

TEACHING PASTORS TO REINFORCE EXPOSITORY
PREACHING WITH SERMON BASED SMALL GROUPS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ALAN STODDARD

MAY 2009

DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife Jeana, the lifestyle disciple maker,
and to our precious daughter, Briana, the ongoing result of our lives.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Dilemma of the Pulpit and the Pew	1
The Purpose of Preaching	4
Extend the Big Idea Through Small Groups	6
2. A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR AND SMALL GROUPS IN THE SCRIPTURES	11
The Priority of the Pastor in the Church	11
The Small Group as the Place of Discipleship	22
Implications for Contemporary Discipleship Approaches	30
3. CONNECTING THE SERMON TO THE SMALL GROUP	33
A New Model for Discipleship	33
The Survey	34
Interviews with Ten Churches	36
Best Practices of Sermon Based Small Group Churches	83
4. THE SEMINAR: CONNECTING THE SERMON TO THE SMALL GROUP	97
Session One Lesson Plan	98
Session One Teaching Outline	99
Session Two Lesson Plan	101
Session Two Teaching Outline	102

Session Three Lesson Plan	106
Session Three Teaching Outline	107
5. EVALUATION AND REFLECTION	122
The Seminar	122
Challenges Found in the Thesis-Project	127
The Doctor of Ministry Journey	129
4. APPENDIX	131
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	156
6. VITA	161

ABBREVIATIONS

(CBC)	Calvary Baptist Church
(CBC)	Calvary Bible Church
(COTF)	Church of the Foothills
(CFC)	Constance Free Church
(ESV)	English Standard Version
(IBC)	Immanuel Baptist Church
(NCC)	North Coast Church
(PCC)	Parkview Christian Church
(SBHF)	Sermon-Based Home Fellowship
(SBSB)	Sermon-Based Small Group
(SBPC)	Solana Breach Presbyterian Church
(SEC)	Southeast Christian Church
(SBTC)	Southern Baptists of Texas Convention

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project culminates in a three-hour seminar created to teach pastors how to reinforce their expository sermons. Creating sermon based small groups to reinforce sermons enhances biblical discipleship and produces life change.

The purpose of this project is to show how sermon based small groups can help people grow spiritually in a complex world that communicates many ideas. Chapter one raises the question how people can best engage scripture and sermon ideas to the point of life change. Chapter two of the thesis-project provides a theological foundation for the role of the pastor as a preacher and the use of small groups to facilitate discipleship. Chapter three of this project provides analysis from ten churches interviewed to discover the reasons why sermon based small groups work. It also provides a best practices list, specific challenges and how to overcome them, and principles for writing curriculum. Chapter four provides the materials used in the three-hour seminar. The final chapter reflects on the process of writing this project and developing the seminar. Evaluation of the seminar is provided and immediate revisions are identified for the future seminar and for future studies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Dilemma of the Pulpit and the Pew

People today have trouble hearing pastors when they preach. No where is this more evident than the family on a typical Sunday morning. A father comes to church stressed out from work. He wonders if he will have a job in six months. He is distracted. His wife is wondering what might be troubling him, but she is also concerned with things that are undone in her home. She failed to pay the bills this week and is praying that she will remember to pay them online when she gets home from church. The kids are in church with their parents, but their minds are on other things. Johnny is looking forward to going to his friend's house after church to play video games. Jenny likes church, but cannot seem to understand the relationship between what the pastor says and what her Sunday School teacher says. The messages at the church are no different than the topics of her teachers at school. This fictitious family of listeners represents millions of people. Even during tough times, people are still in the pews and hear sermons every week in churches across America.¹ These are only a few of the obstacles that keep them from hearing the sermon. Pastors spend significant amounts of time preparing sermons each week only to be left wondering if the listeners are getting it. Pastors are often left with a disposition reflecting the Verizon Wireless' slogan, "Can you hear me now?" Pastors try to figure out what will get the message across into the listeners' lives from Monday to

¹ Frank Newport, "No Evidence Bad Times Are Boosting Church Attendance," Gallup, December 17, 2008, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113452/Evidence-Bad-Times-Boosting-Church-Attendance.aspx> (accessed March 30, 2009).

Saturday. This is one reason why alternate methods to preaching, such as video are becoming more popular. People today have trouble hearing their pastor's message because they are busy. Buchanan says, "Busyness makes us stop caring about the things we care about [and]...Busyness also robs us of knowing God the way we might."²

The impact of listeners not internalizing the message is important. Listeners leave services unchanged. Christians today are just as susceptible to debt, immorality, alcohol abuse, sexual misconduct, inappropriate language, racism, and other sins, as are non-Christians. For example, there are sixteen million people in the United States who claim they are Southern Baptist, but only eight million participate in the life of a church. A disconnect exists between profession and practice. The divorce rate among Christians and non-Christians is the same.³ The problem is people are not listening to the point of conviction and change in their lives. The problem affects Christian influence on their communities. People today have trouble hearing the pastor because culture influences them more than their churches.

