocket and Dropbox. I've even been known to block out serious chunks of time (like, on the calendar) to organize my MacBook's files and de-clutter the desktop.

I have a passion for organization.

But not everyone shares my enthusiasm for drawer dividers and label makers. Through conversation and general observation over the years it has become clear that there are people who find an overly-organized work environment stiflinag when it comes to their creativity and productivity. Others have concluded that setting aside time to index their notes, catalog their books, assemble all their files according to appropriate categories,

and establish a system of "productivity processes" actually takes away from time in which they can be creative and productive.

While I do not want to quarrel with those whose personality seems to require a certain amount of, shall we say, workspace flexibility, I do want to challenge the assumption that careful attention to organization kills creativity and productivity.

In fact, I would contend that organization is an indispensable key to both.

MINISTRY AND ORGANIZATION

When it comes to ministry, then, Christians should give some serious thought to organization. If we are called to be fruitful and rich in good works—a calling that involves both creativity and productivity—then we should gladly embrace any means that enable us to abound in these things.

Take, for example, a well-organized desk. The effort it takes to plan and maintain an orderly desk may be significant, but the payoff far outweighs the time and energy required to set up your workspace and routinely return everything to its place. More to the point: an organized desk enables you to do a greater amount good for others than you could do with a disorderly desk. In his discussion of promoting effective productivity practices, Matt Perman makes this important link between organization and fruitfulness.

First, good productivity practices reduce the friction in doing good, thus making doing good easier and more likely. For example, I have a series on my blog about how to set up your desk. I think it's pretty fun to have your desk set up well. But what's the ultimate reason a good desk set up matters to me? Because setting up your desk effectively helps you be more effective in serving others. It means that instead of having your stuff all over, getting in your way and creating friction in your life, you can operate in a smooth and efficient way to focus on what you really need to get done" (Matt Perman, *What's Best Next*, 87).

So, the cultivation of effective organizational habits is not merely for your own convenience; it is for the good of others. When we, as Perman observes, "remove the friction in doing good" by maintaining an orderly workspace, we are freed to serve others more effectively.

But it doesn't stop at your desk.

Consider the other areas of your life in which your ability to readily and intentionally meet needs would be enhanced by giving greater attention to organization.

YOUR FINANCES

If you maintain an orderly budget, keep track of your spending, itemize your savings, and intentionally set aside funds for specific uses, you can know exactly how much you are able to give when

urgent needs arise. You will have a keen grasp on how much you take in each month, how much you need to live on, and how much you can give away. In this way, organization does not stifle generosity; it encourages it. And in the long run, a Christian who maintains an orderly budget will most likely give more than the person who thinks they are being more "spiritual" by giving according to their spontaneous impulses. It's counter-intuitive, but a person who only gives "when the Spirit moves" and never gets a handle on their finances usually won't give very much over a given year. They might think they are generous, but in terms of actual numbers, they are surprisingly stingy.

YOUR POSSESSIONS

When you maintain an orderly living space, you are able better to provide specific goods to those who are in need. You need a sleeping bag for a mission trip? It's in the garage on the second shelf from the bottom; I'll have it to you by tomorrow. Do I have any books on eschatology? Yes, in the attic, the two boxes on the far left. I'll bring you a stack on Sunday. Clothes for an 18 month old boy? In a bin near the front of the closet upstairs; you can swing by on Wednesday to pick them up.

On the other hand, when your possessions are unaccounted for and left in disorderly heaps around the house and garage and attic, you are unable to quickly and effectively supply needs. Moreover, disorganization can lead to a poor stewardship of your finances as you repurchase things you already own—whether for your own needs or for the needs of others.

YOUR TIME

Your time is much like your money: if you want to be generous with it, you must get organized. Take a given week for example. If you neglect to plan how you will use your time each day, you will most likely waste a lot of precious minutes (which add up to hours and days and years) that you will not be able to spend serving others. You will also be unable to determine how much time you can spend on a particular project or with a person to whom you are ministering.

In the latter example, if you are unwilling to organize your schedule, you might find that the time you spend with people is often characterized by several "watch checks" and the inability to really concentrate on others because you are weighed down by the anxiety of not knowing exactly how much time you are able to give to a particular situation. Knowing how much time you are able to give to a person in need allows you to concentrate fully on and listen carefully to them. Granted, there are times when God will stretch our schedules and keep us in one place for longer than we planned; but, generally speaking we will find that we enhance our time with oth-

ers when we keep an orderly schedule.

YOUR STUDY

When I ponder the importance of disciplined, orderly study, I am reminded of John "Rabbi" Duncan, a man who, though godly, never reached his potential as a theologian due to his inability to organize his pursuit of knowledge. In the introduction to Duncan's brief biography, we learn that despite his great teaching ability, his failure to impose structure and exercise intentionality in his studies significantly limited his contribution to the Christian world.

