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ENHANCING THE PREACHING SKILL OF EXTENDING AN EVANGELISTIC
INVITATION AT THE CONCLUSION OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
WILLIAM JOSHUA MOREA
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Student Name: William Joshua Morea Student ID # 000-253598

Ministry Project Title:

***ENHANCING THE PREACHING SKILL OF EXTENDING AN EVANGELISTIC
INVITATION AT THE CONCLUSION OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON***

This Ministry Project Report has been approved.

Date of Defense: October 27, 2020

Faculty Supervisor/Chair: Scott Pace

Dr. Scott Pace
Dean of the College at Southeastern
Assoc. Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Preaching
Johnny Hunt Chair of Biblical Preaching

Faculty Reader: Jeff Struecker

Dr. Jeff Struecker
Assistant Professor of Christian Leadership

Field Mentor: Al James

Dr. Al James
Professor of Missions
Associate Dean of Ministry Studies
EQUIP Network Coordinator

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To my Lord who invites sinners to His table.
To Allison for your steadfast love and support.
To Taylor, Caleb, and Micah for all the evenings
daddy stayed late to work on his project.

I am eternally grateful.

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I would also like to thank the wonderful members of First Baptist Church of Ferriday, Louisiana. I began this journey with you. You listened and encouraged me as I preached, and we grew together.

Thank you, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida. Your support and encouragement to finish the task well means more than you know. We have faced so many challenges already, and I know we will face and overcome future obstacles. By God's grace, we will grow together in the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and we will witness the Kingdom coming in power in the lives of the Myrtle Grove community.

ABSTRACT

The project director completed this project to enhance his skill of delivering evangelistic sermon invitations in his preaching context of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, Pensacola FL. The project director wrote Chapter One to describe the purpose of the ministry project. He described his personal and ministry objectives for the project. The project director outlined the rationale for his choosing this project.

The project director composed Chapter Two to establish the biblical and theological foundations of the ministry project. The project director examined the biblical examples of sermon invitations and selected four examples to exegete, interpret, and apply to his ministry project. He chose Ezra's oration (Nehemiah 8), Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13–29), and Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:37–41), followed by a brief overview of Paul's invitational style. The project director applied the theological implications of these passages to the ministry project.

The project director wrote Chapter Three to establish ministry foundations for the project. The ministry foundations included a literary review of key resources related to the development and delivery of expository sermons. The project director conducted a survey of the historical strategies for the invitation followed by a survey of some contemporary examples of preachers who utilize evangelistic invitations. The project director delineated the role of the Holy Spirit in the invitation, outlined the rhetorical elements of the invitation, and identified fallacies to avoid.

The project director wrote Chapter Four to describe the ministry project. He outlined the implementation of the personal skill development plan. The project director explained his utilization of a lay panel and a panel of experts who provided qualitative feedback related to the project director's sermon invitations.

In Chapter Five, the project director evaluated the process and analyzed results of the ministry project. The project director evaluated his ministerial and personal objectives. He also identified the strengths and weaknesses of his sermon invitations based upon feedback from the lay panel and expert panel. Finally, he assessed his personal development because of the ministry project process.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The most crucial moment of decision for listeners during an expository sermon happens when the sermon concludes, and the preacher places the responsibility to respond obediently to the gospel in the hands of his audience. However, ministers lack a clear method and sufficient training to utilize the sermon invitation to accomplish this goal. A plan for the development and delivery of the sermon invitation will provide the strategies and tools necessary to enhance the preaching skill of extending an evangelistic invitation.

Purpose

The project director demonstrated the validity of extending evangelistic invitations, gathered information and evaluated strategies for extending a public sermon invitation. Based upon his research, he developed a plan for enhancing the preaching skill of extending evangelistic invitations at the conclusions of his expository sermons. The project director implemented the plan, providing clear opportunities for people to trust Christ and become more obedient to him. The project director also enlisted a panel of lay leaders and a panel of experts to evaluate his progression and to offer suggestions for improvement. The enhancement of the minister's ability to deliver an expository sermon invitation serves the overall mission and vision of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ, because the invitation to respond provides an entry-point for individuals to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Project Objectives

The project director hoped to accomplish four objectives as a result of the project. First, the project director defended the legitimacy of the evangelistic invitation as the conclusion of an expository sermon. Through biblical analysis and historical research, the project director identified a concise definition of a sermon invitation. The project director compared the invitation to non-invitation conclusions of sermons to see which approaches result greater responses. The project director determined what attitudes exist among SBC pastors toward the sermon invitation. Research included an examination of the biblical examples of sermon invitations, a survey of the historical examples of the sermon conclusion, and analysis of contemporary examples of the sermon conclusion. Obtaining this knowledge allowed the project director to establish the necessity of the invitation.

Secondly, the project director identified various approaches to a sermon invitation. Surveys of the top-growing SBC churches revealed which methods pastors use most frequently and which methods they use least. The project director also examined how the specific sermon topic affects the type of invitation given. The project director then categorized the various methods into three basic approaches. Based upon the information gathered, the project director selected the approach most suitable for his ministry context at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

Thirdly, the project director identified the characteristics of an effective sermon invitation. Through the study of preaching textbooks, journal articles, and guides to sermon delivery, the project director determined which factors and practices make invitations most effective. The project director identified pitfalls to avoid when extending

an invitation. The project director delineated the role of prayer before and during the event. He improved his use of vocabulary during the invitation by identifying which words to use or avoid during the invitation. He sought to enhance the non-verbal communication of the sermon invitation as well. These factors provided a litmus for analyzing the effectiveness of the project director's own sermon invitations.

Lastly, the project director developed and implemented a plan for the delivery of sermon invitations at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church. The plan included specific action steps for the development of effective sermon invitations. The project director determined which areas to address for personal improvement and used qualitative feedback to track his improvement during the project. The project director determined what team members to enlist to help carry out the plan. The project director enlisted and instructed lay volunteers who became evaluators and prayer counselors during the invitation. The project director followed the plan for sermon invitations during the delineated timeframe.

Ministry Context

Historical Context

The Project director became senior pastor of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida in January of 2020. The church resides at the northwest corner of 61st Avenue and Lillian Highway in the Myrtle Grove community of Pensacola. Myrtle Grove Baptist Church cooperates with the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as the local Pensacola Bay Baptist Association of churches for missions and ministry.

The Early Years

In November of 1929, sixteen Southern Baptists in the Myrtle Grove Community met to establish a Southern Baptist church. On March 23, 1930, the organization voted to purchase 165 feet of frontage on Lillian Hwy where the church stands today. Church gatherings on the property began in a tent the Sunday morning of April 15, 1930.

On Sunday morning, April 27, 1930, the charter members officially organized the church, and initiated a Sunday School program.¹ Later that year, on June 13th, the church began an “Armor Bearers Young People’s Union” on Sunday evenings, which later became known as “Training Union.” By 1932, the church’s membership had grown to 71 with a Sunday School enrollment of 127 and a Baptist Young People’s Union enrollment of 52. The church petitioned to enter the Pensacola Bay Baptist Association, and borrowed \$750 to construct its first sanctuary.²

Development and Expansion

The church’s original sanctuary burned down on September 18, 1944. Soon after, the church built a newer sanctuary (currently named “Butler Chapel”), along with an educational building and nursery facility. These facilities still stand today along with the addition of a 1250-seat worship center constructed in 1976 and remodeled in 2001. The newer worship center includes an office suite, music rooms, library/media room, audio-visual recording and control rooms. The physical footprint of the buildings provides more than adequate space for the current attendance of the church.

¹ Fred B. Chance, “Church History,” *A Guide Book for Every Church Member*, (Pensacola, FL: Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, 1956), 2.

² “Myrtle Grove Baptist Church History, March 8, 1988,”—printed in the 1988 church pictorial directory.

Toward Missions and Outreach

Myrtle Grove Baptist Church has a history of strong missions giving. During the 1980s, Reverend Butler challenged the church to give generously toward missions. As a result, giving trends increased, and in 1987, the church gave 23 percent of its budget to the Cooperative Program. In recent years, however, members voted to cut the church's budget, and Cooperative Program giving fell to less than 8 percent of the budget.

Myrtle Grove Baptist Church has planted three mission churches during its history. First, Millview Baptist Church, planted in 1954, stands today as Blue Angels Baptist Church on Hwy 98 near the Haven Park community. Second, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church established Heritage Baptist Church in 1974 in Cantonment, FL. Heritage remains a thriving congregation in a growing area. Thirdly, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church planted Perdido Bay Baptist Church in 1970, near the Perdido Community on Sorrento Rd. All three Baptist churches continue to serve the people of Escambia County, FL today.³ In addition to these mission churches, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church began a weekly Hispanic Ministry on campus in 2004 which grew to more than sixty regular attendees.⁴

Demographic and Cultural Context

The project director obtained demographic and cultural information concerning Myrtle Grove Baptist Church's ministry context from the Percept Group. The study area included a three-mile radius around the physical location of the church property at 5920

³ "Myrtle Grove Baptist Church History."

⁴ Florida Baptist Convention, "Resumen de Celebración del Ministerio de la Iglesia (RCMI) Para congregaciones de la Convención Bautista de Florida, November 12, 2012."

Lillian Hwy in Pensacola, FL. The study includes “people and place,” “community issues,” “faces of diversity,” and “faith preferences” of the ministry context.⁵

The Percept Group reports the current population of the study area is 69,506 people which increased by 3.3 percent since 2000. The study projects another 4.6 percent increase by 2023, well above the national average population growth of 3.5 percent for the same time.⁶ The study also identifies the target population as “extremely diverse” with 51 percent Anglos, 33.1 percent African-American, 7 percent Hispanic/Latino, 5 percent Asian, and 5 percent Native-American/other. The study projects that the Hispanic/Latino population will increase to 19.9 percent by 2023. The data indicates a robust and diverse population for the ministry context of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

The Percept Group reports the majority lifestyle of Myrtle Grove’s population as “Middle American Families” at 44 percent of the population and a close second as “Ethnic and Urban Diversity” at 35 percent. The generational groups represented in the target area match the national averages with only a slightly higher average of “Gen Z 0 to 16” and “Millennials 17 to 36” which total 53 percent of the population—compared to the national average of 48 percent of the same generational group. The study identifies the majority of families with children as “Non-Traditional” based upon a reported 64 percent of families led by single, divorced, or widowed individuals. A staggering 46 percent of the families with children are led by single mothers compared to the national average of 25 percent. The diverse makeup of the families of the Myrtle Grove

⁵ Percept Group, “First View 2018, Prepared for: Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, Study Area Definition 3.0 Mile Radius.”

⁶ Percept Group, 4.

Community presents a challenging opportunity for the church to define new ways to reach and reflect that diversity within its own walls.

Current Trends

Resident Membership

According to the 2009–2018 Church Trend Profile⁷ provided by the Pensacola Bay Baptist Association, Myrtle Grove Baptist church had a total Membership of 3,927. Myrtle Grove did not report resident membership in the same year, and the last reported resident membership was 3,738 in 2015. Resident membership increased from 3,460 in 2009 to 3,738 in 2015.

Attendance

According to the 2018 Church Trend Profile provided by the Southern Baptist Convention, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church has experienced a downward trend in attendance during the last ten years. In 2009, the church recorded an average weekly worship attendance of 750. That number fell to 375 by 2018. Sunday School enrollment also saw a marked decrease from 1,162 to 700 in the same period of time. In the decade recorded during the study, the church recorded the highest number of baptisms with forty-four in 2014. The lowest number of baptisms in a year occurred in 2017 with only seven baptisms recorded. In total, the church recorded a net percentage decrease of 52.3 percent in baptisms during the study period, and a 50.0 percent decrease in worship attendance. In contrast, the resident membership of the church increased by 300

⁷ Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, “Church Trend Profile, 2009–2018 Membership and Program,” 2018, 1.

members. The Church Trend Profile demonstrates the need for new strategies to promote attendance.

Financial Information

The Church Trend Profile provided by the Pensacola Bay Baptist Association demonstrates a similar trend in giving to the recorded attendance trend. In the decade of giving recorded by the study, annual total receipts fell from \$2,016,050 to \$905,722—a net decrease of 55.1 percent. As a result, Cooperative Program giving decreased from \$147,308 to \$37,278. Currently, the finance committee along with the staff are developing a plan to increase contributions as well as cooperative program giving.

Leadership Structure

Myrtle Grove Baptist Church employs three full-time pastors, two full-time support staff positions, one part-time youth minister, one part-time children's minister, two paid nursery workers, two full-time custodians, and several part-time musicians and audio-video technicians. Twenty-two deacons actively serve on the Myrtle Grove Baptist Church deacon body. A leadership team comprised of committee chairpersons, ministry team coordinators, and staff meets once-per-month to make ministry decisions and plan and coordinate events. The church also holds a monthly church-wide business meeting on the third Wednesday of every month.

Summary

Myrtle Grove Baptist church has a long history of missions and cooperation for the Kingdom in the surrounding community. In recent years, however, the church has

suffered losses both in attendance and financial contributions. The church must rethink its approach to ministry on a variety of fronts. Considering the current trend, the clear presentation of the Gospel through the sermon invitation is more crucial than ever.

Project Rational

The Biblical and Historical Foundations

The Bible is the first and best source for the practice of sermon invitations, and biblical support for the public invitation abounds. The Old Testament prophets used the public invitation to call Israel to repentance and rededication to the Lord (Deut 30:2; Neh 8:9–12; Joel 2:13; Hos 6:1). Jesus utilized the public invitation and called his hearers to trust and follow him (Matt 11:28; Mark 8:34). Peter issued a public invitation during his sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41). When contemporary preachers extend a public invitation to respond obediently to their sermons, they follow in the footsteps of both Old and New Testament preachers.

Likewise, a brief survey of church history reveals an unbroken tradition of sermon invitations. Alan Street cites the patristic fathers who used the public invitation. Pre-reformation preachers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, and Patrick of Ireland as early as the fourth century practiced the use of sermon invitations. The public call for repentance through an invitation to raise hands came into use as early as the twelfth century, during Bernard of Clairvaux's ministry.⁸ Modern examples of effective public invitations include those of Billy Graham, Dwight L. Moody, and Greg Laurie. According to Ken Keathley, the abuses of the invitation by the likes of Charles Finney

⁸ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1984), 85–88.

neither negate the necessity of the invitation, nor disprove the legitimacy of conversions which occur during public invitations.⁹ Preachers throughout church history demonstrate strong support for the use of the public invitation.

An Area for Personal Growth

The project director identified the sermon invitation as an area for personal growth in his own ministry. Scott Pace argues, in *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons*, that “the invitation is one of the most critical components of any sermon, and yet it is also one of the most overlooked aspects of sermon preparation.”¹⁰ The project director struggled with the composition and delivery of an effective sermon invitation more than any other aspect of the sermon. Additionally, the project director did not employ an overall strategy for incorporating the invitation into his sermon development, and he involved no team for a shared ministry approach to the invitation.

Due to the lack of adequate design and preparation of the sermon invitation, the project director found that church attendees in his previous context had little to no concept of the purpose of the sermon invitation. In personal conversations with the project director, respondents indicated that “no clear instructions were given” and “no action steps were offered.”¹¹ Guests of the Sunday morning service often began looking around, confused and uncertain how to respond during the invitation. The project director’s unclear instructions to “walk the aisle” or “come to the altar” confused the

⁹ Ken Keathley, “Rescuing the Perishing: A Defense of Giving Invitations.” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*. Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring 2003. 7–8.

¹⁰ R. Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 97.

¹¹ Personal correspondence by the project director with attendees of First Baptist Church, Ferriday Louisiana.

audience. As a result, the project director experienced a lack of physical responses to the messages during the invitation. On several occasions, attendees waited to respond to the sermon until later during the week, indicating they felt too intimidated to come forward during his invitation. Several long-time members of First Baptist Church, Ferriday, LA indicated frustration that more people do not publicly respond during the invitation. Therefore, the project director determined to develop his personal skills of presenting the invitation. He replaced the previous model for the sermon invitation choosing a new model that helps meet his ministry goals, eliminates confusion, and reduces the intimidation associated with his previous methods.

A Practical Ministry Need

Myrtle Grove Baptist Church's annual report of baptisms indicates a drastic decline in baptisms from 2010 to 2020. Baptismal numbers reached an all-time low of just seven baptisms in 2017.¹² The project director desired to reverse the downward trend of baptisms by increasing the number of responses to the public invitations at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

The evangelistic sermon invitation presents the most direct call for repentance and immediate obedience to God's word that most people experience throughout their week.¹³ In interviews conducted with 353 formerly unchurched adults, Thom Rainer demonstrated that 90 percent of all respondents indicated that the "pastor and his preaching was a leading factor in the respondent's decision to join the church."¹⁴ Two

¹² Church Trend Profile

¹³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 142–145.

¹⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 56–60.

thirds of those surveyed responded that “preaching that teaches” led them to their decision, while 147 said that “preaching that applie[d] to [their] life” caused them to want to join the church. Lifeway Research indicates that the formerly unchurched responded to sermons that provided “meaningful life application” and demonstrates how the Bible related to their life.¹⁵ Rainer notes the evangelistic effectiveness of expository preaching over other methods of preaching.¹⁶ The sermon invitation provides the necessary link for both members and the unchurched to respond faithfully to an expository sermon. A preacher who fails to offer a public call to faith and obedience negates the sermon itself and forfeits a great opportunity to see lives changed for the glory of God. Effective expository preaching includes both life application and a call to respond.¹⁷

The preacher uses the sermon to open the doorway of biblical truth, and through the invitation, he welcomes the listener into obedience to the truth. James David Greear argues that the preacher should always issue an immediate call to obedience, rather than allowing time for doubt or disobedience to influence the decision. Greear states that in his own ministry, he often baptizes those who respond on-the-spot.¹⁸ The minister must not neglect the opportunity to invite the listener’s immediate obedience to God’s word when God’s Spirit moves in the lives of the listeners. Ronnie Floyd states that preachers should articulate avenues for immediate response to their sermons with clarity and consistency.¹⁹

¹⁵Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 56–60.

