

SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**ENHANCING THE DELIVERY OF THE SERMON INVITATION:
PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE AT
WRIGHTSBORO BAPTIST CHURCH**

**A MINISTRY PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY
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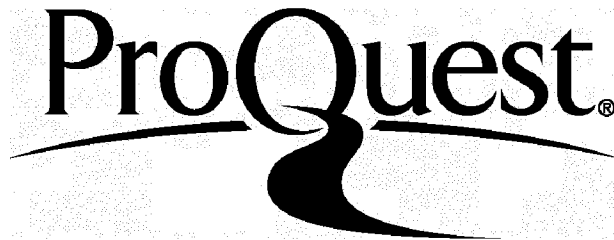
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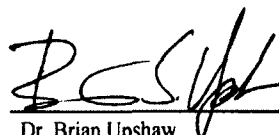
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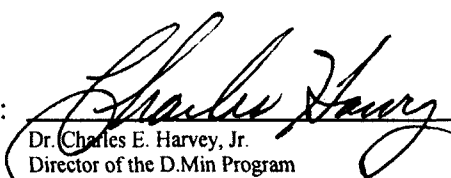
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ABSTRACT

The project director sought to enhance his skill in providing clear and relevant sermon invitations that offer immediate opportunities for response to scriptural truths previously preached. The invitations targeted for improvement not only focused on evangelistic opportunities for response but also all areas of a Christian lifestyle including obedience, evangelism, and worship. The project director researched various resources to define and determine characteristics of effective sermon invitations that provided immediate opportunities for response. These characteristics formed the foundation for the development of an assessment tool used to evaluate the effectiveness of the project director's sermon invitation.

The project director selected and trained an eight-person focus group that represented his current congregation. Over a period of eight weeks the focus group listened to the sermon during the Sunday Morning Worship Service, completed the assessment tool following the service, and met with the project director during the week to discuss their evaluation. The project director documented the recommendations of the focus group and made necessary adjustments to his sermon invitations.

Through interaction with the focus group and information provided by the assessment tool, the project director exhibited improvements in his ability to offer effective invitations. The project director concluded a sermon invitation must provide simple response opportunities with simple instructions, and these opportunities must

clearly and directly connect to the focus of the text and the sermon's main points.

Simplicity and clarity lead to effective invitations.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ministry Project Purpose

The project director desired to enhance his skill in delivering sermon invitations at Wrightsboro Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina. He aspired to improve his ability to provide clear and relevant sermon invitations that offer immediate opportunities for response to scriptural truths previously preached. These types of invitations not only focus on evangelistic opportunities for response but also include a commitment to all areas of Christianity, including active obedience to the Holy Spirit, life in conjunction with biblical precepts, and a lifestyle of focused worship.

The project director researched various resources to define and determine characteristics of effective sermon invitations that provide immediate opportunities for response to previously preached sermons. These characteristics formed the foundation for an assessment tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the project director's sermon invitations. The project director selected and trained an eight-person focus group representative of the Wrightsboro Baptist Church congregation at the time of the project to use the assessment tool.

Over a period of eight weeks the focus group listened to the sermon during each Sunday Morning Worship Service, completed the assessment tool following the service, and met as a group with the project director during the week to discuss their evaluations. The project director documented the recommendations of the focus group and made

adjustments to his sermon invitations during the eight-week process. Through interaction with the focus group and information provided by the assessment tool, the project director exhibited improvements in his ability to offer effective invitations.

Ministry Project Rationale

Sermon Conclusion and Invitation

Homiletic manuals recognize the “conclusion” as an essential component of the sermon and delivery process in preaching.¹ The “conclusion” refers to the climax or final movement of the sermon where the pastor “refocuses the thoughts of the audience on what God expects of them.”² Homiletic experts refer to the conclusion as a significant part of the sermon because the pastor issues a persuasive appeal to the congregation for action based on the text. Bryan Chapell described the conclusion as the climax of the sermon where the “preacher marshals the thought and emotion of an entire message into an exhortation that makes all that has preceded clear and compelling.”³ John Broadus defined the sermon conclusion as restating the key elements of the message and persuasively appealing for the practical application of the elements.⁴

Ramesh Richard stated the conclusion completes the sermon and “integrates varied strands, reviews the central proposition of the sermon, resolves earlier irresolution,

¹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 207.

² Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 127.

³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 254.

⁴ John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. ed., ed. Edwin C. Dargan (1897; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 300–301.

and invites the audience to obedience.”⁵ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix explained the conclusion reinforces the proposition of the sermon and reviews its relevancy.⁶ Vines and Shaddix also stated the conclusion should make a call for action because the “Word of God always demands a response.”⁷ Haddon Robinson declared the conclusion should provide the congregation with the sermon’s complete and entire idea and enable the listeners to “know and feel what God’s truth demands of them.”⁸

Two observable themes emerged from these definitions of the sermon conclusion. First, the conclusion restates the key points or main theme of the sermon. It functions as a concise summary where the pastor briefly restates the main thoughts of the preceding exposition.⁹ Second, the conclusion “summons previous thought and present emotions and then exhorts the congregation to act in accord with the thrust of the message.”¹⁰ The entire group of homiletic experts previously cited described the conclusion as a call for obedience, an appeal for application, and a response to the truth of Scripture previously preached. As John Buchanan explained, the truth of Scripture demands a response that should be elicited by the pastor:

We preachers proclaim good news and speak about all the amazing ways that good news penetrates, comforts, challenges and transforms lives. [And] proclaiming good news ought to in some way lead to a response, a decision of some kind. . . . Preaching ought to lead to people caring more, giving more and

⁵ Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 127.

⁶ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 207.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 176.

⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 254.

¹⁰ Ibid., 255.

living more. It is the assurance of God's presence, to be sure, and it is testimony to God's healing love. But it is also an invitation to do something.¹¹

Preaching calls for action, and the pastor summarizes and clarifies the call in the conclusion. Chapell eloquently stated the accepted purpose of the conclusion as the portion of the sermon where the pastor motivates the congregation to act on biblical principles:

In a conclusion, a preacher exhorts people to act on the principles or concepts the sermon has already made clear. Thus, the primary purpose of the conclusion is motivation. Ordinarily, there should be no new exposition or application in a conclusion but rather a determined effort to mobilize the wills of the listeners to conform to previously specified imperatives. . . . The final challenge urges listeners to consider all that has preceded and inspires them to do what has already been made clear.¹²

In unison these homiletic experts teach the pastor motivates the congregation in the conclusion to act on the truths previously declared in the exposition of the sermon. At this point in the message he challenges, inspires, and urges his listeners to respond and apply the biblical truths previously expounded.

Homiletic manuals often neglect to discuss the opportunity to immediately respond or act on the truths previously preached in a sermon. Of the five homiletic experts previously cited who argued for conclusions that motivate the congregation to act, only Vines and Shaddix discussed the "sermon invitation" or the opportunity to immediately respond to the called action declared in the conclusion. Vines and Shaddix addressed the apparent common contradiction between the call to act and any discussion on providing the opportunity to immediately act in homiletic manuals:

¹¹ John M. Buchanan, "Preaching for a Decision," *Christian Century* 128, no. 20 (October 2011): 3.

¹² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 255.

Most books on sermon preparation dedicate very little, if any, attention to this vital part of the preaching event. Many homileticians do not even see the invitation as an integral part of the sermon. The summation—the “conclusion,” as most call it—is considered the end of the sermon. In the last half-century the revival of audience analysis, a growing cynicism toward aggressive evangelism, and certain other factors have given birth to many questions about the role of public expressions of response in preaching.¹³

A consensus exists between homiletic experts and general practitioners that pastors must call the congregation to respond and act on the truths of Scripture just preached.

However, debate remains concerning the necessity and validity of pastors providing opportunities for “listeners to commit themselves to acting on the truth that has been preached before they walk out the door.”¹⁴ Homiletic experts and general practitioners agree on the use of the sermon conclusion; however, debate surrounds issuing the invitation to immediately act on the appeal given in the conclusion.

Direction of Ministry Project

The project affirms the validity and necessity of offering an invitation in order for the congregation to have an immediate opportunity to respond to the call to action issued in the conclusion of the sermon. The invitation should provide opportunities to respond to evangelistic calls and other mandates pertaining to Christianity expounded in the Bible including worship, obedience, and Christian growth. The project director desired to increase his skill and proficiency in the effectiveness of issuing sermon invitations. He perceived a weakness in the clarity and relevancy of his skill set in this area and realized the potential for improvement.

¹³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The project director's research focused in three areas: biblical and theological support for the invitation, types of invitations, and characteristics of effective invitations. First, in seeking biblical and theological support, the project director determined if Scripture provided validation and examples for the use of the invitation. Second, he researched various types and forms of invitations considered valid to offer at the end of a sermon. V. L. Stanfield identified six possible types of invitations, which included one for unbelievers; accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior.¹⁵ Stanfield described the remaining five types of invitations as opportunities of response for believers: rededication, transfer of membership, baptism, vocational service, and commitment to some area of Christian living.¹⁶ The project director predetermined at the onset of the project the list of response opportunities for Christians was limited, could be expanded, and researched for other possible responses.

Third, the project director identified characteristics of effective invitations. Al Fasol listed four qualities present in effective sermon invitations: authority, expectation, clarity, and urgency.¹⁷ He argued pastors must issue effective invitations derived from Scripture's authority with an expectation of a response from the congregation.¹⁸ In these invitations, the pastor would also clarify why the congregation should respond and provide a reason for the urgency of an immediate response.¹⁹ The project director intended to uncover additional qualities of effective invitations in order to qualify and

¹⁵ V. L. Stanfield, *Effective Evangelistic Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 22–24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 68–70.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

quantify an approach to his skill enhancement. In researching these areas, the project director desired to increase his knowledge and practice of offering sermon invitations that provide clear and relevant opportunities of immediate response to the call to action provided in the sermon conclusion.

Ministry Project Objectives

The project director proposed four ministry objectives for this project. All objectives supported the identification and assessment of the characteristics of effective sermon invitations and how these characteristics related to the project director's skill in this area. The first objective involved researching the field of sermon invitations. This research led to the identification of essential components and qualities of an effective invitation. The project director defined an invitation as "effective" when it provided the congregation with an understood opportunity to immediately respond to the central point of the text of the sermon previously preached. The research provided the foundation that allowed for the identification of targeted areas for improvement in the project director's skill in this area. The project director's ability to identify six qualities of effective invitations satisfied the requirements of this objective.

The second objective entailed the project director developing invitations that incorporated the common components and qualities of an effective invitation. The information collected during the research phase of the project served as the basis for the elements identified as "effective." The focus group assisted the project director in refining his invitations during the assessment phase of the project in order to further the development of the project director's skill in this area. The development of eight invitations for evaluation satisfied the requirements of this objective.

The third objective comprised of the development of an assessment tool to evaluate the effectiveness of an invitation based on the information gathered during the research portion of the project. The assessment tool utilized a mixed-method approach using qualitative and quantitative questions. Two homiletic experts evaluated the assessment tool and provided suggestions for improvement before its implementation. The creation of an assessment tool helped to satisfy the requirements of this objective.

The fourth objective involved issuing invitations for evaluation at Wrightsboro Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina. The project director selected an eight-person focus group representative of the congregation of Wrightsboro Baptist Church to evaluate the effectiveness of the project director's invitations based on the assessment tool. The focus group evaluated eight invitations issued for eight consecutive weeks during the Sunday Morning Worship Service. These individuals also met weekly as a group with the project director to discuss their evaluations of his sermon invitations. Completed evaluations from each member of the focus group for the eight-week duration of the implementation phase of the project satisfied the requirements of this objective.

The project director also proposed two personal objectives for this project. The project director focused on increasing knowledge of effective invitations to connect a congregant with the sermon message and the immediate opportunity to respond. At the outset of this project, most homiletic manuals dedicated little attention to issuing effective invitations and often rejected its value in expository preaching.²⁰ Research in this area would increase the project director's knowledge of the elements that constituted

²⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210.

an effective invitation. The project director's enhanced ability to discuss and identify qualities of effective invitations satisfied the requirements of this objective.

The second personal objective emphasized the increase of the project director's skill in the delivery of clear, relevant sermon invitations. "Learning" or "development" included the process of transforming information and experience into new observable behaviors exhibited in knowledge, skills, or attitudes.²¹ This project's purpose focused on the development of the project director's skill in issuing effective invitations. The project's success hinged on the observable improvement in the project director's ability to deliver clear, relevant invitations. The completed assessment tool evaluations provided evidence of the project director's improvement, and these evaluations satisfied the requirements of this objective.

Ministry Context

Wrightsboro Baptist Church, on the outskirts of Wilmington, North Carolina, exists in a rural environment only twelve miles from the beach. Thirteen thousand, two hundred, seventy-three individuals live within a three-mile radius of the church with 75 percent in households of two or more people.²² Demographic information for this area includes 69 percent Caucasian, 45 percent between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four, and an average annual household income of \$52,500 per year. The Wrightsboro community experienced limited population growth over the last decade and includes a

²¹ Robert J. Birkenholz, *Effective Adult Learning* (Danville, IL: Interstate Publishers, 1999), 1–12.

²² All demographic information for the Wrightsboro community was obtained from Esri Business Analyst, "2736 Castle Hayne Road, Wilmington, NC," <http://www.esri.com/ba> (accessed October 25, 2013).

small number of individuals under the age of eighteen. These two facts lead to questions concerning the future existence of the community.

Founded in 1909 with nineteen members, Wrightsboro Baptist Church's membership roll lists over eight hundred individuals with only 450 considered active. On average 360 people attend the Sunday Morning Worship Service.²³ While the church exhibits progress in reaching families with children and individuals below the age of forty, the congregation remains unbalanced toward an older demographic with the majority of the active members over the age of fifty-five. The congregation consists of individuals from diverse occupational positions including teachers, healthcare professionals, factory laborers, factory foremen, and business professionals. Geographically church membership consists of individuals from the Wrightsboro community; however, people from neighboring areas within a twenty-five mile radius of the church constitute the majority of the numerical growth over the last year.

Wrightsboro Baptist Church, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and Wilmington Baptist Association, holds to conservative theological doctrine. The church's worship style and ministry programs reflect conservative theological and cultural views. The church staff consists of three pastors, two full-time ministry leaders, two full-time office attendants, and three part-time employees. At the outset of this project, the project director served as the Senior Pastor, entering his second year of ministry at the church. In its 105-year history, seventeen pastors served at Wrightsboro with an average tenure of over ten years. Comments from the congregation and area pastors revealed Wrightsboro

²³ All demographic information for Wrightsboro Baptist Church was obtained from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, "Wrightsboro Baptist Church, Wilmington, NC," <http://churchpop.bsnc.org/default.asp?orgid=3571> (accessed on October 30, 2013).

experienced limited exposure to expository preaching and theological teaching over the last several decades; however, the congregation currently appreciates and encourages this type of preaching and teaching.

Ministry Project Delimitations

The scope and breadth of sermon preparation and delivery topics and techniques necessitated specific delimitations for this project. First, the project director focused solely on the invitation; he considered no other component, technique of sermon delivery, or sermon preparation unless it impacted the invitation. Second, the project director gave no consideration to secular treatments of persuasive speech or other forms of communication that call a listener to respond to the information previously heard unless they addressed sermon invitations and conclusions.

The project director continued the focus on the invitation with two more delimitations. The focus group centered on evaluating the invitations and not critiquing sermon content as the third delimitation. The focus group discussed scriptural truths presented in the sermon in relation and relevance to the invitation offered following the sermon. Fourth, the project director made no attempt to establish a quantitative correlation between a type of invitation and the number of people who responded; therefore, no report, evaluation, or discussion on the number of responses to the invitations occurred during the project. The reason for this delimitation rests in the obvious difficulty of quantifying the amount of true responses during an invitation. For example, the difficulty in verifying and validating true responses to invitations to worship or make commitments to trust God make them problematic to quantify. In contrast, the project's focus of determining the clarity and congregation's understanding of the offered

opportunity of response allowed for the possibility to successfully verify and quantify the invitation's effectiveness. With this understanding, it appeared establishing a qualitative correlation between a type of invitation and the number of people who respond would not add to the validity of the project director's findings.

Fifth, the project director conducted his research at Wrightsboro Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina. Only the eight-person focus group from Wrightsboro interacted with the project director over the designated eight-week period. No other churches or members of the congregation participated in the project. The implementation phase of the project only extended for eight consecutive weeks; the project director collected no other data from sermons presented before or after this designated period.

Definitions of Terms

The breadth of sermon preparation and delivery topics and techniques required the clarification of certain terminology. "Expository preaching" possesses a multitude of definitions depending on the person and his presuppositions. For this ministry project, the project director utilized Chapell's definition of expository preaching as a discourse that "expounds Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and sub-points that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners."²⁴ In addition, the project director incorporated Robinson's view of the work of the Holy Spirit into the definition. Robinson described expository preaching as the communication of biblical concepts "which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, and then through the preacher, applies to the

²⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 132. This view is also reflected in Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 29; and Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 322.

hearers.”²⁵ Therefore, for the purposes of this project, expository preaching explains and applies the meaning of the biblical text through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As with expository preaching, the definition of “invitation” varies. R. Alan Streett defined it as the “act by which the preacher of the gospel exhorts his hearers and instructs them how to appropriate the content of the *kērygma* in their individual lives.”²⁶ Vines and Shaddix further defined an invitation as a call for immediate response following the sermon,²⁷ while O. Dean Martin expanded the definition to include multi-faceted opportunities for response.²⁸ Greg Heisler’s definition added another dimension by describing the invitation as a Spirit-led response to the Spirit-inspired truth of the sermon.²⁹ Based on these views, the project director defined the “invitation” as the multi-faceted opportunity for the hearer to immediately respond to the scriptural truth of the text following the sermon according to the work of the Holy Spirit in a hearer’s life. The “effectiveness” of an invitation centers on its ability to provide immediate opportunities for response to previously preached sermons that are directly related to the scriptural truth of the focal passage.

Technical terms within the field of research and research methodology also require clarification. Qualitative or “open-ended” questions do not provide options or

²⁵ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

²⁶ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 37.

²⁷ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210.

²⁸ O. Dean Martin, *Invite: Preaching for Response* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), x.

²⁹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 120.

opportunities for a structured response, enabling an individual to answer freely.³⁰

Qualitative research provides understanding for how people think and feel about a specific subject.³¹ Quantitative or “closed-ended” questions provide structure and limit the options for response by providing a range of answers as a Likert Scale.³² Quantitative research gathers data in numerical form that can be put into categories or units of measurement.³³ The project director utilized both forms of research in this ministry project.

Ministry Project Research Methodology

The project director selected the “Ministry Skill Enhancement” research model for this project due to the desired objectives of the project director. The project director’s objectives concentrated on the improvement of a personal skill within his ministry: specifically issuing a clear, relevant invitation following a sermon. This primary objective should affect the congregation and possibly aid future individuals seeking the same goal, but the focus of the objectives centered on the skill improvement of the project director. The “Ministry Skill Enhancement” research model provided the most effective strategy for achieving the primary goals of the project.

The project director began his project by researching various resources to define and determine characteristics of effective sermon invitations. “Effective” invitations

³⁰ Mildred L. Patten, *Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials*, 5th ed. (Glendale, CA: Pyczak Publishing, 2005), 19.

³¹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 14.

³² Ibid.

³³ Patten, *Understanding Research Methods*, 19.

provide immediate opportunities for response to previously preached sermons directly relating to the scriptural truth of the focal passage. These characteristics provided the foundation for developing a mixed-method assessment tool using qualitative and quantitative questions. The qualitative questions attempted to elicit descriptive details about the examiner's opinion on the effectiveness of the type and clarity of the response opportunity offered and its relationship to the text preached. The quantitative questions attempted to elicit a numerical value for the examiner's opinion of the effectiveness of the type and clarity of the response opportunity offered and its relationship to the text preached.

Two homiletic experts evaluated the assessment tool, provided suggestions for improvement, and confirmed its validity. One expert, Jim Shaddix, serves in a dual role as Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Pastor of Teaching and Training at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. The other expert, Michael Moore, possesses over thirty years of experience as a pastor and associational missionary. Both experts provided practical advice in improving the effectiveness of the assessment tool, and the project director incorporated all suggestions into the tool before it was administered.

The project director selected an eight-person focus group representative of the Wrightsboro Baptist Church congregation. The focus group comprised of four men and four women. One man and one woman represented each of the following age groups: twenty to thirty-five, thirty-six to fifty, fifty-one to sixty-five, sixty-six and above. The project director met twice with the focus group, explaining the premise, purpose, and methodology of the ministry project. The first meeting discussed the following topics: the

definition and necessity of the sermon invitation, qualities of an effective sermon invitation, and the ministry project's purpose and methodology. The second meeting discussed questions from the previous meeting, procedures for evaluating the sermon invitations, and procedures for using the assessment tool.

For eight consecutive weeks the focus group listened to the sermon during the Sunday Morning Worship Service and focused on the extended invitation. Following the service, each member of the focus group individually completed the assessment tool. On the following Wednesday evening, the focus group met in its entirety with the project director and discussed their evaluations. The project director documented recommendations made by the focus group and made adjustments to his sermon invitations based on the focus group's assessment. By adjusting the means and methods of the invitation based on the criteria for effectiveness, the project director's skill increased in extending immediate, understandable invitations based on the scriptural truths of previously preached sermons during the eight-week period.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ministry project needs biblical and theological support for offering an invitation as an immediate response to scriptural truths presented in a sermon. Argument against the validity of the invitation focuses on the lack of biblical support for the “altar call.” This argument fails to “distinguish between the function of the invitation and the particular form of its employment.”¹ Considering the “altar call” as a form of response offered during an invitation and not the invitation itself satisfies this concern.

Admittedly the Bible provides little support for the traditional “altar call”; however, the legitimacy and scriptural evidence for offering an invitation still exists. While some forms of the invitation, like the “altar call,” emerged as modern practices, Scripture validates the concept of calling for a response to the truth and authority of God’s Word.² The invitation refers to a multi-faceted opportunity, not limited to a specific style or format, to immediately respond to the scriptural truth of the text following a sermon.³ When considered within these parameters, the Bible clearly provides examples of calls and appeals for individuals to immediately respond to God and the truth of His Word. The following passages represent the biblical evidence of this

¹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 211.

² Farris D. Whitesell, *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 15–16.

³ O. Dean Martin, *Invite: Preaching for Response* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 1.

truth: Acts 2:37–38; 1 Kings 18:21; Ezra 10:1–15; and 1 John 5:21. The discussion of these passages will occur in the order of greatest to least relevance based on the project director’s discretion.

Biblical Foundations

Acts 2:37–38

Acts 2:37–38 provides the foundation for the premise that the presentation of the gospel demands an immediate opportunity for personal response. Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14–36 explains the phenomena of the multiple languages spoken at Pentecost and proclaims the gospel in its most elemental form.⁴ Ajith Fernando described three basic features of this sermon: “(1) a historical proclamation of the . . . death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfillment of prophecy and involving man’s responsibility; (2) a theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; (3) a summons to believe and receive the forgiveness of sins.”⁵ In the climax of his sermon, Peter declared Jesus as Lord and offered a specific invitation to immediately call upon His name and confess Him as Lord.⁶

Verse 37 states this message impacted the Jewish crowd, and they immediately asked how to respond to what they heard concerning Jesus.⁷ The crowd’s response evidences their conviction to immediately respond to the truth they previously heard.

⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *John and Acts*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 274.

⁵ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 101.

⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 115–116.

⁷ Fernando, *Acts*, 110.

Peter provided an opportunity for response in verse 38 by calling the crowd to true repentance: turn from their rejection of the Messiah, call on Jesus' name, receive baptism into the Christian community, and receive the Holy Spirit.⁸ John Polhill explained Peter's sermon focused on issuing an invitation for the crowd to immediately respond to the truth of Jesus they just heard:

The dominant idea in 2:38 thus seems to be repentance, with the other elements following. Repentance leads to baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Spirit. The essential response Peter called from the Jewish crowd is the complete turnabout that comprises true repentance, to turn away from their rejection of the Messiah and to call upon his name, receive baptism into his community, and share the gift of the Spirit they had witnessed so powerfully at work in the Christians at Pentecost.⁹

Polhill also described the universal scope of Peter's invitation. The truth of Jesus invites not only the immediate Jewish crowd to respond but also future Gentile generations who read and hear the message.¹⁰

The passage concludes in Acts 2:41 with approximately three thousand people immediately responding to the biblical truth presented by Peter. This text clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: when presenting the truth of Jesus an opportunity to immediately respond to that truth must follow. The gospel demands an immediate opportunity for personal response; simply discussing it ignores its message and inherent urgency.

⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 117.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

1 Kings 18:21

1 Kings 18:21 provides the foundation for the premise that a person's reaction to a call for response does not negate the validity or necessity for an invitation to respond. As 1 Kings 17 begins, Tyrian princess Jezebel linked Baalism and Israel's government as never before in the nation's history.¹¹ Not satisfied with private worship in her own temple, she insisted on promoting Baal as a replacement for Yahweh and took steps to silence opposition to her goal. Her success and tenacity "moved Israel beyond tolerance of high places and syncretism to outright worship of another god."¹² Yahweh proclaimed through Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1 that He would withhold the rains so Israel would know Him and not Baal as the one true God over all creation. Paul House described the insignificance of withholding the rains as God's way of exposing Baal as a nonentity and at the same time reestablishing Yahweh as sovereign in Israel's mind:

Baal worshipers believed that their god made rain, which is a quite important detail in an agricultural community. Elijah apparently prays for a drought to prove that Yahweh, not Baal, is in charge of the crop-enriching rains. Given the lack of rain in specific seasons of the year in that region Baal cultists had to explain why Baal could not guarantee rain at all times. They said that Baal submitted to Mot, the god of death, each year, which caused drought and barrenness to the land. Eventually Anat defeated Mot and freed Baal, which restored fertility.¹³

Yahweh's attack on Baal reached into Baalism's theological center. Yahweh would disprove Baal as the god of rain through a severe, three-year drought; He would declare His sovereignty over all as the God of creation.

¹¹ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 211.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 210–211.

In 1 Kings 18, nearly three years after the beginning of the drought, God decrees it to end. In verse 19, Elijah instructed King Ahab to assemble all of Israel and the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel. This location served as a stronghold and center for Baal worship; the significance of this area as the battleground would continue to solidify Yahweh's claims of Baal as a nonentity.¹⁴ Elijah not only confronted King Ahab and the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel but also the rebellious nation of Israel who rejected Yahweh. In verse 21, Elijah calls the nation to respond to the reality that Yahweh exists and Baal does not. He challenges them immediately to stop "wavering" between two competing views and "decide who is God and then act on that decision."¹⁵ R. D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel compare this scene to the challenge given to Israel by Joshua:

When Ahab has assembled the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel to confront Yahweh's prophet (v. 20), Elijah addressed the many people who had gathered to see the contest (v. 21). Joshua's choice (Josh 24:15) was theirs: Serve God or serve another (cf. Matt 6:24). But unlike Joshua's people, Elijah's audience held its peace.¹⁶

The silence of the people serves as a concession that they understood the truth of Elijah's accusations; "prayers and homage at the bull shrine can have nothing to do with Yahweh."¹⁷ Israel attempted to hold to two mutually exclusive loyalties, and Elijah called the people immediately to make a choice, but they felt no need or desire to choose.

¹⁴ R. D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1 & 2 Kings," in *1 & 2 Kings-Job*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 144.

¹⁵ House, *1, 2 Kings*, 219.

¹⁶ Patterson and Austel, "1 & 2 Kings," 144.

¹⁷ August H. Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 300.

1 Kings 18:21 clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: how people react to a call for response does not negate the validity or necessity of the invitation to respond. Elijah spoke of the exclusivity of a relationship with Yahweh, and Israel understood the truth required them to immediately respond by worshipping Yahweh and rejecting Baal. Even though the people failed to respond to Elijah's invitation for immediate action, the call for response to the truth of God and Scripture still stood.¹⁸ The validity and necessity of the invitation finds support in the imperatives issued from God's Word and not in the response of the listeners.

Ezra 10:1–15

Ezra 10:1–15 provides the foundation for the premise that people desire and expect an opportunity to immediately respond to the truths of Scripture when convicted by God. In Ezra 9, the Jewish leaders reported to Ezra the Israelites' involvement in intermarrying with neighboring nations and their embracing of other practices contrary to God's law. Ezra responded through public mourning and a public "sermon-like" prayer, declaring the sin of the nation and their tenuous position before a merciful and righteous God.¹⁹ As Derek Kidner explained, Ezra's grieving prayer proclaimed Israel's sinful actions:

The prayer ends with clear recognition that God has every reason to wash his hands of this community, as he had once threatened to do with an earlier generation (Exod. 32:10). This was no exaggerated fancy. There were other Israelites scattered abroad, through whom the promises could be fulfilled. Ezra had not even the heart to plead, as Moses had, that God's name would suffer in

¹⁸ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 57.