The problem is not only with the impact of culture on listeners. The problem is also with the church. People come to church campuses to retreat, yet find more activity. Activity can detract from listener receptivity. Dave Ferguson identified twenty separate ideas⁴ people find when they come onto a church campus. These ideas range from the

² Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 48.

³ George Barna, "Born Agains Just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians," Barna Group, September 8, 2004, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians> (accessed June 16, 2007).

⁴ Dave Ferguson, *The Big Idea: Focus the Message-Multiply the Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 17-18.

parking lot experience, the church bulletin, the music, the sermon, the Sunday School class, and the church newsletter. The twenty different ideas or opportunities fail to help people internalize anything.

Most information is transferred in a church through traditional means. Usually pastors preach and teachers teach using oral presentations. Even the best of pastors must face the sobering fact that listeners only retain five percent of what they hear.⁵ For a pastor, this percentage is depressing. Preachers spend time preparing to preach knowing listeners will only retain a small percentage of what they say. Not only is listener retention a problem, but so also is sermon preparation and delivery. Haddon Robinson has spent his life teaching preachers to help listeners listen. He says of the problem:

Unfortunately some of us preach as we have listened. Preachers, like their audiences, may conceive of sermons as a collection of points that have little relationship to each other...an outline is the shape of the sermon idea and the parts must all be related to the whole. Three or four ideas not related to a more inclusive idea do not make a message; they make three or four sermonettes all preached at one time.⁶

Not only is preaching presented in a traditional format, it is also presented at times disjointed and difficult to relate to a single idea. The sermon is then difficult to grasp within the arena of other ideas and problems already stated previously. People today have trouble hearing their pastor's message. This is because the pastor is attempting to preach too many ideas to listeners who come to the pew with too many competing ideas on their minds. This dilemma may be one main reason why Robinson says, "A sermon should be

⁵ National Training Laboratory, "Learning Pyramid," Texas A & M University, March 30, 2009, <http://lowery.tamu.edu/Teaming/Morgan1/sld023.htm> (accessed March 19, 2009).

⁶ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Message*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 34-35.

a bullet, not buckshot.”⁷

The Purpose of Preaching

Most books on preaching will tell preachers how to do it, but rarely is the “why” of preaching made clear. It is usually found in the definitions of preaching.⁸ However, the purpose of preaching can best be found in the Scriptures. The thrust of Christian preaching is the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8). The Great Commission is the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the purpose of making disciples of all nations. Making disciples includes a mixture of evangelistic preaching and preaching that focuses on growth. In a word, the purpose of preaching is transformation in listeners’ lives. Pastors preach so people will be transformed. People who have never crossed the line of faith need to be transformed from the realm of death to the realm of life. People who have crossed the line of faith need to continue in transformation. Both groups need the word of God preached to them. Scripture says in 1 Peter 2:2, “Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the *word*, so that by *it* you may grow in respect to salvation” (Emphasis mine).⁹ Without the word of God preached there can be no transforming growth. Trusting Christ for salvation, the initial act and subsequent journey, requires faith. Christians acquire faith by hearing the

⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁸ Definitions will not be presented in detail. A survey of first year preaching textbooks will provide unique, yet unified definitions of expository or biblical preaching. The purpose here is to keep the definition simple.

⁹ All scripture quotations in this thesis-project are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible.

word of God preached (Rom 10:13). In modern times the preached word of God is accomplished through a sermon. Haddon Robinson describes the purpose of preaching in stating the, "...sermon should *change lives* in some specific way"¹⁰ (Emphasis mine). James 1:22 says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers." The problem in the church is the chasm between the pulpit and the pew. The challenge is connecting the sermon to listeners' living rooms and workplaces. The purpose of preaching is to create opportunities for transformation using the Scriptures to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and demonstrate how following Christ can help people live purposeful lives. Effective preaching involves not just the dispensing of biblical information, it involves helping listeners listen to the point of obedience and life change.

The purpose of preaching should not be separated from the purpose of the pastor of the church. God provides the pastor "for the equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). The pastor is the one who either preaches or ensures another preacher preaches. Although there are other teachers in churches, such as Sunday School and small group teachers, the pastor is the main preacher-teacher in a local church. While the pastor is not the only voice, his voice receives the most time in the preaching ministry. The purpose of preaching and the purpose of the pastor should be viewed as one ministry with the same purpose. Again, the purpose of preaching is to create opportunities for transformation using the Scriptures to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to reveal how following Christ can help people live purposeful lives. The goal of preaching is transformation or changed lives.