¹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works and What Doesn’t* (Nashville: B&H Books, 1996).

¹⁷ Streett, 144–45.

¹⁸ James David Greear, “Why We Sometimes Baptize On the Spot,” *Summit Life with J.D. Greear*, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/why-we-sometimes-baptize-on-the-spot/>.

¹⁹ Ronnie Floyd, “4 Words to Keep in Mind When You Give a Public Invitation,” <http://www.ronniefloyd.com/blog/5637/pastors/4-words-to-keep-in-mind-when-you-give-a-public-invitation-2/>.

A strategic plan for the sermon invitation will help the project director guard against emotional manipulation, and/or coercion, and allow the project director to issue a more convincing and direct call to his listeners.

Without a clear strategy for the sermon invitation, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church will likely continue to experience a lack of faith responses to the sermons preached; baptism numbers will remain stagnant. Through enhancing the skill of delivering the sermon invitation at the conclusion of an expository sermon, the project director will effectively leverage the crucial moment of decision which occurs during the sermon invitation.

Assumptions

The project director assumes that the skill of extending sermon invitations can be improved through research, planning, and practical skill enhancement. Secondly, the project director assumes that sermon invitation should take place at the conclusion of an expository sermon. However, the project director does not assume the inevitability of the invitation but will defend the necessity of the invitation as the proper conclusion of an expository sermon. Thirdly, the project director assumes that the preaching event implies the goals of evangelism and discipleship, and that repentance and obedience to God's word are prerequisites to these outcomes.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations

The project must address a need in the ministry setting of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

The program time requirements will not allow for an extended time of development to

measure the overall effectiveness of the plan but will allow for initial qualitative feedback from both the lay panel and the expert panel. The skill enhancement model allows only limited collection of quantitative and the ability to determine outcomes is subjective.

Delimitations

The project director chose a skill enhancement project model rather than the other project models. The project director decided to focus on the sermon invitation, rather than the other components of the sermon. The project director chose to limit the project to formulating a plan to develop evangelistic sermon invitations. The project director did not include a plan to enhance the application of the sermon to the lives of his believing audience. Additionally, the project director chose to limit his study of invitational methodologies to the top-growing churches in the U.S.

Definition of Terms

Expository Preaching

“Christ Centered, text driven, Spirit led preaching that transforms lives.”²⁰

Evangelistic Invitation

“A persuasive call, issued at the conclusion of a sermon, for listeners to respond immediately to the Gospel by repenting from sin and trusting in Christ for salvation.”²¹

²⁰ Daniel L. Akin, William J. Curtis, Stephen N. Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011) 2.

²¹ The project director’s own definition, based upon biblical, historical, and academic research on the subject.

Conclusion

The project director believes the enhancement of the preaching skill of delivering an invitation at the conclusion of an expository sermon will benefit the ministry of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church. Thorough research will reveal both the necessity of the invitation, and the proper methods that the project director should utilize in his preaching ministry. The development of a plan for skill enhancement will allow for qualitative and quantitative evaluation. As a result, the project director will grow in his ability to issue a call to respond in faith to the sermons he preaches at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 2 BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

From the Old Testament prophets, to the apostles, biblical preachers made use of the invitation at the conclusion of their messages. In a dramatic demonstration of the judgment of Yahweh, Moses stood at the entrance of the camp of the rebellious Israelites and called the faithful men in the camp to join him where he stood. Moses exhorted his people to obey the proclamation of God's word (Deut 30:2). Smith notices four major elements in Moses' preaching: explanation, illustration, application, and exhortation. All biblical preachers build upon the stylistic foundation laid by Moses—even Jesus.¹ The Old Testament prophets utilized means of persuasion to call their audience to repent and obey the messages they proclaimed (Joel 2:13; Hos 6:1). Ezra the scribe gave one of the clearest examples of an Old-Testament invitation after reading and expounding the Book of the Law (Neh 8:9–12). Likewise, New-Testament examples of the invitation abound. Jesus of Nazareth was the master teacher and expositor who concluded his messages with an invitation to respond (Matt 7:13–27; Luke 6:47–49). Peter and Paul demonstrated the same use of the invitation in their Apostolic ministry.

In this chapter, the project director will examine the biblical examples of sermon invitations. He will examine the literary and historical context of three selected texts,

¹ J. Josh Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict: Recovering the Role of Exhortation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019), 60–61; 79–80.

noting the setting and purpose of each oration. He will highlight the features of the sermon invitation present in Ezra's oration (Neh 8), Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:13–29), and Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:37–41), followed by a brief overview of Paul's invitational style. He will offer contemporary application to the ministry discipline of expository preaching.

Ezra's Invitation

Explanation

One of the earliest biblical examples of expository preaching found in the Bible occurred during Nehemiah's administration as governor of Judea. In 445 BC, King Artaxerxes gave leave to Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah retells the story of the perilous rebuilding of the walls of the city in the first-person in chapters 1–7.² Then, in chapter 8, the focus shifts to Ezra the scribe's reading of the Book of the Law. Ezra and the Levites with him expounded the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures to the returning exiles at the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

According to Jim Shaddix, Ezra's sermon included translation, interpretation, and explanation for an audience which was culturally, linguistically, and generationally removed from the original text.³ These characteristics model expository preaching across generations. Mervin Breneman notes that the Jewish rabbis considered Ezra the founder of postexilic scribal and rabbinic activity.⁴ Ezra's example later developed into the

² David and Pat Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, 3rd edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 334.

³ James Shaddix, *The Passion-Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2003), 74.

⁴ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 10, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 58.

homiletical forms of Judaism practiced in Israel during the first century. Vines and Shaddix contend that the homiletical practices of ancient Judaism directly influenced the development of Christian sermon delivery.⁵

As the anticipation of the reading of the Book of the Law mounted, multitudes gathered near the Water Gate in Jerusalem (vv.1–3). The word “people” occurs thirteen times in the first half of chapter 8 with the phrase “all the people” predominating those references.⁶ The assembly included all ages of people who could understand (בִּין) the words spoken from the platform (v.2), including men, women, and children. Ezra read from the scroll for nearly six hours according to v.3. The ESV supplies the phrase “the people were attentive.” The Hebrew phrase literally states, “The ears of all the people were towards the Book of the Law.” The phrase implies both attention and discernment.⁷

In verses 5–6, Nehemiah describes the response of the people to Ezra’s reading of Scripture. The phrase, “Opened the book” (v.5) indicates that Ezra “unrolled the scroll,” since codices were not yet invented. At this unrolling of the ancient scroll, the congregation stood in reverence. Secondly, when Ezra offered his benediction to “the Lord, the Great God,” the people responded with a double “Amen!” The recitation of the Law followed by the congregational response of “Amen” causes the reader to recall Deut 27 when Moses renewed the covenant on Mt. Ebal, after the forty-year wanderings in the wilderness. Lastly, the people responded by lifting their hands, bowing their heads, and

⁵ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 19.

⁶ Breneman *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 223.

⁷ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, WBC Vol.16. Edited by David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 482, 498.

worshipping prostrate with their faces to the ground. These liturgical actions outwardly demonstrate the willingness of the people to respond obediently to Ezra's message.⁸

Insights for the Invitation

First, Ezra practiced the oral reading of the Scriptures. While many preachers would see this aspect of exposition as fundamental, a plethora of today's preachers claim to be orators of God's word while never reading a single verse of Scripture during their messages. Ezra grounded his message in the Scripture, reading directly from the Book of the Law from a wooden platform built for this purpose (Neh 8:4). While the congregation of Israelites bears resemblance to a contemporary worship assembly, the two gatherings contrast at the point of sermon content. While Ezra the scribe read from the Book of the Law, the content of contemporary exposition includes the entire revelation of God, driven by a Christo-centric homiletic.

Although biblical preaching does not necessitate a lengthy reading of the biblical text, it does require grounding the message in the meaning of the text. Landon Dowden says, "There is nothing better for God's people than God's word."⁹ Meyer states that true shepherding only occurs through text-driven preaching: "The preacher as steward and herald must say what the text says, and the preacher as shepherd must lead the people where the text leads."¹⁰ The proper interpretation of the biblical text gave Ezra's invitation to obedience validity and authority.

⁸ Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 225.

⁹ Landon Dowden, Ph.D., The Church at Trace Crossing. <http://www.tracecrossing.org/#/about-us/staff>.

¹⁰ Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 261.

Second, Ezra’s companions provided the interpretation of the written text for the audience. G. Campbell Morgan suggests these thirteen Levites broke up the larger group into smaller cell groups for this purpose.¹¹ Ezra preached to a post-exilic audience, at least twenty generations removed from the original Sinai covenant (Matt 1:17), and, for many listeners, Ezra’s message was their first exposure to the biblical text.¹² The pual פִּרְשׁ (Neh 8:8) can mean “to be explained, decided” or in this context, probably means “to be divided into sections: expounded ex tempore, or, translated.”¹³ In other words, Ezra and the Levites broke the text down into paragraphs and gave the interpretation, thought by thought, of the Book of the Law. Williamson highlights the fundamental thought of Neh 8: “Reading with explanation leads to understanding, and this is a source of joy; understanding, however, should issue in obedience, and this in turn will end in joy.”¹⁴ The Levitical work focused on insuring the proper understanding and communication (פִּיר) of the Book of the Law. When the preacher of God’s word forgoes the crucial step of explanation, he invites his listeners to respond to a message they never received.

Thirdly, not only did Ezra read and explain the biblical text, he and the Levites made contemporary application of the text. Once Ezra read and the scribes interpreted, they communicated the “meaning” or “insight” (פִּיר) of the text to the congregation.¹⁵ The congregation wept as they heard the Word of God preached for the first time,

¹¹ James E. Smith, “The Books of History,” *Old Testament Survey Series* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 742.

¹² Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 58.

¹³ William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 299.

¹⁴ Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 283.

¹⁵ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

demonstrating heartfelt repentance and remorse over their previous failures.¹⁶ Then the people went away rejoicing that “they had understood the words declared to them” (Neh 8:12). Ezra practiced a strategy that Keller calls “preaching to the heart”.¹⁷ Application serves as the bridge between the biblical text and the invitation’s call to obedience.

Lastly, Ezra went beyond the simple exposition of the text. Ezra’s preaching commanded a response from the people to behave accordingly. The people responded in universal obedience to Ezra’s invitation. Neh 8:6 says, “And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.” Nehemiah noticed immediately after the reading the Torah that the date of his public reading corresponded with the prescribed date for the Feasts of Booths. Nehemiah then gave specific instructions for his listeners to observe the holiday in obedience to the Scriptures. Without delay, the post-exilic Jews celebrated the feast for the first time in response to Ezra’s message. Ezra extended an invitation to obey the message of the text, and the congregation willingly submitted to the authority of Scripture.

Jesus’ Invitation in the Sermon on the Mount

Explanation

Jesus began his earthly ministry by preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:12–17).¹⁸ Jesus regularly engaged in text-driven, biblical, expository preaching,

¹⁶ *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, 337.

¹⁷ Tim Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 193.

¹⁸ Tony Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 5.

while demonstrating that he himself is the revealed Word of God. On the road to Emmaus, Cleopas and another disciple experienced the greatest exposition of the Old Testament in history when Jesus “... beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, ... *interpreted* to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,” (Luke 24:27 ESV). Akin, Allen, and Matthews note that the word διεμήνευσεν, rendered “interpreted” (ESV) and “expounded” (NKJV), is the root for the English word *hermeneutics*.¹⁹ Throughout his preaching ministry, Jesus utilized the public invitation and called his hearers to repent, to trust, and to follow him (e.g., Matt 7:13–27; 11:28, Mark 1:14–15; 8:34).

Matthew’s Gospel preserves a clear example of Christ’s superior ability to expound Scripture in The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Jesus proclaimed the revelation of God as well as clarified and expounded the Old Testament for his audience during the sermon. The expositional formula that Jesus used, “You have heard it said... but I say to you...” demonstrates not only Jesus’ superior knowledge of the Scriptures, but his authority to clarify the meaning of the text for his audience (vv. 28–29). In his conclusion, Jesus offers a dramatic invitation for his listeners to respond with radical obedience (7:13–27).

Jesus concluded the sermon with a group of illustrations which Guelich calls a “series of admonitions,” calling his hearers to respond positively to his sermon.²⁰ Guelich sees three distinct literary subsections of 7:13–27. Jesus began his invitation with an

¹⁹ Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 28.

²⁰ Robert A. Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: W Pub Group, 1982), 384.

exhortation to enter the narrow gate (7:13–14). Next, Jesus issued a two-part warning— firstly, that false prophets will arise, and secondly, of the real threat of being led down the wrong way by false prophets (7:15–23). Finally, Jesus closed with the parable of the two foundations to illustrate the gravity of the decision at hand (7:24–27). Guelich upholds the literary unity of the passage demonstrating that the warnings of vv.15–20 belong in the greater context of Jesus’ concluding admonition.²¹

Blomberg also sees three concluding “illustrations” which each reinforce the necessity of obedience to Christ’s words. The first category in each case (the narrow way, the tree bearing good fruit, and the solid foundation) all refer to those who hear and obey resulting in salvation. The converse in each illustration portrays the sad state of listeners who only hear but do not obey the words of Jesus. In each illustration, these disobedient listeners are ultimately destroyed.²²

The First Admonition: The Wide and the Narrow Way (vv.13–14)

Jesus begins with his first admonition, warning against the dangers of following the crowd down the pathway to destruction. Carson contends that εὐρύχωρος should be translated “broad” rather than “easy,” contrasting the exclusive nature of the truth against the destructive inclusiveness of deception. Stott notes that Jesus only provides one choice and excludes the possibility of syncretistic avoidance of choice.²³ Jesus frames the singular choice between these two paths with antithetical parallelism (vv.13–14).²⁴

²¹ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding*, 385

²² Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, Vol. 22, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 131.

²³ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture* (Nottingham, England: 2008), 193.

²⁴ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding*, 407.

Carson makes a few observations from Jesus' metaphor.²⁵ First, God's way to life restricts access. The narrow road provides no room for selfish ambition or personal opinions. However, Carson highlights the joys of traveling upon the narrow road that ultimately leads to life. Secondly, the majority opinion leads away from the path of life. Carson contends that, ultimately, relatively few people will find salvation, while the majority will be forever lost. However, Jesus shifted concern from precise statistical information to concern for personal salvation. Thirdly, a desire to please the masses will lead away from the path to life. In a sense, hearers of God's Word who choose the narrow way, not only reject "herd mentality" but embrace counter-culturalism. Fourthly, Carson notes that the two ways are not ends in themselves, but both lead to eternal destinations: heaven or hell. Finally, Carson insists that Christ limits the options to only two ways.

The Second Admonition: Good and Bad Fruit (vv.15–23)

The second admonition begins with the second-person plural "beware" (προσέχετε), which prompts the listener to the warnings that proceed. Jesus' two-part warning highlights the reality of "Christians" who will masquerade as true followers, but inwardly reject his teaching.²⁶ While Carson sees two separate illustrations in the "Two Trees" (vv.15–20) and the "Two Claims" (vv.21–23)²⁷, Guelich demonstrates how the two illustrations form a literary unit warning against false discipleship.²⁸

²⁵ Donald A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 130–133.

²⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 132.

²⁷ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 134–140.

²⁸ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding*, 385.

Jesus warns his listeners that false prophets will arise to lead unsuspecting sheep away from the truth (v.15). Stott asserts that Jesus warned of false prophets because they already existed when Jesus was delivering the sermon, and Jesus regarded the Sadducees and Pharisees as false prophets.²⁹ Stott also demonstrates that Jesus' warning against false prophets leaves no room for syncretistic appropriation. Jesus makes exclusive claims to truth and calls his listeners to avoid the deception of the false prophets by responding obediently to the truth he proclaims.³⁰

Jesus equips his listeners to distinguish between true and false prophets by examining their fruit (v.20). The "diseased tree" (false prophet) will produce bad fruit, while the "healthy tree" (a true prophet) will produce good fruit. Carson explains, "The fruit the Lord Jesus looks for is a life in growing conformity to the norms of the kingdom: righteousness, transparent humility, purity, trusting and persistent prayerfulness, obedience to Jesus' words, truthfulness, love, generosity, rejection of all that is hypocritical." Carson cautions against superficial application of the fruit test, in favor of a holistic examination of the prophet's life.³¹

The second half of Jesus' warning pertains to false "professors."³² Carson notes that these false disciples approach Jesus with reverence and orthodox language yet lack the essential characteristic of a true believer—obedience to Christ.³³ Guelich notes that other than this instance, the term κύριε appears only on the lips of Jesus' disciples and

²⁹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 197.

³⁰ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 198.

³¹ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 137.

³² Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 205.

³³ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 138.

those sincerely seeking him.³⁴ Stott comments, “They called Jesus ‘Lord, Lord’, but never submitted to his lordship, or obeyed the will of his heavenly Father.”³⁵ These pretenders claim to accomplish great works in the name of Jesus yet never experience true transformation. They mistakenly believe they will be accepted by the Lord on the day of judgement, but Jesus will ultimately reject them (v.23).

The Third Admonition: Two Builders (vv.24–27)

Jesus utilizes one last poignant illustration to convey the devastating consequences of disobedience to his message. Carson labels the illustration “Two Houses”³⁶ while Stott focuses more upon the quality of the foundations themselves.³⁷ Carson contends that the parable focuses not upon the foundations, but upon the two builders and their entire approach to building. Jesus contrasts the life of obedience to his words in the sermon with a life of disobedience to his instruction.³⁸

The first house, having been constructed upon the solid rock of obedience to the teachings of Christ stands firm against the rising tide. Jesus describes the builder of the house on the rock as “wise” and the other builder as “foolish.” Carson depicts the devastation of the foolish man’s home in vivid terminology: “a house shattered, pulverized and swept away by a vicious storm.” Jesus uses the storm imagery to cap a series of warnings concerning the judgment to come. Neither house escapes the judgement of the storm, but only the wise man’s house remains.

³⁴ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding*, 398.

³⁵ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 207.

³⁶ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 140.