¹⁹ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 131.

such a case. His prayer was naked confession, without excuses, without the pressure of so much as a request.²⁰

Ezra's concern for God's nation and his commitment to God's character compelled him to respond in confession and repentance on behalf of the people.²¹ Ezra displayed his brokenness over the sin of God's people in light of God's righteousness.

Ezra's dedication and leadership in serving under the authority of God provoked a positive change in the people.²² The people responded to Ezra's prayer of despair in Ezra 10:1–6 with confession, repentance, and an oath of faithfulness to God's commands.²³

Charles Fensham described this response as a reaction to Ezra's prayer due to the Israelites sin:

It is to be expected that this strange behavior of an important person like Ezra, an official of the Persian king, should have attracted the attention of the passerby. The emotional situation in which Ezra was supplicating and weeping on the behalf of his people proved infectious for the assembled crowd. They wept bitterly.²⁴

The mourning led the leaders of the community to encourage Ezra to lead the nation in reform. They desired to immediately respond to the admission of their sin brought on by Ezra's prayer. Prompted by the people to act quickly, Ezra led the priests, Levites, civic officials and eventually all present in the community of returning exiles to take an oath of spiritual separation from the surrounding nations. Surprisingly, the people, not Ezra,

²⁰ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 12 (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 78.

²¹ Knute Larson and Kathy Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 103.

²² Ibid.

²³ Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah," in *1 & 2 Kings–Job*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 668–669.

²⁴ Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 133.

initiated the reform and oath, revealing their conviction brought by God through Ezra's prayer.²⁵ Knute Larson and Kathy Dahlen explained the oath promised a spiritual separation and not simply to divorce foreign wives:

Ezra concluded his remarks by emphasizing the need for spiritual distinctiveness; the marriage issue resulted from a larger problem of compromise. The crisis had developed from relaxed attitudes toward the cultures around them. Therefore, Ezra aimed his directive at the entire assembly, telling them to separate from the peoples around them. Ezra and the leaders urged the people to divorce their foreign wives. . . . Drastic measures were needed to purify the community from a growing corruption.²⁶

God convicted the community of returning exiles to the truth of Ezra's message and need for reform so that they spontaneously and corporately affirmed the oath.²⁷ A nation experienced reform in response to one man's heartbroken prayer over sin.

The Ezra passage clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: when God convicts people concerning the truths of Scripture they desire and expect an opportunity to immediately respond. God convicted the community of returning exiles of their sin through Ezra's actions, and sought an immediate opportunity to respond. Ezra provided opportunity by immediately calling the community to agree to pursue reform. The conviction created by God through the truth of His Word creates a desire for immediate personal response, therefore, validating the necessity for offering the opportunity for an immediate response.

²⁵ Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 79.

²⁶ Larson and Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 119.

²⁷ Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah," 671.

1 John 5:21

1 John 5:21 provides the foundation for the premise that the truths of Scripture demand action and, therefore, require an invitation to immediately implement and practice them. In 1 John, the author presents to his readers the biblical truth that through their union with Jesus they possess the desire and ability to obey God and show Christ's love to other believers.²⁸ John also explained to believers that these desires and abilities provide assurance of their eternal salvation because the possibility of their existence comes only through reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ.²⁹ In his letter, John hoped to encourage and protect believers who struggled with their faith due to external and internal pressures. Externally, individuals “outside the community—‘the world’ and ‘the Jews’—brought the threat of persecution, challenging believers to abandon the faith.”³⁰ Internally, opposition to John's previous teachings “had reinterpreted the community's Jesus tradition and created a new Christology, which focused on the divinity of Christ while rejecting his humanity.”³¹ John intended to “encourage Christians to endure the persecution and discourage them from accepting the doctrines of the Antichrists.”³² His primary method of communicating the message “is to restate in the strongest possible terms the marks of true Christianity.”³³

²⁸ Summary taken from views explained by Colin G. Kruse in *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²⁹ Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 287.

³⁰ Tom Thatcher, “1 John,” in *Hebrews–Revelation*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 13, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 424.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

In 5:21 John ended his letter with a final call for response; he exhorted believers to immediately respond to the message of his letter by keeping away from anything contrary to the truth of Christianity.³⁴ John's imperative to keep from idols highlights the "commitment that believers owe, not to images of whatever sort, physical or mental or both, but to the doctrine, ethics, and devotion that only the Son of God reveals and defines."³⁵ Robert Yarbrough explained John's call to commitment invited his readers to immediately respond to his message by putting its precepts into practice:

Positively, 1 John 5:21 clears the ground to implement the message of 1 John in a robust way. "Reject the false and embrace the real." Undistracted and unencumbered by the Christ-substitutes that for so long literally bedeviled God's people, believers are now freed to walk in the truth: the light, the faith, the love, and the eternal life won for them by the Son of God.³⁶

John appealed for his readers to respond to the truth of Scripture by not pursuing any action or belief that contradicted what they had just read. He reminded them that while Jesus keeps and sustains them, they still must be diligent and alert by guarding themselves from anything that may become a substitute for God.³⁷

John called his readers to immediately respond to his message by actively protecting themselves from any form of idolatry. The author of 1 John calls his readers to actively practice commitment and devotion to Christ and not simply discuss it.³⁸ This passage clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: the truths of Scripture

³⁴ Kruse, *Letters of John*, 192.

³⁵ Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 323.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 325.

³⁷ Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 218.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

demand action and not discussion alone. Therefore, the presentation of biblical truths requires an invitation to immediately implement and practice them.

Theological Implications

Provision for Immediate Response

Scripture clearly supports the biblical foundation that God expects individuals to immediately respond to the truth revealed in His Word. Whether the response requires accepting justification by faith or pursuing sanctification, reconciliation, or restoration, an expectation to respond exists. This biblical foundation leads to the theological implication that if God expects an immediate response to His Word, then the necessity for an immediate response exists. As John Buchanan explained, the truth of Scripture demands the eliciting of a response after the presentation of the biblical text:

We preachers proclaim good news and speak about all the amazing ways that good news penetrates, comforts, challenges and transforms lives. [And] proclaiming good news ought to in some way lead to a response, a decision of some kind. . . . Preaching ought to lead to people caring more, giving more and living more. It is the assurance of God's presence, to be sure, and it is testimony to God's healing love. But it is also an invitation to do something.³⁹

The truth of Scripture demands an immediate response, and people must receive an invitation or opportunity to respond to the biblical text they heard previously preached.

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix declared the importance of the call for a response to a sermon's purpose:

Preachers today, then, uncompromisingly must call upon listeners to act upon the message of the text. Regardless of the form of expression, every sermon should be intent upon fostering change in the lives of people. The entire message must move toward this purpose. We do not preach merely to hear ourselves talk or simply to

³⁹ John M. Buchanan, "Preaching for a Decision," *Christian Century* 128, no. 20 (October 2011): 3.

convey information. We preach for a response. We are lawyers pleading our Lord's cause. We are calling for a verdict.⁴⁰

In "calling for a verdict," each individual listening to a sermon decides whether or not to act on the truth presented from the text. The necessity to provide an opportunity to immediately respond to God's Word at the sermon's conclusion remains regardless of the listener's response.

This theological implication leads to the practice of providing an immediate opportunity or invitation for people to respond to the truths of Scripture after every sermon. John R. W. Stott argued a pastor must never proclaim God's Word without issuing an appeal for response. He declared, "We are to find room for both proclamation and appeal in our preaching if we would be true heralds of the King."⁴¹ Scripture demands more than discussion; it demands a personal response, and preachers must always "work towards provoking such a response, even if it means warning people and pleading with them."⁴² Because of its power and authority, not only should pastors provide the opportunity for a response to God's Word but also they should expect and prepare for it.⁴³ The facts that the truth of God's Word calls for a response and the sermon's purpose leads to this response require an invitation or opportunity for the hearer to immediately respond after each sermon.

⁴⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 212.

⁴¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 57.

⁴² Fernando, *Acts*, 118.

⁴³ Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 119.

Activity and Delivery Method Coincides with Text

A second theological implication derived from this biblical foundation requires the invitation to coincide with the preceding sermon from a biblical text. The cohesion between the text, sermon, and invitation reveals itself in the “activity” and delivery method of the called response. When the “activity” and delivery method of the invitation reflect the central purpose of the text and sermon, then the opportunity for response will coincide with the biblical truth revealed in Scripture.

In each of the four passages previously examined, the “activity” or call to action matched the biblical truth declared. John’s call in 1 John 5:21 to immediately choose to keep from idols coincided with the biblical truth to remain solely devoted to Christ and to experience true life through Him. Ezra’s call for an immediate decision for reform in Ezra 10 coincided with the biblical truth that God expected Israel to be spiritually separated from the surrounding nations. Just as the response activity of these passages coincided with the revealed biblical truth, the “activity” of the invitation offered by a pastor must coincide with the meaning of the biblical text previously preached. Roy Fish explained the activity of the invitation must derive from the biblical truth revealed in the sermon text:

First, major emphases of a message should be stressed in the invitation. If one has preached on stewardship, the major stress of the invitation should be commitment of oneself to tithing or some other aspect of stewardship. If the pastor has brought a message on the home, the invitation should include opportunity for commitment of homes to Christ. Such invitations could include specific challenges such as family prayer, or a time of daily devotions employing the Bible or some devotional book.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Roy Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 34.

The activities of the called responses at the close of the sermon “have become so routine that they often have absolutely no relationship to the message that has been preached.”⁴⁵ As O. Dean Martin explained, “If I spend my allotted time for the worship experience encouraging people to grow in their faith and become more committed in their faith experience, I do not want suddenly to invite them to join the church.”⁴⁶ The activity of the invitation must coincide with the revealed truth of the text.

As with the activity, the delivery method of the invitation should also match the biblical text previously preached. Greg Scharf argued the presentation of the response should reflect how the original author called for a response in the sermon text. Scharf explained the invitation may use additional legitimate means of moving people to valid responses, but to neglect those within the passage itself ignores authorial intent:

This question looks for ways this text transforms the life of the believer by renewing the mind (Rom. 12:1–2) and how it sanctifies him or her (John 17:17). Does it appeal to the hearer’s mind, emotions, will, conscience, sense of duty, love for God, sense of need, or love of the truth? Does it use questions, examples, reminders, word pictures, Scripture citations, or argumentation? Is the means employed repetitive, hitting the same note again and again, or is it more cumulative, building a case for the desired response by a range of rhetorical techniques?⁴⁷

Scharf’s argument centered on the premise that as the text shapes the sermon and activity of the invitation it also determines the delivery method of the called response.

In Acts 2 Peter made rational arguments concerning the identity of Jesus based on information readily available to his audience. The invitation for response he provided

⁴⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 215.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Invite*, 50.

⁴⁷ Greg R. Scharf, “God’s Letter of Intent: Six Questions that Reveal What God Meant to Say in a Text,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 232.

after his argument called for the acceptance of Jesus as their Savior and King as a rational decision. In a similar event found in 1 Kings 18, Elijah made rational arguments concerning the identity of God based on information readily available to his audience. The invitation for response he provided after his argument called for the acceptance of Yahweh as their God and King as a rational decision. Peter and Elijah's delivery method of the invitation coincided with their delivery method of the truth of God's Word. Therefore, the pastor must deliver the invitation in the same manner as the text delivered God's truth whether through an appeal to the hearer's sense of need, duty, or truth, or through argumentation or Scripture citation. The invitation must always match the previously preached text in the delivery method and activity of the response.

Biblical and Theological Objections

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the most vocal opponents to the invitation this century,⁴⁸ listed nine reasons why he rejected offering an evangelistic invitation in *Preaching and Preachers*. Two of his primary objections discussed pressuring the "human will" and his rejection of man's "responsibility" in salvation. Lloyd-Jones believed the invitation puts direct pressure on the human will, leading people to respond out of fear, psychological influences, or to obtain positive benefits like family acceptance or escape judgment. He declared the will or motivation for action should be approached primarily through the mind or intellect and then through the affections or emotions.⁴⁹ For Lloyd-Jones, the pastor acts egregiously if he appeals to the will or affections before first

⁴⁸ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 131.

⁴⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 286.

appealing to the mind. While not addressing or identifying Lloyd-Jones specifically, Vines and Shaddix rejected the validity of this concern based on the work of the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit God is not limited or bound to human reasoning, nor is He obligated to continue or repeat His work in a person's life. If a man is beating his wife, he need not be encouraged to "think about" repenting. If a woman is living in adultery, she does not deserve the privilege of "contemplating" the ramifications of leaving such a lifestyle. One would be hard-pressed not to consider the immediate obedience of Matthew, Zaccheus, the woman of Sychar, and others.⁵⁰

Lloyd-Jones' argument exposes the need to avoid manipulation in the invitation; however, his concerns do not negate the validity of offering an opportunity for immediate response to biblical truth previously preached.

Lloyd-Jones' primary rejection of the invitation appeared centered on his view that offering an immediate opportunity for response implies "sinners have an inherent power of decision and of self-conversion."⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones did not oppose a call to repent and believe, but rejected the idea of asking people to come forward in response to the gospel message, which he criticized as a call to self-conversion. Lloyd-Jones argued 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:1 explained man's inability to choose, accept, or decide for Christ; he believed Scripture only supports the precept that God chooses man.⁵²

David Engelsma echoed Lloyd-Jones' views in arguing the "gospel is the good news of sovereign, particular grace. The doctrine of the well-meant offer is opposed to

⁵⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 217.

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 289.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 293.

this.”⁵³ For Engelsma, “offering” the gospel to all people is acceptable; however, the notion that God’s grace is available to all people in that offer is doctrinal error:

That which is objectionable in the free offer of the gospel, or well-meant gospel offer, is not the teaching that the church must preach the gospel to everyone and must call hearers to faith in Jesus Christ. But the error of the doctrine on the offer . . . is its teaching that the grace of God in Jesus Christ, grace that is saving in character, is directed to all men in the preaching of the gospel. Inherent in the offer of the gospel is the notion that God loves and desires to save all men; the notion that the preaching of the gospel is God’s grace to all men, an expression of God’s love to all men, and an attempt by God to save all men; and the notion that salvation is dependent upon man’s acceptance of the offered salvation, that is, that salvation depends upon the free will of the sinner.⁵⁴

Engelsma rejected “offering” the gospel because he rejected the notion “that salvation depends upon the sinner’s acceptance or rejection of the offer.”⁵⁵ Like Lloyd-Jones, Engelsma believes Scripture only supports the precept that God chooses “particular men willing their salvation and efficaciously accomplishing it.”⁵⁶

Scripture declares man’s status as totally and unequivocally “lost” apart from divine intervention,⁵⁷ and this confirms the validity of Lloyd-Jones’ and Engelsma’s premise of natural man’s inability for self-conversion. However, through the “power of the Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, man’s mind is enlightened to receive the gospel and his will freed to respond.”⁵⁸ As Leighton Ford explained, God speaks during the invitation inviting people to come to Him and allowing Him to do the impossible:

⁵³ David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3d ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 48.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁷ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 133.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

If anyone feels that he cannot give an invitation for a sinner to come to Christ, because of man's inability, let him remember that Jesus invited a man whose hand was paralyzed to do what he could not do! "... Stretch out your hand ..." Jesus commanded (Matthew 12:13), and the man obeyed the command and did what he could not do!⁵⁹

Lloyd-Jones presented a valid view of God's sovereignty in salvation; however, ignoring man's responsibility in this view makes it incomplete. J. I. Packer balances these views by explaining God, in His sovereignty, holds each person equally responsible for his reaction to the gospel:

Scripture teaches that, as King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose (see Gen 14:8; 50:20; Prov 16:9; 21:1; Mt 10:29; Acts 9:27–28; Rom 9:20–21; Eph 1:11, etc.). Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues (see Mt 25; Rom 2:1–16; Rev 20:11–13, etc.). Thus, the hearers of the gospel are responsible for their reaction; if they reject the good news, they are guilty of unbelief. "Whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed" (Jn 3:18; cf. Mt 11:20–24; Acts 13:38–41; 2 Thess 1:7–10, etc.).⁶⁰

According to Packer, God, in His sovereignty, made man a responsible moral agent and He will not treat him as anything less.⁶¹ In developing a complete view of salvation, Packer advised recognizing both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility:

We shall not oppose them to each other, for the Bible does not oppose them to each other. Nor shall we qualify, modify, or water down, either of them in terms of the other, for this is not what the Bible does either. What the Bible does is to assert both truths side by side in the strongest and most unambiguous terms as two ultimate facts; this, therefore, is the position that we must take in our own thinking.⁶²

⁵⁹ Leighton Ford, *The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 120.

⁶⁰ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

God's sovereignty does not negate man's responsibility, and both views are necessary for a complete view of salvation. However, as Ford stated, the pastor must remember "Salvation is 'all of grace' . . . God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe, but even when we make our decision, God does not leave us on our own. His grace is in His command, and His grace is in our response."⁶³

An individual's theological position on man's responsibility in salvation will affect his view of the invitation. A complete perspective that embraces both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility within God's grace will support the necessity to issue an invitation. A perspective favoring one position over the other will produce an unbalanced view as represented by Engelsma who labeled the "altar call" as "an abomination before God and man" and the practices of Billy Graham as the "doctrine of Pelagius out of hell."⁶⁴

Conclusion

The truths of Scripture innately demand a response from those confronted with them. Every sermon should be preached with an understanding of the response the passage calls for the individual to make. After the sermon, the preacher must issue an opportunity to immediately respond to the truth just presented. The "activity" or call to action of this opportunity should not only coincide with the truth of the text, it should also match its delivery method. The particular format provided for individuals to respond to the truths of Scripture may vary as long as those presenting God's Word offer the opportunity and invitation to respond.

⁶³ Ford, *The Christian Persuader*, 121.

⁶⁴ Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, 63.

CHAPTER 3

MINISTRY FOUNDATIONS

The Contemporary Argument Surrounding Sermon Invitations

Homiletic experts and general practitioners agree, as previously discussed in Chapter 1 while examining the views of the sermon conclusion and invitation, that pastors must call the congregation to respond and act on the truths of Scripture previously preached. The sermon conclusion provides the opportunity for this call to respond. Ramesh Richard explained the conclusion “integrates varied strands, reviews the central proposition of the sermon, resolves earlier irresolution, and invites the audience to obedience.”¹ However, debate exists concerning the necessity and validity of pastors issuing an invitation or providing immediate opportunities for “listeners to commit themselves to acting on the truth that has been preached before they walk out the door.”² As previously discussed in Chapter 1 while examining the views of the sermon conclusion and invitation, homiletic experts and general practitioners agree on the use of the sermon conclusion; however, debate surrounds issuing an invitation to immediately act on the appeal given in the conclusion. A brief survey summarizing the basic arguments for each side of the debate will provide a foundation for the invitation’s impact on contemporary preaching.

¹ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 127.

² Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 210.

The Argument for Sermon Invitations

One faction of the debate declares the invitation as necessary and essential for concluding the sermon and preaching event.³ The argument for using the invitation centers on three simple and practical presuppositions. First, if a pastor issues a call to action, then an opportunity to immediately act and respond must follow. The proponents of this view describe the expectation for an opportunity to respond to a called action as a universal principle and not simply a religious ideal. As Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix wrote, “Even secular psychologists agree that if you are going to call people to action, you ought to give them some immediate way to act.”⁴ O. Dean Martin explained integrity demands the offering of an invitation after the call to action in the sermon’s conclusion:

This problem is simply a matter of integrity. For instance, are we being honest, to say nothing of reasonable, if we profess to care, spend day after day and hour after hour, service after service, and never once ask anyone to accept or reject the specific proposal that we claim to care so deeply about? No one else in our time is allowed to communicate with such glaring discrepancy! If you sell cars and believe in your product or are committed to its value, then you are expected to eventually say, “Will you buy?” By endeavoring to persuade without granting an honest opportunity to respond is a failure of integrity, to say nothing of a travesty of stewardship. The minister faces the same expectancy.⁵

Since conclusions call, challenge, inspire, and urge the congregation to respond and apply the biblical truths previously expounded, the pastor must provide the opportunity to respond through an invitation. When the heart “stirs” during the sermon and the pastor

³ *Ibid.*, 207

⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵ O. Dean Martin, *Invite: Preaching for Response* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 27–28.

issues a call to action in the conclusion, he must also provide an avenue of response through the invitation.⁶

The second presupposition undergirding the argument for the use of the invitation centers on the view the congregation expects one to be issued.⁷ Martin explained today's culture expects the opportunity to respond to any offer presented to them:

[N]o person, outside the pulpit, that is, spends twenty-five minutes trying to sell a vacuum cleaner and then says, "Thank you so much for the fellowship. Let's go home! Nor does another person spend thirty minutes trying to sell you a lawn mower and then say, at the very last moment, "Do you want to buy a car or not?" Invitations are expected in our culture. People do not want to be pressured, but they know something is wrong if they are not given the chance to make a decision.⁸

Whether given the opportunity to immediately buy a car after a sales presentation, or immediately make amends with an individual after hearing a sermon on forgiveness, culture expects an immediate invitation to respond to a called action.

A third issue that merits discussion and consideration in the argument for the practice of the invitation focuses on its importance in evangelism. Those who advocate the use of the invitation state God not only commissions "preachers to carry the gospel to every creature, He also commissions them to issue a call to rebellious men to respond positively to the gospel."⁹ This premise leads to the view that "the gospel presentation demands a verdict. To deliver the *kērygma* only, without the issuing of an invitation, is to

⁶ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 145.

⁷ Martin, *Invite*, 28.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 139.

be disobedient to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19).”¹⁰ As the debate over man’s responsibility in salvation rages, David Larsen declared a presentation of the gospel demands the issuing of an invitation to respond:

To be faithful to the full message of the Holy Spirit, we must affirm both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The witness of God’s people is a link in His plan. Neither presenting information nor issuing an invitation infringes on divine sovereignty. Packer himself urges us to press invitations of Christ upon the unconverted. We may have differences of opinion as to how and when to do this, but that we should do so is incontrovertible. Stott compellingly argues that there can be no authentic proclamation without appeal and there can be no legitimate appeal without proclamation.¹¹

For those who support the use of the invitation, its role appears integrated with the practice of evangelism and the mandate to share the gospel. If a preacher shares the gospel, then an invitation for immediate response must follow.

Homiletic experts and general practitioners who advocate the use of the invitation argue its practicality as the next logical step after a call to action. These individuals argue culture expects an opportunity to respond even if they intend to reject the opportunity. Those who defend the use of the invitation argue the practice of disturbing people spiritually, leading them to the point to make a decision, calling them to act, and then failing to give an invitation to respond as cruel and potentially damaging.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 140.

¹¹ David L. Larsen, *The Evangelism Mandate: Recovering the Centrality of Gospel Preaching* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 99.

¹² Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 146.

The Argument Against Sermon Invitations

Theological Implications

Arguments against the practice of the sermon invitation concentrate on three key perspectives: theological implications for offering an invitation, the impracticality of providing an opportunity for immediate response, and lack of historical support for its practice. The major argument against sermon invitations in contemporary ministry centers on the biblical and theological implications for offering an invitation. The project director previously discussed this argument and his response in detail in Chapter 2 while examining the views of D. Martin Lloyd-Jones and David Engelsma. In summary, Lloyd-Jones argued Scripture only supported the precept that God chose man and described man as unable to choose, accept, or decide for Christ.¹³ Like Lloyd-Jones, Engelsma believes Scripture only supports the precept that God chooses “particular men willing their salvation and efficaciously accomplishing it.”¹⁴ Both reject the use of the sermon invitation because offering an immediate opportunity for response implies “sinners have an inherent power of decision and of self-conversion.”¹⁵

Kenneth Keathley argued a different view from Lloyd-Jones and Engelsma. He advocated the “antecedent/consequent wills approach” that declares God desires the salvation of all but that He requires the response of faith on the part of the hearer:

The antecedent/consequence wills approach sees no conflict between the two wills of God. God antecedently wills all to be saved. But for those who refuse to repent and believe, he consequently wills that they should be condemned. In this

¹³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 293.

¹⁴ David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3d ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 46.

¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 289.

way, God is understood to be like a just judge who desires all to live but who reluctantly orders the execution of a murderer. The antecedent and consequent desires are different, but they are not in conflict. The antecedent/consequent wills position seems to be the clear teaching of Scripture. God antecedently “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” that consequently “whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Christ antecedently orders the gospel preached “to every creature,” but he consequently decrees that “he that believeth not shall be damned.”¹⁶

Keathley advocates a view that “God’s desire is that the whole world hear the Good News so that those who receive the gospel might be saved.”¹⁷ This theological view embraces the use of the sermon invitation as offering the gospel so others may respond and receive salvation.

An individual’s theological position on man’s responsibility in salvation will affect his view of the invitation. The views of Lloyd-Jones, Engelsma, and Keathley validate this assessment. A complete perspective that embraces both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility within God’s grace as advocated by Keathley will support the necessity to issue an invitation.

The Impracticality of an Immediate Response

Haddon Robinson’s views represent the second argument against calling for an immediate response after a sermon. He described the issuing of an opportunity for immediate response to the truths of Scripture previously preached in a sermon as often impractical because not all sermons provide for an opportunity for immediate response:

Not every sermon can end with “how to do it.” Some preaching explores great questions and it accomplishes its purpose when people gain understanding of how

¹⁶ Kenneth D. Keathley, “Salvation and the Sovereignty of God: The Great Commission as the Expression of the Divine Will,” in *The Mission of Today’s Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, ed. R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 190–191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

God works in the world. No clear specific duty can be spelled out. At times the only proper response to a great biblical text is to fall down and worship. Yet your preaching will more likely be incorporated into the structures of people's lives when you offer practical suggestions on how to translate scriptural truth into life experience.¹⁸

Robinson's position fails to consider three important facts. First, limiting the invitation solely to "how to do it" calls of response negate the variety of creative opportunities available for congregations to respond to God's truth and nature in practical expressions of worship and obedience.¹⁹ Second, inviting the congregation to respond to the sermon by immediately worshipping the God revealed in the sermon's text constitutes a sermon invitation. Third, all sermons should focus on offering "practical suggestions on how to translate scriptural truth into life experience;" preaching should lead to opportunities for life transformation. David Mains explained the pastor must construct his sermon with the understanding of how the text is calling the congregation to respond and how he can help them respond to it:

When approaching a text, I can preach best by, first, zeroing in on the text's subject; second, extracting from the Scripture the response being called for; and third, from my Christian understanding, constructing a bridge that will help people get from where they are to where this text teaches they should be. I want to help them respond to the challenges of the passage.²⁰

According to Mains, all biblical texts and sermons spell out a "specific duty" requiring action.

Martin addressed the issue of the focus of preaching and agreed with views expressed by Mains:

¹⁸ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 179.

¹⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 169.

²⁰ David Mains, "Building Bridges to Action," in *Preaching to Convince*, ed. James D. Berkley (Waco: Word, 1986), 133.

A person preaches either for response or for display! Whenever we as pastors approach the pulpit for the period of proclamation, we are basically and simply pursuing one of two courses: we are asking people to think we are wonderful (and if they have responded at that point then there is no further response necessary), or, we are asking them (right now!) to deal with the issue before us in some logical sequence of commitment.²¹

The argument against offering an invitation due to impracticality appears questionable in several areas, especially the view that a sermon based on the truth of the text may lack an opportunity for a called action of response to that truth.

Lack of Historical Support

David Bennett represents another field of thought for rejecting the use of the invitation. He argued the practice of the invitation and call for response at the end of a sermon began with the evangelist Charles Finney in the early 1800s.²² Bennett wrote that while “one cannot discount the possibility of isolated uses of the public invitation in the first sixteen hundred years of church history, there appears to be no justification for believing that the practice was common during those centuries, and may never have been used at all.”²³ He stated the lack of historical evidence for the invitation reinforces the view that this practice lacks biblical support because previous generations failed to implement it.

R. Alan Streett rejected this view due to the historical evidence he uncovered for the practice of the invitation:

Critics of the public invitation claim that its usage can only be traced back to the ministry of Charles G. Finney (1792–1875). Such an accusation is historically

²¹ Martin, *Invite*, x.

²² David Bennett, *The Altar Call: It's Origins and Present Usage* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), xiv.