> These [teaching] endowments, however, were counteracted by certain weaknesses which hindered his usefulness. There was a lack of any plan in his acquisition of knowledge. He had a fatal tendency to miscellaneous. He was often carried away intellectually with some engrossing mental problem or absorbed spiritually with some enquiry into the state of his soul. Furthermore, he was utterly unmethodical in everything but the arrangement of his thoughts. The greatest defect of his character, however, was, as Dr. Moody Stuart points out, weakness of purpose. 'You could not name any living man whom you could so easily turn aside in judgment from what he had approved, or in execution from what he had intended.' This irregularity in work was fatal to his potential power as a professor and scholar. In this realm he was rather a great possibility than a great realization. ('Just a Talker': Sayings of John ('Rabbi') Duncan, xxix.)

Sadly, Duncan was not as fruitful as he could have been due to a simple lack of organization in his life. And how many of us, who read much and study much, because we are unwilling to establish an effective note keeping and retrieval system, are limiting our contribution to our families, our churches, and our schools? How much valuable truth and useful knowledge are you now unable to pass along to others because you never troubled yourself to write it down and file it away?

These are not a questions of personality—whether we consider ourselves a "Duty Fulfiller" or an "Idealist" or a "Doer" or a "Thinker"—these are questions of stewardship and how we are using the resources God has entrusted to us. Organization may come more naturally to some, but it is needed for anyone who desires to effectively serve others.

So, even if you don't consider yourself an organized person, I encourage you to consider the ways your ministry to others and your capacity to do good would be enhanced by a little more attention to where you keep your pens and how you track your budget.

ENDNOTES

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Two Questions that May Greatly Improve Your Church's Ministry[1]

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I'm no management consultant, leadership expert, or church growth guru. But if you love your church and want to see it as effective as possible–for the sake of evangelism, education, exaltation, and whatever other E's you may have in your mission statement–try asking these two questions. One is from the pastor for his leaders, and the other is from the leaders for his pastor.

QUESTION #1—PASTOR TO LEADERS: "HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PREACHING?"

Most pastors have no mechanism for regular, thoughtful feedback on their preaching. Those laboring on larger church staffs may have a built-in worship review, but most pastors in the country don't enjoy such a luxury. And even if they do, it would be wise to solicit feedback from lay leaders in the church–the kind that are mature in the faith, have demonstrated longstanding commitment, but don't live and breath the details of planning and

evaluating worship services. I have my annual evaluation coming up in the next month. I plan on asking our elder vice-president how I can improve my preaching.

If preaching is the most important thing we do in ministry, why not be more deliberate about trying to develop new skills, weed out bad habits, and get some much needed fine tuning? For most of us, the feedback on our preaching consists of "Good job, pastor" or "Nice sermon, pastor" as people file out after the service. And when we get criticism it often comes from cranky church members who aren't happy with much of anything. I think most church members love their pastor and are normally pleased with the preaching (or they wouldn't stick around). But I also know that every pastor can get better. If Timothy was told to fan into flames the gift he had, shouldn't we–I'm talking to my fellow pastors–look for ways to blow fresh wind across faint coals?

Obviously, this first question is not one you ask of just anyone. We aren't looking to poll-test our latest sermon series. We aren't trying to scratch itching ears. Parishoners may want more of what isn't good for them in their weekly preaching diet. And yet, your best leaders should be able to give the pastor honest, thoughtful, affirming, constructive feedback. I know it can be scary to even ask the question. But the spread of the gospel and the good of our people are more important than our sensitive psyches.

Over the years I can think of lots of helpful feedback I've gotten on my preaching:

Your introductions are too long. Don't be afraid to dive right into the text.

Your sermons could be five minutes shorter without losing anything.

You seem rushed when you get to your conclusion. That's often the best, most important part. Think about trimming back earlier in the sermon so you can slow down at the end.

Your content is great, but it can be too much.

Just be yourself.

Maybe, brother pastor, you need more illustrations, or fewer. Maybe you are going over people's heads, or leaving the people a bit famished. Maybe you've developed a distracting mannerism, gesture, or expression. Maybe you've gotten into a rut. Maybe you are trying too hard to be creative. Who knows? Why not ask?

QUESTION #2—LEADERS TO PASTOR: "HOW CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?"

Like the first question, this one is dangerous. Pastors can be unrealis-

tic. They can be selfish. They can be lazy. They can be greedy. There is no sin you struggle with that we can't struggle with too. And yet, just like most churches love their pastor, I believe most pastors love their church. Very likely, your pastor is working hard, doing the best he can, trying to be a faithful preacher, leader, discipler, evangelist, spiritual caregiver, and family man. So why not ask how you can help him?

I can raise this issue because my church cares for me and my family very well. I'm not trying to send subtle hints and suggestions. In fact, it's because I am treated so well that I'm jealous for my fellow pastors to be cared for equally well. If asked how you can support him and his family, here are some of things you might hear from your pastor.