³⁷ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 208–209.

³⁸ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 141.

Stott notes that both builders reside among the community of professing Christianity. Jesus uses the illustration to hammer at the conclusion that salvation is not merely based upon *saying* the right words about Jesus, or even *hearing* Jesus' words intently, but *doing* Jesus's will. "In other words," Stott writes, "whether the lordship of Jesus which we profess is one of our life's major realities."³⁹ The Sermon on the Mount offers a paradigm shift into the new Kingdom ethic, by which Jesus calls his hearers into radical obedience. Jesus urges his hearers to abandon any other way of life and surrender completely to the new way of life he offers. Jesus invites his hearers into a new relationship with God through himself as their Messiah. Acceptance of this radical transformation, by the repentant soul who responds faithfully, will culminate in eternal life in the consummated Kingdom when Christ returns.⁴⁰

Insights for the Invitation

Firstly, Jesus eliminated any idea that neutrality was an option for his listeners in the concluding invitation of the sermon.⁴¹ Hughes states, "The savior refuses to let his listeners bask in the grandeur of the sermon's thought. He knows that admiration without action is deadly, that conviction without commitment will dull one's spirituality."⁴² For preachers desiring to model Christ's method, phrases such as, "Today, the choice is yours," or "You must make a decision," find appropriateness during the sermon's invitation. Jesus left no room for contemplation without decision.

³⁹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 209.

⁴⁰ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount: Foundation for Understanding*, 413.

⁴¹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*, 205.

⁴² R. Kent Hughes, *Sermon on the Mount* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 241.

Secondly, Jesus used poignant illustrations to provoke the minds of his listeners. A good invitation will utilize means of persuasion which dramatically illustrate the pressing nature of obedience to Christ's commands. Carson admits that Jesus seeks to "frighten" his listeners into salvation.⁴³ While the preacher must never use illustrations to manipulate decisions, the use of vivid imagery provokes the mind's eye both to the urgency and the consequence of the decision at hand.

Lastly, Jesus never backed down from speaking about eternal judgement. Carson comments about Jesus' warnings of hell:

The real issue is the truth behind Jesus' words, the truth which prompts Jesus' warning. Either there is a hell to be shunned, or there is not. If there is not, then Jesus' entire credibility is shattered, for he himself speaks twice as often of hell as of heaven. The pages of the Bible strain metaphor and exhaust the resources of language in describing the holy delights of the new heaven and the new earth, still to come; but they scarcely do less in outlining the horrors and terrors of hell. It is variously described as the place of outer darkness, the place where the worm will not die, the place of exclusion and rejection, the place of burning and torment, the place where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.⁴⁴

Carson concludes that a proper understanding of the Sermon on the Mount acknowledges Christ's threat of eternal judgement.

Current Pew Research Center data shows that only 58 percent of American adults believe in a literal hell.⁴⁵ The staggering decline of the belief in hell signals a decline of the doctrine from the nation's pulpits. Ministers of the gospel bear the burden of warning their listeners of the dangers of rejecting the teachings of Christ, as well as the blessings

⁴³ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 142.

⁴⁴ Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, 142–143.

⁴⁵ "Religious Landscape Study: Belief in Hell," *Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life*, May 30, 2014, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-hell/>.

of following him. Jesus' sermon provokes those who extend gospel invitations to warn their listeners of the wrath to come and point to the way of escape.

Peter on the Day of Pentecost

By the first century, Jews from all over the Roman empire had returned and lived (κατοικοῦντες) in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). These Jews of the diaspora came together to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, or “Pentecost,” one of three great pilgrim festivals.⁴⁶ Lange notes that Luke lists fifteen countries represented by the crowd as Peter seized the opportunity to share Christ.⁴⁷ Luke provides a well-rounded listing of the various groups present: Jews and non-Jewish converts, Romans, sea people, land dwellers, and desert people.⁴⁸ By the first century, the day of Pentecost had evolved to commemorate the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and a yearly renewal of the Mosaic covenant.⁴⁹ Luke emphasizes that while Pentecost commemorated the giving of the Law for the Jews, now the day represents the coming of the Holy Spirit for Christians.

When the Holy Spirit rushed upon the disciples, the gift of tongues drew both attention and criticism from the diverse crowd who heard the disciples in their own languages. McKinny highlights the striking parallels of Acts 2 to Gen 11:1–9 and the

⁴⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 555; 558–559.

⁴⁷ John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, Victor Lechler Gotthard, Charles Gerok, and Charles F. Schaeffer. *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 33.

⁴⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 104.

⁴⁹ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition: New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 386.

reversal of the confusion at Babel.⁵⁰ Peter responds to the accusation that Jesus’ disciples were “filled with new wine” by preaching an expository sermon on the book of Joel, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110.⁵¹ Peter’s proclamation continues in the homiletical tradition of Moses and Jesus.⁵² Peter reveals Christ as the central figure of the Old Testament, and makes contemporary application of the truths of scripture to the lives of those present. When Peter states, “this Jesus...you crucified and killed...,” immediately, the Holy spirit convicted the hearts of the listeners of their sin, and they sought a way to be forgiven. The Holy Spirit empowered Peter to preach to the heart of his hearers and opened the door for the invitation.

In Acts 2:38–40, Peter issues a public invitation at the conclusion of his sermon. Smith sees the command to “repent and be baptized” in verse 37 as the application of Peter’s message. He designates verse 40 as Peter’s exhortation.⁵³ However, Luke’s inclusion of the phrase “many other (ἑτέροις) words” indicates that all of vv.38–40 exhorted Peter’s listeners.

Peter’s three-part invitation begins with the call for his listeners to “repent” (μετανοήσατε). Akin writes that technically, repentance is more than simply behavioral change or forsaking personal sins. Rather, repentance means “changing your mind” on the deepest level of belief and values.⁵⁴ Peter issues a call for these God-fearing Jews to a

⁵⁰ Chris McKinny, “The Location of Pentecost and Geographical Implications in Acts 2 (Acts 2:1–41).” *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. Edited by Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 86.

⁵¹ Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor*, 55.

⁵² Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict*, 84.

⁵³ Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict*, 83–84.

⁵⁴ Akin, Allen, and Mathews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 279–280.

radical new life which begins by turning to Christ. The result of that change will be “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8)—the goal of expository preaching.

Secondly, Peter invites his hearers to bear fruit immediately by submitting to believer’s baptism. The word βαπτισθῆτω literally means “to be dipped under.”⁵⁵ Most Jews would have associated water baptism with gentile converts into Judaism, “So when Jews accepted baptism in the name of Jesus on hearing Peter’s message, it was traumatic and significant for them in a way we in our mildly Christianized culture have difficulty understanding.”⁵⁶ Amazingly, nearly 3,000 Jews accepted the outward mark of their inward conversion to Christ that day (v.41).

Peter lists two results of personal conversion to Christ (v.38b). First, he says, “For the forgiveness of your sins.” On the day that commemorated the giving of the Mosaic law, Peter reminds the people that they were not law keepers, but law breakers. Sin results in separation from God, but Peter presented Jesus’ sacrifice as the means by which God would forgive their sins. Secondly, Peter promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who repent and trust in Christ. Peter extends his invitation to men, women, and children both present and non-present (v.39). Peter became an extension of the hand of God, reaching down and inviting his listeners to be saved. Streett expounds upon the word translated “calls to himself” (προσκαλέσεται):

I have frequently translated it as “give an invitation.” Any time you come across the word “Exhortation” on the pages of the New Testament, you have, in effect, an appeal made for people to come and stand with the

⁵⁵ Albrecht Oepke, “Βάπτω, Βαπτίζω, Βαπτισμός, Βάπτισμα, Βαπτιστής,” Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 529.

⁵⁶ Barker, Kenneth L., and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition: Two-Volume Set*, Edited by Verlyn Verbrugge and Richard Polcyn (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 398.

speaker in whatever it is that he is doing. This of course could take many patterns, all the way from a silent acquiescence of the heart where one is standing or sitting, to the waving of a hand, or the actual presentation of the person before the congregation. In any case, it is an invitation to decide.⁵⁷

The word appears again in v.40 in the imperfect, meaning that Peter continued to invite his listeners to respond. Peter gave ample opportunity for his listeners to respond obediently to his message.

This pattern of preaching did not end with Peter's sermon on Pentecost, rather continued in the early days of the Church. Luke states that the disciples "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The word "devoted" (προσκαρτερέω) means "to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty—to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in."⁵⁸ The early Church was intent upon the public proclamation of God's word in their worship. Their proclamation produced extraordinary results, both spiritually and numerically as "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (v.47). The Lord continues to add daily to the number of the saints daily through the gospel proclaimed.

Insights for the Invitation

Firstly, Peter preached from the overflow of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Heisler reminds the preacher reader that he must maintain a spirit-filled life to be spirit-led in the preaching event: "...if we are not Spirit led and Spirit filled in our homes and in our

⁵⁷ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 63—quotation of Page Patterson.

⁵⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 662.

communities, we should not anticipate being Spirit led and Spirit filled in the pulpit.”⁵⁹ Heisler emphasizes the crucial requirement of the salvation, calling, sanctification, and filling of the preacher of God’s Word. He states that many preachers who lack spiritual empowerment in the pulpit are simply not called by God to preach.⁶⁰

Secondly, Peter understood that God calls (προσκαλέσεται) people to himself (v.39) while the minister is merely an extension of the calling of God. God requires the minister’s faithfulness in the exhortation of his listeners, but the results are in the Lord’s hands (John 6:44). Knowing this truth enables the minister of the gospel to faithfully exhort with boldness and conviction continually, despite the absence of external results. God the Father calls sinners to salvation through the saving message of Christ and empowers the preacher through the Holy Spirit to extend the sermon invitation.

Lastly, Peter provided specific actions for his listeners to follow. After preaching a moving and convicting exposition of Peter’s selected texts, the people were ready to respond. Peter would have squandered the opportunity to reap souls for the Kingdom of God if he did not provide specific instruction for his listeners. Archaeological evidence shows that the use of mikvahs became common practice and widely used throughout Israel by the second century B.C., especially near the temple mount and in homes near Jerusalem.⁶¹ The availability of baptismal waters coupled with the powerful presentation of the gospel provided an immediate way for Peter’s hearers to signify their conversion.

⁵⁹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 68–69.

⁶⁰ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 72.

⁶¹ Benjamin J. Snyder et al., eds, “Mikvah,” *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Paul's Invitational Style

Paul on Mars Hill

On Paul's first missionary journey throughout Macedonia, he sought multiple opportunities to "reason" (διαλέγομαι) in the synagogues (Acts 17:2). Paul's conversations centered around the gospel, and many responded positively to his message. Some Thessalonian Jews, devout Greeks, and many women accepted Paul's invitation to join the Christian faith (17:4). However, some jealous Jews incited a mob against Paul, and circumstances forced Paul and Silas to separately journey onward toward Athens (17:14–15).

When Paul arrived in Athens, the spiritual condition of the people of Athens provoked him to preach daily in the synagogues and in the streets (vv.17–18). In verse 18, Luke writes that Paul preached "Jesus and the resurrection." Apparently, the Athenians understood Paul to be offering two new gods to their pantheon of deities,⁶² and desiring to know more about Paul's strange teaching, they invited him to speak at the Areopagus.

The Areopagus, also known by the Romans as "Mars Hill" provided a central outdoor gathering location for the Athenians. They loved to congregate and hear about new and existing ideas, as well as dispute philosophy and religion. As Paul addressed the crowd, he embedded his message within the cultural context of the Athenians by quoting from their poets (v.28). Paul offered a reasoned argument. Even the Greek poets portrayed the "Unknown God" as a personal being who created everything. Paul deduced

⁶² Polhill, *Acts*, 367.

that a created thing cannot represent God, but he is far above and beyond human imagination (v.29).

Paul concluded his message with an invitation for his listeners to repent and trust in Christ for salvation (vv.30–31). Paul’s invitation follows a four-fold pattern. First, Paul declared the grace of God, stating that God willingly overlooks (ὕπεροράω) the former ignorance of the pagan world (v.30a). Secondly, Paul invited each of his listeners to obey God’s command to repent (μετανοέω) (v.30b). Repentance involves a change of heart and mind. Louw-Nida defines μετανοέω, “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness.”⁶³ Paul believed his message has the power to effect spiritual transformation in the lives of his listeners. Thirdly, Paul pronounced the consequence of Judgement upon those who reject God’s offer of salvation through Christ (v.31a). Lastly, Paul presented the resurrected Christ as the hope and assurance of salvation for the sinner who repents (v.31b).

Paul in the Pastoral Epistles

The Apostle Paul upholds an expositional view of preaching in the Pastoral Epistles. Lea provides an excellent explanation of Paul’s use of the word ὀρθοτομέω (2 Tim 2:15), which means “cutting a roadway” or “building a path”.⁶⁴ Lea states that taken in context, the notion of “cutting” fades quickly into the background revealing the meaning of ὀρθοτομέω to “deal rightly with something so as not to falsify it.” Paul desires for

⁶³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 509.

⁶⁴ Helmut Köster, “τέμνω, Αποτομία, Απότομος, Αποτόμως, Κατατομή, Ὀρθοτομέω,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 111.

Timothy to perform his ministry well, rather than become a peddler of God’s Word (2 Cor 2:17).⁶⁵ Paul charges Timothy with the task of preaching, not based upon the felt needs of the congregation, but upon the life-giving truth of scripture. Paul encourages Timothy to labor diligently at his task (2 Tim 2:14) and give careful thought to his preaching (2 Tim 2:16). Paul admonishes Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2) with authority. Paul charges Timothy to be ready to preach “... in season, and out of season.”

Paul grounds his admonition for Timothy to “Preach the Word” upon the inspiration and sufficiency of all scripture (2 Tim 3:16). Paul advises Timothy that the scriptures can “make [him] wise for salvation” and that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...” (2 Tim 3:15–16). Meyer contends that the inspiration and sufficiency of all Scripture warrants expository preaching.⁶⁶ Robinson states that expository preaching naturally flows out of a high view of the inspiration of Scripture.⁶⁷

Insights for the Invitation

The student of the invitation may draw several conclusions from Paul’s homiletical approach. First, Paul preached the gospel in public places where both religious and secular people heard the Gospel message. Ministers of the gospel must never assume that every member of their audience has a saving relationship with Christ but proclaim the Gospel in a way that relates to both Christians and non-Christians. Secondly, Paul expounded (διδάσκω) the scriptures through a Christ-Centered interpretation (Acts 17:3). Paul writes that God has chosen the “foolishness of preaching (κήρυγμα)” to save souls

⁶⁵ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Vol. 34, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 215.

⁶⁶ Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology*, 273.

⁶⁷ Akin, Allen, and Mathews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 103.

(1 Cor 1:21). The accurate teaching and application of scripture provides vital spiritual nutrition to meet the needs of the Church. Simply put, Christians need to hear expository preaching. Lastly, Paul’s messages contained the κήρυγμα which Paul outlines in 1 Cor 15:3–4: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” Ministers of the gospel should preach Paul’s κήρυγμα as the core of their message. Thirdly, Paul used means to persuade (πείθω) his listeners as he invited them to respond to his message (Acts 17:4). As a result of Paul’s invitations, many of his hearers in Macedonia and Achaia became disciples of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Ministers of the gospel build their invitations upon the solid foundation of Biblical authority. The Old Testament preachers refined the four elements of explanation, illustration, application, and exhortation first practiced by Moses. Jesus followed the same homiletical tradition and invited his listeners to radical obedience in his concluding admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount. Peter concluded the first distinctly Christian sermon with a public invitation to “repent and be baptized,” and 3,000 people were saved as a result. Paul practiced and taught the discipline of exhortation throughout his apostolic ministry. The biblical writers clearly testify: God desires for preachers to invite their hearers to willingly obey the gospel they proclaim.

CHAPTER 3 MINISTRY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Expository preachers point the way to salvation through the proclamation of Jesus Christ. Criswell contends, “The proclaimer of the gospel ought to preach for a verdict. Moses did. Isaiah did. Jesus did. Paul did. Every great preacher of the everlasting hope in Christ has no less poured his life into that appeal that the lost be saved. We ought to preach with purpose and plead for a response.”¹ Citing 1 Cor. 14:23, Streett states the obvious reason for an evangelistic appeal at the conclusion of every message: “Every local assembly has worshipers who are lost.”² In this section, drawing upon the historical and contemporary examples of the sermon invitation, the project director will explore various methods of inviting response and establish the basic elements of a sermon invitation.

Key Resources

Hawkins, *Drawing the Net*

In his book, *Drawing the Net*, Hawkins provides thirty short chapters which describe the nature of the effective public gospel appeal. Hawkins roots each chapter in the Scripture,

¹ Wallie Amos Criswell, introduction to *The Effective Invitation*, by R. Alan Streett (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004), 13.

² R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 35.

while providing practical application for the sermon invitation. Hawkins provides an example of how to extend a public invitation in his Appendix A.³

Keathley, *Rescuing the Perishing*

In *Rescue the Perishing*, Keathley challenges the critics of the public invitation. Keathley demonstrates how the biblical, historical, and theological evidence places the practice of giving public invitations on a solid footing. Keathley refutes the hyper-Calvinist's objections to the sermon invitation and offers insightful evidence for the validity of the practice in today's churches.⁴

Pace, *Preaching by the Book*

Preaching by the Book is a helpful and practical guide to preparing and delivering text-driven expository sermons. Chapter seven provides particularly helpful information about "drawing the net" during the sermon invitation. Pace frames practical guidance with orthopraxy to provide a guide to delivering sermon invitations. Pace's section pertaining to the work of the Holy Spirit proves especially informative for the purposes of this project.⁵

³ O. S. Hawkins, *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* (Nashville, TN: Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2002).

⁴ Ken Keathley, "Rescuing the Perishing: A Defense of Giving Invitations." *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring 2003.

⁵ R. Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018).