²³ *Ibid.*

incorrect. The first-century preachers of the gospel called on sinners to present themselves publicly as candidates for repentance, faith, and baptism. Similar invitations continued to be given until Constantine, emperor of the Roman Empire, proclaimed Christianity the state religion in 324 A.D.²⁴

Streett conceded that the use of the invitation diminished after 324 A.D. until the Reformation in the 1600s. He attributed this to Christianity becoming the state religion in the Roman Empire and then the rise of Roman Catholicism which placed little emphasis on evangelism.²⁵ Roy Fish also attributed the absence of the invitation during this time period to the dissipation of evangelism:

From the fifth century to the sixteenth century there is little evidence for evangelistic invitations being offered. This is due to a number of things. To begin with, vital evangelism was to a great degree dissipated. In a real sense, evangelism ceased to be evangelism. In many instances, because a king or a tribal chief would be converted to the faith, the entire tribe would simultaneously become Christian. The classic example, I suppose, is that of Clovis, the king of the Franks. When he was converted to the faith, he had priests with palm leaves in their hands, dipping them in water and sprinkling the water on his troops as they passed by. In this manner, the Franks became Christianized. Conversion became a matter of mass exercise, and ultimately infant baptism became prevalent in the church and conversion was assumed by the church without a later experience.²⁶

While Streett and Fish agree the invitation declined during the fifth through sixteenth centuries, both would argue individuals offered invitations and opportunities for response before the Reformation Era.²⁷ Streett provides evidence of specific individuals who called for responses to their sermons including Gregory of Nazianzus (330–389), John Chrysostom (347–407), Boniface (680–754), Bernard of Clairvaux (1093–1153), Johann

²⁴ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁶ Roy Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 14–15.

²⁷ See discussions in Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 14–16; Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 83–86.

Tauler (1300–1361), Gerard Groote (1340–1384), Savonarola (1452–1498), Hugh Latimer (1485–1555), and many others during the Medieval Era.²⁸

Fish argued the “resurrection of the public invitation occurred in the mid-eighteenth century. Sometime after 1760, the Separate Baptists and early Methodists began to employ it.”²⁹ Streett accredits the invitation’s resurgence to the Anabaptists “who continued faithfully to issue the public invitation.”³⁰ Bennett’s allegation that the invitation lacks historical support prior to the 1800s appears invalid due to the evidence provided by Streett and Fish. Their research provides the understanding that through much of church history individuals existed who called their listeners to immediately respond to the truth of Scripture they previously heard.³¹

Summary of Contemporary Argument

After surveying the contemporary argument concerning the invitation, the project director holds the position of the validity and necessity of offering an invitation in order for the congregation to have an immediate opportunity to respond to the called action given in the conclusion of the sermon. Sufficient evidence exists to support its benefit and necessity in preaching and teaching, especially in the area of evangelism. While arguments for its rejection exist with passionate advocates, this position lacks adequate and convincing support.

²⁸ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 83–86.

²⁹ Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 15.

³⁰ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 86.

³¹ Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 15.

Survey of Contemporary Views of Sermon Invitations

A brief survey of homiletic manuals and contemporary resources will reveal the scarcity of available dialogue that examines the call for response at the end of the sermon. Due to current and past abuses of the invitation, many books neglect this issue and advocate not offering any type of call for immediate response following the sermon's conclusion.³² However, texts exist that examine the characteristics and various types of effective invitations, and a brief survey of these resources provide a foundation for effectively offering opportunities to respond to the truths of Scripture immediately following the sermon.

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix

In their book *Power in the Pulpit*, Vines and Shaddix define the invitation as the “preacher’s climatic call for listeners to commit themselves to acting on the truth that has been preached before they walk out the door.”³³ They contend the main disagreement surrounding the invitation centers on the failure of individuals to distinguish between the function of the called response and the particular form used to implement it.³⁴ The invitation functions as the uncompromising call of the pastor for the congregation to act upon the truth of the text they just heard. The form of the response can take a variety of formats including public, private, immediate, or delayed actions, depending on the primary message of the text.

³² Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 118.

³³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

Vines and Shaddix provide several characteristics for effective invitations that establish guidelines for its proper function. First, the invitation or “call to action” should flow naturally from the sermon’s conclusion and never appear as an addendum to the message. Second, simplicity and clarity characterize effective invitations and inform the congregation specifically on how they should respond, why they should respond, and what will take place when they respond.³⁵ Third, effective invitations possess a decisive element that serves to confirm a life-changing decision made by the responder. The pastor must call the congregation in the sermon conclusion to make a decision based on the text, and the invitation will provide an opportunity for the listeners to immediately declare their intent to respond to that decision. Individuals express the “intent of such a decision in some immediate way. Subsequent life change is enhanced when persons are given an opportunity to act immediately upon their intentions.”³⁶

Fourth, the effective invitation never manipulates or pressures the listener. The pastor simply calls the individual to personally contemplate the scriptural challenge from the sermon and invites the listener to respond to it without coercion. The listener should never be coerced or pressured to respond. Finally, every invitation should incorporate an evangelistic component. According to Vines and Shaddix, every sermon should turn toward a salvation appeal at some point in the message regardless of the text. The authors contend “all Bible preaching issues forth into evangelism. Regardless of the Bible content of your message, the subject should include an evangelistic appeal.”³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 217.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 218.

With the characteristics of effective invitations defined and guidelines for proper function established, Vines and Shaddix suggest a variety of formats for offering an invitation. The “verbal appeal” represents the most basic, nonnegotiable form of the invitation and involves a verbal plea for the congregation to act on the biblical truth previously heard. The verbal appeal may include the “post-meeting ministry,” which calls respondents to attend a public ministry opportunity in the near future that may include a service in the church or community.

The “physical relocation” response calls listeners to immediately respond to the invitation by moving from their seats to some other nearby location. As the most common model implemented, pastors will use this format to allow the listener to signal they desire to accept the challenge from the text and wish to receive additional direction or assistance. The “written record” and “physical gesture” both serve to indicate a listener’s response to the truth of the sermon text while remaining in their current location. The effectiveness of these methods depends on the activity of the called action. Physical gestures appear more appropriate in calls to worship and a written record more effective when the pastor issues a call for confession or a decision that requires further follow-up. Vines and Shaddix advocate the “multiple approach” which offers more than one way of response during the same invitation; they also contend creative, intentional, and meaningful application of the invitation will enhance its effectiveness.

Tony Merida

Tony Merida addressed the effective invitation or “response” in his book *Faithful Preaching* and defined the “invitation” as a call to act on God’s Word. He provided several biblical references to support his definition where people responded publicly to

God's Word including Genesis 12–13; Joshua 4; Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 8–9; and Acts 2:38.³⁸ Merida stated effective invitations persuade people with integrity to respond to God's Word based on the authority of its truth. They also clearly inform the congregation of the expected outcomes for the called response and easily connect to the truth revealed in the text.³⁹ Merida urged pastors to expect people to respond to the truth of Scripture and make all necessary preparations in anticipation of this response.

The majority of Merida's discussion on the invitation focused on format. He suggested five ways to call people to action as a response to the sermon text. First, the pastor should issue a verbal appeal "to go and do likewise."⁴⁰ If the sermon focused on evangelism, then the invitation should call the listener to commit to share the gospel with at least one person in the upcoming week. Second, the pastor should issue a challenge to physically move by coming to pray at the altar, go reconcile with another Christian in the room, or relocate to another area to discuss a decision.

Third, the pastor should offer a post-meeting response that includes an opportunity for questions and follow-up actions. Fourth, the pastor must provide an opportunity for a private written response that informs the pastor of the listener's decision and allows for future follow-up. Fifth, the pastor should incorporate the self-examination component of the Lord's Supper into the invitation and provide opportunities of pastoral counseling and prayer as the congregation takes the elements. Merida's creative use of the Lord's Supper in the invitation offers a unique opportunity for response while

³⁸ Merida, *Faithful Preaching*, 118.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

providing a concrete, listener-participation activity that coincides with a variety of scriptural truths. Similar to Vines and Shaddix, Merida also encouraged offering a “multiple approach” in the invitation that incorporates a variety of forms of called responses.

David Mains

David Mains offered a clear and concise perspective on the invitation: they must “build bridges” to action. He stated pastors must “build practical bridges,” or list the steps necessary to respond to what Scripture requires, and then walk the congregation “over those bridges, step by step, to get them to that point.”⁴¹ Mains explained people need more than information; they need to know the call for specific action arising from the text even if it is not explicit:

People may leave a service pumped full of interesting new information. They can say how one verse relates to another or how the ethics of the Decalogue foreshadow the completion of the Beatitudes. But what a shame for them to leave church services unaware of what they are to do or stop doing. If someone wants to know how to play music, it does little good for me to talk about the lives of famous composers, or to compare in detail the various instruments in the orchestra, or review how violins are made. It may make me sound learned and wise, but this person needs to be told, “Lesson one is on how to hold your flute. Between now and when we meet next week, I want you to practice holding it like this.” Most Christians I know don’t need more information or “deeper truths.” They haven’t processed a fraction of the ones they already know. Profundity is not the crying need but simplicity coupled with directness: “Here’s what my text is about and it’s calling for us to do this.”⁴²

Mains believed during the invitation the pastor must provide practical suggestions and clear opportunities for the listeners to respond to the called action of the sermon text.

⁴¹ Mains, “Building Bridges to Action,” 130.

⁴² Ibid., 128–29.

Mains also contended limiting invitations to immediate, physical responses to calls for evangelism misses opportunities for Christian growth. He proposed every sermon should lead to an invitation based on the biblical text:

Every sermon can benefit from suggested steps to action. Since the type of bridge depends on the response intended by the text, there are countless possibilities. When trying to determine what bridge to use for a particular sermon, the questions to ask are: “What response does the text demand?” And “How can I best move the people toward that response?”⁴³

Mains explained that providing “bridges” or opportunities for immediate response does not necessarily center on evangelism or physical action. Calls of response may include providing initial, concrete steps to Christian growth and obedience while asking for immediate commitments to enact these steps at later times. Mains also suggested offering opportunities after the service and throughout the week for further discussion serve as “bridges” for nonbelievers to later follow as concrete steps in response to the sermon text.

Greg Heisler

In his book *Spirit-led Preaching*, Greg Heisler ignored the contemporary theological argument concerning the use of the invitation and refused to evaluate the effectiveness of various formats. His focus centered on the work of the Holy Spirit during the sermon and His leadership in the invitation:

Spirit-led preaching is not dogmatic about the type of response called for in any given sermon. What Spirit-led preaching is dogmatic about is that we boldly and unapologetically call for a response to the preached Word of God. When we call for a response, we are partnering with the Spirit’s transformative purpose by calling our audience to make a Spirit-led response to the Spirit-inspired truth we are preaching.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 120.

Heisler explained the call for response as a partnership between the pastor and Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads the pastor to call the congregation to respond to the truth of Scripture He revealed to them throughout the sermon. The author also argued the pastor's partnership with the Holy Spirit enables his call for response to possess a bold and unapologetic quality. For Heisler, the work of the Holy Spirit during the invitation empowers the call for response with legitimacy and urgency.

Heisler based this perspective on the Holy Spirit's work in the invitation in Acts 2:37–38 when the people heard Peter's sermon and desired to immediately respond. He viewed the working of the Holy Spirit in this passage as a description for the Spirit's work during a pastor's sermon:

Have you ever asked God for a sure sign that the Spirit of God was moving and ministering in a genuine way? Acts 2:37–38 gives you one sure way to tell: If your audience comes to you and asks you what they need to do before you even finish preaching your message, then the Spirit of God is working! . . . These people in Acts 2:37 were convinced they needed what Peter was offering then in this message, and they were convinced they needed it now. This is the Spirit's urgency for preaching. They heard the gospel, and they were ready to respond. We must preach with conviction, believing the Spirit is actively working in the hearts and minds of our listeners and moving them to respond appropriately to the Spirit's truth.⁴⁵

According to Heisler, the Holy Spirit creates the urgency in individuals to respond to the truth of the sermon text. He motivates people to respond to the truth of Scripture; therefore, the pastor should always avoid coercion and manipulation.

Randy Frazee

In his article "Helping Hearers Practice What We Preach: How to Avoid Adding to People's Burdens," Randy Frazee offered a new and unique perspective on the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121.

advantages of issuing an invitation. He argued responding to an invitation or “call to action” not only benefits the person who responds but also powerfully effects individuals who witness it:

I have long heard from experts that the seeker struggles with the altar experience. But the secular seeker has now become the spiritual seeker. The spiritual seeker is moved by watching people show their dependence on God publicly. They do not mind it; in fact, they prefer it. They came to see and experience it—as long as they are not forced to participate. Some people who have come to Christ in our church have cited the inspiration point not as something I said but something I said tied to watching people respond to it. They had to admit that kind of humility and dependence on God is something they did not have, and that was the inspirational turning point for them.⁴⁶

Frazees viewed the invitation as an opportunity for those in his congregation not only to make a conscious response to the truth of Scripture but also to allow others to observe the commitment, humility, and dependence on God necessary for the response. He argued the opportunity for response deeply affects all those who respond and those who view the response. Frazee’s novel and intriguing suggestion that watching others respond during the call for response impacts an individual’s spiritual awareness provided a new element in the invitation discussion.

Frazees also advocated administering communion during the invitation. He explained people often feel “something urging them in corporate worship to show their dependence publicly on God and to honor Him, but without a communion station they would not know what to do once they came forward.”⁴⁷ Frazee stated communion gives people something tangible to do while they are responding to decisions they have made

⁴⁶ Randy Frazee, “Helping Hearers Practice What We Preach: How to Avoid Adding to People’s Burdens,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 305.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

with their health, finances, relationships, or career. Along with communion stations, Frazee offers the opportunity to pray with an elder or counselor during the invitation. He stated the number of people coming for prayer dramatically increased since the offering of communion during the invitation because people no longer feel “singled out” when they come forward. Frazee’s approach to the invitation suggests that providing a variety of creative formats and tangible activities for the call to response elicits a greater sense of freedom and comfort within the congregation to respond to the truths of Scripture.

John Stott

John Stott described a clear presentation of the gospel as essential before a preacher issued a call for response. Stott adamantly argued the gospel message about Christ and the gospel invitation to receive Christ are two distinct components of the gospel presentation and should never be equated:

Evangelistic preaching has too often consisted of a prolonged appeal for decision when the congregation has been given no substance upon which the decision is to be made. But the gospel is not fundamentally an invitation to men to do anything. It is a clear declaration of what God has done in Christ on the cross for their salvation. The invitation cannot properly be given before the declaration has been made. Men must grasp the truth before they are asked to respond to it.⁴⁸

According to Stott, not only must a thorough explanation of the gospel come prior to the issuing of the invitation but also the gospel should never be presented unless an invitation to respond follows. He argued preachers act as true “heralds of the King” only when they find room in their sermons for both the proclamation of the gospel and the invitation to respond to it.⁴⁹ According to Stott, only teaching the gospel falls short of the biblical directive; pastors must urge men to embrace it.

⁴⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 55.

Stott also advocated using calls for response at the end of sermons that did not center on the gospel. He insisted pastors should allot time at the end of a sermon for people to respond to the truth of all Scripture and the Holy Spirit's prompting:

Sometimes we will pray aloud and extempore, seeking to express the congregation's response to God's Word. At other times it may be wiser to call the people to silent prayer. For the Holy Spirit may be prompting different responses in different hearts, which a single prayer could never encompass. So why not leave them alone in the silence before God, so that the Holy Spirit may lead each person to crystallize his or her personal response and resolve?⁵⁰

Stott's remarks lead to the assumption that he holds the view that the Holy Spirit prompts the response of the individual during the invitation. His comments also infer he advocates using a variety of forms for the called response depending on the sermon text. Stott's clearest position regarding the invitation describes the gospel message and the invitation as two distinctive but inseparably linked components of the gospel presentation.

Leighton Ford

In his article "How to Give an Honest Invitation," Leighton Ford attempted to provide the criteria for issuing an "honest" invitation. He defined an "honest" invitation as possessing three criteria. First, the pastor must be honest before God. The pastor only possesses the right to call the congregation to respond to the call issued from God. Ford explained pastors must present God's "message faithfully and give his call, trusting him, with the response and giving him the glory. My part is to be faithful; his part is to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁰ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 254.

produce fruit.”⁵¹ Honesty with God implies the invitation issued by the pastor must coincide with the biblical truth of the text.

Honesty with oneself provides the foundation for the second criteria of an “honest” invitation. Ford suggested the pastor ask revealing questions for the reasons he issues or does not issue the call to response:

Why do I give an invitation? Because it’s expected in my church or tradition? Because I need the affirmation of seeing people respond visibly? Or on the other hand, do I not give an invitation because I fear embarrassment if people don’t respond? Or criticism because it’s not part of my group’s tradition? . . . None of us has completely pure motives. We are a mixed people. That is why I must continually pray, “Lord, let me not give this invitation because I need to see results. Let me not shun it because I am afraid or because someone might criticize. I must give it solely because you love these people, you want them to know you, and you have told me to tell them that.”⁵²

In order to give an “honest” invitation, a pastor must question his motives and refocus his attention from himself to God’s priorities and work revealed through him.

Finally, an “honest” invitation exhibits honesty with the congregation. Ford declared the invitation as a “symbolic expression of a spiritual reality. It is nothing more, nothing less—and we need to explain that.”⁵³ Ford advocated the pastor use precise, clear language in describing the purpose and implications of responding to the invitation. People need to know “they can come to God in the quiet sanctuary of their own hearts and then express it in the faithfulness of their living. But they also need to know there is something about the open expression that clinches and seals that inner faith.”⁵⁴ Honesty with the congregation entails explicit instructions that insure individuals will not respond

⁵¹ Leighton Ford, “How to Give an Honest Invitation,” in *Preaching to Convince*, ed. James D. Berkley (Waco: Word, 1986), 140.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 140–41.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

to the invitation with misguided expectations. A pastor will issue an “honest” invitation when he pursues honesty concerning God’s call in the text, honesty about his motives, and honesty about the implications of responding to the called activity. Ford wrote, “There is no one way to extend the invitation, but in every situation there is surely some way.”⁵⁵ The implications of his text also suggest the foundations for the correct and “honest” way to extend the invitation.

R. Alan Streett

R. Alan Streett provided the most definitive examination of the development and delivery of an evangelistic invitation in his book *The Effective Invitation*. According to Streett, evangelistic sermons must include two necessary elements: proclamation and invitation. He stated that preaching of the gospel must always precede the call for listeners to respond to its truth, and any sermon that does not include an invitation as well as the gospel proclamation is not New Testament-style preaching.⁵⁶ Streett stated the New Testament utilized two forms of the invitation and argued modern invitations should follow their example:

Two types of public invitation were used in New Testament times. The first called sinners to demonstrate publicly their desire to repent and believe and was used as a means of bringing them to a state of conversion. The second called upon new converts, who had been supernaturally transformed by the message, openly to witness to their new-found faith.⁵⁷

Streett argued every New Testament-style sermon must include an evangelistic component because Christ’s redeeming work is the foundation of the New Testament.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁶ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 37.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 55.

Therefore, all sermons should provide an invitation that allows the congregation to respond to the gospel. For Streett, the invitation's evangelistic purpose demands the pastor provide an opportunity to respond to the gospel at the conclusion of every sermon.

The Effective Invitation provided an extensive discussion on the biblical foundations, theological content, historical use, preparation, and various models of the evangelistic invitation. One of Streett's most helpful examinations discussed the weaknesses of both the delayed and immediate-response invitations. The delayed-response models, which include "the after meeting," special classes, and response cards, fail to provide opportunities to respond immediately to the prompting of the Holy Spirit at the conclusion of a sermon.⁵⁸ The immediate-response models, which include the "altar call," "raising of hands," and the "private decision," fail to provide the necessary counseling needed for most decisions.⁵⁹ While Streett advocated the use of all methods, he favored an approach that implements multiple forms of response that provide immediate and follow-up opportunities.

From *The Effective Invitation*, Streett provided several interesting characteristics and methods of implementation for the invitation. His emphasis on every sermon exhibiting a redemptive focus establishes the necessity of providing an evangelistic call for response in every invitation. Streett's thorough examination of delayed and immediate-response activities for the invitation also provided essential information. The pastor must possess an awareness and working knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of each model because the "wrong handling of the invitation can do

⁵⁸ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 181.

irreparable damage to the cause of evangelism.”⁶⁰ Streett urged the pastor to select one or multiple models that match the pastor’s skill set and congregation’s personality so that the invitation format will most effectively provide opportunities for listeners to respond to the truths of Scripture.

Summary of Contemporary Views

As stated in Chapter 1, Al Fasol listed four qualities present in effective sermon invitations: authority, expectation, clarity, and urgency.⁶¹ He argued pastors issue effective invitations from Scripture’s authority with an expectation of a response, clarify why the congregation should respond, and provide a reason for the urgency of an immediate response.⁶² Also discussed in Chapter 1, V. L. Stanfield limited the call for response in the invitation to six possible formats.⁶³ At the onset of this project, the project director determined to expand the list of possible characteristics provided by Fasol and uncover additional qualities of effective invitations. He also intended to expand the available invitation “types” or “formats,” believing Stanfield’s list too narrow. The information revealed in the previous survey further developed and expanded Fasol and Stanfield’s qualities and formats of an effective call for response. By assimilating the material discussed in the previous survey, the project director identified six characteristics of effective invitations: flows from scriptural truths in text; creativity and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 169.

⁶¹ Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 68–70.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ V. L. Stanfield, *Effective Evangelistic Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 22–24.

appropriateness of the called response; evangelistic component; Christian growth component; honesty, simplicity and clarity; Spirit-led.

The survey revealed the necessity of the invitation coinciding with and flowing from the truths of the sermon's scriptural text as one of the characteristics of an effective invitation. The pastor only possesses the right to call the congregation to respond to the call issued from God in the text. When the invitation reflects the central purpose of the text and sermon, then the opportunity for response will coincide with the biblical truth revealed in Scripture.

A second characteristic of effective invitations identified in the survey showed the call for response may take a variety of creative formats as long as the activity appropriately reflects the called response of the biblical text. Formats may include immediate and delayed-response activities, physical actions or commitments for future actions, single activities or multiple approaches, practical ministry or calls for worship and prayer. The invitation flows from the call for response presented in Scripture, and creative and varied activities offered during the invitation allow individuals to worshipfully respond to the truths of the sermon text.

The survey identified the third and fourth characteristics of effective invitations as those that possessed both an evangelistic and Christian growth component. Because all Scripture points to the necessity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ for both justification and sanctification,⁶⁴ all sermons should call for a response based on the truth revealed in the text. All sermons will possess a redemptive focus due to the text, and an invitation to respond to the gospel must always follow its proclamation; therefore, all sermons must

⁶⁴ Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 294.

offer an evangelistic invitation. In addition, all sermons reveal an opportunity for individuals to grow in their commitment to an area of Christianity including active obedience to the Holy Spirit, living in conjunction with biblical precepts, and a worship-focused lifestyle. Because the text issues a call of commitment, an opportunity to respond to that call must follow. Due to all Scripture's revelation of the sufficiency of Christ for justification and sanctification, all effective invitations will offer both an evangelistic and Christian growth component.

The fifth characteristic of an effective invitation identified in the survey reveals the necessity for honesty, simplicity, and clarity in the call for response. The pastor must clearly explain the response activity so that the congregation will know specifically how to respond, the reasons for the response, and the desired outcomes for the response. The listener must comprehend that their response correlates with the work of the Holy Spirit and signifies His call in their lives. The invitation offers a "bridge" from the individual's present situation and the call of the Holy Spirit to enter into deeper intimacy with God. Responding to the called activity does not transform the individual; it only signifies the willingness of the individual to allow God to transform them. No matter the form of the response, the congregation must understand the expectations, limitations, and benefits of responding during the invitation.

A reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit and a focus on Spirit-led responses encompass the sixth characteristic of an effective invitation. Raymond McLaughlin explained, "There is nothing unethical about extending an invitation to a congregation to respond to the challenge of the sermon as long as it is not built upon questionable

tricks.”⁶⁵ The Holy Spirit accomplishes the work of the invitation; therefore, a pastor must avoid coercion and manipulation in the call for response. Integrity and humility must undergird any form of persuasion used in the invitation with the pastor relying on the power of the Holy Spirit while questioning his own motivation. The pastor must rely on the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit alone calls and motivates the congregation to respond to the truth of Scripture revealed in the sermon. The Holy Spirit accomplishes the work of the invitation; the pastor must trust and rely on Him alone.

Conclusion

A brief survey of the contemporary arguments and views concerning the invitation reveal its necessity in Christ-centered preaching. The invitation provides the congregation with the opportunity to respond to the Holy Spirit’s leading and direction based on the truth revealed in the sermon text. As with any part of the sermon, planning and preparation must precede the implementation of the invitation in order to ensure its focus on the biblical truths revealed in Scripture. If the pastor willingly and humbly submits to the authority of the Holy Spirit, the activity offered during the invitation will provide the congregation with an opportunity to respond to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture for both justification and sanctification.

⁶⁵ Raymond W. McLaughlin, *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 163.

CHAPTER 4
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Research Design

The project director desired to enhance his skill in delivering sermon invitations at Wrightsboro Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he currently serves as senior pastor. He aspired to improve his ability to provide clear and relevant sermon invitations that offer immediate opportunities for response to scriptural truths previously preached. These types of invitations do not solely focus on evangelistic opportunities for response, but commitment to all areas of Christianity including active obedience to the Holy Spirit, life in conjunction with biblical precepts, and a lifestyle of focused worship.

The project director selected the “Ministry Skill Enhancement” research model for this project due to his desired objectives. The “Ministry Skill Enhancement” research model focuses on developing a plan to improve a specific area of a pastor’s ministry. The project director’s objectives concentrated on the improvement of a personal skill within his ministry: specifically issuing a clear, relevant invitation following a sermon. This primary objective affected the congregation and may possibly aid future individuals seeking the same goal, but the focus of the objectives centered on the skill improvement of the project director. The “Ministry Skill Enhancement” research model provided the most effective strategy for achieving the primary goals of the project.

The research design of the ministry project incorporated five phases: research, development, training, implementation, and assessment. Each phase flowed from the

information and understanding acquired from the previous stage with the purpose of evaluating and improving the pastor's skill in issuing sermon invitations. The construction of the project's research design centered on creating a simple format that provided essential interaction between the project director, relevant information concerning sermon invitations, and feedback from individuals within the project director's congregation.

Phase One: Research

The first phase of the ministry project involved researching views concerning the use of the invitation. This research consisted of examining homiletic manuals and identifying characteristics and formats perceived as essential for issuing an effective invitation. Works consulted included *Power in the Pulpit* by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix,¹ *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by John Broadus,² *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson,³ and *Faithful Preaching* by Tony Merida.⁴

The project director also examined resources that provided practical information on the history, formation, and implementation of the invitation. These resources provided a variety of views concerning the invitation, including arguments against its validity, necessity, and effectiveness. Texts examined included *The Effective Invitation* by R. Alan

¹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999).

² John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. ed., ed. Edwin C. Dargan (1897; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005).

³ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

⁴ Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009).

Streett,⁵ *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* by Farris Whitesell,⁶ *Giving a Good Invitation* by Roy Fish,⁷ and *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* by David Bennett.⁸

The research phrase included examining resources that provided theological arguments that supported or rejected the use of sermon invitations. The project director sought to discover various views on the biblical support for or against the invitation and how interpretation of Scripture affected the argument surrounding the call for response. Texts examined included *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer,⁹ *The Preacher's Portrait* by John Stott,¹⁰ *Preaching and Preachers* by Martin Lloyd-Jones,¹¹ and *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* by David Engelsma.¹²

Through this research, the project director accepted the position of the validity and necessity of offering a sermon invitation in order for the congregation to have an immediate opportunity to respond to the called action given in the sermon's conclusion. This research also allowed the project director to identify essential qualities and

⁵ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004).

⁶ Farris D. Whitesell, *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984).

⁷ Roy Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974).

⁸ David Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* (New York: University Press of America, 2000).

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

¹² David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3d ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014).

characteristics of effective invitations. First, the sermon invitation must coincide with and flow from the truths of the sermon's scriptural text. Second, the format of the invitation will vary depending on the text and the creativity of the pastor. Third, the invitation should always possess an evangelistic component reflecting the redemptive focus of the text. Fourth, an effective invitation will possess a Christian growth component that provides an opportunity for believers to grow in their commitment to an area of Christianity. All effective invitations will offer both an evangelistic and Christian growth component because all Scripture points to the necessity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ for both justification and sanctification.¹³ Fifth, the invitation must be issued with honesty, simplicity, and clarity. The pastor must clearly explain the response activity so that the congregation will know specifically how to respond, the reasons for the response, and the desired outcomes for the response. Sixth, the invitation centers on a reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit and a focus on Spirit-led responses. The Holy Spirit accomplishes the work of the invitation; therefore, a pastor must avoid coercion and manipulation in the call for response.