¹⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 107.

Since the goal of preaching is transformation and Christians seem to be no different than the culture they live in, what is the problem? The challenge is busyness on multiple levels as mentioned already. If the problem is busyness coupled with too many ideas from the world and church, what can a pastor-teacher do to enhance listening to the point of transformation in listeners' lives? Applying the Scripture to life is difficult for trained preachers.¹¹ How much more difficult is it for the listeners in the pews? What is the answer to the problem of enhancing biblical application in the lives of listeners? The purpose of this thesis is to offer a process that will address this problem.

Extend the Big Idea Through Small Groups

Big idea preachers use a set of core processes to bridge the span between the biblical world and the modern world. The process starts with study leading to the crafting of an exegetical idea. That idea is analyzed by three developmental questions leading to the birth of a homiletical idea. When the homiletical idea is formed, the purpose of the sermon is determined. The purpose of the sermon is identified early in the preparation process but immediately relates to the conclusion of the sermon.¹² The challenge is the big idea of preachers' sermons often is not internalized by listeners to impact their lives. The big idea of the sermon needs to be brought up again in listeners' lives after they hear it on Sunday morning.

Pastors who use the big idea method of preaching can extend the purpose of the sermon by writing discussion based small group curriculum. The purpose of the sermon,

¹¹ Haddon Robinson, "Heresy in Preaching," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1997): 21-27.

¹² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 35. Haddon Robinson relates how application of the big idea should happen in the conclusion of the sermon and should be transferable to the world of the congregation.

which is derived from the main idea of the sermon, influences the conclusion of the sermon. Robinson says the purpose of the sermon should be stated as “an instructional objective.”¹³ This provides a way for listeners to apply the purpose of the sermon in a tangible way. Each of the examples Robinson gives for application in the conclusion of the sermon¹⁴ could be extended into the listeners’ daily lives if the applications resurfaced in a small group during the week. Based on his experience with small groups, Ferguson says this: “Our small groups are the environment in which people experience the most dramatic life transformation.”¹⁵ Instead of listeners hearing the sermon idea and then hearing another idea in their small groups, they would hear the sermon idea again within the same week. The small group is the natural place for listeners to talk about how to apply the Scriptures, especially based on the sermon text listeners heard that week. While lecture produces retention related to learning at 5%, when people discuss the subject the percentage jumps to 50%.¹⁶ In his “Cone of Learning” Edgar Dale bumps the percentage to 70%.¹⁷ The small group is the place for the pastor’s message to receive a second hearing with emphasis on clear meaning of the passage and application to life.

The reasons small groups are the prime place for this extension of the big idea are key: 1) the paradigm shift takes the teaching load off the teacher of the class and is placed

¹³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴ Ibid., 109-112. Each of the bulleted application examples could be addressed in greater detail with more accountability to obedience and life change.

¹⁵ Ferguson, *The Big Idea*, 36.

¹⁶ National Training Laboratory, “Learning Pyramid,” March 30, 2009.

¹⁷ Raymond Pastore, “Dale’s Cone of Experience,” Bloomsburg University, Spring 2003, <http://teacherworld.com/potdale.html> (accessed March 30, 2009). The percentages are not as important as the idea that learners learn more when they discuss a subject rather than just listen to one.

upon the pastor, 2) the purpose of the small group shifts from being a place where knowledge alone is dispensed to a place where the purposes of a small group are lived out. Bill Hull was correct when he said, “The small group provides the best environment for disciple making.”¹⁸ He identified four purposes of a small group as a place where participants have, “. . .a working knowledge of the Scriptures; and [an] effective prayer life; meaningful relationships, including an appreciation for accountability; and a positive attitude toward evangelism and the ministry skills to do evangelism.”¹⁹

This approach is different, but it is being done. Ferguson does it at the church he serves.²⁰ Rick Warren has a model for developing small group curriculum based on the worship theme.²¹ Christ Fellowship in Miami, Florida, has a similar yet unique model.²² Tony Cecil, Pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church of Glasgow, Kentucky, writes his own small group material called “Coordinates.”²³ The model is being done effectively. Preachers should be able to write their own curriculum. Yount provides a brief overview of “The teacher as a creative designer.”²⁴ His process is simple and pastors can learn it.

¹⁸ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988), 225.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

²⁰ Ferguson, *The Big Idea*, 111. He walks the reader through the process his team uses to build curriculum.

²¹ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 150.

²² *Ibid.* 96.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁴ William R. Yount, *Called to Teach: An Introduction to the Ministry of Teaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 131-154.