Stott, *Between Two Worlds*

Stott's book serves as a practical theology of preaching. He organizes the book into eight main chapters with subheadings. Each chapter builds toward the production of a sermon that bridges the gap between the world of the Bible and the contemporary context of the hearers. Stott's work flows out of a sincere conviction that, more than anything else, today's church desperately needs Christocentric preaching.⁶

Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict*

Smith confronts the deficient teaching in sermon manuals and seminary classes on the discipline of exhortation. Smith argues that while teachers of exposition place much emphasis to explanation, illustration, and application, exhortation is never mentioned. Smith defines the lost discipline of exhortation as "a call for a verdict" and "an appeal to the will" necessary and distinct element of preaching. Smith concludes that without this element, an oration is teaching, not preaching.⁷

Streett, *The Effective Sermon Invitation*

Streett's book, *The Effective Invitation* is one of very few books dealing primarily with the sermon invitation, proving a valuable resource for the strategic development of the invitation. Streett traces the evangelistic appeals throughout history and provides guidelines for reaching the various demographics present in the preaching context with an

⁶ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture* (Nottingham, England:2008).

⁷ J. Josh Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic: 2019), 1-2.

evangelistic appeal. Streett provides the most comprehensive work available about the sermon invitation.⁸

Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*

Vines and Shaddix provide a comprehensive resource for sermon development and delivery in *Power in the Pulpit*. Their work begins with a theology and philosophy of preaching and moves toward the pragmatism of preaching. Vines and Shaddix also give attention to the development of the preacher as the instrument of the communication of God's word.⁹

Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*

Progress in the Pulpit is a three-part work on the development and delivery of an expository sermon. Vines and Shaddix demonstrate how Christ accomplishes His sanctifying work in the life of the preacher of God's Word. Vines also offers helpful insights for extending an invitation at the conclusion of an expository sermon in chapter ten. Vines defends the practice of extending invitations, traces the history of the invitation and concludes by offering helpful insights into the formulation of the sermon invitation.¹⁰

⁸ R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984).

⁹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999).

¹⁰ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit: How to Grow in Your Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017).

Historical Strategies for the Invitation

The Early Church

Tracing the Christian history relating to the use of the sermon invitation, the historian lands in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when Peter issued the first Christian invitation to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Stott outlines the means of persuasion employed by the apostles as “argumentation” (anticipating and answering people’s objections), “admonition” (warning them of the consequences of disobedience), “indirect conviction” (first arousing a moral judgement in them and then turning it upon themselves, as Nathan did with David), and “pleading” (applying the gentle pressure of God’s love).¹¹ C.E. Autrey writes, “...if a pastor fails to invite his listeners to accept Christ, he is departing from the practice of the New Testament church.”¹² The practice of extending evangelistic sermon invitations was well established by the end of the first century.

The New Testament authors demonstrate the proficient fusion of evangelism and exposition by the apostles. The early church devoted their attention to the Apostle’s teachings (διδασκῆν) (Acts 2:42). Paul’s primary focus was upon evangelism (1 Cor 2:2), and he used the scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament) to demonstrate the validity of the gospel—the Word which he received from the apostles (1 Cor 15:1–9). Wherever the early Church taught the scriptures, they explicitly proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting their hearers to respond in faith.¹³

¹¹ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017), 198.

¹² C.E. Autrey, *Basic Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959), 129.

¹³ Tony Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers*, Revised edition. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 55–75; 246–247.

The Patristic Fathers

The practice of evangelistic invitations continued throughout the second century. Alan Streett cites the patristic fathers who used the public invitation. By the end of the third century, the Patristic Fathers had replaced the practice of immediate immersion of converts with a more deliberate method. Converts underwent a lengthy process of trial and learning known as *catechesis*, which lasted up to three years.¹⁴ A single baptismal service per year held the night before Easter, followed by anointing and communion, became common practice until the early 800s.¹⁵ The prevailing interpretation of Hebrews 6:4 held that sins committed after baptism could never be forgiven by God. Therefore, converts often delayed baptism until they were near death.¹⁶

Medieval Preachers

Pre-reformation preachers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, and Patrick of Ireland, as early as the fourth century, practiced the use of sermon invitations. Gregory's sermons were characterized as powerful presentations of the gospel which appealed to his listeners to repent and believe.¹⁷ John Chrysostom of Antioch (347–407) became known as “John, the golden mouthed” for his gifted sermon delivery which moved his listeners to physically respond to the gospel. Patrick would gather hundreds and offer an evangelistic appeal. Nearly 120,000 people became converts to Christianity during Patrick's ministry. Despite these examples, the legalization of Christianity across the

¹⁴ Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1995), 270–271.

¹⁵ Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought*, 268–269

¹⁶ Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought*, 271.

¹⁷ T. Harwood Pattison, *The History of Christian Preaching* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), 60–61.

Roman Empire and the rising practice of infant baptism caused evangelistic sermon invitations to wane throughout the Dark Ages.¹⁸

The public invitation began to resurge just before the Protestant Reformation. The public call for repentance through an invitation to raise hands came into use as early as the twelfth century, during Bernard of Clairvaux's ministry.¹⁹ Peter of Bruys, a contemporary of Bernard and forerunner of the Anabaptist movement, regularly called for his listeners to "repent, believe, and be baptized."²⁰ Arnold of Brescia also stood for the gospel and believer's baptism, and the Catholic Church hanged him as a result. Peter Waldo and his followers often preached in marketplaces and on street corners. Their messages always included a public exhortation for repentance.²¹

The Protestant Reformation

Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli renewed the practice of evangelism, inviting their listeners to repent and receive Christ personally.²² Still, the Protestant Reformers widely opposed the use of public invitations and believer's baptism, viewing these practices as work-based salvation, preferring private instruction instead. During the same period, the Anabaptists opposed infant baptism and the Catholic priesthood. They faithfully called people to repent, place their trust in Jesus alone for salvation, and be rebaptized as a public declaration of faith. Their stance placed them at odds with the Reformers, and the Catholics violently persecuted the Anabaptists, as well.²³

¹⁸ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 82–83.

¹⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 85–88.

²⁰ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 85.

²¹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 85.

²² Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 82.

²³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 87.

The Puritans utilized the public invitation in their preaching. John Bradford, King Henry the VIII's appointed evangelist preached a strong message of repentance, and possibly invited public decisions. The Puritans brought the practice of sermon invitations with them to the New World.

The First Great Awakening

A renewed evangelistic fervor swept across Europe and America during The Great Awakening. Historians can trace the roots of the modern invitation back to the practices of the revivalists. Vines states that Edwards never called his hearers to come forward during an invitation, however, he did ask them to meet him privately after the service.²⁴ Edwards presented new converts before the church during the following communion service.²⁵ Whitefield followed the pattern of Edwards, adding an evangelistic appeal to come forward. Whitefield called for his hearers to respond in his evangelistic appeal at the conclusion of his sermon on *The Kingdom of God* saying, "Come to Christ, and he will erect his kingdom in you."²⁶ Eleazer Wheelock, the founder of Dartmouth College invited people to come forward during his services.²⁷

Many European preachers disregard the invitation as an American invention.²⁸ However, Streett demonstrates that after the Great Awakening, the public invitation gradually gained acceptance and use, both in America and Europe.²⁹ In England, Wesley

²⁴ Jerry Vines, and Jim Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit: How to Grow in Your Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 159.

²⁵ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 89–90.

²⁶ George Whitefield, *The Kingdom of God*, in Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 2, AD 1572–1900 (London: Hodder & Stoughton and G.H. Doran 1912), 314–15.

²⁷ Robert Tillman Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 47.

²⁸ Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 16.

²⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 93.

employed various means of invitation, always making a public appeal. He used “exhorters”—workers who gifted in evangelism—to keep watch during the invitation for “anxious souls.” When a worker spotted a prospect, he would approach the individual and plea for an immediate response. He would also invite “seekers” (people interested in the Christian faith) to join him for a mid-week prayer service as a public declaration of faith.³⁰ Wesley would sometimes invite “seekers” to come forward publicly for church membership. Wesley used prayer pews called “mourner’s benches” or “anxious seats”—seats reserved for people anxious or convicted by the sermon of their need for salvation.³¹

Like Wesley, the Separate Baptists in Europe used means for inviting sinners to trust Christ. Ministers would walk out into the congregation, shaking hands and inviting sinners to be saved while instrumentalists played a hymn.³² Streett concludes that the widespread use of the public invitation and renewed evangelistic preaching led to countless conversions in Europe and America during this time.³³

The Second Great Awakening

Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875), became widely known for his revivals in America. Prior to his work and evangelism, Finney became a successful lawyer in Adams, New York. He observed how frequently law books quoted the Bible and

³⁰ Howard G. Olive, “The Development of the Evangelistic Invitation” (Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1958), 15.

³¹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 92.

³² William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1961), 56.

³³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 94–95.

purchased his very first Bible, then soon after, began attending prayer meetings. In 1821, Finney trusted Christ and immediately left his law practice and pursued a call to preach.³⁴

After the Presbyterian Church ordained him in 1824, Finney began holding revivals around the U.S. and parts of England. He did not simply lead revivals; he actively planned, marketed, and promoted the event. Finney's unconventional methods and emphasis upon personal responsibility for salvation drew criticism from conservative theologians and hyper-Calvinists. Finney argued that ministers of the gospel should take the initiative through the use of means for man's conversion: "More than five thousand million have gone down to hell, while the church has been dreaming, and waiting for God to save them without the use of means."³⁵ Finney's work became an example for revivals during the time period.

To attract more converts, Finney introduced a series of innovations, called "New Measures," which included the "anxious bench," where would-be converts could contemplate their decision for Christ. Finney would invite seekers to join him in what he called the "inquiry room" after the service. Asahel Nettleton, a revivalist and contemporary of Finney recalled, "In the inquiry room individuals could speak with others without the excitement and pressure of the crowd."³⁶ Finney's introduction of his "New Measures" challenged the preaching norms of his day.

Finney drew critics from conservative circles for his new means and methods. Finney argued that both men and women had a moral obligation to be active in social

³⁴ Elgin Sylvester Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 143–144.

³⁵ Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History*, 144.

³⁶ Bennet Tyler, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of Reverend Asahel Nettleton* (Boston: n.p., 1865), 100.

reform. As president of Oberlin College founded in 1833, Finney led the organization to become the first college to admit both women and African Americans. The college was a vital stop on the Underground Railroad, providing support to runaway slaves who sought freedom in Canada. Finney also expanded the role of women in his religious services. He allowed and encouraged women to speak at prayer meetings, in the presence of both men and women, cutting against cultural norms. Other ministers condemned this innovation, describing the meetings as “promiscuous assemblies,” but by the end of the century, many denominations adopted Finney’s innovative methods.³⁷

Finney has also drawn criticism for his spurious theology among reformed theologians. Michael S. Horton demonstrates that Finney rejected the doctrine of original sin and distorted the doctrines of justification and atonement. He argues that Finney preached a gospel of moralism and adopted the heresy of Pelagius. He contends, “No single man is more responsible for the distortion of Christian truth in our age than Charles Grandison Finney. His ‘new measures’ created a framework for modern decision theology and Evangelical Revivalism.” According to Horton, “Finney became the father of the antecedents to some of today’s greatest challenges within evangelical churches, namely, the church growth movement, Pentecostalism and political revivalism.”³⁸

Finney’s work has drawn more criticism than compliment by many theologians.

However, Keathley refutes the hyper-Calvinists who associate the invention of the invitation with Finney as a gimmick to draw mass responses. Despite Finney’s

³⁷ “People & Ideas: Charles Finney,”
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/godinamerica/people/charles-finney.html>

³⁸ Michael Horton, “The Disturbing Legacy of Charles Finney,” *Monergism* by CPR Foundation 2018, <https://www.monergism.com/disturbing-legacy-charles-finney>.

theological errors, Finney became widely known for his innovations and for leading revivals. Finney led the way for ministers of the gospel to use means of persuasion for salvation. The errors of Charles Finney neither negate the necessity of the invitation, nor disprove the legitimacy of conversions which occur during public invitations.³⁹

Charles Spurgeon

Vines recounts how Spurgeon regularly invited people who responded to join him in a lecture hall where workers assisted them. Occasionally, Spurgeon extended an altar call and had respondents come forward while the choir sang “Just as I am.”⁴⁰ He used elders as “exhorters” to help lookout for anxious souls.⁴¹ Spurgeon would often lead people who responded in a sinner’s prayer at the altar.

Dwight L. Moody

Moody habitually called for immediate response during his invitation to believe the Gospel. Moody said, “Man is born with his back toward God. When he truly repents, he turns around and faces God,” and he called upon his listeners to do just that during the conclusion of his messages. He invited them to stand to signify their desire to trust Christ.⁴²

³⁹ Ken Keathley, “Rescuing the Perishing: A Defense of Giving Invitations.” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring 2003, 7–8.

⁴⁰ Vines & Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 165.

⁴¹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 97.

⁴² Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 42, 97.

Billy Graham

Billy Graham preached the gospel to more people than any other man in history.⁴³ Graham, himself, responded to Christ during the gospel invitation of Mordecai Ham, during a revival in 1934. Streett characterizes Graham's invitations as one of a kind and irreproducible. Early on, Graham utilized a progressive, three-step method of invitation. First, he would ask his listeners to bow their heads. Second, he would ask for those who desired salvation to raise their hands. Thirdly, he would call people who raised their hands to come forward to pray with encouragers. Later, his invitations became simpler and more direct. He would call hearers to "get up" and "come quickly." He frequently used the hymn "Just as I Am" as thousands came forward to receive Christ.⁴⁴

Some contemporary critics view the public evangelistic invitation as a modern emotional gimmick. However, preachers throughout church history demonstrate strong support for the use of the public invitation. The rich history of sermon invitations bolsters the use of the invitation by today's preachers.

Contemporary Examples of Invitations

Ed Newton is pastor of Community Bible Church in San Antonio, Tx. Newton regularly employs the invitation at the conclusion of his messages. The project director examined a sermon preached in August of 2015 titled, "It's All About Jesus." Twenty-six minutes into a thirty-five-minute message, Newton began to hint that he would extend an invitation at the close of the message. During the conclusion, he said to his audience of more than 14,000, "With heads bowed and eyes closed..." He appealed to the

⁴³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 109.

⁴⁴ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 109–130.

congregation for each person to consider if they had a personal relationship with Christ. He invited all who wanted to place their faith in Jesus for salvation to pray the sinner's prayer with him. After the prayer, he asked those who prayed to raise their hands, and "Bible-runners" brought a Bible to each one who raised their hands as a gift. The Bibles included information about how those who trusted Christ could follow up with their decision. He gave time for the congregation to recognize each person who responded, and after asking everyone in the congregation to stand, he dismissed with prayer.⁴⁵

Greg Laurie pastors Harvest Christian Fellowship in Southern California. He also leads Harvest Ministry Crusades around the world. Throughout the years of his ministry, more than 5 million people have attended his crusades, more than 500,000 people made spiritual decisions, and 2.8 million people have viewed Harvest's live webcasts.⁴⁶ On August 30, 2015, Laurie extended an invitation at Anaheim Stadium at a Harvest Crusade as thousands came forward from the stands to trust Christ. As the worship team played softly, he invited respondents using the words of Jesus, "Come to me!" He led them in the sinner's prayer, gave each one a new Bible, and offered a way for them to get connected to a church.

At Harvest America in 2018, Laurie used similar words more than thirty times, "Come just as you are!" and "Come to Jesus!" to invite his listeners to respond. Prayer counselors met those who came near the platform. After time for people to respond, Laurie led thousands in the sinner's prayer. He gave each person who responded a *New Believer's Bible* with notes about how to grow as a new Christian. Laurie concluded by

⁴⁵ Ed Newton, "It's All About Jesus," August 25, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDyAi0ELQdQ&t=431s>.

⁴⁶ "Knowing God and Making Him Known," 2018, Harvest Ministries, <https://harvest.org/about/>.

encouraging each new believer to connect to a local church by texting their info to a number he provided onscreen.

James D. Greear pastors The Summit Church in Raleigh, N.C. Greear offers evangelistic invitations during the conclusion of his messages. He preached a message on October 13, 2019 entitled “Love Indubitably”. During his conclusion, Greear closed his Bible and began looking directly into the audience. He asked, “Have you ever received Christ? Have you ever embraced his love for you?” He led his listeners in a prayer to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. He mentioned that campus pastors were available to help encourage those who prayed the prayer. He concluded by praying for everyone who responded. Greear powerfully executed an expedited gospel appeal.⁴⁷

Johnny Hunt is the former pastor of FBC Woodstock, Ga. Hunt held revival services at his church in 2013. During the message, Hunt offered an evangelistic invitation for those who had never received Christ to come to the front to pray with “encouragers.” He gave simple instructions for those who had “never been genuinely saved” to come forward and say, “I need to be saved,” as the band played. He promised those who responded would not be required to answer any difficult questions or be made to feel uncomfortable. He remained on the platform as the “encouragers” came forward to receive those who desired to trust Christ.⁴⁸ These examples demonstrate the proficient use of the evangelistic invitation in Christian circles today.

⁴⁷ James D. Greear, “Love Indubitably,” October 13, 2019, The Summit Church, <https://summitchurch.com/message/love-indubitably>.

⁴⁸ “Johnny Hunt Revival, Part 1,” Nov 9, 2013, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Ga, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTqA7wVZ-TQ>.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Invitation

The recent revival of the role of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation and delivery has breathed new life into the field of hermeneutics. Recent preaching manuals include sections stressing the importance of relying on the Spirit throughout the preaching process. This new emphasis on pneumatology begs the question, “What role does the Spirit play in the sermon invitation?” Contemporary authors on the subject provide some conclusions.

First, Spirit-led preaching naturally results in a gospel appeal. Heisler states, “What Spirit-led preaching is dogmatic about is that we boldly and unapologetically call for a response to the preached Word of God.”⁴⁹ The Spirit works through the preaching of the Word to convict listeners and convince them of the truth of the gospel. Pace states, “Through faithful preaching of the gospel, people are confronted with the fundamental truths of God’s holiness, man’s sinfulness, and Christ’s forgiveness.”⁵⁰ When preachers call for a response to the message, they cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit to effect life transformation in their hearers.⁵¹

Secondly, Holy Spirit power fuels the effective evangelistic appeal. Alluding to Acts 1:8, Hawkins reminds his readers, “Before we venture out to the place of witness and appeal we should make sure we ‘receive power’ and that the Holy Spirit has come on us in order that we may become effective ‘witnesses’ of His saving grace.”⁵² Azurdia

⁴⁹ Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 120.