Phase Two: Development

With the characteristics identified in the research phase serving as a foundation, the project director moved into the development phase of the project. He created an assessment tool that enabled individuals to examine the project director's invitations and critique their effectiveness based on the identified characteristics of effective invitations. The assessment tool utilized a mixed-method approach with both quantitative and

¹³ Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 294.

qualitative questions. Quantitative research attempts to produce data presented as quantities, numbers, or statistics through structured questionnaires with objective formats like multiple choice questions.¹⁴ The advantage of quantitative research consists of its ability to measure individual reactions to a “limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously.”¹⁵ The quantitative questions presented in this ministry project’s assessment tool attempted to elicit a numerical value for the examiner’s opinion of the effectiveness of the type and clarity of response opportunity offered during the invitation and its relationship to the text preached.

Qualitative research attempts to study issues in depth and detail without “being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis.”¹⁶ The advantages of qualitative research center on its ability to produce unique and detailed information without the categories and generalization of quantitative research.¹⁷ The qualitative questions presented in this ministry project’s assessment tool attempted to elicit descriptive details about the examiner’s opinion on the effectiveness of the type and clarity of response opportunity offered during the invitation and its relationship to the text preached.

The project director chose to create an assessment tool that utilized a mixed-method approach with both quantitative and qualitative questions. While qualitative and quantitative research involves “differing strengths and weaknesses, they constitute

¹⁴ Mildred L. Patten, *Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials*, 5th ed. (Glendale, CA: Pyczak Publishing, 2005), 19.

¹⁵ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be collected in the same study.”¹⁸ John Creswell explained the approach to mixed-method research that used both quantitative and qualitative techniques for gathering information:

A mixed methods approach is one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds (e.g., consequence-oriented, problem-centered, and pluralistic). It employs strategies of inquiry that involved collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems. The data collection also involves gathering both numeric information (e.g., on instruments) as well as text information (e.g., on interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information.¹⁹

The project director utilized the mix-method approach by collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously through the assessment tool. This research method provided the best opportunity for the project director to collect the most beneficial information concerning his skill in offering invitations.

After defining and identifying the characteristics of an effective invitation and deciding on the mixed-method approach, the project director developed an assessment tool that reflected his research. The project director selected two homiletic experts to evaluate the assessment tool and provide suggestions for improvement. One expert, Jim Shaddix, serves in a dual role as Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Pastor of Teaching and Training at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. He has pastored churches in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Colorado, and also served as Dean of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 18–20.

Chapel and Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The other expert, Michael Moore, possesses over thirty years of experience as a pastor and associational missionary. He has served churches in North Carolina since 1971 including First Baptist Mooresville, Friendly Avenue Baptist in Greensboro, and Hocutt Baptist in Clayton. He retired as the Director of Missions for the Robeson Baptist Association. Moore has served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and currently serves on the board of directors of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Both experts provided practical advice for improving the effectiveness of the assessment tool, and all suggestions were incorporated into its design (See Appendix B). The project director provides the assessment tool's final format in Appendix A. Phase two ended with the development of the assessment tool in its final form.

Phase Three: Training

The training phase of the project began with the project director selecting an eight-person focus group from Wrightsboro Baptist Church that reflected the composition of its congregation. The focus group comprised of four men and four women from the various age groups represented in the congregation: twenty to thirty-five, thirty-six to fifty, fifty-one to sixty-five, and sixty-six and above. The focus group also comprised of individuals who exemplified spiritual maturity through their character, lifestyle, and leadership in the church. All persons were spoken to individually and provided with a general overview of the project and the expectations for their involvement.

The project director met twice with the focus group in September explaining the premise, purpose, and methodology of the ministry project. At the first meeting, the project director discussed the following topics: the definition and necessity of the sermon invitation, qualities of an effective sermon invitation, and the ministry project's purpose and methodology. The project director provides his notes and handouts for the meeting in Appendix C. Discussion during this meeting mainly centered on the definition of the sermon invitation and its purpose and implementation in the sermon. Individuals within the focus group possessed little knowledge of the issues involving the use of the invitation due to lack of exposure. They found the biblical foundations extremely helpful in developing their opinion for the necessity of the sermon invitation and the role of the Holy Spirit in its implementation. The meeting concluded with members of the focus group receiving information concerning the sermon invitation and ministry project format to review before the next training session.

The second meeting occurred the following week and the project director answered questions from information addressed in the previous meeting and on the handouts. The main purpose of the training session centered on discussing the procedures for evaluating the sermon invitations during the implementation phase. The project director provides his notes and handouts for the meeting in Appendix D. This training session focused on the assessment tool and its purpose to gather research data that provided specific details and measureable rankings on the effectiveness of the response opportunities offered during the invitation. The project director emphasized that the feedback provided by the assessment would allow him to make adjustments to his method of delivery and improve the opportunities provided for response during the

invitation. These improvements would occur on a week to week basis based on the suggestions and evaluations made by the focus group during the evaluation period of the ministry project. Discussion during this meeting centered on the use of the assessment tool and the time for group evaluation that would occur on Wednesday evening following the sermon invitation's presentation on Sunday morning. The third phase of the ministry project ended after the second training session.

Phase Four: Implementation

After training the focus group, the project director initialized the implementation phase of the ministry project. During the second training session, the project director and focus group selected a period of eight consecutive weeks from October to November for the focus group to listen to the sermon during the Sunday Morning Worship Service and evaluate the invitation with the assessment tool. The project director did not adjust or enhance the sermon content for the eight-week period unless it pertained to the invitation. The sermons preached reflected the current ability of the project director and the focus group never considered enhancement in any other portion of the sermon. The project director provides outlines of the sermons preached and invitations offered during the eight-week evaluation period in Appendices E through L.

After listening to the sermon and invitation, the members of the focus group individually completed the assessment tool following the service. On the following Wednesday evening, the focus group met with the project director and discussed their evaluations for eight consecutive weeks. The project director collected the focus group's completed assessment tools and correlated the data from the qualitative and quantitative questions. He also documented all recommendations made by the focus group during the

meeting. The project director provides the information collected and correlated from the assessment tool and conversations during the follow-up meetings in Appendices E through L. The project director made adjustments or continued to utilize specific strategies and formats in his sermon invitations based on the focus group's assessment during the evaluation period. By adjusting the means and methods of the invitation based on the criteria for effectiveness, the project director's skill improved in extending clear invitations based on the scriptural truths of previously preached sermons. The implementation phase of the ministry project ended after the eighth Wednesday follow-up meeting.

Phase Five: Assessment

The assessment constituted the final phase of the ministry project. This phase involved the project director reviewing the qualitative and quantitative research data provided by the assessment tool and information recorded during conversations with the focus group over the eight-week period. The project director measured his improvement in the skill of issuing effective invitations by tracking his ability to successfully and consistently incorporate the identified qualities of effective invitations in the method, delivery, and opportunity for response. Interaction with the focus group, qualitative suggestions for improvement, and quantitative weekly rankings of effectiveness provided the data used for tracking improvement during the eight-week period. Chapters 5 and 6 provide detailed analysis of data collected during the evaluation stage of the ministry project and the benefits the project offered to the project director's ability to issue effective invitations.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Summary of Project Results

The project director amassed adequate information to evaluate the ministry project by analyzing the data provided by the focus group and examining the discussions from their weekly evaluation meetings. The ministry project's main priority focused on increasing the project director's ability to deliver clear, relevant sermon invitations. Through the entire process of research, development, training, and interaction with the focus group, the project director's skill in delivering effective sermon invitations significantly improved. He learned consistently to follow and adhere to the six characteristics of effective sermon invitations, and to ensure each response activity was directly related to the scriptural text and sermon points. The results from the assessment tool and the project director's own observations validate this evaluation. The project director appraised the success of the ministry project by evaluating the satisfactory completion of each project objective and assessing the effectiveness of specific stages within the project's procedures.

Evaluation of Project Objectives

The project director determined the value and validity of the project based on the satisfactory completion of the four ministry objectives and two personal objectives proposed at the beginning of the project. All objectives supported the identification and

assessment of the six characteristics of effective sermon invitations and how these characteristics related to the project director's skill in this area. The completion of these objectives reflects the positive results of the project and validates the growth of the project director's skill in this area.

Ministry Objectives

First Objective: Research

The first ministry objective involved researching the field of sermon invitations. The project director tremendously benefited from this portion of the project through a variety of diverse readings that ranged from *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer¹ to *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* by David J. Engelsma.² Through this reading the project director discovered issues, arguments, and implications surrounding the sermon invitation not previously considered. *Invite: Preaching for Response* by O. Dean Martin³ served as a primary example for an unexpected source of information. In this text, Martin passionately called for the Methodist Denomination in 1987 to return to the practice of issuing sermon invitations, and warned of the potential consequences to the spiritual health of the denomination if no one reacted to his concerns. In *Engaging Exposition*, Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage discussed the theological debate that surrounds the issue of offering an invitation:

Scripture is clear that it is right for us to invite men and women, boys and girls, to repent of sin, trust Christ, believe the gospel, be reconciled to God, and receive

¹ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

² David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3d ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014).

³ O. Dean Martin, *Invite: Preaching for Response* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987).

the free and gracious gift of salvation. However, a question must be asked and answered: How does this translate to what is commonly called the public invitation? For many this “tradition” attached to the end of a message is a given, and to question its legitimacy is to expose oneself to the charge of being non-evangelistic at best and possibly heretical. On the other hand, some are greatly troubled by what they designate as “the altar call,” “walking the aisle,” or “coming forward to receive Jesus.” They see the invitational system to be without biblical justification, often manipulative, and potentially misleading when it comes to what constitutes salvation. Because of the danger of abuse, the invitation has come under severe and sustained attack.⁴

These and other texts revealed the debate of issuing a sermon invitation in modern Christianity along denominational and theological “camps;” a debate unknown to the project director prior to this ministry project.

The reading and research not only enlightened the project director’s knowledge of the issues surrounding the sermon invitation but also developed his ability to define an effective invitation and identify its essential qualities. *Power in the Pulpit* by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix⁵ and *The Christian Persuader* by Leighton Ford⁶ provided insight and support in this area. The result of this research provided the necessary foundation needed for the project director to construct an assessment tool to evaluate invitations with the standard of six qualities typically present in effective sermons invitations. The project director’s increased knowledge and awareness validates how the ministry project satisfied the project director’s first objective, therefore, confirming its effectiveness.

⁴ Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition: A 3-D Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 207–208.

⁵ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999).

⁶ Leighton Ford, *The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

Second Objective: Develop “Effective” Sermon Invitations

The second objective entailed the project director developing invitations that incorporated the six common components and qualities of an effective invitation. The eight sermon briefs with sermon invitations provided in Appendices D through K demonstrate the satisfactory completion of this objective. The assessments of these invitations given by the focus group also provided in the appendices demonstrate the effectiveness of the invitations.

One unexpected result developed during the formation and implementation of the eight sermon invitations presented during this ministry project. Of the six essential components of an effective invitation, the project director considered the “creativity and/or appropriateness of the called response” quality the most challenging to incorporate and sought guidance from his focus group. “Creativity and/or appropriateness” refers to the variety of formats available for the called response which includes immediate and delayed-response activities, physical actions or commitments for future actions, single activities or multiple approaches, practical ministry or calls for worship and prayer. Creative and varied activities offered during the invitation allow individuals to worshipfully respond to the truths of the sermon text in new and different ways. The creativity of the response activity lacks any restrictions unless it diminishes the biblical truth revealed in the sermon.

The project director desired to utilize creative formats and varied activities for his sermon invitations during the ministry project. His research uncovered unconventional invitations such as nailing pieces of paper to a cross that listed an individual’s sin, washing the feet of one’s family as a symbol of service, and practicing forgiveness with

those in the service. The project director shared these ideas with the focus group looking for suggestions for creative invitations in upcoming sermons. After hearing these examples, the focus group encouraged the project director to restrain and focus more on traditional activities. The focus group believed the congregation would not respond positively to creative activities, and this would hinder their opportunity to respond during the invitation.

While the project director intended to implement various creative activities, he conceded to the wisdom of the focus group and restricted the sermon invitation to more traditional opportunities of response like individual and group prayer, “after meetings,” taking of the Lord’s Supper, and nonverbal commitments for follow-up actions. After further discussion with the focus group, the project director determined he would attempt to offer more creative response activities in the future when it would cause less controversy with the congregation.

Third Objective: Develop an Assessment Tool

The third objective comprised of the development of an assessment tool to evaluate the effectiveness of an invitation based on the information gathered during the research portion of the project. The assessment tool utilized a mixed-method approach of both qualitative and quantitative questions (see Appendix A). Two homiletic experts evaluated the assessment tool and provided minor suggestions before its implementation (see Appendix B).

At the beginning of the implementation phase of the ministry project, the project director perceived the assessment tool easy to use and capable of producing necessary evaluative information. The two training sessions with the focus group produced few

questions, and no one expressed any concern in understanding or using the assessment tool; however, the project director's confidence in the assessment tool transformed into concern and doubt during the first evaluation meeting with the focus group. Members of the group appeared confused about their purpose, how to use the tool, and the meaning of key terms representing the six qualities of an effective invitation. After a lengthy meeting, the focus group exhibited more understanding and confidence in using the assessment tool, and eventually provided adequate information necessary for this ministry project.

Through this experience, the project director developed several conclusions regarding the assessment tool. First, the tool provided adequate evaluative information regarding sermon invitations if the individuals using the tool possessed prior basic knowledge of expository preaching. The project director spent a considerable amount of time teaching the focus group the components of the preaching event including introduction, main points, application, and conclusion before any discussion on the invitation. Prior knowledge of expository preaching would minimize the learning curve for using the assessment tool. Enlisting area pastors or retired pastors as members of the focus group would satisfy this concern, but would not meet the requirement for the group consisting of individuals from the project director's ministry context.

Second, the quantitative portion of the assessment tool yielded little usable information (see Appendices E through L). In mixed method approaches to research, the researcher used the qualitative findings to help "elaborate on or extend the quantitative results."⁷ Typically the quantitative portion of mixed method research provides essential

⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 222.

evaluative information and the qualitative findings validate the reasons for those results. This ministry project yielded contrasting results suggesting the existence of a problem in the assessment tool, evaluation procedures, or focus group. Consistent quantitative results suggested limited growth of the project director's skill; however, the qualitative results suggested both growth in the focus group's knowledge of effective invitations and the project director's ability to issue them.

The quantitative results began high and consistently remained high throughout the ministry project limiting the possibility for the project to validate improvement in the project director's ability to offer effective sermon invitations (see Appendices E through L). The project director concluded the consistent favorable quantitative findings derived from the focus group's lack of knowledge in this area. The group's inability to objectively evaluate the invitations, coupled with their positive feelings toward the project director, led to consistently high quantitative scores regardless of the project director's ability (see Appendices E through L). Answers from the qualitative questions proved more reliable and provided the project director with information on the perceptions of the focus group including details on what they heard and comprehended concerning the invitation. The project director used this information of what the focus group heard to compare what he declared in the sermon invitation and then identified discrepancies. The qualitative questions of the assessment tool provided more usable information than the quantitative portion. In future research, the project director suggests either eliminating the quantitative portion of the assessment tool or redesigning the format and questions to compensate for these issues.

Third, future project directors should evaluate the assessment tool's terminology. The majority of the members of the focus group expressed their disdain for the term "Christian growth component" on the assessment tool. The focus group comprehended the meaning of the term; they understood all sermons should provide an opportunity for individuals to grow in their commitment to an area of Christianity including active obedience to the Holy Spirit, living in conjunction with biblical precepts, and a worship-focused lifestyle. The focus group understood the category's purpose in identifying and evaluating the project director's effectiveness in offering the opportunity for Christian growth in the invitation. The group expressed their dislike for the semantics used to designate this component and suggested changing the name of the category. This discussion began on the first evaluative meeting and continued throughout each meeting with no viable solution offered. While this issue appears minor, the discussion of this term often dominated the agenda and distracted from the main purpose for meeting. The project director suggests the immediate change of this and any nonessential terminology within the assessment tool if used in the future. Possible solutions for replacing the term "Christian growth component" include "spiritual growth component" and "discipleship component."

Fourth Objective: Issue Effective Invitations

The fourth objective involved issuing invitations for evaluation at Wrightsboro Baptist Church in Wilmington, North Carolina. The project director selected an eight-person focus group that represented the congregation of the church in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the project director's invitations based on the assessment tool. The focus group evaluated eight invitations for eight weeks during the Sunday Morning

Worship Service. These individuals met weekly as a group with the project director to discuss their evaluations of his sermon invitations.

The assessment tool provided the most valuable information for the evaluation of the project director's sermon invitations. Through the eight-week process, the project director tracked the knowledge of the focus group and their ability to identify the truth of text, the main points of the sermon, and the six qualities of an effective sermon invitation. The project director realized after the second evaluation meeting that the weekly gatherings would entail more of him teaching the focus group than their providing input to his sermon invitations. The majority of the weekly meetings yielded little profitable information and often left the project director questioning the usefulness of the focus group for his ministry project. However, one issue continued to surface weekly and revealed itself as the priority of the focus group concerning sermon invitations. They believed the simplicity of the activity, the ability to understand the directions of the response, and the ability to connect the activity to the text determined the effectiveness of the invitations (see Appendices E through L). For this focus group, a sermon invitation must provide simple response opportunities with easy to understand directions, and these opportunities must directly connect to the focus of the text and the sermon's main points. Simplicity and ease of understanding equal effectiveness for this group.

While the project director desired to issue creative invitations instead of the traditional opportunities, his interaction with the focus group revealed that simple, easy to understand opportunities with clear connections to the text provided the best format for the congregation to respond during the invitation. This led the project director to ask if the priority of this project consisted of issuing creative response activities or effective

invitations that provided the congregation with the best opportunity for response. David Mains defines true preaching as “simplicity coupled with directness: ‘Here’s what my text is about and it’s calling for us to do this.’”⁸ Pastors must “build practical bridges,” or list the steps necessary to respond to what Scripture requires, and then walk the congregation “over those bridges, step by step, to get them to that point.”⁹ Through his interaction with the focus group, the project director understood that creativity may resonate with those attending the service; however, pastors must reject its use if it leads to sacrificing simplicity, understanding, and connectivity to the text.

Personal Objectives

First Objective: Increase Knowledge

The project director also proposed two personal objectives for this project. The first objective focused on increasing the project director’s knowledge of effective invitations as it related to the congregation’s awareness of their immediate opportunity to respond to the sermon previously preached. The rationale for this objective developed from the view that research in this area would increase the project director’s knowledge of the elements that constituted an effective invitation. Increased knowledge would not only enhance the project director’s ability to discuss and identify qualities of effective invitations, but it would also enable him to produce effective sermon invitations.

The result of the research in this area provided the project director with increased knowledge that enabled him to construct an assessment tool and evaluate his own practice with the standards provided by the six qualities typically present in effective

⁸ David Mains, “Building Bridges to Action,” in *Preaching to Convince*, ed. James D. Berkley (Waco: Word, 1986), 130.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

sermon invitations. This increased knowledge also provided the project director with a confidence concerning his views of the sermon invitation. Pastors and homileticians would typically not object to inviting Christians to immediately respond to biblical truths revealed in a sermon involving the Christian life; however, much debate exists over the biblical support for inviting unbelievers to respond to the gospel and receive Christ.¹⁰ This debate not only affects an individual's view of the sermon invitation, but it forms his foundation concerning the practice and motivation for evangelism. Through his research, the project director's views align closely with those given by Packer in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*:

Whatever we may believe about election and, for that matter, about the extent of atonement, the fact remains that God in the gospel really does offer Christ and promise justification and life to “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.” “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13). As God commands all men everywhere to repent, so God invites all men everywhere to come to Christ and find mercy. The invitation is for sinners only, but for sinners universally; it is not for sinners of a certain type only, reformed sinners or sinners whose hearts have been prepared by a fixed minimum of sorrow for sin; but for sinners as such, just as they are. . . . The fact that the gospel invitation is free and unlimited—“sinners Jesus will receive,” “come and welcome to Jesus Christ”—is the glory of the gospel as a revelation of divine grace.¹¹

Packer not only argues the universal offer of grace to all who come to Christ but also the responsibility of all believers to declare this message to all people and invite them to respond to it:

Evangelism, we have learned, is a task appointed to all God's people everywhere. It is the task of communicating a message from the Creator to rebel mankind. The message begins with information and ends with an invitation. The information concerns God's work of making his Son a perfect Savior for sinners. The invitation is God's summons to mankind generally to come to the Savior and find life. God commands all men everywhere to repent, and promises forgiveness and

¹⁰ Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 208.

¹¹ Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 98–99.

restoration to all who do. The Christian is sent into the world as God's herald and Christ's ambassador, to broadcast this message as widely as he can. This is both his duty (because God commands it, and love to our neighbor requires it) and his privilege (because it is a great thing to speak for God, and to take our neighbor the remedy—the only remedy—that can save him from the terrors of spiritual death). Our job, then, is to go to our fellow men and tell them the gospel of Christ, and try by every means to make it clear to them, to remove as best we can any difficulties that they may find in it, to impress them with seriousness, and to urge them to respond to it. This is our abiding responsibility; it is a basic part of our Christian calling.¹²

The project director applied Packer's views onto the issue of the sermon invitation and concluded his responsibility of fulfilling God's mandate to share the gospel included offering the opportunity to respond to it during the invitation. This ministry project resulted in the project director finding confidence in the importance and necessity of offering the opportunity to respond to the gospel during the sermon invitation.

Second Objective: Increase Skill

The second personal objective emphasized the increase of the project director's ability to deliver clear, relevant sermon invitations. The main purpose of this ministry project focused on this objective, and for its success the project would need to produce evidence of observable improvements in the project director's skill. After several months of researching this topic, developing an assessment tool, ten weeks of training and interacting with a focus group, and several weeks of assimilating and interpreting the findings of the focus group the project director's use of the sermon invitation significantly improved. The qualitative answers provided by the focus group validate this statement, and the project director's own observations support this view. He learned to consistently follow and adhere to the six characteristics of effective sermon invitations;

¹² Ibid., 91–92.

especially simplicity and clarity as encouraged by the focus group. This ministry project resulted in producing observable improvements in the ability of the project director to deliver effective sermon invitations, and, therefore, successfully completed this objective.

Evaluation of Project Procedures

The research design or project procedures of the ministry project incorporated five phases: research, development, training, implementation, and assessment. The construction of the project's research design centered on creating a simple format that first provided interaction between the project director and material concerning sermon invitations, and, second, interaction between the project director and individuals within his congregation. The project director established the criteria of success for each phase as completing desired outcomes within predetermined time allotments.

Phase One: Research

The first phase of the ministry project involved researching views concerning the use of the invitation. Through this research, the project director affirmed the position of the necessity and validity of offering a sermon invitation. This research also allowed the project director to identify six essential qualities and characteristics of effective invitations. This phase of the ministry project produced all intended outcomes within the time allotted.

Phase Two: Development

The second phase of the ministry project consisted of developing an assessment tool that enabled individuals to evaluate and critique the effectiveness of the project director's sermon invitations based on the six identified characteristics of effective

invitations. The assessment tool embodied the project director's research findings and utilized a mixed-method approach with both quantitative and qualitative questions. The project director selected two homiletic experts to evaluate the assessment tool and their suggestions for improvement were incorporated into its design. Phase two produced all intended outcomes within the time allotted and ended with the development of the assessment tool in its final form.

Phase Three: Training

The training phase of the project began with the project director selecting an eight-person focus group from Wrightsboro Baptist Church that reflected the composition of its congregation. The focus group comprised of individuals who exemplified spiritual maturity through their character, lifestyle, and leadership in the church. The project director spoke to each individual separately and provided them with a general overview of the project and the expectations for their involvement.

The project director met twice with the focus group explaining the premise, purpose, and methodology of the ministry project. At the first meeting, the project director discussed the definition of the sermon invitation, six qualities of an effective invitation, and the ministry project's purpose and methodology. The second meeting occurred the following week and focused on how to use the assessment tool to evaluate the sermon invitations during the implementation phase. The project director emphasized that the feedback provided by this assessment would allow him to make adjustments to his invitations and improve the opportunities of response.

The project director incorrectly concluded the training provided the focus group with adequate knowledge to evaluate his sermon invitations and provide profitable

feedback. Individuals within the focus group possessed little knowledge of the importance of the sermon invitation or issues surrounding its use due to lack of exposure to this subject. The project director also inadvertently overlooked the obvious fact that the group as a whole exhibited no understanding of how to implement the assessment tool. If repeating this project, the project director would provide more time and opportunity for additional training that included the practice of evaluating one or more sermon invitations with the assessment tool as a group.

Phase Four: Implementation

After training the focus group, the project director initialized the implementation phase of the ministry project. The project director and focus group selected a period of eight consecutive weeks from October through November for the focus group to listen to the sermon during the Sunday Morning Worship Service and evaluate the invitation with the assessment tool. On the following Wednesday evening, the focus group would meet as a group with the project director and discuss their evaluation. The project director would also document all recommendations made by the focus group during the meeting.

Several issues developed during the eight-week implementation period. First, a two-week hiatus occurred between week six and week seven due to the project director fulfilling other responsibilities essential to the church. While the impact of this unavoidable break appeared minimal, it prolonged the ministry project for the focus group and project director. Second, the lack of experience and knowledge of the focus group greatly influenced their ability to properly use the assessment tool and provide adequate feedback during the weekly evaluation meeting. This issue surfaced during the first evaluation meeting which led the project director to spend a considerable amount of

time training the group on the basic structure of a sermon, the foundations of expository preaching, the importance of the sermon invitation, and how to properly use the assessment tool. This instruction continued for the duration of the eight-week period with the focus group exhibiting greater knowledge and ability each week. By the end of the implementation phase, the focus group possessed the necessary skill to evaluate a sermon invitation; a skill they demonstrated by evaluating the invitation given by a speaker filling the pulpit during the project director's absence.

Training the focus group in evaluating sermon invitations for the duration of the implementation phase resulted in an unexpected benefit. However, this benefit came at a cost—it limited the opportunity for the project director to receive valuable feedback during most of the ministry project. If repeating this project in the future, the project director suggests enlisting two or three local or retired pastors and creating an additional focus group. This group would not necessarily attend the services, but listen or watch a recording of the sermon and evaluate the invitation independent from the primary focus group. This solution would not only allow the primary focus group to continue to meet the standards of consisting of only individuals in the project director's ministry context, it would also allow for the essential feedback necessary for this project.

Phase Five: Assessment

The assessment constituted the final phase of the ministry project. This phase involved the project director reviewing the qualitative and quantitative research data provided by the assessment tool and information recorded during conversations with the focus group over the eight-week period. As previously discussed, the quantitative portion of the assessment tool yielded little usable information. From the onset, the focus group

scored the project director extremely high in all areas leaving little room for improvement. This led the project director to suggest either eliminating the quantitative portion or redesigning the questions to allow for a greater variance in scores. The discussions during the evaluation meetings also yielded a limited amount of viable feedback. This left the project director depending on the qualitative questions of the assessment tool to provide the data needed for this ministry project. Although this phase dealt with obstacles, it produced all intended outcomes within the time allotted.

Summary of Project Procedures

The project director measured his improvement in the skill of issuing effective invitations by tracking his ability to successfully and consistently incorporate the identified qualities of effective invitations in the method, delivery, and opportunity for response. Interaction with the focus group and qualitative responses taken from the assessment tool provided the data used for tracking improvement during the eight-week period. While the procedures of the ministry project exhibited minor flaws, they successfully provided the necessary framework that allowed for the improvement of the project director's skill in issuing sermon invitations.

CHAPTER 6

MINISTRY REFLECTION

One definition of learning describes it as the process of transforming information and experience into new observable behaviors exhibited in knowledge, skills, or attitudes.¹ The primary objective of this ministry project centered on the project director increasing his skill or “learning” to consistently present effective sermon invitations. During the ministry project, the project director’s skill in delivering effective sermon invitations significantly improved as he learned to consistently adhere to the six characteristics of effective sermon invitations, and ensure that each response activity was directly related to the scriptural text.

With the primary objective achieved, the question presented itself if other “learning” occurred, or if the project director exhibited any new observable behaviors due to the implementation of this project. In order to answer this question, the critical step of self-evaluation and examination should occur. Achieving awareness of changes in behavior, actions, and attitudes occurs when an individual assesses his current presuppositions and activities in light of his previous views and actions. According to the definition previously stated, the opportunity for “learning” occurs when observable discrepancies between the two exist. Through the process of self-examination and evaluation, the project director observed additional learning occurred during the project

¹ Robert J. Birkenholz, *Effective Adult Learning* (Danville, IL: Interstate Publishers, 1999), 1–12.

as his perceptions changed concerning the purpose of the ministry project, his ministry context, and the success of the focus group.

Purpose of the Ministry Project

Of the six essential components of an effective invitation, the project director considered “creativity and/or appropriateness of the called response” the most challenging to incorporate into his invitations prior to the beginning of the project. “Creativity and/or appropriateness” refers to the variety of diverse formats available for the called response which allow individuals to worshipfully respond to the truths of the sermon text as long as the activities appropriately reflect the biblical truth revealed in the sermon. The project director observed a personal weakness in this area and desired to explore creative formats and varied activities to incorporate into the sermon invitation during the ministry project.