"My wife feels alone." Our elders formed "Team Trisha" a few years ago to care for my wife. It's a few other women in the church who meet with her regularly to hear how she's doing and find ways to help (especially when I'm busy or out of town).

"I could use more vacation time." I know most people in the church work hard at their jobs, sometimes for little pay and with little vacation. But your bad experience doesn't have to be the standard for everyone else. For the life of me I don't know how some pastors survive on two weeks vacation per year. I recommend three weeks as a minimum, preferably four. In Britain, I'm told, six weeks is quite normal. One of the surest ways to decrease the effectiveness of your church's ministry is to get a burnt out pastor. When churches are sticklers with their pastor's vacation, they hurt themselves as much as anyone.

"I don't have enough money for books." Even a modest book allowance would be a tremendous blessing, and could pay big dividends.

"I'd like to attend a conference, but it's far away and kind of expensive." Find a way to make it happen. There are dozens of good conferences. Your pastors can't (and shouldn't) go to all of them, but it would serve his soul and serve your church if he could go to a couple–maybe a smaller local conference each year and one of the big national conferences. These conferences are only partly about the content. They are just as much for the fellowship, the friendships, the road trip, and the time away. Not to mention the free books.

"I could use more study time." This may mean making adjustments to the weekly grind so your pastor can devote himself more fully to the word of God and prayer. This may mean helping your pastor manage

his own time better. This may also mean adding one or two weeks of study time to your already generous vacation package. If the pastor actually uses the time to read, write, and reflect, I can't imagine a church regretting this sort of allowance.

"We are barely making ends meet." That's a tricky one. At least hear him out. Do what you can to make his service a joy and not a burden.

"Pray for me." Pray for your pastor in private. Pray for him if you have the opportunity to lead in prayer in church. Take time once in awhile to pray for him during your elders' meeting. See if he'd like a group to regularly meet with him for prayer.

Ministry is hard work. For all of us–pastors, elders, church members, for every Christian. But let's not make it harder, or less joyful or less effective, than it has to be. Sometimes the best thing you can do for your church is the simplest thing: just ask the right questions. These two are a good place to start.

ENDNOTE

1. This article originally appeared at TheGospelCoaltion.org. Used by permission.

What Works For Us (and Might Work For You) in Family Worship[1]

BRIAN HOWARD

Brian Howard has twenty-two years of leadership experience as a leadership coach, non-profit executive, church planter, lead pastor, and business owner Brian spent two years serving on the board of the Acts 29 Network, where he directed church planter training, coaching, and networking for three west coast states. Brian also co-founded and led the Sojourn Network, a national church planting network.He currently leads Church Multiplication for Pacific Church Network.Brian has coached several hundred leaders around the world and is the Executive Director of Context Coaching Inc., a firm that specializes in coaching leaders. Brian holds a Master's degree from Talbot School of Theology, has been married for twenty years to the love of his life, and has four children.

Are you a parent?

Then you need to know that your kids are going to learn primarily what you teach them.

You might sometimes wish that you could delegate the spiritual training of your kids, but you are the one who is responsible to teach, train, and disciple your kids. This is not something to be outsourced to Sunday School teachers or youth pastors as past generations have sometimes done.

Over my fifteen years of parenting, my wife and I have continuously attempted to teach our kids what is true and call them to live in light of the truth of who God is and what he has done. We have read the Psalms and Proverbs as a family several times. When we do this, we have each of our kids (who is old enough to read) read a verse until we are finished with a chapter. After reading a chapter we have a discussion about what we learn in the chapter about who God is, what He is done, and how He relates to us. Then we

finish by praying together.

We have read through The Jesus Storybook Bible several times. We have also had seasons where we felt like complete failures at family worship. But we have never given up. In light of what we have learned over the years, here are four words of advice to help you press forward in family worship:

1. YOU ARE BY FAR THE PRIMARY SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE IN THE LIFE OF YOUR KIDS.

Consider how Moses instructs the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy concerning God's ways:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7, ESV)

The Scriptures make it clear that parents are to teach their kids God's truths. But what about teenagers?

Recently I read a summary of the writing of researcher, Christian Smith, who asserts that our assumptions about American teenagers are often incorrect. He says:

In U.S. culture, the very ideas of "teenager" and "rebellion" are virtually synonymous...But that impression is fundamentally wrong. What we learned from interviewing hundreds of different kinds of teenagers all around the country is that the vast majority of American teenagers are exceedingly conventional in their religious identity and practices. Very few are restless, alienated, or rebellious; rather the majority of U.S. teenagers seem basically content to follow the faith of their families with little questioning.

Contrary to what many people think, you are the primary spiritual influence in the life of your kids. Wayne Rice, one of the pioneers of American youth ministry, argues this compellingly in his book, Reinventing Youth Ministry (Again). Knowing that we have a large influence on our children's lives is both comforting and scary.