⁵⁰ R. Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 103.

⁵¹ Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 120–121.

⁵² O. S. Hawkins, *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* (Nashville, TN: Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2002), 135.

asserts that the power of the Holy Spirit is the “*sine qua non*” of biblical preaching without which nothing else matters. He demonstrates that the Apostle Paul relied solely upon Holy Spirit power for the conversion of his listeners, rather than rhetorical manipulation.⁵³ Effective invitations result from hearts surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit and enabled by his power.

Rhetorical Elements of an Expository Sermon Invitation

Essential components of an expository sermon invitation include persuasion, exhortation, caution, and instruction. The various means employed by the minister must serve one or more of these purposes, or else, the means detract from the message. Devoid of these elements, the invitation short-circuits the gospel.

Persuasion

The New Testament herald of the gospel explained to his listeners what God expected of them considering the message preached. He then urged them to heed God’s command and be saved.⁵⁴ Green offers a potent charge to today’s preachers to call for a commitment like the apostles did:

So many Christians fluff it at this point. They duck out of this culminating moment of encounter. It is time to burn your boats...you will not offend them by asking, ‘Would you not love to get this settled once and for all this evening? It is very simple, but very profound. You need to surrender your life, the best way you know how, to Jesus Christ. Ask him to come into your life and take control.’⁵⁵

⁵³ Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry*, Revised edition (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2015), 98–99.

⁵⁴ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 39

⁵⁵ Michael Green, *Thirty Years that Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 138–139.

The persuasive preacher urges listeners to take advantage of the opportunity to respond to the gospel. The truth(s) of the sermon should lead naturally into the persuasion of the invitation. Vines and Shaddix state, “The invitation should never appear to be an addendum to the sermon but should flow naturally from its summation.”⁵⁶ Richard states that “By the end of the sermon the audience must have the answer to three important questions: *What* did the preacher speak about? *So, what* difference does, or should it make? *Now what* do I do with God’s claims in this sermon?”⁵⁷ Shaddix reminds the preacher that attempting to provide pragmatic solutions to all of life’s issues is unrealistic, and not the goal of expository preaching. He reminds the preacher to aim at authentic faith in the life of the believer.⁵⁸

During the invitation, preachers should attempt to break down resistance to the gospel, by appealing to the will of the listeners. Smith distinguishes between the act of preaching and simply teaching by one decisive factor: “Preaching calls for a verdict.” He states, “Preaching is not simply the truth and a service to the mind. Preaching is the delivery of the truth with an appeal to the will.”⁵⁹ Keller reminds the preacher that preaching the whole Word of God means “preaching to the heart.” He states that Paul’s preaching included not only reason and logic, but “moved people to life change.”⁶⁰ The Reverend G. Campbell Morgan believed that a good conclusion “storms the citadel of the

⁵⁶ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 215.

⁵⁷ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 115.

⁵⁸ James Shaddix, *The Passion-Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2003), 44.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict*, 1–2.

⁶⁰ Tim Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 193.

will.”⁶¹ Effective invitations appeal to the audience by demonstrating the benefits of trusting Christ.

Ministers must persuade but also guard against the manipulation of their hearers. Patterson relates Aristotle’s idea of *pathos* to the “passion” of Jesus. Although Jesus’ sacrifice was “emotional,” he was also intentional, reasonable, and determined. Patterson, therefore, defines *pathos* as “passion in preaching.”⁶² Patterson states that without *ethos*, however, passion deteriorates into emotional manipulation. Shaddix warns that the use of emotion without truth produces a temporary, emotional response to the message.⁶³ Likewise, Smith reminds the preacher that the “mood” of the sermon should reflect the “spirit” of the text of Scripture.⁶⁴ Articulating the gospel passionately and clearly allows its truth to persuade the listeners without the use of emotionally manipulative stories, illustrations, or devices.

Exhortation

Paul instructed Timothy to always be ready to *παρακαλέω* his listeners (1 Tim 4:2). The word translated means “to call,” “to beseech,” or “to exhort,” sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Streett demonstrates that the New Testament call to follow Christ was always accompanied by a request to “come” or “be baptized”—the outward expression of repentance and faith.⁶⁵ In contemporary lingo, “extend an invitation” or “offer an

⁶¹ Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 128.

⁶² Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 30.

⁶³ Shaddix, *The Passion-Driven Sermon*, 54.

⁶⁴ Steven W. Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons Like Scripture* (B&H Academic, 2015), 21–22.

⁶⁵ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 66–69.

opportunity” refers to exhortation. Exhortation adds urgency to the invitation—it calls the hearers to respond.

Caution

The gospel preacher must be willing to warn against rejecting God’s offer of salvation.⁶⁶ Paul instructed Timothy to always be ready to “reprove” and “rebuke” his hearers (1 Tim 4:2). Chapell states that all expository preaching reveals the “fallen condition focus” of the text and Christ as the remedy. Chapell reminds his readers that messages that merely advocate morality and compassion miscommunicate the gospel, and degenerate into Pharisaism.⁶⁷ Christ offers the only hope for a fallen sinner to be redeemed (John 14:6, Acts 4:12), and the consequence for rejecting Christ result in eternal judgment (2 Thess 1:7–12). The preacher of God’s Word only completes the task of exposition after he has warned of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation.

Instruction

If the application of the sermon answers the question, “so what?” then the invitation to respond answers the question, “now what?” Pace states, “As we conclude our sermons, we must be specific in what we are inviting people to do.”⁶⁸ Vines and Shaddix state, “If at no other time during the sermon, every person in attendance should realize ‘This is for me’ during the invitation. This instruction should resemble the instructions recorded in the New Testament to repent, believe, and be baptized.

⁶⁶ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 38.

⁶⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 273–274.

⁶⁸ Pace, *Preaching by the Book*, 105.

Ted Traylor advocates several different methods for instructing respondents during the invitation. The traditional method calls respondents to come forward for prayer with an “encourager” near the altar. The “Next steps” method invites respondents to “go out” rather than “come forward.” Respondents are invited to a separate area to tables to talk with an encourager in a relaxed atmosphere. Traylor also recommends the use of cards to record information to allow for follow up. Another method involves hosting a quarterly meal for new members and prospects. During the meal, the pastor presents the gospel, and a trained “host couple” counsels the people at their table and records decisions on cards.⁶⁹

Greear reminds preachers that decisions to trust Christ in the New Testament always led to immediate baptism. He advocates occasional opportunities for immediate baptism.⁷⁰ Dwight L. Moody once gave an impassioned gospel presentation but dismissed his hearers to consider the message for the week. However, that week, the infamous Chicago Fire swept through the heart of his community. Moody recalled that event as one of the great blunders of his ministry.⁷¹ The invitation must provide instructions for immediate response to the gospel, rather than leave hearers to consider the matter.

⁶⁹ Ted Traylor, “Your Church On Mission: 5 Ways to Give an Evangelistic Invitation” April 19, 2018, North American Mission Board, <https://www.namb.net/your-church-on-mission-blog/five-ways-to-give-an-evangelistic-invitation/>.

⁷⁰ James D. Greear, “Why Baptism Sunday?” August 12, 2019, *Baptist Press*, <http://www.baptistpress.com/53426/jd-greear-why-baptism-sunday>.

⁷¹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 161–2.

Fallacies to Avoid

The Extemporaneous Invitation

In *Drawing the Net*, O.S. Hawkins relates the moment of inviting someone to respond to the message of salvation to the ancient Galilean practice of fishing. Jesus called his disciples to become “fishers of men,” and Hawkins equates the invitation to respond to the act of “drawing the net” as the culmination of the fishing expedition.⁷² “Drawing the net” or “setting the hook” requires intentional planning and precision timing. Preachers cannot neglect personal preparation and intentionality if they expect a positive response to their sermon invitations.

Scholars agree that preachers often overlook the sermon invitation in their preparation. Robert E. Coleman comments that ministers “feel awkward” about the invitation and that seminaries fail to equip them for the responsibility.⁷³ Chapel states that preachers delay constructing a conclusion until they are worn out from preparing the meat of the sermon. As a result, preachers are tempted to extemporize (rationalized as letting the Holy Spirit inspire) that portion of the sermon that holds the potential for greatest impact.⁷⁴ Pace regards the invitation as one of the most overlooked aspects of sermon preparation by ministers of the gospel.⁷⁵ Ministers must allot equal, if not greater time to the preparation of the invitation as other parts of sermon preparation if their invitations will become more effective.

⁷² Hawkins, *Drawing the Net*, 11.

⁷³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 15.

⁷⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 260.

⁷⁵ Pace, *Preaching by the Book*, 97.

The Isolated Invitation

Streett points to a common fallacy relating to the invitation. He states that evangelical pastors often preach messages devoid of gospel content and conclude by inviting listeners to trust Christ.⁷⁶ Stott states, “We must never issue an appeal without first making the proclamation.”⁷⁷ In *Between Two Worlds*, Stott elaborates, “The request for decision without doctrine is an offense to human beings, for it is little less than a mindless manipulation.”⁷⁸ Streett explains that ministers of the gospel must proclaim (κηρύσσω) and explain (διδάσκω) the content of the gospel (κήρυγμα) before inviting listeners to respond.⁷⁹ Preachers fail at their task when they extend an invitation to believe a gospel they never preached or preach a gospel they never invite anyone to believe.

Similarly, Vines cautions against offering false hope that a prayer, walking down an aisle, or being baptized can save. Preachers must explicitly present Jesus as the only means of salvation for their lost hearers.⁸⁰ Streett states, “The job of the preacher is to point people to the crucified and risen Lord and call upon them to trust in Him.”⁸¹ The desire for public response can induce persuasive pleas from the pulpit. However, preachers must not superimpose the perfunctory matters of coming forward, prayer, and baptism, over repentance and belief.

⁷⁶ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 21.

⁷⁷ John R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 55.

⁷⁸ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 221.

⁷⁹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 22–25.

⁸⁰ Vines & Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 166.

⁸¹ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 31.

The Theoretical Invitation

The invitation provides the opportunity for personal response to the message of salvation. Streett highlights the necessity for personal appropriation of God's offer of salvation. He states, "So often evangelical preachers exhort their listeners to embrace the doctrine of the atonement rather than the Christ who offered His life as an atonement."⁸² Streett continues, "Until the hearer believes the facts of the gospel and receives Jesus Christ as his own personal Lord and Savior, the gospel message offers no hope for salvation."⁸³ Ministers of the gospel should invite hearers to personally receive Christ, rather than conclude their messages with summary material or general doctrinal statements.

Conclusion

Ministers of the Gospel have employed the use of the sermon invitation throughout church history. The gospel demands the use of persuasive means for the response for today's hearers. Christ calls upon his laborers to make reasoned and passionate pleas unto salvation. However, no means or measures can manipulate salvation. The preacher must remain committed to the authority of Scripture and submitted to the work of the Holy Spirit for the effectiveness of the invitation. As a result, the minister's message will result in lives challenged and changed for the glory of God.

⁸² Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 30.

⁸³ Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 33.

CHAPTER 4 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project director chose a skill enhancement model for the project to provide the opportunity for the project director to grow in his personal skill of developing and delivering sermon invitations. The project director also chose this model for the benefit of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, which is directly affected by his sermon delivery. The skill enhancement model also serves the purpose of Myrtle Grove Baptist church to reach its community with the gospel of Jesus Christ, because the project director developed his ability to evangelize the non-believing hearers of the sermon and invite them to trust Christ.

The project director accomplished four objectives during the implementation of the project. First, the project director defended the legitimacy of the evangelistic invitation as the conclusion of an expository sermon. Secondly, the project director identified various approaches to the development and delivery of a sermon invitation. Thirdly, the project director identified the characteristics of an effective sermon invitation. Lastly, the project director developed and implemented a plan for the delivery of sermon invitations at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church.

Through biblical analysis and historical research, the project director defined the sermon invitation as “a persuasive call, issued at the conclusion of an expository sermon, for listeners to respond immediately to the Gospel by repenting from sin, trusting in

Christ for salvation, and being baptized.” This definition reflects the essential elements of an effective sermon invitation the project director identified through research.

The project director compared and contrasted truly evangelistic invitations to non-invitation conclusions of sermons to see which approaches result in greater responses. The project director determined what attitudes and approaches exist among SBC pastors toward the sermon invitation. Research included an examination of the biblical examples of sermon invitations, a survey of the historical examples of the sermon conclusion, and an analysis of contemporary examples of the sermon conclusion. Obtaining this knowledge allowed the project director to establish the necessity of the invitation.

Biblical and Historical Survey

The project director began by searching Scripture for every example of the sermon invitation. The project director selected three primary examples of sermon invitations in the Bible. The project director conducted word studies on the various biblical words associated with these invitations, consulted commentaries and textbooks related to the topic of expository preaching, and developed a theological basis for the sermon invitation. A thorough exposition of each passage helped the project director establish the validity of evangelistic invitations and lay the groundwork for designing a plan for personal improvement.

The project director conducted a study of the historical background of the invitation, tracing the methods of sermon delivery from the early Church up to today. In addition, the project director researched current preaching handbooks and essays along with other relevant academic material on the subject for varied approaches to the

invitation process. This information allowed the project director to systematically categorize the various approaches to the sermon invitation. He identified the essential elements of an evangelistic invitation which included persuasion, exhortation, caution, and instruction. He listed the most common fallacies for sermon invitations today as well as the best practices for effective sermon invitations.

The project director categorized approaches to the sermon invitation into three basic categories: the non-evangelistic invitation, the somewhat evangelistic invitation, and the evangelistic invitation. The non-evangelistic sermon invitation focuses on changing the attitudes or behaviors of the congregants but does not specifically outline the Gospel. The somewhat evangelistic sermon invitation relates the invitation to the Gospel in some way but does not explicitly invite listeners to immediately receive Christ. The evangelistic sermon invitation clearly outlines the gospel and invites listeners to respond by repenting from sin and trusting in Christ for salvation. The truly evangelistic invitation calls for immediate response and warns of the consequences of inaction. The project director believes that the most effective approach for sermon invitations makes the gospel explicitly clear for the listeners. The project director chose the evangelistic sermon invitation as the model which he implemented at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church during the duration of the project.

Survey of Contemporary Approaches

Next, the project director surveyed the methods of the SBC's leading pastors who give invitations. The project director consulted with denominational entities to identify the

churches with the greatest per-capita baptism numbers in recent years.¹ The project director consulted with pastors from these congregations and documented their methods for issuing the invitation. The project director developed and utilized an interview questionnaire to gather this information.² The project director also evaluated the invitations/conclusions of these pastors utilizing the sermon invitation feedback form.

The project director surveyed LifeWay Research’s Outreach Top 100 churches to find the top growing churches in the US.³ For more than ten years, Outreach Magazine has collaborated with LifeWay Research to track the country’s fastest growing and largest churches. The organization contacts thousands of churches every year, inviting them to join their self-reported survey. They examine rapidly growing churches of 1,000 or more and rank them by a factor of both percentage growth and numerical gains year over year. Outreach Magazine creates profiles of 100 churches to help researchers better understand the dynamics of their growth.⁴

Outreach Magazine listed Lakepointe Church in Rockwall, TX as the fastest growing and third largest church in the SBC in 2020.⁵ The project director used the sermon feedback form to review Pastor Josh Howerton’s message from 1 Sam 3:1–11, entitled “My Sheep Hear My Voice,” which he delivered on August 16, 2020 at

¹ “2018 Florida Baptisms,” Florida Baptist Convention, 2018. <https://fbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2018-Baptisms.pdf>

² See Appendix D.

³ “Outreach Top 100,” Lifeway Research, 2019, Outreach Magazine/Lifeway Research Special Report, <https://lifewayresearch.com/outreach-top-100/>

⁴ “Outreach 100: The Definitive Guide to Church Growth in America,” 2020, <https://outreach100.com/>.

⁵ “Fastest-Growing Church in America.” Outreach 100, 2020, <https://outreach100.com/fastest-growing-churches-in-america>.

Lakepointe Church.⁶ Howerton stressed his main point that he wanted his audience to grasp: “God wants to speak to me.” As Howerton brought his message to a close, he turned his attention directly to his online audience, and he issued an evangelistic invitation for his non-Christian listeners to be saved. “God has spoken to you three times... it was the voice of God and now is your moment to say ‘speak lord for your servant is listening’... and here is what he wants to say to you: ‘I died for you, and I want you to be mine. I was crucified for you, and I want you to become my son or my daughter.’” Then, Howerton closed by inviting his listeners to pray a prayer. Howerton applied his invitation to Christians in a powerful way, without neglecting to evangelize his non-Christians audience.

Outreach Magazine listed Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, NC as the top growing and reproducing church in the SBC in 2019.⁷ In just two years, the church grew to more than 1,000 members. “Brandi,” one of the Mercy Hill’s launch team members accounts for the church’s rapid growth stating, “The Gospel being on display every week is truly the thing that God has used to bring about life change.”⁸ Andrew Hopper serves as the lead pastor of the newly-planted church.

The project director utilized the sermon invitation feedback form to review Pastor Andrew Hopper’s message titled “The Call of Every Christian” which he delivered on August 1, 2020 from 2 Cor 3:1–6.⁹ Hopper shared the “Big Idea” of his message early,

⁶ Josh Howerton, “My Sheep Hear My Voice,” Lakepointe Church August 16, 2020, <https://lakepointe.church/watch/?sapurl=LysxNmE4L2xiL21pLytrZzc4NHR0P2JyYW5kaW5nPXRYdWUmZW1iZWQ9dHJlZQ==>.

⁷ “Fastest-Growing Church in America.”

⁸ Mercy Hill Church, 2020, <https://mercyhillchurchnc.online.church/>.