The project director’s research uncovered unconventional invitations consisting of nailing pieces of paper to a cross that listed an individual’s sin, washing the feet of your family as a symbol of ministry and humility, and practicing forgiveness with those around you during the service. This project director discussed with the focus group his desire to incorporate one of these or other creative activities into a sermon invitation. After hearing these suggestions, the focus group encouraged the project director to restrain from these activities and continue to focus on more traditional response opportunities. The focus group believed the congregation would not positively respond to creative activities and this would hinder their opportunity of response during the invitation.

The focus group also expressed the importance of simple, easy to understand sermon invitations that exhibited a clear connection to the scriptural text and main points of the sermon. They stated the project director's main priority should focus on offering sermon invitations that involved simplistic activities of response with easily understood guidelines. The focus group perceived more creative approaches as too intricate and confusing for the congregation. They also believed creative invitations could remove the focus from the biblical truth of the passage to the activity. These perceptions led the focus group to suggest to the project director to continue to utilize more traditional response activities during the invitation. The issue of creative invitations continued to surface weekly in the evaluation meetings, and the focus group consistently and passionately encouraged the project director to refrain from creative activities.

The project director disagreed with the focus group's perceptions; he believed simplistic, easily understood invitations could also exhibit creativity. His desire to implement various creative activities during the invitation continued until he considered the focus group's other concern; creative invitations could distract this congregation from the biblical truth presented in Scripture. While other congregations may worshipfully respond to less traditional activities, the focus group expressed their concern that this congregation would respond negatively and lose focus on the opportunity to respond. This led the project director to ask if the purpose of this project consisted of issuing creative response activities, or effective invitations that consistently provided opportunities for the congregation to respond to the scriptural truth revealed in the sermon. Would the project director risk the opportunity to allow the congregation to

respond to the truth of the text in order pursue a desire for personal development in one area of the sermon invitation?

The project director concluded faithful preaching that glorified God encompassed and undergirded all aspects of this ministry project. Faithful preaching reflects the “zeal that God has for his own glory, that the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and that the pervasive atmosphere of preaching be the holiness of God.”² The preaching event must reveal the glory of God, declare His plan and act of redemption, exalt the person and work of Jesus in all Scripture, and call people to respond to God, His Word, and His work. The preaching event, which includes the sermon invitation, must focus on these guidelines.

This understanding changed the project director’s view of the purpose of the ministry project. The primary purpose of this project focused on faithfully presenting the word of God and not producing and implementing creative response activities. While the project director desired to issue creative invitations instead of the traditional opportunities, he conceded to the wisdom of the focus group and restricted the sermon invitation to more traditional opportunities of response. Through his interaction with the focus group, the project director learned creative response activities only benefit a congregation if they possess the ability and openness to understand how the opportunity connects to the truth of the scriptural text. The project director also learned the ministry project should never compromise the integrity of faithful preaching.

² John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 23–24.

Project Director's Ministry Context

Wrightsboro Baptist Church possesses an older demographic with the majority of its active members over the age of fifty-five. While families with children and individuals below the age of forty continue to join and regularly attend the church, Wrightsboro's attendance continues to lean toward an older demographic. The church exhibits theologically and culturally conservative views, and these perspectives are reflected in its worship style and ministry programs.

Although the project director fully understood his ministry context prior to the inception of the ministry project, he still attempted unsuccessfully to use creative response activities during the invitation. Following this issue's resolution, the project director once again refreshed his understanding of his ministry context, and how the church's characteristics must influence the delivery format of every aspect of his preaching including the sermon invitation. Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage attested to this principle in *Engaging Exposition*:

Delivering a sermon effectively, however, requires understanding as much as you can about your audience. If they are not getting the message, then the sermon is a washout, no matter how well-intentioned and well-prepared it may be. Preachers must learn to analyze the audience—the collection of individuals gathered in front of him. Audience analysis includes the following criteria: size, demographics, interest, attitude, and spiritual condition.³

The author stressed that in order to communicate with one's congregation a preacher must understand his ministry context and deliver scriptural truth through the most effective means possible that will allow the congregation to understand and respond to these truths. This understanding directly impacts the delivery and format of the sermon invitation.

³ Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition: A 3-D Approach to Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011), 322.

Through the ministry project, the project director once again realized the format and method of delivery of any component of the sermon must reflect the ministry context. The cultural and theological makeup of the congregation will influence the most effective methods of communicating scriptural truth. The current demographics of Wrightsboro Baptist Church should lead the project director to consider more conservative means of communication at this time.

Success of the Focus Group

The lack of experience and knowledge of the focus group greatly influenced their ability to properly use the assessment tool and provide adequate feedback during the ministry project. This issue surfaced during the first evaluation meeting which led the project director to spend a considerable amount of time training the group on the basic structure of a sermon, the foundations of expository preaching, the importance of the sermon invitation, and how to properly use the assessment tool. The project director realized after the second evaluation meeting that the weekly gatherings would entail more of him teaching the focus group than their providing input into his sermon invitations. The majority of the weekly meetings yielded little profitable information and often left the project director questioning the usefulness of the focus group for his ministry project. He initially evaluated the focus group as a failure and a hindrance to successfully completing the ministry project's objectives.

The instruction of the focus group continued for the duration of the eight-week period. During this time, the project director began to notice the focus group's increased knowledge of the sermon invitation, their ability to identify the truth of text, and recognize the main points of the sermon. He began to track their development and by the

end of the ministry project, the focus group possessed the necessary skill to identify the components of a sermon and evaluate a sermon invitation. The project director began to perceive the focus group as a “success” as they continued to exhibit greater skill in this area.

The focus group provided the project director with two key pieces of data through their interactions during the project. First, their responses on the qualitative questions of the assessment tool provided the project director with the opportunity to compare and contrast what he declared in the sermon invitation and the information they recorded. This allowed the project director to assess his effectiveness in communicating the invitation’s purpose and format. Second, this group continually stressed the necessity for sermon invitations to be simplistic, easily understood, and easily connected to the text and the sermon’s main points. Their commitment to these areas significantly influenced this ministry project and the project director’s views.

At the onset of this project, the project director questioned the validity and usefulness of the focus group. As the project progressed, the project director’s opinion of the usefulness of the group significantly altered. The focus group not only mastered the basic knowledge of a sermon’s components and sermon evaluation, they also contributed to the project director’s development and improved skill in offering an invitation.

Conclusion

Through reflection, self-evaluation, and examination, the project director identified changes in his presuppositions and actions that occurred during the implementation of the ministry project. He clarified his views of the underlying purpose of the project, renewed his commitment to allow his ministry context to influence the

format of his communication, and redefined his concept of success as it related to the focus group. The project director possesses the perception he “learned” more than he originally expected through the implementation of the ministry project.

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

Easily understood *Mostly clear* *Not completely clear* *Confusing*

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Poor	Needs Attention	Satisfactory	Excellent	Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	1	2	3	4	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	1	2	3	4	
Evangelistic Component	1	2	3	4	
Christian Growth Component	1	2	3	4	
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	1	2	3	4	
Spirit-led	1	2	3	4	

Recommendations:**3 things to keep...**

1.

2.

3.

3 things to improve...

1.

2.

3.

APPENDIX B

HOMILETIC EXPERTS' EVALUATION OF ASSESSMENT TOOL

Jim Shaddix

Two homiletic experts evaluated the assessment tool, provided suggestions for improvement, and confirmed its validity. One expert, Jim Shaddix, serves in a dual role as Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Pastor of Teaching and Training at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. He has pastored churches in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Colorado, and also served as Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana.

After reviewing the assessment tool, Shaddix confirmed its validity and stated it covered the major issues regarding the invitation. He especially appreciated the emphasis on encouraging the individual to consider if the form of the invitation coincided with the content of the sermon.¹ Shaddix suggested the tool include opportunities for assessing the possibility of manipulation in the invitation. According to Shaddix, one of the major issues with regard to issuing a sermon invitation is the manipulation of the responders.²

The project director believes the fifth and sixth characteristics of an effective invitation satisfy Shaddix's suggestions. The fifth and sixth characteristics identify the necessity for honesty, simplicity, and clarity in the call for response and a reliance on the

¹ Jim Shaddix, e-mail message to project director, September 30, 2014.

² Ibid.

work of the Holy Spirit. The pastor must clearly explain the response activity so that the congregation will know specifically how to respond, the reasons for the response, and the desired outcomes for the response. The listener must comprehend that their response correlates with the work of the Holy Spirit and signifies His call in their lives. Responding to the called activity does not transform the individual; it only signifies the willingness of the individual to allow God to transform them. Integrity and humility must undergird any form of persuasion used in the invitation with the pastor relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. The pastor will avoid coercion and manipulation in the invitation as long as he relies on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Michael Moore

Michael Moore, the second homiletic expert asked to evaluate the assessment tool, possesses over thirty years of experience as a pastor and associational missionary. He has served churches in North Carolina since 1971 including First Baptist Mooresville, Friendly Avenue Baptist in Greensboro, and Hocutt Baptist in Clayton. He retired as the Director of Missions for the Robeson Baptist Association. Moore has served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and currently serves on the board of directors of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

After reviewing the assessment tool, Moore also confirmed its validity and stated it covered the major issues regarding the invitation. He suggested the tool include the assessment of evangelistic opportunities for response in the invitation.³ Moore believes

³ Michael Moore, interview by project director, Leland, NC, December 16, 2013.

all Scripture points to the necessity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ for justification; therefore, all sermons should call for a response to the gospel in the invitation.⁴

The project director believes the third characteristic of an effective invitation satisfies Moore's suggestion. The third characteristic identifies effective invitations as those that possess an evangelistic component. All sermons will exhibit a redemptive focus due to the redemptive nature of all texts, and an invitation to respond to the gospel must always follow its proclamation; therefore, all sermons must offer an evangelistic invitation.

⁴ Ibid.

APPENDIX C

HANDOUT AND NOTES FOR FIRST FOCUS GROUP MEETING

The Sermon Invitation: Part One

Purpose of Activity: To improve the pastor's delivering of sermon invitations through interaction with a focus group. Improvement will be based on specific criteria identified as the characteristics of effective invitations.

Sermon Invitation Definition: The multi-faceted opportunity for the hearer to immediately respond to the scriptural truth of the text following the sermon according to the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearer's life. The "effectiveness" of an invitation centers on its ability to provide immediate opportunities for response to a previously preached sermon that is directly related to the scriptural truth of the focal passage.

Rationale for Issuing Invitations: Homiletic manuals recognize the "conclusion" as an essential component of the sermon and delivery process in preaching.¹ The "conclusion" is the climax or final movement of the sermon where the pastor "refocuses the thoughts of the audience on what God expects of them."² Homiletic experts refer to the conclusion as a significant part of the sermon because the pastor issues a persuasive appeal to the congregation for action based on the text.

A consensus exists between homiletic experts and general practitioners that pastors must call the congregation to respond and act on the truths of Scripture just preached. However, debate exists concerning the necessity and validity of pastors providing opportunities for "listeners to commit themselves to acting on the truth that has been preached before they walk out the door."³ Homiletic experts and general practitioners agree on the use of the sermon conclusion; however, debate surrounds issuing the invitation to immediately act on the appeal given in the conclusion.

¹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 207.

² Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 127.

³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210.

The pastor holds the position of the validity and necessity of offering an invitation in order for the congregation to have an immediate opportunity to respond to the called action given in the conclusion of the sermon. The invitation should provide opportunities to respond to evangelistic calls and other mandates pertaining to Christianity expounded in the Bible including worship, obedience, and Christian growth.

Biblical Foundations:

- *Acts 2:37–38*: This text clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: when the truth of Jesus is presented, an opportunity to immediately respond to that truth must be provided. The gospel is not something that is simply discussed; it is a message that demands an immediate opportunity for a personal response.
- *1 John 5:21*: John called his readers to immediately respond to his message by actively protecting themselves from any form of idolatry. The purpose of 1 John is not the discussion of commitment and devotion to Christ, but the call to actively practice it.⁴ This passage clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: the truths of Scripture are not meant to be simply discussed; they are to be practiced. Therefore, the presentation of biblical truths requires an invitation to immediately implement and practice them.
- *Ezra 10:1–15*: This passage clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: when people are convicted by God concerning the truths of Scripture they desire and expect an opportunity to immediately respond.
- *1 Kings 18:21*: This passage clearly provides the foundation for a simple premise: how people react to a call for response does not negate the validity or necessity of the invitation.

The Contemporary Argument Surrounding Sermon Invitations:

- *Argument for Sermon Invitations*
 1. If a “call to action” is issued then an opportunity to immediately act and respond should be provided. “Even secular psychologists agree that if you are going to call people to action, you ought to give them some immediate way to act.”⁵
 2. Our culture expects an immediate invitation to respond to a called action. “No person, outside the pulpit, that is, spends twenty-five minutes trying to sell a vacuum cleaner and then says, ‘Thank you so much for the fellowship. Let’s go home! Nor does another person spend thirty minutes trying to sell you a

⁴ Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 219.

⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 211.

lawn mower and then say, at the very last moment, ‘Do you want to buy a car or not?’ Invitations are expected in our culture. People do not want to be pressured, but they know something is wrong if they are not given the chance to make a decision.”⁶

3. If the gospel is shared then an invitation for immediate response must follow. The gospel presentation demands a verdict. To deliver the gospel only, without the issuing of an invitation, is to be disobedient to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19).⁷

- *Argument Against Sermon Invitations*

1. It is impractical to always offer an invitation because not all sermons provide an opportunity for immediate response. *Rebuttal*: all Scripture demands a response. “When approaching a text, I can preach best by, first, zeroing in on the text’s subject; second, extracting from the Scripture the response being called for; and third, from my Christian understanding, constructing a bridge that will help people get from where they are to where this text teaches they should be. I want to help them respond to the challenges of the passage.”⁸
2. The practice of the invitation began with the evangelist Charles Finney in the early 1800s and previous generations failed to implement it. *Rebuttal*: “Critics of the public invitation claim that its usage can only be traced back to the ministry of Charles G. Finney (1792–1875). Such an accusation is historically incorrect. The first-century preachers of the gospel called on sinners to present themselves publicly as candidates for repentance, faith, and baptism. Similar invitations continued to be given until Constantine, emperor of the Roman Empire, proclaimed Christianity the state religion in 324 A.D.”⁹ While the invitation was in decline during the fifth through sixteenth centuries, individuals offered invitations and opportunities for response during this period including Gregory of Nazianzus (330–389), John Chrysostom (347–407), Boniface (680–754), Bernard of Clairvaux (1093–1153), Johann Trauler (1300–1361), Gerard Groote (1340–1384), Savonarola (1452–1498), Hugh Latimer (1485–1555), and many others during the Medieval Era.¹⁰

⁶ O. Dean Martin, *Invite: Preaching for Response* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 28.

⁷ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 140.

⁸ David Mains, “Building Bridges to Action,” in *Preaching to Convince*, ed. James D. Berkley (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 133.

⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83–86.

3. Offering an immediate opportunity for response implies “sinners have an inherent power of decision and of self-conversion.”¹¹ *Rebuttal*: “As King, He orders and controls all things, human actions among them, in accordance with His own eternal purpose. Scripture also teaches that, as Judge, He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues. Thus, the hearers of the gospel are responsible for their reaction; if they reject the good news, they are guilty of unbelief.”¹²

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 289.

¹² J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 22.

APPENDIX D

HANDOUT AND NOTES FOR SECOND FOCUS GROUP MEETING

The Sermon Invitation: Part Two

Characteristics of Effective Invitations

- *The invitation coincides with the truths of the sermon's scriptural text.* The pastor only possesses the right to call the congregation to respond to the call issued from God in the text. When the invitation reflects the central purpose of the text and sermon, then the opportunity for response will coincide with the biblical truth revealed in Scripture.
- *A variety of formats are available for the called response as long as the activity reflects the called response of the biblical text.* Formats may include immediate and delayed-response activities, physical actions or commitments for future actions, single activities or multiple approaches, practical ministry or calls for worship and prayer. The invitation flows from the call for response presented in Scripture, and creative and varied activities offered during the invitation allow individuals to worshipfully respond to the truths of the sermon text.
- *The invitation possesses both an evangelistic and Christian growth component.* Due to all Scripture's revelation of the sufficiency of Christ for justification and sanctification,¹ all effective invitations will offer both an evangelistic and Christian growth component. All sermons will possess a redemptive focus due to the text, and an invitation to respond to the gospel must always follow its proclamation; therefore, all sermons must offer an evangelistic invitation. In addition, all sermons reveal an opportunity for individuals to grow in their commitment to an area of Christianity including active obedience to the Holy Spirit, living in conjunction with biblical precepts, and a worship-focused lifestyle. Because a call of commitment is issued from the text, an opportunity to respond to that call must be offered.
- *The invitation is issued with honesty, simplicity, and clarity.* The pastor must clearly explain the response activity so that the congregation will know specifically how to respond, the reasons for the response, and the desired outcomes for the response. The listener must comprehend that their response correlates with the work of the Holy Spirit and signifies His call in their lives. The invitation offers a "bridge" from the

¹ Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 294.

individual's present situation and the call of the Holy Spirit to enter into deeper intimacy with God. Responding to the called activity does not transform the individual; it only signifies the willingness of the individual to allow God to transform them. No matter the form of the response, the congregation must understand the expectations, limitations, and benefits of responding during the invitation.

- *The response of an individual during the invitation is the work of the Holy Spirit.* Raymond McLaughlin explained “there is nothing unethical about extending an invitation to a congregation to respond to the challenge of the sermon as long as it is not built upon questionable tricks.”² The Holy Spirit accomplishes the work of the invitation; therefore, a pastor must avoid coercion and manipulation in the call for response. Integrity and humility must undergird any form of persuasion used in the invitation with the pastor relying on the power of the Holy Spirit while questioning his own motivation. The pastor must rely on the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit alone calls and motivates the congregation to respond to the truth of Scripture revealed in the sermon. The Holy Spirit accomplishes the work of the invitation; the pastor must trust and rely on Him alone.

² Raymond W. McLaughlin, *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 163.

APPENDIX E

SERMON: JOHN 6:25–40

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. Jesus often declared himself to be “something” in order to explain His relationship to the spiritual needs of men: He is the light in our darkness, the entrance to true security and fellowship, the true guide and protector in life, and our hope in death. Jesus desired that people would receive Him not because of what He might give them but because of what He might BE to them. In John 6, Jesus claims to be something rather ordinary; He says, “I am the Bread of Life.” What did He mean by saying He is the “bread of life?”

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In John 6:25–40 Jesus declared that He is the “bread of life” and described what that meant. As we look at our passage today, first we will see the question concerning the “bread of life,” and second Jesus’ declaration that He is the “bread of life.”
2. Believers should understand their life must reflect their belief that Jesus is all they need to be satisfied. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand that Jesus is all you need to have an eternal relationship with God.

C. Context

1. John 6 begins with the feeding of the five thousand. The purpose of this miracle was to prove that Jesus is God by showing He does what only God can do. And if He is God then His message must also be true; all that come to Him repenting and believing He can forgive them of their rebellion against God will be reconciled to God. However, the crowd does not believe Jesus to be God and King, but a man of God who would once again restore Israel into a powerful nation.
2. Next, Jesus goes into the hills to pray, and sends the disciples ahead in a boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Later that

night, when the Twelve were caught in a headwind, Jesus came to them walking on the water; once again proving that He is God who forgives and reconciles because He does what only God can do. The next morning the crowd went looking for Jesus only to discover that He, too, was on the other side of the lake and they wondered how He got there.

II. The Question (6:25–29)

- A. The crowd asked: “Rabbi, when and how did you get here?” Jesus ignores their question and says, “You’re not here because you believe My message that I am God and King, the One who forgives and reconciles; you’re here for a free lunch—you want to see a show and a miracle.” In verse 27 Jesus declares, “Stop running after this stuff in this temporary, physical world that will fade away; but go after the food that lasts forever that I can give you.”
- B. And now comes the question; the question that all people eventually ask. In verse 28 the crowd asked: “What work does God require so we can have this bread that gives eternal life?” It’s the same question so many people ask today: “What do I need to do to be right with God and go to heaven; how good do I have to be?” That’s what people want to know—what rules they have to keep, which ceremonies they need to go through, which holy days they have to observe, how much they need to give to charity. People want to earn salvation, earn forgiveness, and earn eternal life.
- C. But in verse 29 Jesus doesn’t give them a “to do” list. He declares: “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.” Jesus says you can’t DO anything, you can’t earn eternal life or work for it; you can only believe in Me—the One God has sent—and receive it.
- D. *Unbeliever Application:* This morning you may not consider yourself a Christian, but you want to know what you need to do to earn eternal life. You hope you have done enough good actions or lived a good enough life that God will show mercy on you and allow you to go to heaven. But the Bible says, specifically in Ephesians 2:8–9, you can never come to God and say, “Here is all the good stuff I have done; accept it as a payment for my sin and rebellion against You.” The bad news is that God will never accept our good works. The good news is that He never expects you to earn your relationship with Him. What He offers is to forgive and reconcile you to Himself as a gift of love when you come to Him through faith in Jesus believing Jesus died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your rebellion so that through Him you may be made whole, forgiven, and reconciled with God forever. Eternal life comes through faith in Jesus alone.

III. The Declaration: “I am the Bread of Life (6:30–40)

- A. The crowd appeared to understand what Jesus was saying. So they ask for a sign to prove that He has the authority to do what He says He can do—give them manna. There was an expectation that had developed over hundreds of years that the Messiah would be like Moses and give the people manna from heaven.
- B. Jesus corrects the crowd
1. Moses did not give them manna in the desert; God did.
 2. He is not talking about physical bread but the true bread from heaven which is eternal life. Jesus says, “I’m talking about the One who is the bread of God; the One who gives true life to the world!”
- C. In verse 34 the crowd begged, “Give us this bread!” And that’s when Jesus makes His outrageous claim in verse 35: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”
1. Jesus declared, “I AM the bread; I don’t give it because I am it, and through me you will be satisfied because I am sufficient to meet every need!”
 2. In verses 36–40 Jesus makes it clear that He gives true life that satisfies all people who God brings to Him and believes; Jesus will turn no one away who comes to Him in faith; and He is faithful in giving this life forever; this true life that truly satisfies for all time; this true life that lasts for eternity that begins right now.
- D. *Illustration:* Bread enthusiast Susan Seligson wrote an article protesting any “low-carb” diets that call for people to eliminate bread. She points out that bread has been around for 8,000 years, is present in every culture that has ever existed, is revered in some religions like Islam and Hinduism where it is blasphemous to cut it with a knife, and the Arabic word for bread—“*aysh*”—is also the word for “life.” She writes, “When you demonize bread, you demean life itself. I wouldn’t want to live in a world without bread.” Even though she is a “nut” she makes a good point: bread is basic to life. It sustains, nourishes, comforts, draws people together, and is essential to human health. It turns out that the bread industry is planning an aggressive PR campaign to counter all the low-carb diet plans—their proposed slogan is: “Bread. It’s essential.”
- E. *Believer Application:* Christian that is what Jesus is saying about himself: “I am essential to life. You can’t live without me. Everything that bread

represents to human beings—sustenance, comfort, relationship, goodness—I am. I am sufficient for all your needs; not only do I give you eternal life but I give you true life right now—I am what satisfies you as you live day by day!” Christian, you truly need Jesus more than your desires, more than a job, more than a relationship, a possession, self-fulfillment, or whatever you think will make you happy or you can’t live without. He is all you need; He is the bread of life and through Him you have true life. Christian, if you truly believe He is sufficient for all you need, then you will live every day focused on His will and His presence, because you understand you need Him. If you believe He alone can satisfy you then you will focus each day on seeking Him in prayer and Bible study, serving Him as an act of worship. Christian, if you believe Jesus is sufficient for all you are as the “bread of life,” then you will live your daily life as Paul declared in Philippians 3:12 trying to grab ahold of the One who has already grabbed ahold of you. Christian, if you truly believe He is sufficient for all you need then your life will show it.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As we come to the end of our passage, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Live like you believe Jesus is all you need because He is the “bread of life.”
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself a believer, but you want to be right with God; you want to know you have eternal life in Christ’s presence. The Holy Spirit is creating that desire in you, and He is also making you aware that Jesus is all you need to be made right with God. Through His death on the cross He has paid the penalty of your sin, and through faith in Him He will forgive and reconcile you to God forever. Jesus is all you need to have eternal life and true life now; accept His invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation today.
- C. Christian, Jesus is the “bread of life” and you must live your life as an act of love, devotion, and worship to Him. You worship Him by admitting He is the only One you need, the only One you can’t live without, the only One who is sufficient to fulfill all our wants, needs, and desires. You worship Him because you know when you have Jesus you have all you need because He is the “bread of life.”

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has

revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; that He is God and King and will rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. The Holy Spirit has made you aware that Jesus is all you need to be satisfied for all eternity. The only way you can respond is to accept Christ's invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation through faith in Him. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him.

- C. Christian, how can you respond right now? In a few moments, you will take the Lord's Supper—you will take the bread remembering that Jesus is the "Bread of Life;" and you will have the opportunity to worship Him and declare that you know He is all you need for eternal life and daily life. Worship Him because you know He is sufficient to bring you into an eternal relationship with God and fulfill every need and desire. At this moment, prepare your hearts to take the Lord's Supper, and use this time to ask Christ to forgive you if you have been looking for something or someone else to bring you the satisfaction in life that only He can bring. Use this time to prepare your heart to worship Christ as the bread of life during the Lord's Supper. If you need any help or encouragement, you can come to the pastors, or pray at your seat, with those beside you, or at the altar.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *John 6:25–40*

Date: *October 5, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Jesus is the bread of life—He is all you need*
- *He declares “I am” the Bread of Life*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The Question*
- *Believe*
- *The Declaration*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Jesus is all you need to come to God in faith*
- *Live your life like you believe Jesus is all you need*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Come to God in faith and receive eternal life. He alone gives you what you need.*
- *Jesus is all you need—He is the bread of life and the only way to God*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 6 responses “Mostly clear” – 2 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Offer to respond was given to Christians and non-Christians; they could come to the altar, come talk with either of the two pastors, or pray where they were. This coincided with the sermon that you can accept Christ today—now!*

- *The way we live our lives will show how we love Jesus*
- *Know that Jesus is all you need to have eternal life and spend eternity in heaven.*
- *Accept His invitation of forgiveness and reconciliation*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.75	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.625	
Evangelistic Component	3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ran through entire message
Christian Growth Component	3.375	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Told how to grow through Bible study and prayer
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart felt and easy to understand
Spirit-led	3.75	

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

- *Easy explanation of the response from the text*
- *Key points from Scripture*
- *Strong voice*

3 things to improve...

APPENDIX F

SERMON: MARK 8:31–9:1

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. In 1955 Parker Brothers came out with a game for church families called “Going to Jerusalem.” Your playing piece wasn’t a top hat or shoe; it was a little plastic disciple with a robe and staff. You always started in Bethlehem, and made stops at the Mount of Olives, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and Bethany. If you rolled the dice well, you went all the way to a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but you never got to the Crucifixion. There were no demons, angry Pharisees, or demanding crowds along the way. It was a safe adventure for a Christian family on a Sunday afternoon. I wonder if it ever occurred to people as they leaned over a card table jiggling dice and moving plastic disciples around the board that the Christian life is much more demanding. I wonder if we realize it today. The Christian life is more about service and sacrifice than most Christians are comfortable with. Christians must accept that there is a price for following Jesus and that price is everything.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 8:31–9:1 Jesus declared that being the Christ meant He would go to the cross and that there is a cost for following Him.
2. As we look at our passage today, we will first see the reality of the cross for Jesus and, second, the reality of the cost for His followers.
3. From this passage, believers should understand that Jesus has expectations for His followers. And if you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand your need to accept the truth about Jesus and not embrace a Jesus of your own making.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through

His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference.

2. Our passage is in a larger section from 8:22 to 10:52 and centers on Jesus' traveling to Jerusalem. In this section we see a variety of Jesus' teachings but the focus is the three times Jesus describes His death and resurrection, and the meaning of following Him.
3. Several weeks ago in 8:29 we witnessed a miracle moment when Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" and it was as if cataracts were removed from Peter's eyes. "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one of the OT; you are God and King; and we believe in You." But the reality was that Peter and the Twelve did not see Jesus completely; they did not fully understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ; they had their own ideas of who the Messiah would be and what He would do.