2. DOING SOMETHING FOR FAMILY WORSHIP IS FAR BETTER THAN DOING NOTHING.

My friend Josh McPherson, pastor of Grace City Church in Wenatchee, Washington recently told me, "A good plan today is far better than a perfect plan next week." Perfection can be the enemy of progress. Read a verse and talk about it. Pray together. Get a book and go through it. But do something. Perfection has never worked for us. We have never, not even a single time, done family worship 7 nights in a row. Our goal is to pull it off somewhere around 4 nights a week. We have to

work around high school basketball games, gymnastics, music lessons, dinner with neighbors, and the like But we keep at it knowing that something is far better than nothing.

3. DON'T QUIT WHEN YOU GET DISCOURAGED.

The best way to save money, unless you are super rich, is not normally to make a one time deposit. The best way to save money is to put some away every month. Eventually, in most cases, your consistent savings will amount to a large savings account. This same principle of consistency is true with family worship. There will be times when a fight breaks out during family worship or when you feel like yelling at everyone. Come back to it tomorrow night. Don't get discouraged and quit when your kids don't vow to spend their lives on the mission field in Africa. Stay with it for years. Don't quit.

4. WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW FOR FAMILY WORSHIP.

A few weeks ago I called my friend, Chad Vegas, who pastors Sovereign Grace Church in Bakersfield, CA. I asked him for some insight into what might be effective for us to do in family worship now that we have two teenagers. Chad recommended that we take our family through the New City Catechism (www.newcitycatechism.com). We started this a few weeks ago and love it. Here is how it works for us:

- We have dinner as a family 4-5 nights per week.
- Before we get up from the dinner table we have a time of family worship.
- We focus on one catechism question per week. (There are 52 total)
- I printed 6 copies of the questions so each person has a copy. We keep them next to the dinner table.
- There is an iPad and iPhone app for the New City Catechism. I have this open when I am leading.
- By the end of the week, our kids have the catechism question and answer memorized.
- There are accompanying Scriptures that go along with the question of the week.
- Chandra (my wife) and I talk through with our kids the implications of the question and the Scripture that we read.
- We pray together.

It's not rocket science.

Here is my final challenge: No matter what, start having family worship this week.

ENDNOTES

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Should I Tell My Spouse About Struggles with Sexual Purity[1]

GARRETT KELL

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"Should I tell my wife?"

Daniel leaned back with no interest in the meal before him. He'd looked at racy pictures again and the weight of conviction was inescapable. He had confessed his sin to God and to me, but should he confess it to her?

What would you tell Daniel?

SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Because every couple is different, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question. Some couples are totally transparent with each other, while others find it best to allow accountability to be handled by trusted friends. Regardless of where you land on the spectrum, it is important for husbands and wives to develop a plan to help each other fight sexual temptation.

What follows are seven principles to help you and your spouse wade through this sensitive area together.

1. Help each other make it to heaven.

> "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Hebrews 3:13

My chief calling as a husband is to help my wife love Jesus more. My wife has the same responsibility toward me. In fact, I would suggest that the most weighty and wonderful responsibilities in marriage is to help our spouse make it to heaven. One of the ways to make this happen is by doing whatever we can to help them fight off temptation, including sexual temptation (Heb. 12:1-2; James 5:19-20). We are to be each other's greatest allies in the journey toward the heavenly city (Rev. 21-22).

Satan will oppose your efforts with all he's got, but you must not lose sight of this fact: your greatest responsibility as a couple is to help each other home by leaning upon the strength of your Savior. Let the mantra of our marriages be the same as the psalmist, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3). This will be painful at times, but it is eternally worth it.

2. Cultivate an atmosphere of intimate trust.

> "The heart of her husband trusts in her..." Proverbs 31:11

After God brought Adam and Eve together in the first marriage, we are told, "the man and his wife were both naked and unashamed" (Gen. 2:25). They had nothing to cover up in those days. There were no deleted search histories in Eden. There were no shameful compromises or weeping wounds from unfaithfulness.

Intimacy and trust are still possible outside of Eden, but they don't happen by accident. They must be cultivated. As 1 John 1:7 promises, "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..." There is no better way to deepen trust in marriage than walking honestly and openly together.

Do you hide things from your spouse?

I believe there should be no secrets in marriage. Surprises? Yes. Secrets? No.

Wisdom and discernment is certainly needed on this point. For instance, it is unwise to share every thought that comes in your head or every conflict you have at work or the details of other people's lives that have been shared with you. We aren't talking about those kinds of issues. This is a challenge to not intentionally hide sins from your spouse. Death and deceit breed in the darkness. A husband and wife

should always be honest with each other about the condition of their souls.

If our goal is to build trust, it probably seems counter-productive to reveal trust-breaking sins. But the fact is, nothing builds trust like seeing your spouse trying to delight in God more than anything else. Honesty and humble transparency, over time, produce intimate trust in your marriage. Walk in the light together.

3. Consider the Basics of Accountability.

> "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..." James 5:16

At some level, husbands and wives should be each other's accountability partners. Confessing sin to each other should be a normal part of your life together. Because each couple is different, you need to have a conversation about what this will look like in your own marriage.