⁹ Andrew Hopper, “The Call of Every Christian – 2 Corinthians 3:1–6,” Mercy Hill Church, August 1, 2020, <https://mercyhillchurch.com/functional-church-series/>

and later returned to that main point during his invitation. Hopper invited his listeners to “step over the line, come to faith, and get baptized this month.” Hopper challenged his listeners, “Get out from behind the internet and get into the water, and that’s what I’m going to call you to do.” Hopper continued, “The Spirit is knocking on your heart. It is time to let Him in, to confess your sins, to believe that Jesus went to the Cross so that you can have newness of life. Let’s do that today.” Hopper implements explicitly evangelistic invitations on a regular basis, and God has blessed his church with enormous growth.

Among the top-growing churches in SBC life, Outreach Magazine named Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, TN as the 65th fastest growing church in America, and the 10th fastest growing SBC church.¹⁰ The project director utilized the sermon invitation feedback form to review Pastor Mike Glenn’s message titled “A Disciple Knows Joy” which he delivered on August 9, 2020.¹¹ At the closing of his sermon, Glenn offered a somewhat evangelistic invitation. Glenn approached the camera and spoke directly to those listening online. Glenn utilized text messaging technology to invite his listeners to respond to his invitation. Prayer counselors were available to answer people who responded.

Defining Characteristics

Thirdly, the project director identified the characteristics of an effective sermon invitation. Through the study of preaching textbooks, journal articles, and guides to sermon delivery, the project director determined which factors and practices make

¹⁰ “Fastest-Growing Churches in America.”

¹¹ Mike Glenn, “A Disciple Knows Joy,” Brentwood Baptist, August 9, 2020, <https://brentwood.church/sermons/a-disciple-knows-joy/>.

invitations most effective. The project director also examined how the specific sermon topic affects the type of invitation given. The project director identified fallacies to avoid when extending an invitation. These included: “the extemporaneous invitation,” “the isolated invitation,” and “the theoretical invitation.” The project director delineated the role of prayer before and during the event. He identified appropriate vocabulary to utilize during the invitation and identified which words to avoid during the invitation. He worked to enhance the non-verbal communication of the sermon invitation as well, by keeping good eye contact, and keeping an open body posture. After defining these characteristics, the project director used these factors to provide a basis for analyzing the effectiveness of the project director’s own sermon invitations.

Implementation of Personal Development Plan

For the final stage of the project, the project director developed and implemented a personal plan for the improvement of the sermon invitation. The project director listed action steps to ensure the clear communication of the gospel, improve the movement and transition toward the invitation, and ensure clear instructions during the invitation. The project director added these steps to the sermon brief template he utilizes weekly during sermon preparation, under the heading “Call to Respond”. The project director followed these steps for his invitations beginning August 2, 2020. The project director also trained prayer counselors to receive respondents to his invitations using NAMB’s Spiritual Commitment Guide.

Sermon Brief Template

The project director listed these action steps under “Call to Respond” in his sermon brief template:

Call to Decision

- Persuasion
 - Relate the Biblical Truth to the audience’s fallen condition.
 - Remind them of the Gospel message (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ).
- Exhortation
 - Call for repentance from sin.
 - Call them to place their faith in Christ for salvation.
- Caution
 - Warn them of the consequences of inaction.
- Instruction
 - Lead them with specific action. Options:
 - Lead them in the sinner’s prayer in their pews.
 - Call them forward for prayer or counseling (walk the aisle).
 - Ask them to raise their hands in response.
 - Have them fill out a response card.
 - Share a number for them to text their response.
 - “Next Steps”—have them move to a private location for prayer and counseling.
 - Offer the opportunity for new believer’s baptism.¹²

The project director submitted his personal development plan to an expert panel for evaluation of the objective content and approval before implementation.

The project director developed a five-point Likert scale survey to collect response data from two panels of evaluators. The project director titled the survey the “Sermon Invitation Feedback Form.” The project director asked each panelist to watch and review three sermon invitations recorded prior to the implementation of the personal development plan and three sermon invitations recorded after the implementation of the personal development plan. Panelists recorded their responses anonymously on the

¹² See Appendix C for an example of the project director’s full sermon brief.

feedback form. The lay panel and the expert panel listened to the sermon invitations and submitted their evaluations afterward. Both the lay panel and expert panel evaluated the progress of the project director at the end of the designated project period.

Qualitative Feedback

The Lay Panel

The project director sought qualitative feedback from active members of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church. The project director enlisted a ten-member panel of evaluators through phone correspondence. Once everyone agreed to participate, the project director provided each participant with six written sermon invitation feedback forms for them to complete anonymously, along with specific instructions. The project director emailed links to six sermon invitations—three prior to the implementation of the personal improvement plan, and three during the implementation, but chose not to inform the participants as to which sermons were delivered prior to the improvement plan. The panel returned their completed forms to the project director's office, and the project director compiled the data that he received. He used the data to gauge his improvement during the project period.

The Expert Panel

The project director also enlisted an expert panel for qualitative feedback and evaluation of sermon invitations. The project chose three individuals who have experience in preaching and a willingness to evaluate objectively. The project director contacted the prospective panelists through email correspondence. The project director chose Dr. Brian Nall, Reverend Glenn Harrigill, and Dr. Christopher DeGeorge. DeGeorge who formerly

served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Tupelo, MS, became the Lead Pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in April 2020. He holds a DMin in expository preaching from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. DeGeorge focused his doctoral research on the sermon invitation. Harrigill serves as pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Vidalia, LA. The project director served in the Delta Baptist Association alongside Harrigill while the project director served as pastor of FBC Ferriday, LA. Nall serves as the Director of Missions of the Pensacola Bay Baptist Association in Pensacola FL. Nall formerly pastored Ferris Hill Baptist Church and Pine Summit Baptist Church in FL, and he holds a DMin from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The expert panel voluntarily agreed to provide objective feedback to the project director.

The project director emailed links to recordings of the same sermon invitations the lay panel reviewed. The expert panel reviewed the invitations, recorded their responses on the sermon invitation feedback form, and offered suggestions and feedback from an informed perspective through email and phone conversations. The project director then determined which areas to address for personal improvement and used the qualitative feedback to track his improvement during the project.

Quantitative Data

The project director compared baptism numbers during the project to the previously reported figures. The project director determined if individuals who were baptized responded during the sermon invitation. The project director determined how the plan for personal skill enhancement directly affected their decision to be baptized.

Conclusion

The project director demonstrated the prolific use of the evangelistic sermon invitation throughout history. He utilized the biblical and historical information he collected to design a personal development plan that guided the development and delivery of evangelistic sermon invitations within his own ministry context at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church. The project tracked his progress throughout the process through the feedback of the lay panel and the expert panel.

CHAPTER 5 PROJECT ANALYSIS

As a result of the project, the project director grew both in practical knowledge of the functional elements and purpose of the invitation. Prior to the research conducted in preparation for the project, the director had limited knowledge of the purpose and function of the invitation. Through the biblical, historical, and practical ministry research of the invitation, the project director became convinced of the proper place of the evangelistic invitation as the conclusion of the preaching event.

The project director grew in his ability to develop and deliver evangelistic sermon invitations through the implementation of the strategic development plan. By adding a practical process to the development of the invitation to the sermon brief template he utilizes weekly, the project director gained direction in the invitation planning process. The steps of the invitation remind the project director to include the essential elements of persuasion, exhortation, caution, and instruction into every invitation. The practical steps listed in the sermon brief also provide a reminder for the minister to focus upon the invitation as much as other elements of the sermon. The project director grew in the practice of prayer for the invitation, as well. However, an evaluation of the qualitative feedback and the quantitative data collected identifies several areas for growth that the project director still needs to address.

After a thorough evaluation of the project process the project director would have allowed more time for the implementation of the project. During the brief time allowed

for the project, the director saw moderate skill enhancement. If the time constraints were longer, even more improvement would be expected, and more data could be collected. Additionally, the project director would have provided both panels better recordings of the sermon invitations for review. On a positive note, the sermon invitation feedback forms proved to be effective measurement tools to track the project director's progress in the implementation of the project goals.

Evaluation

The Project Objectives

The project director accomplished four primary objectives during the project. First, the project director defended the legitimacy of the evangelistic sermon invitation. Secondly, he identified various approaches to the sermon invitation. Thirdly, he identified the essential elements of an effective evangelistic sermon invitation. Lastly, the project director implemented a personal skill development plan during the latter portion of the project. The project director improved his own knowledge and skills through each of these stated objectives.

The project director sought to demonstrate the validity of the evangelistic sermon invitation through a biblical background study. The project director found numerous instances of evangelistic appeals throughout Scripture. Beginning with Moses and the children of Israel, through New Testament preachers like Peter and Paul, God used preachers to invite their hearers into a faith relationship with himself throughout the biblical account. A survey of Christian history demonstrated that preachers throughout history also utilized the public evangelistic appeal during their sermon invitations. The

biblical and historical evidence warrants the practice of evangelistic sermon invitations in the project director's own ministry context.

The project director identified various historical approaches to the sermon invitation, some of which the project director had never encountered. Some of historical practices include praying the "sinner's prayer" in the pew, the use of "anxious benches," calling respondents to come forward for prayer or counseling (walk the aisle), raising hands in response to the invitation, filling out cards, text messaging responses, "Next Steps"—moving respondents to a private location for counseling, and lastly, a call for immediate baptism. The project director also identified the biblical vocabulary historically associated with invitations. The project director has adjusted his use of vocabulary during the sermon invitation. The project director grew in his knowledge of the historical background of many of the practices associated with the invitation today.

Through the biblical and historical study of the invitation, the project director identified four basic elements of an effective sermon invitation. The project director designated these elements "persuasion" "exhortation," "caution," and "instruction." The project director modeled his sermon brief and the sermon invitation feedback form to reflect the inclusion of these elements. The project director grew in his understanding of these rhetorical elements of the sermon. He also grew in his skills of including these elements in his invitations both in development and delivery as a result of the project.

The personal development plan caused the project director to evaluate the amount of time he spends praying specifically for the invitations of his sermons. Prior to the implementation of the project, the project director offered prayers for listeners to trust Christ in response to the sermon. Now, the project director prays more specifically for

people to respond according to the action steps chosen for the sermon. The project director began to involve the worship ministry team of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in these prayers before the preaching event. The project director plans to continue leading these prayers privately with the ministry team before every sermon.

Qualitative Feedback from the Lay Panel

The process of gathering qualitative feedback from the lay panel went rather smoothly. Panelists were respectful, timely, and offered meaningful feedback on their questionnaires. The project director enlisted the help of the Ministerial Assistant of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church to select panelists who were faithful attenders of worship and who had professional experience, internet access, and agreed to objectivity. The panelists returned their responses to the office of the church quickly.

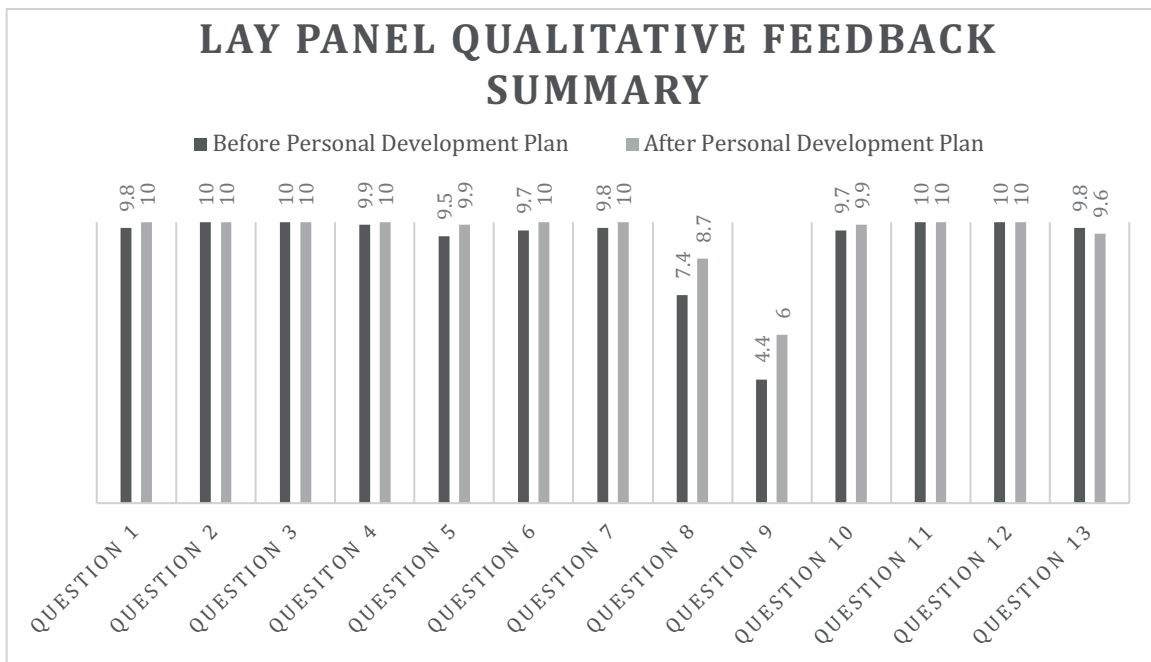
One limitation of the sermon invitation feedback form related to the subjectivity of the Likert scale. The feedback options ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” to the questions listed on the form. While some panelists utilized the full spectrum of responses, others never marked below a “3” on the form. The project director designed the questions to help minimize this issue, but some amount of subjectivity seemed inevitable due to the nature of the survey.

Another issue involved the use of internet recordings of sermons. Several members of the lay panel commented that the recordings of the sermon invitations ended before they could see how many people physically responded to the invitations of every sermon except the second sermon on the list. This only slightly hindered the feedback

from the lay panel, whereas most of the questions on the form related to elements of the invitation which were on display on the video recordings before the videos ended.

The project director compiled all the responses to his sermon invitation feedback form provided by the lay panel into one summary page per sermon. Using that data, he assigned ten (10) quality points to each question. Based upon feedback percentages, the project director calculated quality points earned for each question both prior to the implementation of the personal development plan and afterward. The following graph (figure 1) represents the results:

Figure 1. Lay Panel Qualitative Feedback Summary



Questions 1–4 relate generally to the presentation of the sermon invitation. Question 1 states, “The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message.” The project director received 9.8 quality points before the project and 10 quality points after the project.

Question 2 relates to eye contact and body posture, and question 3 relates to the transition between the body of the sermon into the invitation. Panelist gave the project director a

perfect score across-the-board for these two elements. The project director received a 0.1 quality point improvement from before the personal development plan to afterward on question 4, which relates to the connection of the sermon's Biblical Truth to the invitation. Overall, the project director received positive feedback from every panelist on questions 1–4 with only slight improvements during the implementation of the personal development plan.

Questions 5–9 deal specifically with the presentation of the Gospel and the exhortation to repent and believe. Question 5 states, “The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly.” The project director received a 0.4 quality-point improvement over the course of the personal skill development plan. One panelist responded to the director's invitations prior to the development plan, “I did not hear about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.” Although the study indicates only modest improvement during the project period, the project director is confident that his skills in this area will continue to improve in the future as he continues to implement the principles of the personal development plan.

Question 6 deals with the speaker's communication of clear actions steps to follow for those who respond to the invitation. The lay panel reported a 0.3 quality point increase over the course of the development plan. Prior to the ministry project, the director neglected to plan for specific action steps ahead of the sermon event. His lack of planning caused miscommunication of action steps and haphazard directions during the invitation. The addition of this element to the project director's sermon brief template reminds him to take time regularly to plan clear action steps for hearers to respond to the invitation.

Question 7 states, “The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation.” The project director received positive feedback on this question both prior to the project implementation and afterward. Through the study of the biblical calls to repentance, the project director chose to include this survey question. The project director desired to improve his use of vocabulary during the invitation, specifically with the use of the word “repentance.” The project director improved his use of this word by 0.2 quality points during the project period.

Question 8 refers to the element of caution during the sermon invitation. The panel gave the project director his second-lowest score on this survey question. The project director rarely warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation during his invitations prior to the project but saw a marked improvement of 1.4 quality points during the project period. Once again, the project director remains confident he will continue to grow in this skill.

Question 9 states, “The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized.” Question 9 resulted in the most negative feedback from the lay panel. The project director included this question as a result of his biblical study of invitations. A command to be baptized in the name of Jesus frequently accompanies the presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament (c.f. Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35–38; 10:48; 22:16). The project director became aware that despite the clear New Testament command to baptize new believers, and the preaching examples of Peter, Philip and Paul, the project director rarely mentioned baptism during the invitation prior to the project.

The lowest score the project director received, altogether, related to his use of the word ‘baptism’ prior to the implementation of the project. The project director gained 1.6

quality points over the course of the development project for this element—the greatest gain in any single area of the survey. The project director determines to mention baptism during every future invitation as a result of his study.

Questions 10–12 on the sermon invitation feedback form relate specifically to the speaker’s actions toward those who respond to his invitation. Question 10 asks if the speaker allowed adequate time for people to respond. Panelists commented that some of the videos ended early, so they could not view how many people responded to the invitation. However, the project director received mostly positive feedback on this question. The project director received a 0.2 quality-point improvement through the implementation of the personal skill improvement plan.

Questions 11–12 on survey resulted in perfect quality-point scores from the lay panel. Question 11 asks if the speaker was respectful and confidential toward people who responded, and question 12 asks if decision counselors were available to pray with people who made public decisions. Panelists comment that the project director always maintains confidentiality, and decision counselors were always present during his invitations. However, the project identified one point for improvement in this area that he plans to address. Though the project director made decision counselors available, he identified the need for more trained decision counselors, particularly female and minority counselors. Currently, every decision counselor at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church is a white male. Not only does the church need more trained decision counselors, some female or minority respondents may feel uncomfortable with white male counselors.