II. The Reality of the Cross (8:31–33)

- A. In 8:31 Jesus taught the Twelve what it meant for Him to be the Christ—to be the Messiah. But Jesus does not call Himself the Messiah; He calls Himself the "Son of Man."
 1. This is Jesus' favorite term for Himself and He uses it over 81 times in the Gospels. The "Son of Man" is a direct reference to Daniel 7:13–14 which describes the exalted One who will come with the clouds of heaven and receives authority, glory, and sovereign power from God setting up an eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed.
 2. Jesus declared He was this "Son of Man" and used this title because the Jews had put a lot of baggage on the title Messiah that God never did. The people of Jesus' day believed the Messiah would be Moses-like by providing bread for them to eat constantly, Joshua-like in leading them to recapture the Promised Land, and David-like in establishing a Kingdom with all of Israel's enemies serving as footstools. The crowds and the Twelve expected the Messiah to be a military and political leader, and Jesus says, "I'm not that guy—you made up that guy. I am the Christ and I will suffer and I will be rejected and I will die, and then I will rise again in three days."
- B. Verse 32 states Jesus spoke plainly to the Twelve that He was not here to set up a political kingdom, but to die on the cross for the sins of the world. He explained it, but the Twelve didn't like it; and Peter, speaking on all of their behalf, let Him know it. Why didn't they like it?

1. They were not prepared to accept a Christ who suffered; anyone with Jesus' amazing powers to silence the sea, cast out demons, feed thousands and heal the sick should never have to suffer, be rejected, and become a victim of violence.
 2. The Twelve had their image of what the Messiah would do and Jesus' definition was all wrong—it didn't match up with theirs.
- C. In verse 33 Jesus reprimanded Peter and the rest of the Twelve for their way of thinking; for placing their views and desires above God's will. Jesus said you can't make me a Messiah of your desires and dreams.
- D. *Unbeliever Application:* A lot of people make the same mistake today. Many people who consider themselves unbelievers are not comfortable with who Jesus is and the stipulations He places on salvation.
1. The Bible is very clear; all people are eternally separated from God because of our choice to reject Him and make ourselves the god of our lives. And the only way to be rescued from that eternal separation is through faith in Jesus. It's through accepting the truth that Jesus alone died on the cross to pay the penalty of our rebellion, and, therefore, Jesus alone can offer forgiveness and reconcile us with God forever—He is the only option.
 2. But people reject this because it doesn't fit their views of who God is and what He does—just like Peter and the Twelve. This is not a God they are comfortable with or want to believe in. They choose to believe in a God who brings to heaven good people who live good lives and follow a certain set of rules even though passages like Ephesians 2:8–9 explicitly say this is not how God works. They reject the truth that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled with God saying, “I know good people who don't believe in Jesus—isn't their religion just as good—aren't all religions the same—doesn't God just accept us as long as we believe something about Him.” They argue this even though in John 14:6 Jesus declared no one comes to God except through Him.
 3. This morning, if you believe you can earn your way to heaven and have eternal life by being a good person or that there are other ways to be reconciled with God other than Jesus, then you have a God of your own making. Jesus is very clear that He alone can rescue you from your separation from God because HE alone died on the cross to take the penalty of your rebellion and sin. He alone can rescue you from your isolation, your loneliness, your guilt; He alone will rescue you from a meaningless life filled with fear and self-doubt. And this morning, through the Holy Spirit, He is

offering you eternal forgiveness and eternal reconciliation with God; He is inviting you to true life, and HE alone has the power and authority to do it. This morning, will you stop hiding behind a Jesus of your own making and accept the invitation to be reconciled with God through the true Jesus?

III. The Reality of the Cost (8:34–9:1)

A. In verse 34 Jesus explains the cost for following Him. He calls the crowds to come and gather with the Twelve and He lays out His expectations for His followers, and in these expectations He gives them three demands, a rationale for accepting the demands, and finally a warning.

1. The Demands

- a) Jesus first proclaims the demands for following Him in verse 34: “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”
- b) The first demand is to “deny yourself” which means to deny your self-promoting ambitions. Jesus calls His followers to renounce a self-centered, self-motivated life and embrace the life of a servant—embrace a life of saying “no” to your will and “yes” to God’s.
- c) The second demand is “take up your cross.” We minimize and cheapen the force of this statement. Jesus was not talking about minor discomforts in our lives when he said take up your cross. To the Twelve and the crowd the cross symbolized death. The historian Cicero described the cross as a cruel, disgusting penalty, the worst of extreme tortures inflicted on slaves and criminals. They understood that Jesus was saying that if you were going to be His disciple you had to be willing to deny yourself even to the point of death.
- d) The third demand is “follow Him.” That means that a disciple follows the way Jesus has chosen and not the way he has chosen for himself. It means you will obey His commands, directives, and leadership in your life; it means that following Jesus is not a part-time gig you do on Sundays and Wednesdays, but a lifestyle you embrace every day. Following Jesus means you give up everything to Him: your desires, your wants, your dreams, your time, your family, your ambitions, your life, your all. And that’s

the cost of being a disciple, of being a follower of Jesus: Jesus demands all of you—all and nothing less.

- e) *Illustration:* Neil Postman, in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, writes, “I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.” Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die. Following Jesus to Golgotha is not some tedious detour; it is the main road. We can only hope to be ready when he leads us along paths that we would never have chosen for ourselves.”

2. The Rationale

- a) The cost of following Jesus seems too high, so why would we follow Him. Because it is the best life you could possibly have; following Jesus costs you a life of just “existing” in exchange for a life that’s worth living.
- b) In verses 35–38 Jesus gives a tightly reasoned argument that it is worth paying the cost to follow Him. If a follower of Christ spends all his energy focusing on the here and now, he loses the entire point of this life, the true life of being eternally minded and joining Christ in His work that He is doing all around you. The true life of serving Christ and being sold out to His will every day. A true disciple of Jesus recognizes that unless his efforts, his actions, and his motives are focused on the eternal plan and eternal glory of God then his life is meaningless, and the best he can hope for is to acquire some things that will ultimately slip through his fingers. A disciple gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.
- c) *Illustration:* Martin Luther said, “If we consider the greatness and the glory of the life we shall have when we have risen from the dead, it would not be difficult at all for us to bear the concerns of this world. If I believe the Word, I shall on the Last Day, after the sentence has been pronounced, not only gladly have suffered ordinary temptations, insults, and imprisonment, but I shall also say: ‘O, that I did not throw myself under the feet of all the godless for the sake of the great glory which I now see revealed and which has come to me through the grace of Christ!’”

3. The Promise/Warning:

- a) In 9:1 Jesus tells the Twelve and the crowd that some of you are going to be around to see me die on the cross to pay for the sins of the world and provide a way to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all who come to me in faith. Some of you will see my resurrection, proving that I am God and all that I said I was going to do, I have done. Some of you will see the coming of the Holy Spirit, and you will proclaim the good news about me here and all over the world. Some of you will see the number of followers grow and become my church. But you will not be a part of any of it unless you completely give me your life and become sold out to me.
- b) *Christian Application:* Jesus demands that if you are going to follow Him you give Him everything: your life; your time; your family; your hopes; your dreams; your all. It may mean leaving a job or volunteer position; it may mean giving up status or pats on the back; it may mean giving up comfort, security, free time and resources; it may mean giving up resentment, anger, hurt feelings, or personal opinions. And we do it knowing that even though the price sounds incredible, it's worth it because of what we have in Christ; it's worth it because it is a life of meaning and purpose—it's the true life. Christian, are you a groupie in the crowd or are you a disciple following Christ?

IV. Conclusion

- A. As we come to the end of our passage, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Accept Jesus for who He is and respond to Him the only way you can.
- B. This morning if you are not a believer it's because you have a Jesus of your own making that fits your beliefs and have rejected the truth of who Jesus truly is. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is offering you forgiveness of your sin and reconciliation with God; He is inviting you to true life, and HE alone has the power and authority to do it. This morning, accept Jesus for who He is and His invitation to reconcile you with God for eternity.
- C. Christian, this morning you have to accept Jesus for who HE is—your God and your King who has the authority to demand all of you. You respond to the truth of Jesus by giving all of yourself to Him every day knowing that this is the life worth living. Jesus does not ask for a part of

you or part of your time or a part of your life—He demands it all and you respond by giving it all to Him because you know it's the true life.

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; that He is God and King and will rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now, stop embracing a Jesus of your own making and embrace the true Jesus the only way you can—by faith accept His invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, how can you respond at this moment? Recognize Jesus for who He is—your God and King and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you have responded to Him as the One who calls you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him—this morning ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if you are a groupie in the crowd or a follower of Christ living the true life. As you pray through this and listen to the Holy Spirit, please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in any way.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 8:31–9:1*

Date: *October 12, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Jesus plainly told His followers that He would suffer, be rejected, and die, but rise again in three days for them (and us)*
- *There is a price to pay for following Jesus*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The Reality of the Cross*
- *The Reality of the Cost*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Accept Jesus for who He is and respond to Him the only way you can—through faith*
- *Living in Jesus' will is worth it*
- *Christ is sufficient; have faith in Him alone*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *As an unbeliever you must accept Jesus for who He is—God and King—and come to Him through faith*
- *As a believer we need to be a part of what Jesus is doing to further His kingdom and give Him everything*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *The Reality of the Cross – accept Jesus for who He is and realize He is the only way to salvation*
- *The Reality of the Cost – give up everything in this world to follow Jesus*
- *Invited to pray with pastors or come to the altar*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.75	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.625	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded on key points of Scripture within the invitation
Evangelistic Component	3.625	
Christian Growth Component	3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Felt the need to get on my knees to pray more and study Bible harder
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very easily understood
Spirit-led	3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absolutely

Recommendations:**3 things to keep...**

- *Being specific about who you were talking to (non-believers and Christians)*
- *Declaring the time of the invitation*
- *“Buddy system” to come down front with a friend*
- *Encouraging people to pray together at seats and share the gospel with each other in congregation*

3 things to improve...

APPENDIX G

SERMON: MARK 9:2–13

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. I am convinced that there is a weight that only Christians feel; weight that comes from denying ourselves, picking up our crosses, and following Christ. I talked to a friend this week whose adult son was angry with him, and he was feeling the weight of needing to reconcile with his son, and continue to be a witness to Him. Who but Christians feel that weight? I know a great couple who volunteer the majority of their time working to share the gospel in Vermont, but their family has rejected them and will not allow them to see their grandchildren anymore. Who but Christians feel that weight? I am close to a lady who struggles with depression and physical pain, but she chooses not to be angry with God, and rejoices in Him every day no matter her situation. Who but Christians feel that weight? Believers are called in our relationship with Christ to feel the weight caused by our self-denial, cross-carrying, Jesus following lifestyle. But we are not meant to feel this weight without also seeing Christ's glory. Unless we embrace who He is and what He has done for us, we will not be able to handle this weight.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 9:2–9:13 Jesus revealed His divine glory declaring that He is God and King and His followers can be encouraged in their service to Him when they focus on who He is. As we look at our passage today, we will discuss the four parts of this event: the transfiguration, appearance, announcement, and confusion.
2. Believers should understand that the weight they carry as followers of Christ is only bearable when they focus on Jesus' glory. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand that Jesus is the only One who can rescue you from the weight you feel in your separation from God.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference. Our passage is in a larger section located in 8:22 to 10:52 and takes place as Jesus travels to Jerusalem. The focus of this section is the three times Jesus describes His death and resurrection, and the meaning of following Him.
2. Over the past several weeks we have read in chapter 8 that the Twelve begin to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they did not understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ. They wanted a military and political leader, and not a Savior. Jesus told them that He would suffer, be rejected, die, and finally rise again; and if anyone was going to follow Him they must accept this truth and also be willing to give up everything for Him. This was like heavy weights placed on the Twelve and the crowd who were listening; weights that seemed almost too much to bear.
3. In 9:2 we read that it had been six days since Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ; six days since Jesus revealed that being the Christ meant He would die on the cross and raise again; six days since He said following Him would cost you everything. And just as the weight of Jesus' death on the cross and the weight of the cost of their discipleship seemed at its heaviest, an astonishing event occurred.

II. The Transfiguration (verses 2–3)

- A. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a high mountain and there He was "transfigured" or literally "metamorphed" in the Greek.
- B. Jesus didn't morph out of humanity into something else; He revealed the glory of God which was always His. The light of God didn't descend upon Jesus the way it did with the Ark of the Covenant in the OT; it shone out from within Him. He is the glory of God and He is the light of the world. Jesus' transfiguration was a confirmation to the disciples of His identity: He is God and King—He is God in the flesh and everything bows before Him. He is not just a rabbi, a good man, or a political leader; He is the One who establishes the Kingdom of God because He is God.

III. The Appearance (verses 4–6)

- A. Elijah and Moses appeared and they talked with Jesus. Peter then rambled about how good it is that everybody was there and suggested building

temporary shelters for everyone. Mark then tells us that Peter was just talking because he and the other two were scared.

B. What's the significance of Moses and Elijah being there with Jesus? Both are major OT figures that point to the coming of the Messiah and what He would do.

1. Deuteronomy 18:5 declares that God will raise up another prophet like Moses and the people expected the Messiah to be like Moses and liberate them from Rome. Malachi 4:4–6 declares that Elijah would return at the dawn of the end of time which would result in God's ultimate redemption of His people.

2. Elijah's and Moses' presence with Jesus is significant; it declares that Jesus is the One humanity has waited for; He is the fulfillment of what was promised through Moses and Elijah; the Kingdom of God is here because Jesus is here and ultimate liberation and redemption of humanity is about to happen—but it will not happen on a battlefield or through some government leader, but in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That's why they're there; their presence announces that the time of humanity's liberation from sin and redemption by God has arrived through Jesus.

III. The Announcement (verses 7–8)

A. In verses 7–8 a cloud appeared—which is symbolic of God's presence in the OT—and it surrounded Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. Then a voice from the cloud proclaimed, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" It is amazing that Jesus is radiating light, standing with Moses and Elijah, surrounded by a cloud representing God and God does not say, "Look at Him," but "Listen to Him." Listen to what He said—that as the Christ, He will suffer, be rejected, die, and He will rise again in three days. Peter and the Twelve confessed Jesus was the Christ in 8:28 but rejected the idea that Jesus must suffer and die in 8:32. God is declaring that the death and resurrection of Jesus will by no means be a tragedy or a mistake, or a withdrawal of God's favor; God is making it clear to Peter and the others that it's a divine necessity if humanity is going to have the opportunity to be forgiven and reconciled to Him forever.

B. In verse 8 it all ends as suddenly as it began and Jesus is alone. This helps us understand that our hope for salvation and eternal life is in Jesus alone. Our hope does not focus on the saints of old or modern teachers or preachers—it's in Jesus alone. He is not just another prophet; not just another Rabbi, not just another miracle worker. He is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Jesus is not a reflection of the current mood or the projection of our own desires. He is God and King, Savior of the world, and substitute for our sins—more loving, more

holy, and more wonderful than we can ever image. Jesus is our only hope to be rescued from our separation from God and reconciled with Him forever. There is only Jesus.

IV. The Confusion (verses 9–13)

- A. Jesus, Peter, James, and John descend the mountain and Jesus tells them to keep all this quiet until after His resurrection. This makes sense because the transfiguration was a revelation of His glory and to proclaim that glory before the cross would have incited the crowds to try to make Him a political King—the cross and resurrection needed to happen first.
- B. The three disciples agree to remain silent but they were confused about something, something the teachers of the law had been talking about. So they asked Him, “Jesus, if your death, resurrection, and return are marks of the coming of God’s kingdom like you said, and if the OT prophet Malachi said that Elijah would return before that time to restore all things, then why has Elijah not returned?” The three disciples are still looking for a way to avoid the suffering of the cross; the weight of who Jesus is and what He requires of them seems to be too much for them to carry.
- C. Jesus responds by telling them the teachers of the law are right; Elijah does come first and restores all things; but the OT also says the Son of Man will suffer and be rejected as well. By the way, Elijah has already come in John the Baptist and you misunderstood it with all the others. His ministry was not to herald the approach of messianic “happy days” and military conquests; you need to rethink what “restore all things” actually means. The bottom line is that all is going as planned—all that has been fulfilled and will be fulfilled is exactly the way it is supposed to be even if it does not meet their expectations. Jesus declares that His glory and His suffering go hand and hand and cannot be separated.
- D. And this is what the disciples needed to hear. For six days they were carrying the weight that Jesus will suffer on the cross and not be a political leader; carrying the weight that He expected them to deny themselves, pick up their crosses and follow Him; they were to give themselves completely to Him and follow Him wherever He led even if it cost them their lives. That’s the weight they carried for six days. Then on the mountain they saw the promise of glory, the promise that Jesus could and would do all He said He would; that He could give eternal life and life worth living. But now—coming down the mountain as they entered into the everyday realm of life—Jesus reminded them that the cross is still coming and in your service to Him there will be difficulty and hardship.
- E. *Christian Application:* Christians are called to a life where they are sold out to Christ, denying self, taking up their cross and following Him

knowing it is the best life because they live every day in His presence. But it is not easy. Christians do suffer; just like Jesus they are rejected and despised by family and friends; they give up comfort, resources, time, and self-glorification—it is the best life, but it's not easy and they feel the weight. The weight of carrying the gospel into a dark world; the weight of living holy lives as our old nature complains; the weight of living in this dying world when we long for a better home; the weight of dying to self and serving selflessly.

1. Christian, unless we are going to be heavy hearted, burdened and bent from all that weight—you need to focus on the glory of Christ. Jesus who shines like the sun and reigns in glory; who loves you and reveals Himself to you every day in answered prayer, the encouragement of a friend, the power of His provision, and His guidance through His word. As He reveals Himself it's like you are on the mountain seeing Him in all of His glory.
 2. Christian, you must hold on to those moments as you go down into the valley to serve Christ where confusion and sin run free. When nothing in life seems to work out and there are no answers for what you are experiencing, remember there is nothing in this world that will not bow down to Jesus. When the weights are heavy upon you, you keep your eyes on Christ's glory—you remember the mountain in the midst of hardship; you remember who He is and what He has done for you and He enables you to bear the weight.
- F. *Unbeliever Application:* This morning you may not consider yourself a Christian but you do feel a weight today; the weight of being separated from God and trying to do life on your own; the weight of loneliness, isolation, guilt, anger, and even shame. Your weight is because you have rejected God for your own desires and ambitions thinking you can find happiness apart from Him. This morning, Jesus is inviting you through the Holy Spirit to allow Him to remove that weight completely. He is inviting you to come to Him in faith believing that He is God and King and in His love for you He died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your sin and He alone can offer you forgiveness and reconciliation with God. The life you are looking for comes through faith in Jesus Christ; He alone can lift the weight of your sin and separation from God because He alone died on the cross for you. You don't have to live with your weight; accept Jesus' invitation this morning of true life and experience His glory for yourself.

IV. Conclusion

- A. As we come to the end of our passage, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Be free from the weight of your life through the glory of Jesus.

- B. This morning, if you are not believer, the only way you will be free from the weight of your sin and separation from God is through accepting Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. This morning, accept Jesus' invitation and be free.
- C. Christian, you often feel the weight of your service to Jesus, the weight of denying yourself, picking up your cross, and following Him. The only way you will not be crushed by this weight is to focus on the glory of Christ, the One who constantly reveals His love and power to you. It is when you remember Him on the mountain you are able to serve Him in the valley.

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; that He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. That He is the only One who can free you from the weight you feel in your separation from God. Right now accept Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation with God and be free. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you. This is the only you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, spend this time thinking on who Christ is, what He done for you on the cross, and how everything bows before Him. Think of all the ways He has revealed his power and love to you personally over the past year. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you all you need to remember. Then I would encourage you right now to take your worship guide and write some of this down or commit to writing it down later. Keep this list with you and as you feel the weight of your service to Christ, you can take this list out and let it remind you of His glory—let this list strengthen you as you focus on Him in the hardship of your service. As you pray and listen to the Holy Spirit, please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in anyway.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 9:2–13*

Date: *October 19, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The glory of Christ*
- *Bearing the weight of the world and the cost of following Jesus*
- *The transfiguration and what it reveals about Jesus*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The Transfiguration*
- *The Appearance*
- *The Announcement*
- *The Confusion*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Be free from the weight of your life through the glory of Jesus*
- *Jesus is everything and following Him will cost you everything, but nothing is better than salvation through Jesus*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Come to God in faith and receive eternal life. He alone gives you what you need*
- *Jesus is all you need—He is the bread of life and the only way to God*
- *The invitation was described or explained as a time set aside in the service to respond to Jesus calling and the text presented*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Come down front, grab the person beside you and ask them to go down front with you, or pray at your seat*

- *Throughout the sermon it was repeatedly said that only Jesus can help us bear the weight of the world. This is displayed through the Scripture through the transfiguration and announcement as well as the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples. During the invitation the pastor reiterated the importance of responding to Jesus as well as Jesus being the only way we can bear the weight of this world.*
- *Christian—there is a cost to following Him; focus on Jesus and His glory so you can see His power and love so you can bear the weight. Non-Christian—your weight is because you have rejected Christ. Jesus alone can give you what you need; accept Him and He will free you from your weight.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.875	
Evangelistic Component	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly explained how nonbelievers should respond to the text and Jesus
Christian Growth Component	3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explained how Christians should be responding to Jesus
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses were clear and you did not talk too quickly to me
Spirit-led	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on Christ • Always!

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

- *Easy instructions at invitation*
- *Reference to Scripture in the invitation*
- *Encouraging prayer with the people around you*
- *Stating how intimidating it can be to come up front*

3 things to improve...

- *Slow down*

APPENDIX H

SERMON: MARK 9:14–29

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. Three years ago I was putting Christmas lights on the house. I had gotten the lights down from the attic, tested the strands to make sure everything worked, spent hours going up and down a ladder, and then the final moment—I plugged them in to watch them glow. But when I plugged them in there was no light—no light! Hours had been sacrificed and there were no lights. After 30 minutes of panic, frustration, and wishing I could punch Thomas Edison in the face, I remembered that the outlet I was using in the garage was connected to the light switch—if I did not turn on the light, that outlet had no electricity—no electricity meant no lights. I calmly gathered myself, apologized to Edison, turned on the light switch and watched my house light up like Las Vegas. The problem was not that I had not worked hard or hooked up something incorrectly, it was I had no power and without power there are no Christmas lights. In our Christian lives we work hard and believe we do everything right, but for some reason it just doesn't seem to work, there is no power. We feel like we are doing everything we can in our lives and our service to Christ; in fact we feel we can't work any harder, but we struggle and we wonder why is nothing happening and why is it so hard—why is there no power in our lives. And this is what Jesus addresses in our passage today.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 9:14–9:29 Jesus declared that His disciples are only successful when they place their faith in Him and not themselves. As we look at our passage today, we will discuss the four parts of this event: the disciples' failure, the importance of faith, the healing, and the focus of faith.
2. Believers should understand that power in this life only comes through faith that focuses on Christ. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand that Jesus is the only One who can rescue you from your separation from God and give you true life.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference. Our passage is located in a larger section from 8:22 to 10:52 and takes place as Jesus travels to Jerusalem. The focus of this section is on the three times Jesus describes His death and resurrection, and the meaning of following Him.
2. In 9:2–13 we saw Jesus reveal His divine glory to Peter, James, and John on a nearby mountain once again declaring that He is God. And as they descended down the mountain He reminded them that He is the Christ; He would suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again in three days; and if anyone was going to follow Him they must accept this truth and be willing to give up everything for Him. He explained that His purpose for revealing His glory to them was to encourage, motivate, and focus them as they serve Him in difficult times. As we begin our passage today, we see that the glimpse of Jesus' glory was well needed for the situation they would face as they rejoined the other disciples.

II. The Disciples' Failure (verses 14–19)

- A. As Jesus descended the mountain with Peter, James, and John, He saw the other disciples engaged in an argument with the teachers of the law as a large crowd looked on. When Jesus arrived the crowd goes wild like today when we see celebrities. Jesus then asked, "What's this argument about?" and a man in the crowd tells Jesus that he had brought his son to Him because he was possessed by a demon that regularly tormented his son.
- B. Then in verse 18 the man explained why the fighting and arguing was happening, why the teachers of the law were accusing and criticizing the disciples—they had tried to perform the exorcism and failed—failed? This is alarming; why had they failed? Had Jesus not told them they could and would do exorcisms in 3:15 and 6:7— doesn't 6:13–14 tell us that they had success in doing them? Why had they failed now; why were they now powerless—what was different? Jesus response in verse 19 gives some insight; it's not really clear what Jesus is saying or who He is even referring to, but more than likely this is about His disciples; His disappointment that in this crucial moment they had failed because of their lack of faith. They had been His constant companions and they should have learned how this works by now. "How long shall I stay with you" conveys that Jesus knows His time is short and the disciples seem to be making little progress; "how long shall I put up with you" just shows his weariness at their consistent spiritual blindness. Jesus is disappointed, but

keep in mind that He never gave up on the Twelve and in His faithfulness He continued to grow them as we will see later.

III. The Importance of Faith (verses 20–24)

- A. Jesus tells the crowd to bring Him the boy and in verse 20 we see the demon's destructive power. Jesus asked the father how long the boy had suffered like this and he replies, "Since childhood." His response shows us the hopelessness of the situation and the desperation of the father. This is not something new; this is something they have battled for years.
- B. The father helplessly asked Jesus to help him IF He can; if—he does not doubt that Jesus would like to help; he is just unsure if He has the ability. In verse 23 Jesus responds, "If I can . . . IF I can? My ability is not the question here but what is the question is your faith—your trust in me—the question is if you believe I can do it!" When Jesus says, "Everything is possible for him who believes," He is not saying that if you have enough faith God will give you what you want He or you can accomplish anything you want to do. Jesus is saying that those who have faith set no limits to the power of God in their life; that they believe God can and will do anything He desires.
- C. Bible teacher I. Howard Marshall writes, "For Mark, all things are possible to the believer because, actively or passively, the believer sets no limits on God's power to break into his or her concrete situation, for the very existence of faith within the believer is the ground which allows God to act in his or her context."
- D. Jesus is telling the father that the problem is not Jesus' ability but His lack of faith in Jesus' power and ability. And then in verse 24 we see a beautiful display of honesty—we read something that all believers struggle with—belief and unbelief; the man exclaims, "I do believe; help me with my unbelief!" He has struggled for so long with his son that he has given up hope, but unlike the people at Nazareth who refuse to believe in Jesus, the father does believe because he would not have brought his son in the first place. He knows his faith is weak; that he doubts, but in the end he is desperate enough to ask for a miracle and for faith that expects the impossible. The father's cry may seem like a contradiction, but who of us have not experienced both belief and unbelief as we struggle in our walk with Christ—who of us has not felt both at the same time.
- E. *Christian Application:* The great evangelist D. L. Moody once said there are three kinds of faith: struggling faith like a man struggling to swim in deep water; clinging faith, like a man hanging onto the side of a boat; and resting faith, like a man safely within the boat reaching out to help others. Christian, we experience all three at different times in life, but maybe this

morning you are like this father and have struggling faith. You have battled with an issue, situation, feeling, or person for so long you have lost hope that God will ever intervene. In your heart you think, “I believe God can and will intervene, but I am not certain of it.” This passage encourages you this morning to embrace a humble, honest trust in Christ just like this father did. He does not come to Jesus with fake trust or a put on spiritual smile; he does not ask for some sign to jump-start his faith—He just stretches out his empty hands toward God and asks Him to fill them with faith—he expects everything from Christ and nothing through His own power. Like a man desperately treading water in a deep ocean, he pleads for Jesus to throw him a life preserver; and Jesus is not angry or put off by him, in fact He embraces him. This morning Christian, you may be treading water and struggling in your faith; understand that Jesus is inviting you to come to Him and humbly admit your need and that you trust Him alone to provide.

IV. The Healing (verses 25–27)

- A. Jesus, seeing the crowd growing, works quickly to cast out the demon. The demon cries out in anger and frustration but is powerless to resist Jesus’ authority. The effect on the boy was so severe that the crowd thought he was dead; he was exhausted over the ordeal but he responded to the touch of Jesus. The language Mark uses of “taking him by the hand” reminds us of Jesus raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead; the language here reminds us of His resurrection that is to come; the language reminds us of what Jesus has done for Christians in their salvation.
- B. According to Ephesians 2 we were once dead in our sin, lifeless just like this boy. “Dead in our sin” means that we are all eternally separated from God because of our choice to rebel against Him; to reject Him as our God and make ourselves our own god as we pursue our own desires. But this pursuit does not bring happiness; it brings isolation, pain, loneliness, and “death” or eternal separation from God. But Jesus offers us life; all who come to Him in faith He reaches out, grabs our hand, pulls us up from death, and gives us true life; eternal life in His presence by forgiving our sin and reconciling us with God forever. Christian, never forget you were once dead in your sins; never forget that when you accepted Jesus’ invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation, He reached out His hand, grabbed you, and raised you to new life. That is what Jesus did for you.
- C. *Unbeliever Application:* This morning you may not consider yourself a Christian but you do feel the loneliness, isolation, guilt, regret, anger, and even shame that comes from being separated from God. This morning, Jesus is inviting you through the Holy Spirit to allow Him to grab you by the hand and raise you from death to new life. The Holy Spirit is telling you right now that there are no other gods out there; there is no one else

coming for you; there is no other god who loves you and passionately pursues you; who longs to forgive you of your sin and heal you of your brokenness—it's Jesus alone. And He is inviting you to come to Him in faith believing that He is God, and in His love for you He died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your sin and He alone can offer you forgiveness and reconciliation. The life you are looking for comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Accept Jesus' invitation this morning.