Here are a few basic ideas:

- Talk. If you've never had a conversation with your spouse about your struggles with sexual sin, you should have one. Your spouse needs to know to whom they are married. I strongly encourage you to allow your pastor to help you think through how to have this difficult initial discussion.
- Plan. Husbands and wives should work together to make an accountability plan (see #4 below). Because your body is not your own (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:4) they have the right and responsibility to talk through this with you. Husbands should lead by taking the initiative in this discussion (Eph. 5:22-25) and wives should give husbands the much-needed help they require (Gen. 2:18). Regardless of which spouse is struggling, you need to help each other. Again, it may be wise to involve a pastor or other mature Christian friends in this process.
- Ask. Part of the plan should be that your spouse reserves the right to ask you at any time how you are doing in your fight against temptation—and expect to get an honest answer from you.

I would also suggest that you should always have at least one other person, of the same sex, to whom you are accountable, not just about sexual sin. Sin thrives in the darkness. Making regular and honest confession to another believer is one of your best defenses against sin's power.

4. Agree on Your Approach to Accountability.

I have spoken to dozens of people

about this subject and every couple does things differently. What follows are two categories on the opposite ends of the accountability spectrum.

Some couples are very open about sexual temptations. Some couples agree it is best to tell each other when they feel tempted, if they find someone else attractive, if they compromise at all on the internet, if they give into self-gratification, and just about everything else. Couples who take this approach say that complete transparency helps both of them to stay honest and vigilant in the battle against sin.

If you lean toward this option,

- Make sure your motives are good. Sometimes seeing the pain that our sin inflicts on the ones we love can be a deterrent to sin, but don't use your spouse just to unload your guilt and make you feel better.
- Don't expect your spouse to respond well to your sin. Your confession may devastate them. Don't get all self-righteous because you're being vulnerable. You've sinned against them. Don't get defensive when they ask questions. Nothing ruins a confession like making excuses. Give them a chance to grieve, process, and go to God. Give them permission to talk to a trusted friend about what has happened if they need to.
- If you've agreed to a plan, honor it. If you've sinned in a way your spouse would expect you to tell them, follow through with being honest. It will be tempting to find a way out and rationalize a million excuses why you don't need to tell them (I won't do it again, I don't want to hurt them, and so on).
- Be willing to switch your plan if it seems wise. Insecurities can flourish in unexpected and unnecessary ways in these conversations. I have godly friends who have tried going with the "total transparency" option and found it to be way too much for their spouses to handle. There is no shame in making changes to the plan if necessary.
- If your spouse confesses sin to you, you will be tempted to be most worried about how the sin affects you. It is normal to be hurt by sin, but ask God to help you be even more concerned about the way your spouse has strayed from him. None of us can do this perfectly, but plead with God to keep your heart postured in that direction.

Some couples don't talk about this area in detail unless a certain level

of sin occurs. Some couples agree it is best for their spouse to confess struggles with lust to a mutually trusted Christian friend, not to them. They humbly realize they would be too hurt by their spouse's straying heart or that they feel the struggle is too foreign to them to be able to know how to help them.

If you lean toward this option,

- Have an agreed-upon type of sin at which you agree to talk to your spouse. Purity is a heart issue (Matt. 5:28, 15:19), but it is fine for couples to set agreed-upon conversational mile markers. This may be habitually looking at porn, giving in to masturbation, or crossing certain lines with someone of the opposite sex. Pray for God to give you wisdom in this discussion.
- Don't use this approach as a deceptive cover for your sin. Romans 13:14 says "make no provision for the flesh to gratify its lusts." The well-trusted accountability partner should know what these mile markers are and be willing to inform the spouse if sin were to ever get out of control.
- Don't avoid the discussion just because it hurts. As one wife said to me, "out of love for him, I would want to be a part of the solution, but it would be really difficult." That's a good perspective. Growing in holiness and helping others to do the same is hard and painful work. It is humble to know your limitations, but it is also humble to accept your responsibilities. Pray for God to give you wisdom to know the balance.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this subject. Some spouses will be able to hear about your struggle, be hurt by it, but recover in the grace of God. Others will be devastated by the fact that you'd even be tempted, even if you didn't yield to the temptation. We need to live with our spouses in an understanding way and be willing to humbly and graciously build a plan together (1 Pet. 3:7).

5. Ask Each Other Important Questions

As you begin this process together, here are a few questions to help you begin the conversation.

- How are we helping each other love God more? How can we do this better?

- How can I help you fight against temptation? Who else can help you?
- Do you fear talking to me about these things? How can we make our marriage a safe place to have these talks?
- Do you have any sins in your life that no one knows about?

For many of us, having this kind of conversation can be terrifying. Some of us don't want to know what our spouse is struggling with, and some of us don't want our spouse to know what we're struggling with. But because God's glory and the salvation of souls are at stake (Heb. 3:12-14), we must be willing to have tough conversations.