Lastly, question 13 asks about the overall effectiveness of the invitation in the opinion of the panelist. The project director experienced his only loss of quality points

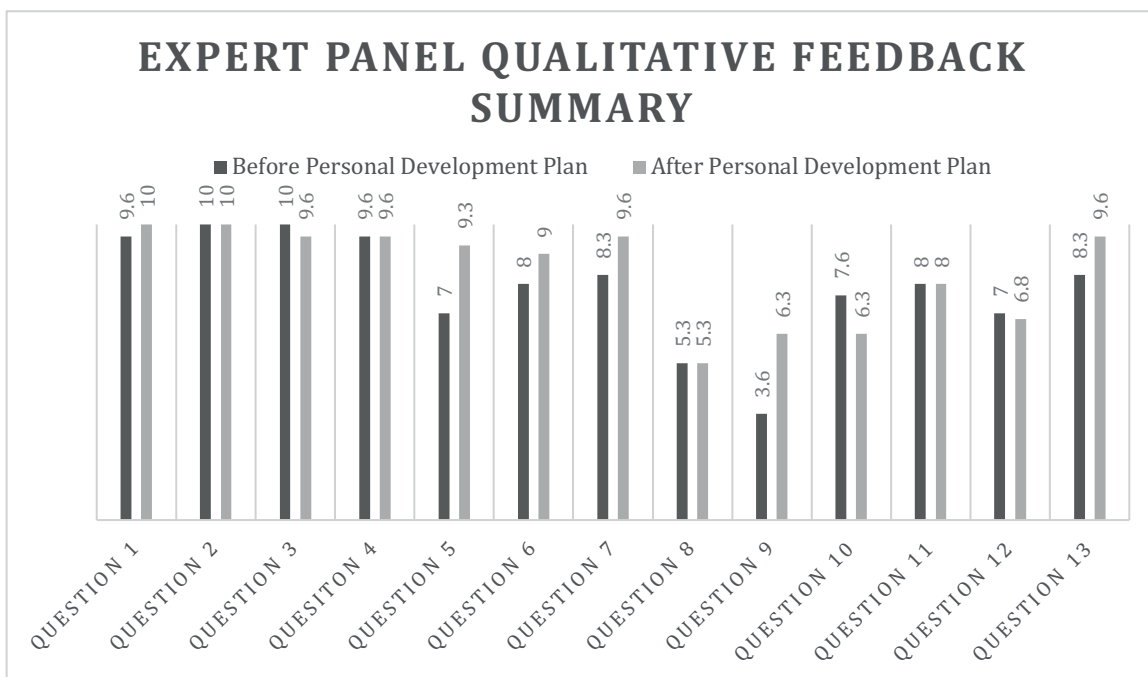
during the project on this question. The project director received positive feedback on this question prior to the implementation of the project. However, the project director lost 0.2 quality points after the implementation of the personal development plan. The project director theorized that, overtime, panelists became more aware of the functional elements of the invitation and developed a more critical eye. The project director plans to conduct surveys again after another six months to gauge his continued improvement.

Qualitative Feedback from Expert Panel

The expert panel viewed the same sermon invitations as the lay panel and provided expert feedback to the project director through the Sermon Invitation Feedback Form.¹ The expert panel corresponded with the project director through text messaging and email. The results from the expert panel were similar to results from the lay panel evaluations. The following graph (figure 2) represents the results:

¹ See Appendix G for a summary of the expert panel feedback data.

Figure 2: Expert Panel Qualitative Feedback Summary



The expert panel offered more qualitative feedback than the lay panel. Overall, the panel rated the project director lower on survey responses than the lay panel did. However, improvement in several areas during the personal skill development plan was much more clearly defined.

Questions 1–4 relate generally to the presentation of the sermon invitation. The expert panel rated the project director’s presentation of the sermon invitation—eye contact, body language, transition, connection to the biblical truth of the sermon—with nearly perfect scores. The results were consistent with the results from the lay panel.

Question 5, which states, “The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly” received a low score of only 7 quality points prior to the personal development plan. The project director demonstrated significant improvement through the implementation of the personal development plan according the expert panel responses.

The project director recorded a 2.3-quality-point gain from the implementation of the project.

Questions 6–7 deal specifically with exhortation and the call to action. The project director gained 1 quality point on each of these survey questions as a result of the project. Question 8, referring to the element of caution during the invitation received the second-lowest response on the survey. The expert panel indicated no improvement in this area during the project implementation. The project director recognizes his need for improvement in this aspect of the delivery of his invitations.

Once again, question 9 received the lowest score from the expert panel, just as from the lay panel. Question 9 states, “The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized.” The expert panel rated the project director even lower on this point than the lay panel with 3.6 quality points before the implementation of the project. This data confirms the weakest point of the project director’s invitation development and delivery. However, the lay panel marked a 2.7 quality-point improvement after the implementation of the personal development plan.

The lower scores recorded by the expert panel on question 10–12 resulted from a lack of adequate recordings for the invitations, a problem mentioned earlier in the project report. The lay panel offered feedback through comments on this issue. For questions 10–12, one respondent commented, “If the invitation was shown, I feel certain that each of these would have received a ‘5.’” Due to recordings cutting off the latter portions of the invitations, the project director could not achieve an accurate feedback result from these survey questions.

Question 13 provides an opportunity for the panelists to rate the overall effectiveness of the sermon invitation in their opinion. The expert panel provided good feedback both on survey question 13 as well as in the comments section. The project director received a 1.3 quality point increase on this question as a result of the implementation of the skill development plan.

The project director gleaned a few insights from the comment section of the expert panel feedback forms. First, the expert panel reminded the project director to keep his language understandable for non-Christians present in the congregation. Panelists offered additional constructive criticism on the point of clarity for “next steps.” The project director believes poor planning led to confusion in this area during his sermon invitations. Lastly, one panelist reminded the project director of the need to offer clear action steps or encouragement for Christians who need to respond to the sermon during the invitation. The project director benefited greatly from the feedback of the expert panel and will continue to heed the advice he received.

Quantitative Data from Baptisms

The project director hoped to see an increase in baptisms because of the project. When the project director became the Pastor of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, he saw no baptisms for the first three months. Then, in March of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic caused in-person worship services to disband. When services resumed in June of 2020, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church still had no baptisms. When the Project director began to implement his strategy for the invitation in late July and August 2020, he began to see new members joining the church and new believers coming for baptism. Though these

numbers were modest (five new members, four professions of faith, and two baptisms as of September 13, 2020), the project director remains hopeful the baptism numbers will continue to increase because of the ongoing implementation of the project's strategies.

Conclusions

Overall, the panels rated the project director well in his presentation of the sermon invitation. A survey of the data collected from both the lay panel and the expert panel reveals several areas where the project director improved in effectiveness in his delivery of evangelistic invitations. These areas include his use of appropriate vocabulary (i.e., "baptism," "repentance"), clarity in the gospel presentation, and the communication of clear action steps for those who respond to the invitation. The panel also indicated the project director's strengths were his eye contact, body language, transitions, connection of the biblical truth of the sermon to his invitation.

The panels indicated several areas for growth through the survey process. The panel identified the project director's weakest point which relates to his call for baptism. The project director also needs to grow more in his call for repentance and caution against inaction. The project director needs to include more specific instructions for next steps, including baptism. The project director remains committed to the improvement of the development and delivery of the sermon invitation, and moving forward, the qualitative feedback and quantitative data provides concrete information. The project director intends to continue conducting similar surveys to periodically track his continued improvement toward his preaching goals.

Project Director's Reflections

I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this project. From the initiation of the project, I saw a marked improvement in my confidence and delivery during the sermon invitation. I believe my ministry and preaching grew stronger as a result of the principles learned through the research and skill enhancement of the project. I grew in my use of vocabulary during the invitation of my sermons. I feel much more confident about warning my hearers about the consequences of rejecting God's offer of salvation. I am much more convinced of the necessity of the inclusion of evangelistic invitations in every sermon.

Sermons should reflect the heart of God for the lost listeners in the congregation. Authentic life-change only happens through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Invitations that fail to make the Gospel clear and to invite listeners to receive Christ, exclude the spiritually lost segment of the congregation. Through the implementation of the project, I grew in the disciplines of prayer and planning for the invitation. I learned that planning invitations takes time in the study that must become part of my weekly routine. I must not neglect to prepare for the invitation, hoping God will "move in the moment" as has been my method in the past. If I desire for my listeners to respond obediently to my sermons, I must become more intention in that effort.

I grew in the knowledge of my ministry setting because of the project. Half-way through the writing phase of my project, I accepted the call to become the lead pastor of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, FL. As a result, the DMin department chair requested a re-write of the background/setting research I conducted at FBC Ferriday for chapter one. I undertook to rewrite that section with frustration because of the time

constraints of the project. However, through the research of the history of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, I discovered the rich and vibrant missions' history of the church. I desire that our church re-establish the Hispanic ministry in our community, as well as revitalize our missionary efforts. The discovery of that information encouraged me and spurred me on in my ministry goals for Myrtle Grove.

The biblical research opened my eyes to the plethora of biblical examples of the invitation. The biblical language of the invitation is pertinent to the presentation of the Gospel during the preaching event. Ministers should employ this language if they expect their invitations to become more effective. I was also able outline the rhetorical elements of the invitation in meaningful way because of the biblical research. I utilized that outline in the development of my sermons through concluding segment of my sermon brief. I also learned from the survey of the biblical material regarding the sermon invitation that the Bible is an invitational book. God, throughout Scripture, invites people to Himself. He desires that all should come to know the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX A
SERMON INVITATION FEEDBACK PANEL INSTRUCTIONS

Sermon Invitation Feedback Panel Instructions

Instructions: Please watch the invitation portion of each of these six sermons and fill out the Sermon Invitation Feedback Form provided. You may email your completed forms to joshmorea@gmail.com, or text pictures of your forms to 601-941-2028. Forms may also be hand-delivered to Betty Scurlock at Myrtle Grove Baptist Church. Thank you very much for your participation.

Sermon #1

Date: 04/28/2019

Title: "The End of Your Rebellion"

Isaiah 1:1–20

<https://www.facebook.com/545172548926768/videos/328743771147926>

Begin at 4:45

Sermon #4

Date: 07/19/2020

Title: "The Attitude of a Christian:

Service" Philippians 2:19–30

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LR2LEdQDIcI>

Begin at 35:16

Sermon #2

Date: 02/02/2020

Title: "The Perfect Marriage" Genesis

2:18–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoJ1tOToy5A>

Begin at 1:00:50

Sermon #5

Date: 08/02/2020

Title: "The Attitude of a Christian:

PEACE" Philippians 4:1–9

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VQ6IJEJkeE>

Begin at 36:38

Sermon #3

Date: 02/09/20

Title: "Mommies & Daddies" Psalm 127

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PociFC39OvY>

Begin at 38:50

Sermon #6

Date: 08/23/2020

Title: "Out of Egypt: In the Meantime"

Exodus 2:11–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCv7oIZscEM>

Begin at 35:00

APPENDIX B
SERMON INVITATION FEEDBACK FORM

Sermon Invitation Feedback Form

Sermon Date: ____/____/____ Title of Sermon: _____

Please circle your response to each item with (1) indicating that you strongly disagree, through (5), indicating that you strongly agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:	1	2	3	4	5
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:	1	2	3	4	5
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:	1	2	3	4	5
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:	1	2	3	4	5
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:	1	2	3	4	5
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:	1	2	3	4	5
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:	1	2	3	4	5
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God's offer of salvation:	1	2	3	4	5
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	1	2	3	4	5
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:	1	2	3	4	5
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	1	2	3	4	5
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:	1	2	3	4	5
13. Overall, the invitation was effective:	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Comments Concerning the Invitation (you may use the reverse side of this page as well):

APPENDIX C

SERMON BRIEF: “THE ATTITUDE OF A CHRISTIAN: PEACE”

Josh Morea 08/02/2020 Sermon Brief

A. Foundational Elements

1. Sermon Title: The Attitude of a Christian: “Peace”
2. Text: **Philippians 4:1-9**
3. Subject: Peace
4. ETS: Paul pleaded for peace among the believers in Philippi and told them how to have peace in God.
5. ESS: **Christians are to be people of peace in a worried world.**
6. OSS: Believers will seek peace and pursue it.

Psalm 34:14 (ESV) Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

B. Formal Elements

Introduction:

1. There are two types of people in the world: Peace makers (Bring a sense of calmness to the chaos around them) and Peace takers (When they enter the room, they suck all the peace right out).
2. Can you grant a sense of calmness into the chaos around you? Do you make your world a more peaceful place? Or do you add to the strife? **Christians are called to be people of peace in the midst of a worried world.** You can change that today. God grants peace to His children when they pray.
3. Peace as the New Testament defines it is not the cessation of outward trouble, but inner turmoil.

Body: **In the midst of our worried world, Jesus offers believers...**

- I. **Outward Peace (vv.1-3)**
 - a. Explanation

Then: *In view of Who Christ is, and what He has done... Paul commands the Church to be unified...*

1. Cooperate – Remember you’re on the same team...
 - a. Paul calls his reader a “**yokefellow**”. Yokes were used to tie animals together and to distribute the weight of a burden. It’s similar to the relationship believers have in Christ as we work together to carry out God’s mission on earth.
 - b. Animals yoked together must work in unison to accomplish their task. They can’t decide to go at it alone. They can’t decide they don’t need each other. They can’t say, “I don’t like the way you smell; you are in desperate need of a bath!” They are locked together. And the truth is that they both stink, but they need each other.
 - c. Peace is necessary if they are going to get anything done. Or else they are going to be locked together in a tug of war. So, Paul uses this word on purpose to describe the church.
2. Coordinate – Help – Literally “**Grabbing hold of Together**” – pick up your end of the load.
3. Collaborate – the root of that word is **LABOR** – meaning we are **striving toward the same goal**. There is a SINGULAR goal in mind for the Christian, and we are working toward that Goal together.

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

People who are not on our team are the mission field. “Lost people act lost” quit getting bent out of shape about people.

- i. Truth: **Peace is necessary for the church to accomplish God’s will.**
- ii. Today

Sometimes we think our lives would be so much better if we didn’t have to deal with *this* person. The people in your life are not there by chance. God has placed them specifically in your life at that very moment, so that you can minister to them, and so that your example could be seen to all men.

- b. Illustration: I couldn’t hit Jenny when dad called her my sister.
- c. Application: Preacher, you don’t know how difficult he/she is:

You are right, but **you** are difficult. It will be the most difficult thing you’ve ever done to love and be kind to someone who doesn’t love you. Do you think it was easy for Christ to die for you while you were still a sinner?

Focus on each other’s good qualities rather than their faults and failures.

Speak a word of encouragement. Your tongue can cut or compliment, it’s your choice.

I. Inner Peace (vv.4-7)

a. Explanation

- i. Then: Christians are told not to fear 365 times in the Bible.

You either have **faith** or **fear**. You will either **worry** or you will **worship**, you cannot do both simultaneously.

Turn your worry into worship and your fear into faith...

1. Through Praise

- a. Rejoice in the Lord – “Paul’s praises turned his prison into a palace” – Adrian Rogers
- b. Be Gentle (**considerate**) toward everyone – Someone who is gentle toward everyone has no reason to worry.
- c. Worship Acknowledges two truths...
 - i. **The Lord is Close** “The Lord is at hand” – *They locked Paul in, but they couldn’t lock Jesus out.*
 - ii. **The Lord is in Control** “Known to God”
- d. Do not be anxious
 - i. “Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.” – Charles Spurgeon

1 Ti 3:3 not a drunkard not violent but gentle not quarrelsome not a lover of money
Tt 3:2 to speak evil of no one to avoid quarreling to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people
Jas 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable gentle open to reason full of mercy and good fruits impartial and sincere
1 Pe 2:18 Servants be subject to your masters with all respect not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust

2. Through Prayer – entreat God for divine favor, **ACKNOWLEDGE** Him in your circumstance.

- a. Supplication (begging for something) (**NEEDS**)
 - b. Thanksgiving – does your prayer life consist of **THANKSGIVING**?
 - c. Requests (things you are asking for) (**WANTS**)
- ii. Truth: **God grants peace of mind to those who pray.**
 - iii. Today:
 1. Many people think prayer is a ritualistic thing we do.
 2. The world thinks prayer is good for the psychology of a person, but it really doesn’t affect anything.
 3. We pray because prayer works! We pray because God hears, and acts upon our requests.

b. Illustration

John 14:27 (ESV) ²⁷ **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**

- i. **The world offers peace in a bottle or a pill.** A relationship that will never satisfy. Or in money, but the problem is that it will never be enough.
- ii. Jesus had perfect peace when the disciples panicked in the storm. He trusted the Father to fulfill His promise.

c. Application

- i. Give it over to God, and leave it there.
- ii. Let Go, and let God!

I. **Upward Peace (vv.8-9)**

a. Explanation

i. Then:

1. Turn your eyes heavenward and Fix your mind on your God.
 - a. True – having the quality of truthfulness, corresponding to reality.
 - b. Honorable – you could talk about it in front of your grandparents.
 - c. Just – fairness – doing right by others.
 - d. Pure – without mixture of sin or evil. (Garbage in – Garbage out)
 - e. Lovely – recognizing the beauty in God’s Creation
 - i. A minister and a little boy both wrote home after seeing the Grand Canyon.
 1. The minister wrote to his family... what a wonderful sight! I’ve beheld the majesty of God’s creation today. Such depth and color, and wonder!
 2. The little boy wrote to his mother... today, I spat a mile!
 - f. Commendable – praiseworthy
 - g. Excellent – as good as it gets.
 - h. Worthy of praise >>>> THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS

Paul is painting a picture of the mind of Christ using words.

Before the days of GPS, Sailors used dead reckoning to navigate close to the shoreline during the day by triangulating their position from points on the shoreline. At night, they used the stars to navigate the seas. Christians need focal points for their minds or else their minds will run off-course.