V. The Focus of Faith (verses 28–29)

- A. At this point in the story the question still remains: “Why were the nine disciples powerless in helping the boy?” This is the question that the disciples themselves had and so they asked Jesus. In verse 29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.” Jesus' response implies that they failed because they had not prayed. Understand that Jesus did not offer a special prayer or a magical invocation to exorcise demons—what Jesus is saying is that you can only do this when you are in close fellowship with God. The disciples had taken for granted that the power that had worked through them earlier was something they could use at will; they had stopped prayerfully depending on God to do the work; they depended on themselves. We see this in their question in verse 28, “Why couldn't WE drive out the demon?” They wondered if they had used the wrong technique, the wrong word, or the wrong procedure. Jesus replies, “You focused on you and never focused on me; you forgot you have no power to do my work apart from me; only through faith focused on me will you be able to do anything for my kingdom; I have the power and I work through you when you prayerfully focus on Me.”
- B. *Christian Application:* And Christian this is the same message Jesus wants us to hear as individuals and as a church—we can do nothing without Him.
1. We must be completely dependent on God in all we do—His power flows out of our fellowship with Him; a fellowship that grows through daily prayer and Bible Study; a fellowship that grows through focusing on Him day after day.
 2. But like the disciples, we have an undisciplined prayer life; we are more eager to engage in techniques than to take the time to walk closely with God. As Bible teacher Henri Nouwen wrote, “We have fallen into the temptation of separating ministry from spirituality, service from prayer. Our demons say: ‘We are too busy to pray, we have too many needs to attend to, too many people to respond to, too many wounds to heal.’ Prayer is a luxury, something to do during a free hour, a day away from work or on a

retreat.” A life of prayer and bible study goes hand and hand with a life of power on mission for Christ.

3. Daily prayer and Bible study makes you receptive to God’s hand in your life and shows your dependence on Him; without it, you are dependent on yourself and you will be able to do nothing. As Christians and as a church, our lives should give evidence of God’s power, God’s presence, and God’s hand—do they? If you are like the disciples wondering why you are unable to serve Him and see His hand in your life, let me ask you a question—how much time do you spend in prayer and Bible study each day? Unless you are dependent on Christ through prayer and Bible study you will never see His power in your life.

VI. Conclusion

- A. As we come to the end of our passage, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Power in this life comes through Jesus alone.
- B. This morning, if you are not believer, the only way you will be free from the weight of your sin and separation from God is through accepting Jesus’ invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. This morning, accept Jesus’ invitation and be free; accept the truth that Jesus alone has the power to rescue you from your sin and separation from God. He alone can grab your hand and raise you to true life if you come to Him in faith believing He is who He says He is and accepting His invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. This morning, accept Jesus’ invitation knowing He alone has the power to forgive you and reconcile you to God forever.
- C. Christian, do you have a “struggling faith” where you doubt what God can do like the father of the demon-possessed boy; is your faith more focused on you and your abilities than on Christ’s power like the disciples? This morning, Jesus invites you to come to Him knowing He has the power to give you the faith you need to trust Him and the power to work in your life. Stop focusing on yourself and wondering if Jesus can intervene; come to Christ daily through Bible study and prayer trusting that He has the power to work in your life; through His power you will not only have faith, but you will also see His mighty hand.

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.

- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; that He alone can raise you from your sin and death and bring you into true life by forgiving you of your sin and reconciling you to God; that He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now accept Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, how can you respond at this moment? Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you your faith in Christ this morning. Are you like the father of the boy with "struggling faith"? Then come to Jesus this morning in honesty, with empty hands declaring that you need Him to fill them with faith to believe. Are you like the disciples and your faith is focused on yourself and not Christ; is there no evidence of God's power in your life? Commit today that you are going to focus on Christ through daily prayer and Bible study; that every day you will seek Him knowing that you can do nothing without Him. As you pray through this and listen to the Holy Spirit, please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in any way.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 9:14–29*

Date: *October 26, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Why do Christians not have power in their life*
- *Understanding that without Jesus we have nothing. You must have true faith in Jesus who gives us our daily strength*
- *The power of Christ in our lives*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The Disciples' Failure, The Importance of Faith, The Healing, The Focus of Faith*
- *Unless you have faith in Jesus in your life, you will not have power in your life*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Only through Christ and our relationship with Him can we have power to shine for Him*
- *Power in this life comes through Jesus alone. We must open our lives to Christ so He can flow through us*
- *By putting all our faith in Jesus we have power for life that only come through Him*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *People are invited to respond how they are led by the Holy Spirit*
- *Christ alone has the power to raise you from death to life. He alone has the power to do the impossible.*
- *Trust in Jesus Christ for He alone has the power to do all things, even to raise us from our spiritually dead state. Have faith in the power of Jesus and depend on Him.*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Must depend and focus on Jesus every day; without Him we have no power just like the disciples when they failed to heal the young boy. Accept Jesus and be reconciled with God. Encouraged Christians to have a “quiet time.”*
- *Christian—trust that Christ can give you the faith to believe; live a life dependent on Him. Non-Christian—accept the truth that Christ alone has the power to rescue you from separation from God, to forgive you of your sins, and reconcile you to Him forever; He will raise you from death to life.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Really enjoyed the continued comparison to shining like Christmas lights
Evangelistic Component	3.875	
Christian Growth Component	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging “quiet time”
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	
Spirit-led	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged congregation to follow the Holy Spirit

Recommendations:**3 things to keep...**

- *Encouragement to bring a friend if scared to respond*
- *Asking someone next to them how to accept Jesus*
- *Do not reject/ignore the Holy Spirit*
- *Distinguishing between response of Christians and non-believers*

3 things to improve...

- *Ask believers during the invitation to be in prayer that the Holy Spirit will move people to respond*

APPENDIX I

SERMON: MARK 9:30–37

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. Couple of weeks ago, a friend sent me a text entitled “Success in Life at Different Ages:” At age 5, success is losing your first tooth. At age 12, success is having friends. At age 16, success is having a driver’s license. At age 25, success is having a job. At age 40, success is having money. At age 65, success is retiring from a job and spending your money before your kids do. At age 75, success is still having a driver’s license. At age 85, success is remembering your friend’s name. At age 95, success is still having teeth (yours or dentures – it doesn’t matter). This puts life in perspective, doesn’t it? But a question that comes from this text is “What is success and who determines it?” Our culture defines success as meeting a goal that we ourselves have established; acquiring some position or possession or status that alleviates us above those around us; success is winning by defeating others; success is having more stuff than those around us. But is that Jesus’ definition of success; and what does it mean to be successful in His kingdom? This is something Jesus addresses in our passage today.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 9:30–9:37 Jesus again discusses his death, burial, and resurrection; the Twelve respond with ignorance and pride, and Jesus teaches them about humility and servant leadership. As we look at our passage today, we will discuss the necessity of the cross and necessity of serving others because of the cross.
2. Believers should understand that they are called to serve other people in Christ’s name instead of serving themselves. And if you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand that Jesus alone can rescue you from your separation from God and give you true life.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference.
2. Our passage is located in a larger section from 8:22 to 10:52 and focuses on the three times Jesus discusses His death and resurrection, how it relates to His followers, and their relationship with Him.

II. The Necessity of the Cross (verses 30–32)

- A. In verse 30 we read that Jesus for the second time discusses the necessity of the cross with the Twelve. Jesus and the Twelve left the house they were staying in after Jesus had healed the demon-possessed boy. They moved through the region Galilee to Capernaum as they traveled toward Jerusalem where Jesus would complete His redemptive mission and give His life on the cross as a ransom for many. As they traveled, Jesus was focusing on teaching the Twelve privately. As in 8:31, he declares He is the Son of Man, the one described in Daniel 7:13–14; the exalted One who would come with the clouds of heaven and receives authority, glory, and sovereign power from God setting up an eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed. Jesus declares I am not going to do it by setting up a political kingdom or through military conquest; I will do it by giving my life as a ransom for many. Jesus is teaching and assuring the Twelve that His coming crucifixion is not a tragedy or a catastrophe; it is something divinely ordained by God. It is a divine necessity if man is going to be redeemed from sin and death; if man is going to be rescued from their separation from God; if man is going to be forever reconciled to God, Jesus, God himself, must give His life as a ransom for many.
- B. In verse 32 we read the Twelve did not “understand” what Jesus meant and they were afraid to ask Him about it. We need to understand that the Twelve grasped Jesus’ words; if you had asked them what Jesus had just said, they would have responded, “Oh, He talked AGAIN about His being delivered into the hands of men, killed, and rising from the dead—we wish He’d stop talking about it!” They understood the content and meaning of Jesus words; they just didn’t understand why it had to be this way. And they were probably afraid to ask because, as we will see, they had an idea of who they wanted Jesus to be and what they wanted Him to do, and His crucifixion was not a part of their plan. They understood Jesus’ words, they just didn’t accept why it had to be that way.

- C. *Unbeliever Application*: A lot of people make the same mistake today. Many people who consider themselves unbelievers understand what Jesus did on the cross but refuse to accept that they need Him.
1. The Bible is very clear; all people are eternally separated from God because of their choice to reject Him and make themselves the god of their lives by pursuing what they want and what they think will make them happy—but truth is without Christ we can never truly be happy—making yourself the center of your life only leads to isolation, fear, anxiety, and loneliness because you have eternally separated yourself from God. The Bible declares the only way to be rescued from eternal separation is through faith in Jesus. It's through accepting the truth Jesus alone died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your rebellion and therefore Jesus alone can offer forgiveness and reconcile you with God—He is the only option.
 2. Like the Twelve you understand what the Bible says, but you refuse to accept the reality of your need for Jesus. You believe God brings good people to heaven who live good lives and follow certain rules even though passages like Ephesians 2:8–9 explicitly says that's not true—being good is not the standard. You believe other religions and beliefs lead people to the same God, even though passages like John 14:6 declare no one comes to God except through Jesus. The reality this morning is that there is no one else coming for you; there is no other god who loves you and passionately pursues you; who longs to forgive you of your sin and heal you of your brokenness—it's Jesus alone. And like the Twelve you understand words, you just don't accept them. This morning, Jesus is inviting you through the Holy Spirit to come to Him in faith believing that He is God and in His love for you He died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your rebellion. Come to Him in faith believing He alone can offer you forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Through the Holy Spirit, you understand the words, now accept Jesus' invitation for true life.

III. The Necessity of Serving Others (verses 33–37)

- A. In verse 33 we read that Jesus and the Twelve continued to travel to Capernaum in Galilee which had been the base for much of Jesus' earlier ministry. When they entered a house Jesus directly asked the Twelve what they had been arguing about as they were traveling; Jesus knew the answer—but the Twelve were silent because they were embarrassed. They were embarrassed because instead of discussing the implications of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection; they were arguing about their position of power, honor and status in Jesus' kingdom. Don't miss the irony; Jesus is walking ahead of the Twelve on His way to His sacrificial death while the Twelve are behind Him pushing and shoving trying to be first in line.

- B. *Illustration:* The Twelve's arguing about position and status is not that surprising when you consider their culture. In Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures honor, status, and position was of the utmost importance. In all public events like banquets, places of honor were carefully assigned based on someone's status; when you came into worship at synagogues you were seated according to rank; rabbis even argued about the seating order in heaven. They argued over what would determine who would sit closest to the throne of God: someone's righteousness, knowledge of Torah, or good deeds. In the Twelve's culture—status was everything.
- C. This is important to understand because what Jesus says next is revolutionary; in light of this culture, what He says next is radical.
1. In verse 35 Jesus declared true greatness, true success in Jesus' kingdom is not to elevate yourself to the mountain top; it's not having money, positions, or possessions; true success and greatness comes by serving others. The term "servant" here is "διακονος" and it refers to a domestic servant whose sole purpose was to meet the needs of others.
 2. And whose needs were they supposed to meet; the powerful, the affluent, those with great status and honor? Jesus answers that question in verses 36–37 when he grabs a child and takes him into His arms and says, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in MY NAME welcomes me and the One who sent Me." Understand Jesus was not setting up children as a model of purity or innocence that is to be imitated. Unlike our present day, the first-century was not child-oriented and children were not romanticized as examples of purity and innocence. Children in Jesus' day had no social status or no rights. In fact, in Judaism they were considered weak and not even people of the covenant because they could not keep the Law. Children were insignificant, at the bottom of the social ladder, and had no status or power. Jesus declared greatness and success in His kingdom meant caring about insignificant people because He Himself cares about them.
 3. The very fact that the Twelve were concerned about who was the greatest and their status positions in Jesus' kingdom reveals they understood nothing about Jesus suffering and death; the fact that He, as Paul declares in Philippians 2, as God and King took on the role of a servant, humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross. What they failed to recognize was what Jesus' kingdom would be like. His followers were not to elevate themselves to greatest but to humbly serve in His name; to show the same love, grace, and mercy for those who are powerless around them just as

He would do on the cross. That success in Jesus' kingdom means you, as His follower, serve the needy, forgotten, and powerless—those who have no influence, titles, or importance EXCEPT to God—just as He will do through His death, burial, and resurrection.

D. *Christian Application*

1. Christian, the same is true today. Greatness and success as a follower of Christ is not glorifying ourselves or making sure we have honor, status, or fame; it's not making sure we have more or are patted on the back; success is not lifting ourselves on to the mountain top; success is glorifying Christ through our obedience and service to Him. One way we do that is serving others in His name, for His glory, and for His honor. For most Christians, this is a foreign concept. It's like an entirely new language, a radically different culture, a whole new set of values. We're afraid that if we were to give and serve others we would lose out—we believe first is first, and last is last; more is more and less is less. There is no servant math and Jesus' words applies to everyone else—not us. But that's not true. This is why Jesus went over this with the disciples again and again. Jesus said: "I know it's a new math, a new way of thinking. It's not of this world, but because of Me and what I have done for you, I want you to share My love with others so they will see who I am in you and that you are reborn through me." Was Jesus saying there would be sacrifice? Yes. Was He saying serving is easy? No. But He was saying that serving is worth it, because when you do it, you have His presence, you are walking in His will, and you are in fellowship with Him.
2. So, here is the practical and painful question this morning. Christian how are you serving others in Christ's name; how are you showing His love to all people—especially the powerless—around you. How specifically are you serving your neighbors showing them the love of Christ and telling them that He offers them eternal life in God's presence? How specifically are you serving your co-workers, classmates, family or friends—showing them that as Jesus provides for their physical needs He will also provide for their greatest need: forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. How are you serving others in this church by participating in weekly childcare, volunteering for outreach events like "Trunk or Treat", helping in cleanup days or keeping up the church grounds; how are you serving or are you just waiting to be served?

3. We started this morning with the question of who defines success. For a Christian, Jesus is the One who defines it. In His Kingdom, greatness and success means you serve others in His name for His glory; you serve to show the love that He showed when He gave His life on the cross as a ransom for many. Christian, attending worship service and going to Bible study is important, but your King expects you to get your hands dirty serving others in His name. That's success in Jesus' Kingdom. The problem is for most of us, our hands are too clean.

VI. Conclusion

- A. As we come to the end of our passage, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: True success in this life depends on who you are serving.
- B. This morning, if you are not a believer, accept the truth that Jesus alone has the power to rescue you from your sin and separation from God. Living to serve yourself as your own God does not bring joy or peace; only fear, loneliness, isolation, and eternal separation from God. Accept Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation; come to Him in faith and you will have the life you have been looking for.
- C. Christian, in light of what Jesus has done for you on the cross, He calls you to humbly serve others in His name showing them the love He has shown you. Success in Jesus' kingdom is not elevating yourself or seeking your will and your comfort; it's serving others. Who are you serving this morning in His name; yourself or others?

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; you know He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now accept Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.

- C. Christian, how can you respond at this moment? During this time I would encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you are serving others in Jesus' name or are you more focused on others serving you. Are your hands dirty from sharing the Gospel or are they too clean. Ask Him what you need to do to serve your neighbors, co-workers, family, and friends so that you may reveal His love and His offer of life to them. Ask the Holy Spirit how you are to be serving Him by serving others in this church? This time needs to be a moment of decision that leads to action; this moment needs to be a time where you decide I want to be great in Jesus' kingdom by becoming a servant to all in His name! As you pray through this and listen to the Holy Spirit, please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in any way.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 9:30–37*

Date: *November 2, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *How Jesus defines success*
- *Christian success is serving others*
- *We are called to serve others in Jesus' name*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The necessity of the cross, the necessity of serving others*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *If you want to be successful you must serve others in Jesus' name*
- *True success in this life depends on who you are serving; are you serving yourself or others in Jesus' name?*
- *Success in this life is determined by who you are serving. We should serve everyone in Christ's name showing the love Jesus has shown to us.*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Accepting Christ as Savior and Lord through faith for His forgiveness and reconciliation*
- *A time set aside to respond to the Holy Spirit and truth of passage*
- *Unbeliever—accept the truth that God and only God can forgive you of your sins and reconcile you to Him forever. Christian—we are called to serve others in His name and for His glory.*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Non-Christian—Jesus is the only way to heaven and salvation. Christian—serving others is your duty as a follower of Jesus.*

- *Unbelievers can accept the Holy Spirit; this coincides with the main points and conclusion because the person is recognizing the necessity of Jesus dying on the cross as well as who they should be serving. Christians are invited to pray for new ways they can serve in Jesus' name; a time of decision that leads to visible action. This coincides with the main points and conclusion because it is necessary to serve others and by finding new ways to serve in His name we will have success in His kingdom.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.875	
Evangelistic Component	3.75	
Christian Growth Component	3.875	
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	
Spirit-led	3.875	

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

- *Acknowledging we are entering a time of invitation*
- *Recommending unbelievers talk to people beside them; I think this helps create a sense of community*

3 things to improve...

APPENDIX J

SERMON: MARK 9:38–41

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. There is an old story about a company who made drill bits and they were very excited about their product and their future opportunities. When they hired a new president for the company, they wanted him to see how great they were and how much influence they already had in the drill bit market. So on the new president's first day, the department managers gathered all the employees together for a huge celebration. During the event, they gave speeches about the company's control over the drill bit market and the fact that they sold 60% of all the drill bits purchased in America. They touted their company's success and how proud they were of their status as the nation's top drill bit manufacturer. The workers cheered and everyone was excited about what the company was doing. After the speeches, the new president stood up and declared, "While I'm excited about our drill bit sales, we must remember one fact: there is no market for drill bits. There is only a market for making holes and if someone figures out a better way to make a hole then we will all be out of a job." This story emphasizes an important fact: it's easy to get distracted and lose sight of what we are supposed to be doing. This principle has very real biblical applications for a Christian and the church. What is our goal, what is our "hole"; what is the main focus of all we do as Christians and as a church? Jesus answers that question for us in our passage today.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 9:38–9:41 Jesus rebukes the Twelve's pride revealed in their telling another believer to stop casting out demons in His name. As we look at our passage, we will examine the Twelve's confession of what they had done and Jesus' response to their actions. I will also provide three points of application: one for believers and one for unbelievers.
2. Believers should understand that your focus is to be on Jesus in all that you do, especially when it comes to the church. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you

understand that Jesus alone can rescue you from your separation from God and give you true life.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference. Our passage is located in a larger section from 8:22 to 10:52 and focuses on the three times Jesus discusses His death and resurrection, how it relates to His followers, and their relationship with Him.
2. In 9:30–32 Jesus for the second time discusses the necessity of the cross with the Twelve; that His coming crucifixion is not a tragedy or a catastrophe; it is a divine necessity if man is going to be redeemed from sin and death, rescued from their separation from God, and be forever reconciled to God. If this is going to happen, then Jesus, God himself, must give his life as a ransom for many.
3. And how do the Twelve respond? In verses 33–37 we learn that they were arguing about who was the greatest; who had the highest status, most prestige, the greatest recognition. This was a pride issue and the very fact that the Twelve were concerned about who was the greatest reveals they understood nothing about the coming cross. What they failed to recognize was that in Jesus' Kingdom there is no room for personal pride or glorifying yourself; it's about glorifying Christ and one of the greatest ways to do that is to humble yourself, like Christ, and serve others in His name; to show others the same love, grace, and mercy He showed us on the cross. Jesus is telling the Twelve that being a follower means you focus on His glory and not your own.

II. The Confession (verse 38)

- A. As we pick up our passage in verse 38 we see that the Twelve are still clueless and still have their pride fully intact. John, one of the inner three who saw Jesus reveal His glory on the mountain not that long ago, says, "Hey Jesus, we (meaning all the Twelve) saw this guy driving out demons in your name—the nerve of that guy; who does he think he is. We told him to stop!" What is interesting about John's explanation is that this unknown exorcist was casting out demons in Jesus' authority. He was not bringing glory to Himself but pointing to the power and authority of Jesus as God and King.

- B. What is also interesting is that nine out of the Twelve disciples had just failed to cast out a demon in 9:14–18 because they were not focused on God. What they have just failed to do, this guy was doing. So why did they stop him—because he was performing exorcisms which only Jesus and the Twelve should be doing or because he could do it when they had just failed? Either way the problem was pride. The Twelve were more focused on their egos than they were on promoting the name of Jesus; more focused on their fame and status and honor than on revealing the message of Jesus’ salvation to the crowds around them—the problem was their pride—they were focused on themselves and not Jesus.

III. The Response (verse 39–41)

- A. Jesus’ response in verses 39–41 must have been alarming to the Twelve because He not only condones the man’s work in His name but He questions the Twelve’s actions. Jesus gives the Twelve two practical reasons why they need to leave this guy alone and let Him continue.
1. First, in verse 39, He says if this guy is casting out demons in His name then God is the One doing the work—not this guy. Only God can do that so obviously He is working in him because he is a believer and if he is doing that in My name he is not going to turn around in the next five minutes and talk bad about Me or lead people away from Me—he is doing this to glorify Me.
 2. Second, in verse 40, Jesus explained the Twelve needed to understand who the enemy is and stop fighting with those who are actually on their side. This guy is not against proclaiming Jesus’ name, this guy is not working against the Twelve, and if he is not fighting them, but helping to promote the name of Jesus, then he is actually one of them.
 - a) In verse 41 Jesus provides a concrete example for what He had just said in verse 40. “If anyone gives a cup of water in My name because you belong to Me then I’m certainly not going to condemn him!”
 - b) In this culture hospitality was huge and giving a cup of water was one of the smallest acts you could do—it’s like saying “yes sir.” Jesus is saying if this guy is helping us out by pointing people to Me, why did you rebuke him—why do think I am going to be upset with him?
- B. The Twelve were upset because this guy was doing what they thought they alone had the right to do; they believed they had cornered the market on serving Jesus and it was all about them and in their pride they reacted.

Jesus tells them, “It’s not about you, it’s about Me, My glory, and My message of rescue and reconciliation for all people. Don’t fight those who are involved in my mission; just focus on Me and proclaim my name to all. Focus on Me and the rest will fall into place.”

VI. The Application

A. Jesus’ message to the Twelve has very practical implications and application to us today. All of us are called to focus on Christ and not on our pride, our will, our beliefs, or our desires—He is the focus, foundation, and center of all we do.

B. *Christian Application*

1. As we began this morning we asked the question, “What is our main focus as Christians and as a church?” The answer is Jesus and His mission; we are called to focus every part of our lives and every ministry in this church on knowing Christ and making Him known. We are to focus on knowing Him, serving Him, and sharing His offer of forgiveness and reconciliation to all people around us. That’s our focus!
2. But sometimes we get sidetracked; sometimes we get caught up in matters that have nothing to do with knowing or sharing Christ. We get caught up in secondary issues like what color the carpet should be, what shade of beige we should paint the walls; should the children drink raspberry or cherry Kool-Aid during children’s church. And this always leads to petty disputes that are more centered on our pride than on the gospel. And when we engage in these disputes we forget who the true enemy is; we forget how easily He cleverly distracts us from our focus; we forget that when we fight with those in our own ranks the enemy is winning.
3. Christian, Jesus calls us to function in love as His followers (John 13:34–35). Others in the church may not do it right, they may not do it the way you do it, and they may not meet your standards. But if it is not against the Bible then let it go and live in love because that is how you focus on Christ and we as a church continue to work as a family to know Christ and make Him known. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are not the enemy, so live in love for the sake of the gospel.

C. *Unbeliever Application*

1. I have often heard verses 40–41 misinterpreted especially at funerals. Ministers grasping for straws to ease a family’s grief have

read those verses in reference to the person who had died who was not a Christian. The minister is implying that because the deceased who was not a Christian did not show hostility toward Jesus or His followers God would reward this neutrality with eternal life. If you read this passage in its context there is no way you can have that understanding. In fact, what Jesus is saying is that it's all about Me and that includes eternal life in God's presence. But still, people want to believe they can be good enough or do enough good actions to have eternal life with God.

2. The Bible is very clear; all people are eternally separated from God because of their choice to reject Him and make themselves the god of their lives by pursuing what they want and what they think will make them happy—but the truth is without Christ there is no true joy—only isolation, fear, anxiety, and loneliness because you have eternally separated yourself from God. And the Bible declares over and over you can't fix this problem—it doesn't matter how good you are, how much you come to church, how much volunteer work you do or how much money you give to charity—it's not about doing good works. The only way to be rescued from that eternal separation from God is through faith in Jesus. It's through accepting the truth Jesus alone died on the cross to pay the penalty of your rebellion and therefore Jesus alone can offer forgiveness and reconcile you with God forever—He is the only option.
3. This morning, Jesus is inviting you through the Holy Spirit to come to Him in faith believing He alone can offer you forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Stop focusing on yourself and your efforts to earn eternal life with God and focus on the only One who can rescue you from your separation from God—focus on Jesus alone and accept His invitation for true life.

VI. Conclusion

- A. This morning, let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Jesus is your focus.
- B. Christian, your focus is to know Christ and make Him known. When that is your focus—when Jesus is your focus—you are more concerned about Christ than your way, your glory, and your pride. Remember, the enemy is not other Christians and we realize that when we focus on Jesus.
- C. This morning, if you are not believer, you need to focus on Jesus and accept the truth that He alone has the power to rescue you from your sin and separation from God. It's not about your good actions or neutrality toward believers; it's about accepting Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and

reconciliation; come to Him in faith allowing Him to be your God and King and you will have true life; the life you have been looking for.

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so how do you respond right now? The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; you know He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now accept Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, how can you respond at this moment? Ask yourself what is your focus: is it you or is it Christ? Just like the Twelve, have you let your pride create divisions, disputes, and feelings of competition with other Christians? If so you need to go to these Christians in this room today, right now, and ask for forgiveness and if they are not here you need to commit to calling or visiting them ASAP. Jesus takes love and unity in His church very seriously and we should too. Christian, use this time to focus on Christ as He has called you to do.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 9:38 – 41*

Date: *November 9, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *What is your focus? As believers it must be Jesus*
- *Jesus must be your focus*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *The Confession, The Response*
- *Believers—Jesus is to be your focus in all you do. Unbelievers—Jesus must be your focus if you are going to be forgiven and rescued from your separation from God.*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Jesus is the focus—know Him and make Him known. If you do not know Him, talk with someone and learn how to know and accept His free gift of salvation.*
- *As believers—Jesus is our focus; to know Him and make Him known. As unbelievers—we reject God and are separated from Him; nothing we do can fix this, but we can receive God's gift—Jesus.*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Unbeliever—accept the Holy Spirit's invitation to come to God through faith in Jesus; talk to pastors, friend, or person beside you. Christian—what is the center of your life? Should be Christ. Seek forgiveness from anyone you need to by calling or visiting.*
- *A time set aside to respond to the Holy Spirit and truth of passage*
- *Unbeliever—accept the truth that God and only God can forgive you of your sins and reconcile you to Him forever. Christian— we are called to serve others in His name and for His glory.*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Non-Christian—do not ignore the Holy Spirit's calling; talk to the person beside you and ask them how to accept Jesus' gift of salvation or come down and talk to pastors. Christian—do not get side tracked by Satan, make peace with your fellow Christians.*
- *Unbelievers must accept Jesus and respond to the Holy Spirit. Christians are called to analyze who/what they are focusing on and if it is not Jesus then commit to putting Him as the focus of your life. Resolve disputes and overcome your pride. This coincides with the main points and application because believers are supposed to build each other up for the glory of God.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	• Tied things together very nicely
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.875	
Evangelistic Component	3.875	
Christian Growth Component	3.75	
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	
Spirit-led	3.875	

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

- *Giving clear options of response for believers and unbelievers*
- *Great pace while talking*
- *Pray at your seat if you don't come down front*
- *Pray with person next to you*

3 things to improve...