A few weeks ago, my wife and I talked through this article with a couple of close friends. God used that discussion to help them pray and discuss how they could better serve each other in this area. They said the conversation was difficult at times, but in the end God used it to draw them closer than they had been before.

If you want to do this, but don't know how, I'd encourage you to share this article with your pastor or another mature Christian couple and ask them to help you begin this journey together.

6. Go Make Love

> "Do not deprive one another...come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you..." 1 Corinthians 7:5

Much could be said here, but believe this: making love should be a priority in your marriage. God has given sexual intimacy for many reasons, one of which is to help each other fight against sexual sin. Husbands and wives need to be committed to regularly engaging in sexual intimacy.

Some of you may be tempted to feel like a mere outlet for your spouse's physical desires. Guard your heart from this distortion. As my wife told a friend, "As a wife, you have the great responsibility of protecting your marriage by serving your husband through sex. It's one of God's divinely ordained means to help his heart not be as easily tempted by lust. Sex is sometimes a sweet dying to self." The same truth goes for husbands. Serve your wife through sexual intimacy, through non-sexual affection, and through regular, intentional, attentive conversations. God can use that to help guard her heart from wandering.

For some of you, this encouragement to make love to your spouse brings up a slew of painful emotions. Maybe you have been sinned against gravely by your spouse and the thought of giving

yourself to them intimately is almost inconceivable. Maybe you're facing physiological problems that hinder you from being able to make love. Maybe it's one of countless other reasons that make sex with your spouse difficult.

If you and your spouse are one of the many who feel this way, please don't give up. Prayerfully plan and begin working through these issues with your pastor, a gospel-centered counselor, or capable doctor. Be patient with each other in this process and trust that the Lord is able to do more than you can imagine (Eph. 3:20-21).

7. Keep the Gospel Central in Your Marriage.

Husbands and wives sin against each other every day. This is part of marriage in a fallen world. But there is something unique about sexual sin that seems to hurt in a distinctly deep way. And even if they haven't sinned but are being tempted to do so, the sting of knowing that your beloved's heart is being tempted to stray can be painful.

So if your spouse comes to you with the weight of sinning against you and the Lord on their back, it will be difficult, but remember that Galatians 6:2 says we are to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Lead them to the cross where they, and you, will both be refreshed and restored by the Lord who daily bears our burdens (Ps. 55:22, 68:19). Plead with the Lord to cover your pain with his grace and you do all you can to cover your spouse's shame with the truths of the gospel.

Remind each other that the Jesus who spoke severely about sexual sin (Matt. 5:28-30) is the same Jesus who died for those sins and rose victorious over them (Rom. 4:25). He is patient with sinners of all sorts, and promises forgiveness for all who turn from their sin and follow after him (Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:8-9). He promises to intercede for us and provide grace in our time of need (Heb. 4:14-16) while also providing power to help us war against our unrelenting foe (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:17).

Moments like these are where the gospel feels most real and most needed. They are also when the power of the gospel can most transform your marriage. God will help you forgive and work through the process of restoration. So don't lose heart with each other, or with yourself. God's grace is sufficient, even for what you and your spouse face.

Help each other to heaven. Talk about these things. Cultivate intimate trust. Make a plan. Make love. Cast yourselves upon the grace

of God. And do this all with your hope fixed on the glory that is to be revealed. We will be home with Jesus soon, so help each other toward that Day.

For Further Consideration

- Heath Lambert's excellent book *Finally Free* (ch. 5) discusses how spouses should talk about sexual sin.
- Remember that temptation is not sin. This article by Kevin DeYoung may be helpful to read together. (http://bit.ly/1uARUOa)
- Dr. Russell Moore answers a man who asks if should confess an affair that happened years ago. (http://bit.ly/1rWAeuf)
- Considering marrying someone who struggles with porn? Read Heath Lambert's article and listen to John Piper's advice first. (http://bit.ly/1saGvE2; http://bit.ly/1qgUwKN)
- John Piper also addresses whether your spouse's struggle with porn is worthy of divorce.(http://bit.ly/1sZEgkI)
- What should you do if your spouse confesses that they have committed adultery or is living a secret life of sin? A good article by John MacArthur helps you think through forgiveness, but you must involve the elders of your church in this discussion. (http://bit.ly/1pPXvuA)

Author's Note: Thank you to my wife, Zach Schlegel, Jason Seville, Shai Linne, Brian Davis, and the many other brothers and sisters who helped me think through this important topic.

ENDNOTES

[1] This article originally appeared at 9Marks.org. Used by permission.

Bring the Bible Home to Your Heart[1]

DAVID MATHIS

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We all want to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22)

Who wants to feel the failure or share in the shame of being pegged like one "who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror . . . and goes away and at once forgets what he was like" (James 1:23–24)? It would seem like Bible application is an essential spiritual discipline to consciously pursue every time we encounter God's word — but that depends on how we define "application."