Isaiah 26:3 (ESV) You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

Colossians 3:2 (ESV)² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Romans 8:6 (ESV)⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

2. Practice these things... Give your heart and life over to the Lord in every way. God will give you peace in your heart in exchange.
 - a. Paul knew that whatever happened to him, he was destined for eternity with God.
 - b. The only way for him to have true and lasting peace, was to have peace with God.
- ii. Truth: ***The only way we make peace with God is through the blood of Jesus.***
- iii. Today:
 1. We give Jesus the throne of our hearts.
 2. Some people think they are alright with God, or that God is just alright with them, but they’ve never surrendered their lives to Jesus.
 3. They will hear, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

b. Illustration

i. Until we surrender to Christ, we are at war with God!

Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace
Over all victorious in its bright increase
Perfect, yet it floweth fuller every day
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding as He promised
Perfect peace and rest
Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand

Never foe can follow, never traitor stand
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there
Every joy or trial falleth from above
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love
We may trust Him fully all for us to do
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true

c. Application: The result of a **LIFE FULLY DEVOTED** to Christ is the **PEACE OF GOD**.

Call to Decision:

- Persuasion
 - We were once enemies of God.
 - Remind them of the Gospel message (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ). **Romans 5:8–10 (ESV)** ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
 - Christ is the greatest peacemaker the world has ever known.
- Exhortation
 - Call for repentance from sin.
 - Call them to place their faith in Christ for salvation.
- Caution
 - Warn them of the consequences of inaction.
 - If you never know Christ as the Peacemaker, Christ will tell you to “depart”
 - **Isaiah 48:22 (ESV)** “There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.”
- Instruction
 - Lead them with specific action. Options:
 - Lead them in the sinner’s prayer in their pews.
 - Call them forward for prayer or counseling (walk the aisle).
 - “Next Steps”—have them move to a private location for prayer and counseling.
 - Offer the opportunity for new believer’s baptism.

Are you ready to have peace in your life? Are you tired of the inner turmoil that sweeps your heart every day? It’s time to lay it all down for the PRINCE OF PEACE.

APPENDIX D
PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you have a typical format or favorite method you follow during your sermon invitations?

What factors led to your choosing this method?

Do you regularly share the Gospel during your invitation?

How do you lead people to respond to your invitations? (Raise hands? Walk aisle? Fill out cards? Text messages?)

What advice would you offer to a fellow preacher who would like to sharpen his skills for the invitation?

APPENDIX E
LAY PANEL RESPONSE SUMMARY

Sermon #1

Date: 04/28/2019; Title: “The End of Your Rebellion” Isaiah 1:1–20

<https://www.facebook.com/545172548926768/videos/328743771147926>; Begin at 4:45

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:			10%	40%	50%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:				20%	80%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:			10%	10%	80%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:			50%	30%	20%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	30%	20%	40%	10%	
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:					100%
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:	N/A				
13. Overall, the invitation was effective:					100%

Comments:

“#5. I didn’t hear the Gospel presentation clearly, however, Jesus as Savior and what he can do was stated. (Implied?) #9. I did not hear about baptism #11. Tape finished before someone responded #11&12 – no one came forward so these 2 were n/a”

“Great message on repentance and turning from rebellious actions and attitudes – gospel message not clearly presented, but it was stated that rebellion is forgiven through Jesus Christ. I do not know if altar counselors were present for counseling. Pastor’s call for show of hands for a decision to repent of rebelliousness was effective.” “Pastor Morea transitioned from his sermon into the invitation smoothly and effectively.” “No decisions in this service. Baptism was not mentioned.”

Sermon #2

Date: 02/02/2020; Title: "The Perfect Marriage" Genesis 2:18–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoJ1tOToy5A>; Begin at 1:00:50

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				10%	90%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:					100%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:		10%	30%	20%	40%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	30%	30%	30%		10%
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:					100%
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:					100%
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:					100%

13. Overall, the invitation was effective:					100%
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Comments:

“#5. Not sure if you expected me to ‘hear’ death/burial/resurrection in specific words. (?)”

“The Pastor ‘Josh Morea’ displayed compassion and sincerity with the individual who came forward during the invitation.”

“Excellent and very practical message! A call to commitment in marriage. Great invitation!” “Baptism was not mentioned.”

Sermon #3

Date: 02/09/20; Title: "Mommies & Daddies" Psalm 127

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PociFC39OvY>; Begin at 38:50

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:				20%	80%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:				10%	90%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:					100%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:				20%	80%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:	10%	20%	20%	10%	40%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	40%	30%	20%	10%	
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			10%	20%	70%
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:	N/A				
13. Overall, the invitation was effective:				20%	80%

Comments:

“#8/#9 = I did not hear it being addressed! 11 Tape finished and did not see a response! Recording ended before invitation hymn started, so #11/#12 and 13 are N/A. However, to the best of my memory I would mark strongly agree to 11, 12, and 13 if anyone came forward (I was present for this service).”

“I was no able to fully answer 4,6,10,11 because the recording was ended just before the response to the invitation. The recording ended after the prayer for salvation ended.”

“Pastor Morea stressed the importance of families and being a part of God’s eternal family.”

“Baptism was not mentioned. No decisions.”

Sermon #4

Date: 07/19/2020; Title: “The Attitude of a Christian: Service” Philippians 2:19–30

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LR2LEdQDIcI>; Begin at 35:16

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				10%	90%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:					100%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:		20%	20%	10%	50%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	30%	30%	20%	20%	
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:					100%
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:					100%

13.	Overall, the invitation was effective:				20%	80%
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Comments:

“Video cut short of actual ending. However, I was present during this service, sermon, invitation.”

“The recording ended before the invitation hymn began, but I was present in the service so to the best of my memory I would have marked #10 and 11 strongly agree if anyone came forward.”

“I am not sure of response to invitation due to recording being cut off. Every service, I feel Josh gives ample time for people to respond and wants to personally speak with them.”

“Pastor Morea stressed renewal of Christian service and blended his sermon perfectly into the invitation.” “Baptism was not mentioned. No Decisions.”

Sermon #5

Date: 08/02/2020; Title: “The Attitude of a Christian: PEACE” Philippians 4:1–9

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VQ6IJEJkeE>; Begin at 36:38

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:					100%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:					100%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:				40%	60%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:		10%		10%	80%
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:				10%	90%

11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:					100%
13. Overall, the invitation was effective:			10%	10%	80%

Comments:

“#11 Tape did not show if anyone responded.”

“recording ended before invitation song began so #11 and #13 are N/A. However, to the best of my memory, I would have marked strongly agree for 11&13 if anyone came forward (I was present for the service).”

“Again, the recording ended during the response time. I rated 10,11, & 13 from being present at the service. Counselors are present at the invitation time.” “No decisions.”

“The invitation fit perfectly with the sermon.” “Video ended before anyone could have responded.”

Sermon #6

Date: 08/23/2020; Title: “Out of Egypt: In the Meantime” Exodus 2:11–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCv7oIZscEM>; Begin at 35:00

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
2. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
3. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
4. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
5. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				10%	90%
6. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:					100%
7. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
8. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:				20%	80%
9. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	30%	40%	10%	20%	

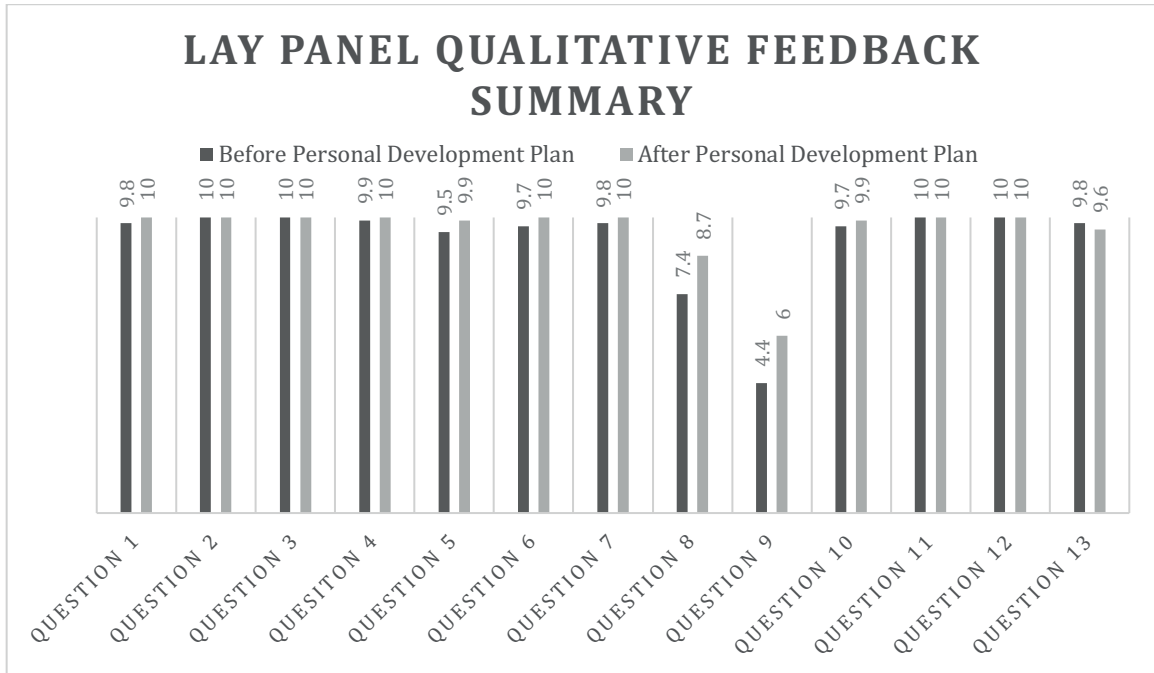
10. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:				10%	90%
11. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:					100%
12. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:					100%
13. Overall, the invitation was effective:					100%

Comments:

“#11. Tape did not show if anyone responded.” “Recording ended as hymn began, but service was recent enough that I remember how it went. 2 people came and it was handled very well, especially the fact that Pastor introduced new members and allowed congregation to meet them and share in their decisions. *best of the six recordings viewed*.”

“Pastor Josh Morea always stresses the importance of the invitation.” “Pastor Josh talks with each person that comes forward. I feel that is the time that he goes over baptism, then has altar counselors talk with them regarding baptism and becoming a member of the church.” “Baptism was not mentioned. No decisions.”

APPENDIX F
 FIGURE 2. LAY PANEL QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK SUMMARY



APPENDIX G
EXPERT PANEL RESPONSE SUMMARY

Sermon #1

Date: 04/28/2019; Title: “The End of Your Rebellion” Isaiah 1:1–20

<https://www.facebook.com/545172548926768/videos/328743771147926>; Begin at 4:45

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:				50%	50%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:		50%	50%		
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:		50%			50%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:		50%		50%	
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:		50%		50%	
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	50%	50%			
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:				50%	50%
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:	N/A				
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:		50%			50%

Comments:

“The only reason for the marks of 3&4 were due to the message begin directed to Christians in rebellion against God and not necessarily the lost coming to Christ. Great message and very good invitation. Reveals the heart of the pastor.”

“The segmented response time came across confusing. For someone not familiar with invitation time, it could be confusing. Gospel wasn’t clearly laid out, yet a response was made.”

Sermon #2

Date: 02/02/2020; Title: "The Perfect Marriage" Genesis 2:18–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoJ1tOToy5A>; Begin at 1:00:50

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				50%	50%
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:					100%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:				50%	50%
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:			50%	50%	
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	50%	50%			
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			50%		50%
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:			50%		50%
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:		50%			50%
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:				50%	50%

Comments:

“Be careful on theological terms left undefined – ‘sanctification’”

“Clearest action steps compared to other messages”

“Video does not show 10–12”

Sermon #3

Date: 02/09/20; Title: "Mommies & Daddies" Psalm 127

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PociFC39OvY>; Begin at 38:50

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:				50%	50%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:		50%			50%
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:		50%			50%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God's offer of salvation:	50%	50%			
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:		50%	50%		
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			100%		
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:	N/A				
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:				50%	50%

Comments:

"Gospel plan was clear; Video did not show counselors, Duration of Invitation, or next steps after invitation (can't evaluate)."

"Was not able to see the entire invitation, so some items are marked as 'neutral.' If the invitation was shown, I feel certain that each of these would have received a '5'."

Sermon #4

Date: 07/19/2020; Title: “The Attitude of a Christian: Service” Philippians 2:19-30

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LR2LEdQDIcI>; Begin at 35:16

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				50%	50%
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:				50%	50%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:				50%	50%
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:	50%	50%			
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:			100%		
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			100%		
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:			100%		
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:				50%	50%

Comments:

“Guidance for salvation pre-prayer did not line up with content of prayer.”

“Repentance was not mentioned or unpacked.”

“All of invitation was not shown in video—duration, counselors?”

“Next actions could be improved.”

“Same as sermons 3&4. If full invitation was filmed, all items marked ‘3’ would have been marked ‘5.’”

Sermon #5

Date: 08/02/2020; Title: “The Attitude of a Christian: PEACE” Philippians 4:1–9

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VQ6IJEJkeE>; Begin at 36:38

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:				50%	50%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:				50%	50%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:					100%
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:				50%	50%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:					100%
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:					100%
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			100%		
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:	N/A				
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:			100%		
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:				50%	50%

Comments:

“Non-salvation portion (peace) could be strengthened.”

“Did not see actual invitation (not on video) in order to evaluate ample time, respectfulness, & counselors.”

“Wasn’t able to see complete invitation, but as with the previous sermons, if I [were] able to see it, the ‘3’s’ would have been marked as ‘5’s.’ Bro Josh really makes it clear what he is asking.”

Sermon #6

Date: 08/23/2020; Title: “Out of Egypt: In the Meantime” Exodus 2:11–25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCv7oIZscEM>; Begin at 35:00

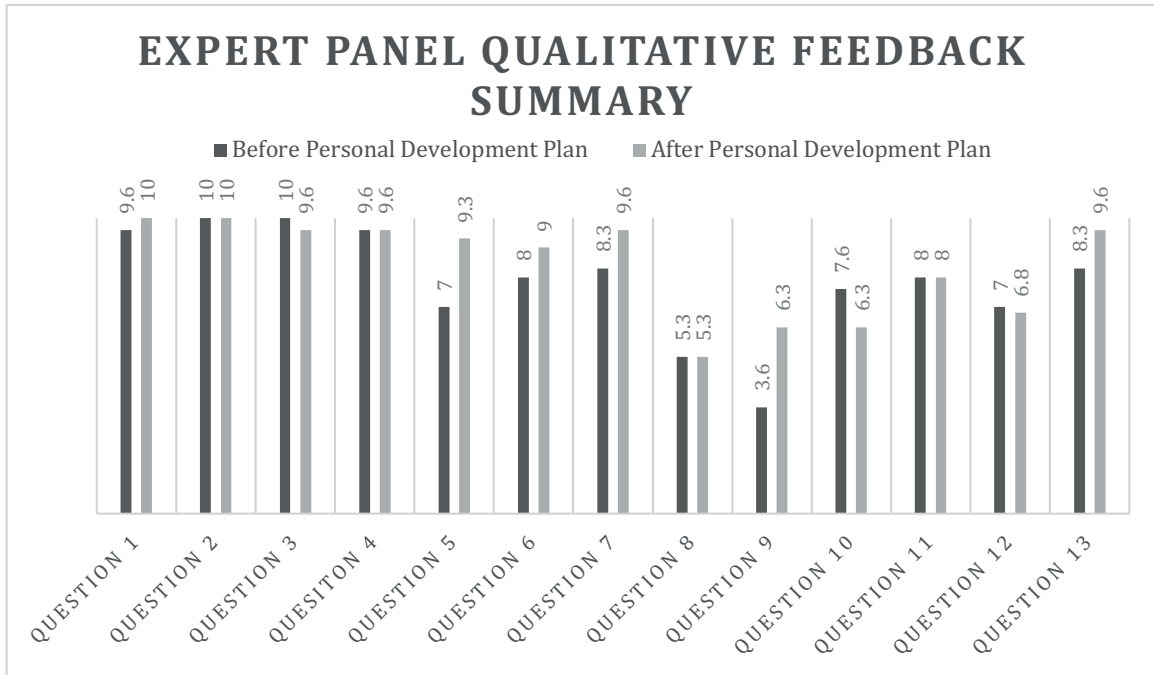
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. The speaker invited his listeners to respond to the message:					100%
15. The speaker maintained good eye contact and body language with the congregation throughout the invitation:					100%
16. The speaker transitioned smoothly from the message into the invitation:					100%
17. The speaker connected the invitation directly to the Biblical Truth of the sermon:					100%
18. The speaker presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly:				50%	50%
19. The speaker provided specific action steps for response:				50%	50%
20. The speaker called his listeners to repent of their sins and put faith in Christ for salvation:					100%
21. The speaker warned his listeners of the consequences of rejecting God’s offer of salvation:	50%	50%			
22. The speaker invited his listeners to be baptized:	50%	50%			
23. The speaker allowed ample time for response during the invitation:			50%	50%	
24. The speaker was respectful and confidential toward those who responded:			50%		50%
25. Decision counselors were available to pray with those who made decisions:			25%	25%	50%
26. Overall, the invitation was effective:				50%	50%

Comments:

“Video did not show full invitation, can’t evaluate #'s 10,11,12.”

“More clarity on next steps would be helpful, 1. functional (come, counselors, etc.) 2. topical (guidance for non-salvation decisions).”

APPENDIX H
 FIGURE 2. EXPERT PANEL QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK SUMMARY



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VITA

William Joshua Morea

PERSONAL

Born: March 2, 1984, Jackson, MS

Parents: William and Kellone Morea

Married: Allison Nicole Morea

Children: Aaron Taylor, Caleb Levi, Micah Andrew, Abigail Nicole

EDUCATION

M.Div., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010

B.A., Mississippi College, Clinton, MS, 2006

Hinds Community College, Rankin Co, MS, 2002–2004

Diploma, Richland High School; Richland MS, 2002

MINISTERIAL

Senior Pastor, Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, Pensacola, FL, 2020–Present

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Ferriday, LA, 2014–2020

Pastor, Arm Baptist Church, Silver Creek, 2011–2014

Pastor, Progress Baptist Church, McComb, 2009–2011

Ordained, 2005

Licensed to Ministry, 2004

Salvation, 1996