APPENDIX K

SERMON: MARK 9:42–50

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

A. This past summer our family went to Carowinds and Abby wanted me to ride the “Wind Seeker” with her. This a three-minute ride with 32 suspended twin seats spinning around a central tower 300 feet in the air—it was the longest three minutes of my life. I have never been afraid of heights until that moment—I had my first panic attack on this ride. I don’t know what did it—the fact I could see Georgia from my seat, that only a simple lap bar was keeping me from falling to my death, or that the wind continually slung our seat back and forth. Either way—I couldn’t get off that ride fast enough. And when I did my beautiful wife asked me if I was ready to ride it again—ready to ride it again—I’m still not ready to ride it again and never will be. Why? Because it’s not worth it—when I look at the fear and potential heart attack that comes with the ride it’s just not worth it so why do it. And that is what Jesus is saying this morning about pursuing sin in our lives—when you consider the cost and understand the consequences, it’s just not worth it.

B. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon

1. In Mark 9:42–9:50 Jesus teaches the Twelve that remaining in their pride and self-centeredness is not worth it; it’s not worth what it costs. As we look at our passage, we will examine Jesus’ three clear commands: stop causing others to sin, stop causing yourself to sin, and be salt.
2. Believers should understand that holding on to pride and self-centeredness is not worth it when you realize what it costs you in your fellowship with God. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, this passage should help you understand that Jesus alone can rescue you from your separation from God and give you true life and there is no sin worth going to hell for.

C. Context

1. The book of Mark is an account of the gospel or good news that Jesus offers you rescue from your separation from God through His work on the cross and how you respond to Him makes all the difference. Our passage is located in a larger section from 8:22 to 10:52 and focuses on the three times Jesus discusses His death and resurrection, how it relates to His followers, and their relationship with Him.
2. In 9:30–32 Jesus for the second time discusses the necessity of the cross with the Twelve; that His coming crucifixion is not a tragedy or a catastrophe; it is a divine necessity if man is going to be redeemed from sin and death, rescued from their separation from God, and be forever reconciled to God. If this is going to happen, then Jesus, God himself, must give his life as a ransom for many.
3. And how do the Twelve respond? In verses 33–37 we learn that they were arguing about who was the greatest; who had the highest status, most prestige, the greatest recognition. This was a pride issue and the very fact that the Twelve were concerned about who was the greatest reveals they understood nothing about the coming cross. What they failed to recognize was that in Jesus' Kingdom there is no room for personal pride or glorifying yourself; it's about glorifying Christ and one of the greatest ways to do that is to humble yourself, like Christ, and serve others in His name.
4. But the problems with pride didn't stop there—in verses 38–41 John tells Jesus he and the other disciples stopped a man from casting out demons in Jesus name because he was not a part of their group. The Twelve were upset because this guy was doing what they thought they alone had the right to do and in their pride they reacted. And Jesus tells them, "It's not about you, it's about Me, My glory, and My message of rescue and reconciliation for all people. Don't fight with those who are involved in My mission—you are in this all together; just focus on Me and proclaim my name to all. I am to be the focus, not you or your pride."
5. Jesus has been talking to the Twelve about pride and explaining how their self-focus has caused them to miss what Jesus is doing all around them, miss His mission, and how it's caused them to be in conflict with each other and other believers. And now He explains why they need to let it go; He explains why living with pride and selfishness is not worth it.

II. Stop causing others to sin (verse 42)

- A. In verse 42 Jesus warns the Twelve how serious it is to lead other believers so that they step out of God's will and plan. "Little ones" in this verse doesn't refer to children but believers who are less mature in the faith than you that you could influence. Jesus is telling them that causing other more impressionable Christians to compromise their faith whether tempting them to sin or follow a false teaching is worse than someone putting a millstone around your neck and drowning you in the ocean.
1. Millstones were large stones used for grinding wheat or other grains. The stone Jesus refers to in verse 42 is literally the "millstone of a donkey" or a stone so big that donkeys were used to turn it and not people—that's a big stone! So Jesus tells the Twelve if you lead anyone to step out of My will or My ways it will be better for you to drown in the bottom of the sea with a large millstone around your neck than face the judgment of God.
 2. Jesus is using hyperbole or exaggeration to create a strong impression to get His point across. It's like when we say, "My wife's or my mom's bag weighs a ton"—the point is that the bag is very heavy, though it probably does not weigh a ton.
- B. So why is Jesus saying this to the Twelve? Since verse 33 the Twelve have been constantly arguing with themselves and with other believers. Their pride and self-centeredness has caused them to lose sight of Jesus and focus on promoting themselves. These were the Twelve selected by Jesus to proclaim His name and His message to all people, to represent Him to the crowds—but what were they modeling—what were they showing the people. Pride, selfishness, self-glory—is this what Christ's kingdom is about; is this what it meant to be transformed by Christ? Jesus is telling the Twelve to stop pursuing their pride and self-centeredness because it's not worth it; he will not allow them to act like that and influence young and immature believers; He will not allow His disciples to mislead others to sin.
- C. *Christian Application:* Christian, the same applies to you; what are you modeling to others around you? When others see you at work, the grocery store, the ball fields, school, home—what do they see? When others come to our church at VBS, Community fish fry, a worship service; do they see the love of Christ; do they see a life transformed by Jesus' power and His presence; do they see that we are different from the world around us? In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul declares imitate me as I imitate Christ; in Philippians 3:17 Paul says follow my example and live as we do. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 we are called ambassadors for Christ where God makes His appeal for salvation through us. Paul reminds us that we are to model

a transformed life that comes through a relationship with Jesus to those around us. But are we? Or are we more like the Twelve; more committed to pride, our desires, our lifestyles, and our wants than we are to Christ? Jesus says, “My child, it’s not worth it—I will hold you accountable for how you portray Me to those around you. Let go of your pride, let go of your self-centeredness, and let others see ME in you. Don’t cause others to sin because of what they see in you—it’s not worth it.”

III. Stop causing yourself to sin (verse 43–48)

- A. In verses 43–48 Jesus continues to warn the Twelve about the seriousness of their actions of focusing on themselves and holding on to their pride by explaining the serious of causing yourself to sin.
1. Jesus provides three very vivid statements about removing body parts if they are causing you to sin because they are not worth it if they are causing you to go to hell and spend eternity separated from God. Once again, this is hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point. Literally cutting off your hand or foot and plucking out your eye does not resolve the problem. A one-handed, one-footed, one-eyed person can still choose to sin, hold on to pride, and be self-centered—no amount of amputation changes the heart.
 2. So what is Jesus saying? Hanging on to your sin is not worth it—it’s not worth breaking fellowship with God—it’s not worth going to hell for. It’s better to receive Christ’s forgiveness and stop pursuing your sin no matter how hard it may be and no matter what you need to do, and follow Christ no matter the cost.
- B. *Christian Application:* Christian, you are just like the Twelve; in your pride and self-centeredness you hold on to sin that you know you should let go. You prefer in your pride to water down Christ’s command to pick up your cross and follow Him and say it’s OK to be comfortable, not serve in the church, and not share the gospel. You prefer in your pride to live in compromise with the world and say it’s OK to look and act like those around you and pursue sexual sin and disunity; it’s OK for you live each day with yourself as your focus instead of pursuing Christ’s will for your life. And Jesus says, “It’s not worth it. In your pride you will not admit that you’re wrong and your pride is costing you My presence, My peace, and My power in your life. It’s not worth it.” What sin are you holding on to this morning that is costing you the full presence of Jesus in your life—whatever it is, it’s not worth it.”

C. *Unbeliever Application*

1. If you are not a Christian, these verses really apply to you. First, you need to accept the truth that hell is a real place. The Bible clearly and explicitly teaches that hell is the forever destination of all who choose to reject Jesus' offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. Hell is described throughout Scripture as "eternal and unquenchable fire" in Matthew 25:41 and 3:12, "shame and everlasting contempt" in Daniel 12:2, a place where "the worms never die and fire is not quenched" in Mark 9:44–49 and Isaiah 66:24, a place of "torment" and "fire" in Luke 16:23–24, and "everlasting destruction" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. The torment of hell is as never ending as the peace and joy of heaven. It's a place no one wants to go because it's the only place where God is not, but it's a place people choose because in their pride they refuse to accept the truth that Jesus is the only One who can rescue them from it.

2. The Bible is very clear; all people are eternally separated from God because of their choice to reject Him and make themselves the god of their lives by pursuing what they want and what they think will make them happy—but the truth is without Christ there is no true joy—only isolation, fear, anxiety, and loneliness because you have eternally separated yourself from God. And the Bible declares over and over you can't fix this problem—it doesn't matter how good you are, how much you come to church, how much volunteer work you do or how much money you give to charity—it's not about doing good works. The only way to be rescued from that eternal separation from God is through faith in Jesus. It's through accepting the truth Jesus alone died on the cross to pay the penalty of your rebellion therefore Jesus alone can forgive you and reconcile you with God forever—He is the only option.

3. This morning, Jesus is inviting you through the Holy Spirit to come to Him in faith believing He alone can offer you forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Let go of your pride thinking your efforts or your beliefs can earn you eternal life with God; accept the only One who can rescue you from your separation from God. Truthfully, hell is not worth your pride—stop allowing yourself to sin by rejecting God's offer of life through Jesus; Hell is just not worth it; there is no sin worth going to hell for.

IV. Be Salt (49–50)

- A. In verses 49–50 Jesus summarizes everything he has been discussing with the Twelve since verse 30. Through His death on the cross, anyone who

comes to Jesus in faith believing He is God and King, believing He alone can forgive and reconcile you to God will become a part of His forever family. But being a follower does not lead to pride, comfort, or self-glory; being a follower of Christ leads to service and sacrifice to Him and others in His name for His glory—Jesus has declared that there is no room for pride and self-centeredness in His kingdom.

- B. Throughout the NT Jesus and others remind us that this lifestyle of service and sacrifice is not easy. And in verse 49, Jesus says, “Just as salt is added to the temple sacrifices to purify the offering; your persecutions and hardships for me have a purpose; when you live in service and sacrifice to Me it will be hard and you will suffer, but I will use it to make you more like Me. And in verse 50, Jesus uses salt to tell the Twelve that this lifestyle of service and sacrifice to Him and to others in His name is not a choice; it’s what He expects from followers. Just as salt changes the food and sacrifices it comes in contact with; a follower of Jesus will impact those around them, believer and unbeliever, by the way we live, act, and talk; because we will point people back to Jesus. And if we are not doing this we are as worthless in the Kingdom as salt that has lost its saltiness. So Jesus looks at the Twelve who are fighting among themselves and fighting with those outside the group and says, “Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” What is He saying? Be different because you are different and stop focusing on yourselves; stop being selfish and self-centered, and be at peace with everyone so you can point people to Me.
- C. *Christian Application:* As a church and as a people, we need to spend less time talking about what we want and like, and spend more time asking the question: Are we salt; when people see us do they see Christ, do they see a transformed life and place where all people can serve and worship Jesus together—are we truly focused on Him? We must spend less time focused on ourselves and our comfort and more time engaged in His mission, proclaiming His name in this community, and in this city. That is what our King Jesus expects from all His followers including you.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Let me sum up or conclude what we have talked about today with a simple statement of application: Sin is not worth the cost. Just as I understand it’s not worth ever riding the Wind Seeker again, we must acknowledge that our sin is never worth the cost of not having Jesus in our lives.
- B. Christian, you are called to be salt, to be different, to live in service and sacrifice to your King and Savior, but many of us choose to live in pride and self-centeredness thinking its more about our comfort, our wants, and our desires. The One who saved you has transformed you to live on

mission for Him. If you are not then you are living in the sin of self and it's not worth it. It's not worth losing His power and presence in our life. This morning, are you like the Twelve or are you salt? What sin of selfishness and pride do you need to stop pursuing? Let it go and focus on Jesus knowing that the sin is not worth it.

- C. This morning, if you are not believer, you need to give up your pride and accept the truth that Jesus alone has the power to rescue you from your sin and separation from God. It's not about your good actions or being a good person; it's about accepting Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. Accept Jesus offer realizing your pride is not worth going to hell for.

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, but the reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; you know He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now you can respond by accepting Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, what can you do right now? Ask yourself are you truly living as salt; when people look at your life do they see the difference Christ has made; when they see us as a church do they see how we are different because of Jesus. Are you just like the Twelve holding on to pride and self-centeredness or are you living at peace with all people for the sake of pointing others to Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what sin you need to let go of so you can be salt to those around you. As you pray through this and listen to the Holy Spirit—please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in any way.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 9:42–50*

Date: *November 30, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Understand sin is not worth the cost of going to hell*
- *Stop pursuing sin*
- *Hanging on to sin in your life is not worth the cost which includes eternal separation from God*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Stop Causing Others to Sin; Stop Causing Yourself to Sin; Be Salt*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Live like you understand sin is not worth the cost*
- *Live like you understand sin is not worth the cost. As a follower, we are called (expected) to live a life that impacts others. Are we impacting people for Christ?*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Unbeliever—do not reject the Holy Spirit; respond by talking to the person next to you, come down and talk to the pastors; accept Jesus and confess your sins to Him. Christian—get rid of sin in your life and do not cause others to sin*
- *A time set aside to respond to the Holy Spirit and truth of passage*
- *If we truly understand the cost of sin then we should impact people for Christ. Sin is not worth the cost of not having Christ in our lives.*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Unbeliever—the truth is Jesus is the only One who can rescue you. Christian—fall before God and examine your life—are you all in for Christ? Commit yourself to Him and let go of your pride.*

- *We must realize we are causing others to sin by the way we live our lives. Need to focus on Christ and what He wants and not what we want.*
- *Non-believers—ask to have Jesus come into your life. Believers—ask the Holy Spirit to help take away sin and have Jesus as the King of your life. This relates to the main points because it addresses how to deal with your sin, pride, and self-centeredness that separates you from God.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	3.875	
Evangelistic Component	3.875	
Christian Growth Component	3.875	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitely challenged believers to examine our lives—all in or not for Christ!
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	
Spirit-led	4	

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

3 things to improve...

APPENDIX L

SERMON: MATTHEW 28:18–20

Sermon Outline

I. Introduction

- A. During the month of December, most SBC churches focus on supporting our more than 5,000 international missionaries serving in 153 nations all over the world through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The 42,000 SBC churches in the U. S., which average 100 to 200 people on Sunday mornings, combine their financial support to keep these missionaries on the field. Alone the majority of churches could not support one missionary for an entire year, but together we support over 5,000.
- B. This offering is named after Charlotte Diggs Moon or Lottie to her friends. In 1873, at the age of 33 she left her comfortable life in Virginia and answered God’s call to serve as a missionary in China. Lottie would stay there for the next 39 years serving Christ until her death at the age of 72. This offering is also named after Lottie because of the numerous letters she wrote home urging Southern Baptists to greater mission involvement and support. It was her diligence and persistence that started the first national offering for international missions in 1888. Lottie Moon believed that every Christian has a part to play in spreading the gospel including to foreign countries they have never visited.
- C. You know; she’s right. Every Christian has the responsibility to share the gospel where Christ has placed them; everyone is called to be a missionary in their home, community, at their job, and to all people they meet. That is why the theme for this year’s offering is “One sacred effort”; this theme is to remind us that it is the call of every Christian to declare God’s magnificent story of redemption and reconciliation for all mankind so they may know Him. This is our main purpose as followers of Christ and this theme is founded on Matthew 28:18–20, which is often called the Great Commission and that is our passage today.
- D. Central Truth of the Text and Sermon
 1. In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus declares the primary focus for His followers as they serve Him. Today we will examine the main command of this focus and three ways for accomplishing it.

2. Christians must understand that Jesus expects you to focus on making disciples. If you consider yourself an unbeliever, you are encouraged to listen this morning and understand why Christians should spend so much time sharing the gospel and teaching the Bible.

E. Context

1. In the verses leading up to ours today, Jesus has resurrected from the dead and exploded from the grave showing His power and authority. He has revealed Himself to His disciples and many other followers and spent the last 40 days preparing them for their mission after His ascension into heaven. It is now time for God the Son, to leave and take His place at the right hand of God the Father.
2. In verse 16 Jesus invites His disciples to meet Him on the Mount of Olives—an elevated hill in Galilee that they all knew. In verse 17 we read that when He appeared to them there, they worshiped Him and some “doubted.” “What were they “doubting?” Many people say, “They doubted whether or not it was Jesus;” but this is a little difficult to accept because He had been with them off and on for the last 40 days. What is more likely is that they knew Jesus was leaving and they were scared; they doubted if they could continue on without Him. If we understand their “doubting” like this, then what Jesus says in verse 18 and at the end of verse 20 makes sense. Jesus declared to them that He has been given “all authority” in heaven and in the earth. Jesus is saying, “Don’t be afraid, you’re going to be OK; I can and I will take care of you and I will be with you; there is nothing beyond my power; there is nothing that I can’t do—nothing; so no worries.” Why is that important? Jesus is about to tell His followers what He expects them to do as a result of their relationship with Him and they are afraid—afraid of hardship, sacrifice, and their ability. And Jesus says, “Don’t worry, I am the One in control; trust me.”
3. *Christian Application:* Christian, we struggle the same way. We know Christ has called us to serve and join Him in the work He is doing all around us; His work of revealing His name and His amazing offer of redemption and reconciliation to all people. But we are afraid to join Him. Afraid of what it may cost us in time and personal comfort; afraid of the sacrifices we will have to make; afraid that we can’t do what He is asking us to do. And Jesus is giving us the same assurance: “I have all power and all authority—everything bows to me—don’t worry, don’t be afraid join me—I

got this.” This morning, what is it keeping you from serving Christ completely? What is it that is keeping you from sharing the gospel and Christ’s love with family, friends, and co-workers; what is it that’s keeping you from serving Him in the church; what is it that is keeping you from stepping out into a difficult situation so He can work through you; what is it that’s causing you to do doubt and not trust Christ completely; Today Jesus is saying, “Trust me; I got this; just follow me.”

II. The Command: Make Disciples

- A. In verse 19 Jesus gives His followers a command that is the core of their mission; He declares what He expects His followers to do. He starts off with the word “therefore” saying, “Because you know I am over everything and everything bows before me; that I am with you and you trust me, therefore this is what you must do—this is what I expect you to do: make disciples of all people.” To be a disciple is to be a sold out follower of Jesus, and Jesus is saying, “Christian, your main job, the focus of your life is to be leading other people to Me and helping them learn how to walk with me every day—your focus, your priority is not socializing, gaining knowledge, or to be entertained; you have been called, commanded, and commissioned by your God, King, and Savior, Jesus Christ, to be committed and sold out to making disciples of all people.
- B. This is to be the priority and focus of all that we do as individuals and a church. Why? Because that is what our King has called us to do, and because we love Him and understand what He has done for us on the cross, what else can we do but obey Him (John 14:23). Christian, Jesus commanded that making disciples is to be our priority, it comes first in our life—we do it because we love Him and understand what He has done for us on the cross. In this passage Jesus gives His followers three ways to accomplish making disciples; in verses 19–20 He clearly explains a three step process for making disciples.

III. Make Disciples by Going

- A. The first step is to “go”; go into the world; into our communities, into our homes, schools, and jobs and tell anyone who will listen that the only way to be rescued from eternal separation from God is through faith in Jesus. We go into a world that is lonely, hurting, and looking for rescue from their sin by trying to fix themselves, find happiness in other people, or find salvation in false beliefs, and tell them of Jesus’ offer of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. That is because Jesus alone died on the cross to pay for the penalty of their sin. He alone can forgive them and reconcile them with God forever—that Jesus is their only option. Jesus declares you can’t make disciples by sitting in the same place, doing the same things,

and hanging out with the same people; you must be active in engaging the world around you with the purpose of telling them about Me.

- B. *Illustration:* I was asked to speak about this at an Associational Meeting five years ago. A man after the presentation came to me and said, “I disagree with you; the people in the community know where we are at; they can see the steeple; we don’t need to go to them; they should come to us.” Problem with that view is that it ignores the fact that Jesus commanded His followers to go and share, not sit and wait. In his book, *Kingdom Principles for Church Growth*, Gene Mims said, “A church that does not go to lost persons and share the gospel with them is like a restaurant that has food prepared but refuses to serve the hungry.”
- C. *Christian Application:* We make disciples by going into our communities and sharing with them the bread of life—Jesus Christ. If we are going to obey Jesus in our love for Him then we have to get up from our comfortable lives and be aggressive in reaching our community with the message of Jesus Christ. Going and sharing the gospel is how you make disciples and it must be a priority.

IV. Make Disciples by Baptizing

- A. Second, we make disciples by baptizing. The word baptize in the NT language means to “immerse” so what is Jesus telling us to do in reference to making disciples? According to Romans 6, baptism or immersing someone under water is a symbolic act that shows a new believer understands their commitment to Christ. It shows that they understand that they are no longer enslaved and controlled by sin, but through Jesus’ rescue and the daily empowerment of the Holy Spirit they are a new creation; forgiven, redeemed, and reconciled to a new life lived every day in service to Christ. Baptism is a time a new believer declares to the church and the world they know what Christ has done for them on the cross and how they are to live in Him.
- B. But baptism also shows something else; it shows that the new believer understands their new relationship to the body of Christ—the church. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–14, Paul declared that our baptism also proclaims that a new believer understands that through Christ and the Holy Spirit we have been immersed into one organism that needs one another, loves one another, and supports one another—the church.
- C. *Christian Application*
1. Baptism is a time when someone who has accepted Christ says, “I understand what Jesus has done for me, how my life is now different, and how I am to live it; I understand that I am not to do

this alone, but I am a part of the church and we need each other to grow in Christ and fulfill His plans.”

2. In baptism the new Christian declares what they know, but the question is how do they know? How do they come to this understanding? And that is what Jesus answers in the Great Commission—Christian it is your job to tell them and train them. That’s how we make disciples—by leading them to Christ and then training them on prayer, Bible Study, evangelism, missions, service, worship—it’s our job to teach them the basics. That’s how it has been done for two thousand years; it’s your job as a Christian to match yourself one on one with new or immature believers and teach them basics of the faith so they may be baptized before this community declaring they know who they are in Christ and what He has done for them—it’s your job to prepare them. The reason the modern church has so many spiritually immature Christians who look like the world is because no one took the time to teach them the basics of their faith. We lead them to Christ, rush them through baptism, and say “good luck” and we wonder why they struggle. Making disciples means we as mature believers teach new and immature believers the basics of the faith—that’s how you make disciples.

V. Make Disciples by Teaching

- A. Christians make disciples by teaching; by continually teaching other Christians what it means to obey Jesus’ commands and daily live for Him. To teach believers to observe Christ’s commands means to instruct believers how the Bible applies to their everyday life and how they are to live out His commands. Christians teach one another through large groups like Sunday Morning or Wednesday night Bible studies, Life Groups, Awana, Connect, or worship services; we as Christians teach one another through individual relationships like mentoring or accountability partners or just having coffee and talking about God’s word. We as Christians are continually pouring into one another, learning the meaning of God’s word, and how it applies to our lives through teaching each other what God has revealed to us.
- B. *Christian Application:* Christian, whose life are you pouring into this morning: a child or grandchild, a neighbor, coworker, spouse, friend—who are you teaching what it means to obey Christ? This is how you fulfill the Great Commission, this is how you make disciples—it’s not just the pastor’s job or your Bible study leader’s job; it’s the call of every believer to be impacting another believer for Christ. You grow as a believer and understand how to live the Christian life by spending time with other believers in the study God’s word—you make disciples by pouring into

others as they pour into you. That does not mean that you have to teach a class, but it does mean you need to be involved with another individual helping them grow in Christ as they help you. That's how you make disciples—that's how you fulfill the Great Commission.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He called His followers to work together with ONE SACRED EFFORT to make disciples of all people by going to them and sharing His perfect plan of redemption and reconciliation through faith in Him; to train new believers in what it means to be a follower and how to do it; and to teach one another how to obey Him in our everyday lives. This is what He commands of all believers—including you. Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China in the late 1800's wrote: "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered, it is a command to be obeyed." And we obey it because we love Him and know what He has done for us. That is why we share the gospel and give to missions like Lottie Moon Christmas Offering that support missionaries who share the gospel; that is why we train new believers; that is why Christians pour into each other's lives—we do it because our King Jesus commanded us to do it. That is why we fulfill the Great Commission—because we love the One who first loved us.
- B. So with this understanding, how can we apply this passage today? Obey Christ, fulfill the Great Commission, and focus on making disciples.
 1. Christian, you need to look at your life and ask the question, "Am I sharing the gospel, am I training new believers, am I teaching others to obey God's word," because if you are not then you have the wrong focus and that focus has to change. If you are like those on the Mount of Olives doubting if you have the courage, knowledge, or strength to do it, remember Jesus says, "No worries, I have all the power and I am with you—trust me and obey me out of your love for me and I will do the rest." Christian, make it a priority out of your love for Christ and He will take care of the rest.
 2. As a church we have to look at everything we do and ask the question, "Does it share the gospel, does it train new believers; does it teach other believers how to obey the Bible?" If something we do doesn't then why are we doing it? If the Great Commission is our primary focus why would we pursue something else?
 3. This morning, every Christian needs to examine their life and what we do as a church and ask the question, "Are we focused on making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission?" If we are

not then we are not obeying our King; if we are not then a lot has to change. Are we making disciples?

V. Invitation

- A. This is the time we call the invitation; a time when you are invited to respond to how the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- B. This morning you may not consider yourself religious or a believer, so you need to understand that you can't make followers of Christ until you are one yourself. The reality is that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the truth about Jesus Christ in a way that you understand; you know He alone can rescue you from your sin and separation from God through faith in Him. Right now you can respond by accepting Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Holy Spirit leads you, I encourage you to step out from your seat and come forward this morning and let us talk to you more about what Jesus has done for you on the cross and how He will change your life forever if you let Him. This is the only way you can respond at this moment.
- C. Christian, what can you do right now? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if you are making the Great Commission your primary focus; are you sharing the gospel; are you training new Christians, are you helping other Christians grow in God's word? Remember what Hudson Taylor said, "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered, it is a command to be obeyed." Are you obeying it; what's keeping you from obeying your King this morning?" Commit today to trust Him to be with you and empower you, and step out and begin making disciples of all people. As you pray through this and listen to the Holy Spirit, please know the altar is open and Pastor Mike and I are here to help, guide, and encourage in any way.
- D. If you are struggling with an area in life or just need prayer, I invite you to come forward because we are available to you. At this moment, respond to what the Holy Spirit is calling you to do.

Summary and Sample Responses from Sermon Invitation Assessments

Sermon's Text: *Mark 28:18–20*

Date: *December 7, 2014*

Sermon Content

1. Provide a brief explanation of the **theme/subject/general idea** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Our duty as Christians is to make disciples*
- *Learning how/what it means to make disciples*
- *The Great Commission*

2. List the **main points/divisions** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Make Disciples: Go, Baptize, Teach*

3. Explain the **conclusion/final application/call of response** of the sermon:

(Sample responses)

- *Obey Christ, fulfill the Great Commission, and focus on making disciples*

Invitation Presentation

1. Briefly describe how the time of invitation was **explained/defined** by the pastor:

(Sample responses)

- *Unbeliever—make followers of Jesus only after you have become one yourself. Christian—focus on making disciples.*
- *A time set aside to respond to the Holy Spirit and truth of passage*

2. Circle the following that most accurately describes the overall directions given in the invitation:

“Easily understood” – 8 responses

3. List the specific **ways/methods offered to respond** to the sermon in the invitation and how this method **coincided with the sermon's main points and conclusion**:

(Sample responses)

- *Unbelievers need to talk to a pastor or other Christian on how to receive salvation through Jesus Christ; do not let the opportunity to go by; respond to the Holy Spirit.*
- *Focus on being a disciple because it is the only way you can make disciples. As Christians we are to fulfill the Great Commission.*

4. Rate each element of the invitation:

	Average Score out of 4 possible points	Sample Comments
Flows from Scriptural Truths in Text	3.875	
Creativity and/or Appropriateness of Called Response	4	
Evangelistic Component	3.875	
Christian Growth Component	3.875	
Honesty, Simplicity, and Clarity	4	
Spirit-led	4	

Recommendations:

3 things to keep...

3 things to improve...

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