The key question we need to answer is what effect should regular Bible intake have on our hearts and lives — and how does it happen?

GOD'S WORD IS FOR YOU

For starters, we should be clear that aiming to apply God's words to our lives is grounded in the good instinct that the Bible is for us. Optimism about life application makes good on these amazing claims that all the Scriptures are for Christians:

"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 Timothy 3:16–17).

"Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. . . . [T]hey were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The whole Bible is for the whole church. We have good Scriptural warrant to come to God's words expecting them to be understandable and applicable. We should make good on Puritan preacher Thomas Watson's counsel,

> Take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think thus: "God means my sins;" when it presseth any duty, "God intends me in this." Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, bring it home to yourselves: a medicine will do no good, unless it be applied. (Spiritual Disciplines, 57)

Yes, take every word as spoken to yourself, with this essential anchor in place: Seek to understand first how God's words fell on the original hearers, and how it relates to Jesus's person and work, and then bring them home to yourself. Expect application to your life as God speaks to us today through the Spirit-illumined understanding of what the inspired human author said to his original readers in the biblical text.

SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS FOR EVERY DAY?

So then, is it right to think of "application" as an everyday means of God's grace? Is this a spiritual discipline to be pursued with every Bible encounter? The answer is yes and no, depending on what we mean by application.

Some good teachers have claimed that every encounter with God's word should include at least one specific application to our lives — some particular addition, however small, to our daily to-do list. There is a wise intention in this: pressing ourselves not just to be hearers of God's word, but doers. But such a simplistic approach to application overlooks the more complex nature of the Christian life — and how true and lasting change happens in a less straightforward way than we may be prone to think.

It helps to acknowledge that the vast majority of our lives are lived spontaneously. More than 99% of

our daily decisions about this and that happen without any immediate reflection. We just act. Our lives flow from the kind of person we are — the kind of person we have become — rather than some succession of timeouts for reflection.

And this is precisely the line along which the apostle prays for his converts. He asks not that God give us simple obedience to a clear to-do list of commands, but that he give us wisdom to discern his will as we encounter life's many choices coming at us without pause. Paul prays

- that we would be "transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).
- that our love may "abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent" (Philippians 1:9–10).
- that we "may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9–10).

Rather than dictating specific actions, he wants to see us formed into the kind of persons who are able to "discern what is pleasing to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).

GOD'S WORD IS FOR SEEING

And so, as John Piper says, "A godly life is lived out of an astonished heart — a heart that is astonished at grace. We go to the Bible to be astonished, to be amazed at God and Christ and the cross and grace and the gospel." The kind of application most important to pursue in encountering God's word is such astonishment. Press the Scriptures to your soul. Pray for the awakening of your affections. Bring the Bible home to your heart.

As we're freshly captivated by the grandeur of our God and his gospel, we become what we behold: "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). And so we come away from our Bible intake with a more satisfied soul. Which imparts a flavor and demeanor to our lives and decision-making that affects everything.

Meditating on God's words shapes our soul. Sometimes it yields immediate and specific points of applications — embrace them when they come. But be careful not to let

the drive for specific actions alter the focus of our devotions from astonishment and seeking, as George Mueller did, "to have my soul happy in the Lord." Coming to the Scriptures to see can make for a drastically different approach than primarily coming to do.

The Bible is gloriously for us, but it is not mainly about us. We come most deeply because of who we will see, not for what we must do. "Become a kind of person," counsels Piper, "don't amass a long list."

THE BLESSING OF BRINGING IT HOME

This is the pathway to flourishing we catch a glimpse of in the old covenant in Joshua 1:8 — meditation, then application, then blessing:

> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

When Bible reading first aims at astonishment (meditation and worship), it works first on our hearts and changes our person, which then prepares us for application, and application to God's blessing: "your way [will be] prosperous, and then you will have good success." So applying God's words to our lives is not only an effect of his grace to us, but also a means of his ongoing grace.

> Jesus says in John 13:17, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." So also James 1:25 promises that someone who is not a hearer only but "a doer who acts . . . will be blessed in his doing."

When we bring God's words home to our hearts, and then apply them to our lives through an amazed and changed heart, it is a great means of his grace to us. He loves to bless the true application of his word to our lives.

ENDNOTES

[1]This article originally appeared at DesiringGod.org. Used by permission.

Why So Many Churches Hear So Little of the Bible[1]

R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to his presidential duties, Dr. Mohler hosts two programs: "The Briefing," a daily analysis of news and events from a Christian worldview; and "Thinking in Public," a series of conversations with the day's leading thinkers. He writes a popular blog & a regular commentary on moral, cultural and theological issues. In addition to contributing to a number of collected volumes, he is the author of several books, including *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues with Timeless Truth (Multnomah)*; *Desire & Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance (Multnomah)*; *Atheism Remix: A Christian Confronts the New Atheists (Crossway)*; *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World (Moody)*; *The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness (Multnomah)*; *and Words From the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the Ten Commandments (Moody)*; *and The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership that Matters (Bethany House)*.

"It is well and good for the preacher to base his sermon on the Bible, but he better get to something relevant pretty quickly, or we start mentally to check out." That stunningly clear sentence reflects one of the most amazing, tragic, and lamentable characteristics of contemporary Christianity: an impatience with the Word of God.

The sentence above comes from Mark Galli, senior managing editor of Christianity Today in an essay entitled, "Yawning at the Word." In just a few hundred words, he captures the tragedy of a church increasingly impatient with and resistant to the reading and preaching of the Bible. We may wince when we read him relate his recent experiences, but we also recognize the ring of truth.

Galli was told to cut down on the biblical references in his sermon. "You'll lose people," the staff member warned. In a Bible study session on creation, the teacher was requested to come back the next Sunday prepared to take questions at the expense of reading the

relevant scriptural texts on the doctrine. Cutting down on the number of Bible verses "would save time and, it was strongly implied, would better hold people's interest."

As Galli reflected, "Anyone who's been in the preaching and teaching business knows these are not isolated examples but represent the larger reality."

Indeed, in many churches there is very little reading of the Bible in worship, and sermons are marked by attention to the congregation's concerns, not by an adequate attention to the biblical text. The exposition of the Bible has given way to the concerns, real or perceived, of the listeners. The authority of the Bible is swallowed up in the imposed authority of congregational concerns. As Mark Galli notes:

> It has been said to the point of boredom that we live in a narcissistic age, where we are wont to fixate on our needs, our wants, our wishes, and our hopes—at the expense of others and certainly at the expense of God. We do not like it when a teacher uses up the whole class time presenting her material, even if it is material from the Word of God. We want to be able to ask our questions about our concerns, otherwise we feel talked down to, or we feel the class is not relevant to our lives.[2]

And Galli continues:

> It is well and good for the preacher to base his sermon on the Bible, but he better get to something relevant pretty quickly, or we start mentally to check out. Don't spend a lot of time in the Bible, we tell our preachers, but be sure to get to personal illustrations, examples from daily life, and most importantly, an application that we can use.[3]

The fixation on our own sense of need and interest looms as the most significant factor in this marginalization and silencing of the Word. Individually, each human being in the room is an amalgam of wants, needs, intuitions, interests, and distractions. Corporately, the congregation is a mass of expectations, desperate hopes, consuming fears, and impatient urges. All of this adds up, unless countered by the authentic reading and preaching of the Word of God, to a form of group therapy, entertainment, and wasted time—if not worse.

Galli has this situation clearly in his sights when he asserts that many congregations expect the preacher to start from some text in the Bible, but then quickly move on "to things that really interest us." Like . . . ourselves?

One of the earliest examples of what we would call the preaching of the Bible may well be found in Nehemiah 8:1-8 (ESV):

> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the

> Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Ezra and his companions stood on a platform before the congregation. They read the scriptural text clearly, and then explained the meaning of the Scripture to the people. The congregation received the Word humbly, while standing. The pattern is profoundly easy to understand: the Bible was read and explained and received.

As Hughes Oliphant Old comments, "This account of the reading of the Law indicates that already at the time of the writing of this text there was a considerable amount of ceremonial framing of the public reading of Scripture. This ceremonial framing is a witness to the authority of the Bible."[4] The reading and exposition took place in a context of worship as the people listened to the Word of God. The point of the sermon was simple: "to make clear the reading of the Scriptures."

In many churches, there is almost no public reading of the Word of God. Worship is filled with music, but congregations seem disinterested in listening to the reading of the Bible. We are called to sing in worship, but the congregation cannot live only on the portions of Scripture that are woven into songs and hymns. Christians need the ministry of the Word as the Bible is read before the congregation such that God's people—young and old, rich and poor, married and unmarried, sick and well—hear it together. The sermon is to consist of the exposition of the Word of God, powerfully and faithfully read, explained, and applied. It is not enough that the sermon take a biblical text as its

starting point.

How can so many of today's churches demonstrate what can only be described as an impatience with the Word of God? The biblical formula is clear: the neglect of the Word can only lead to disaster, disobedience, and death. God rescues his church from error, preserves his church in truth, and propels his church in witness only by his Word—not by congregational self-study.

In the end, an impatience with the Word of God can be explained only by an impatience with God. We all, both individually and congregationally, neglect God's Word to our own ruin.

As Jesus himself declared, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

ENDNOTES

[1] This article originally appeared at AlbertMohler.com. Used by permission.

[2] Mark Galli, "Yawning at the Word," Christianity Today [online edition], posted November 5, 2009. http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/novemberweb-only/144-41.0.html

[3] Mark Galli, "Yawning at the Word," Christianity Today [online edition], posted November 5, 2009. http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/novemberweb-only/144-41.0.html

[4] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Volume 1: The Biblical Period (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007).