This thesis-project will teach pastors to reinforce the big idea of expository preaching by using sermon based small groups to allow more opportunity for application of the purpose of the sermon. The project will culminate into a workshop designed to teach pastors how to use sermon based small groups.

Chapter two of the thesis-project will provide a biblical-theological foundation for the role of the pastor-teacher. Emphasis will also be on the priority of small group discipleship in the Scriptures. Both of these topics will be paired in practical application for today.

Chapter three will present contemporary research of literature reviewing churches that use sermon-based small groups. Pastors who are developing their own small group curriculum will be interviewed. The interviews will be analyzed to present the models for writing small group curriculum. Strengths and weakness will be identified. Curriculum from churches will be evaluated and the evaluation will be analyzed and the results presented.

Chapter four will present the design of the workshop. In the workshop, a small group of pastors who preach or teach each week will be taught the following things: 1) why they need to write small group curriculum, 2) how to design small group discussion based curriculum lessons based on the purpose of the sermon, and 3) they will develop at least one small group curriculum based on the purpose of a sermon.

For churches that have ministers of education or ministers of discipleship, emphasis will include their roles in curriculum writing. The seminar will model the process by using an expository preaching series through Philemon. The participants will be given an example expository series with curriculum to use in their churches.

Chapter five will provide personal and professional learning outcomes gained by the author. Workshop participants will be interviewed and will use a response form to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop. Revisions for the workshop will be completed. Suggestions for future study will be identified. A book will be written to guide pastors in planning preaching and writing small group discussion based curriculum.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR AND SMALL GROUPS IN THE SCRIPTURES

This chapter will provide an analysis of the position of the pastor in the New Testament. The priority of small group use as the instrument and place of discipleship will also be examined. This chapter will show how the pastor's leadership in disciple-making is not only biblical, but it is also practical. Implications for contemporary discipleship will be identified to guide pastors today in focusing on tasks resulting in transformation of peoples' lives.

The Priority of the Pastor in the Church

The position of a pastor is crucial to the effectiveness of a local church to make disciples. Although other positions in the church are important and needed, the position of pastor is the most important because the pastor usually sets the tone for action in the church.

The Origin of the Pastor

Tracing out the position of pastor is neither easy nor clear in the Old Testament. Where did the position of pastor originate? The position could go back to the father of the Hebrew family in the list of possibilities. Fathers in Hebrew culture were responsible for discipleship in the family (Deut 6:1-9). Elders were also a part of the patriarchal culture, but were not elders in the New Testament Church sense.²⁵ The Old Testament equivalent

²⁵ Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 185.

for the position of pastor might be found to an extent in the roles of the priests and prophets. The priests ministered in the temple. The prophets proclaimed God's message to their cultures. However, the picture does not really become clear until the New Testament.

Certain pastoral qualities were evidenced in Jesus' life. To state the official office of pastor originated with Him might be an overstatement. However, Jesus modeled all the attributes of a pastor (John 10:11). Jesus spent three years mentoring and developing twelve men (Matt 10:1-4). He modeled for them how to teach, serve, heal, and evangelize. Jesus reproduced Himself in the twelve apostles.²⁶ He expected His followers to do the same thing (John 20:21).

The Apostles modeled both negative and positive attributes. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John record positive ministry accomplished by the Apostles, but they also record the times when they did not get it right. For example, Judas received the same equipping from Jesus as the other Apostles, yet he ended up betraying Jesus (Matt 26:14-16). Peter also received equipping, yet he denied knowing Jesus (Matt 26:69-75).

The Book of Acts records the positive employment of Jesus' work with His disciples. Peter went from denying Jesus to proclaiming Him (Acts 1-12). Peter preached Jesus boldly (Acts 2:14-36), healed the sick (Acts 3:1-10), stood up for Jesus before the religious (Acts 4:1-22), provided leadership in the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:37-47, 4:32-37), served as visionary for Jesus' message and mission (Acts 10:9-48), and even went to jail for preaching and witnessing of Jesus (Acts 12:1-5). Peter is not mentioned in Acts

²⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 21.

after chapter twelve, but he leaves the scene with Herod's soldiers looking for him. He ended up in Caesarea. Tradition has his final fate in fulfillment of Jesus prophecy of his death (John 21:18-19). Peter is one example of how all of the Apostles lived out Jesus' mentoring them to be shepherds of God's people.

A major transition in the New Testament is the shift from the office of Apostle to the leadership position of elder.²⁷ After Jesus death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the eleven remaining Apostles replaced Judas Iscariot with Matthias (Acts 1:26). The Lord added the Apostle Paul as the final Apostle (Acts 9:1-18). The office of Apostle probably ceased its existence in A.D. 45 with the institution of elders by the Apostles.²⁸ By the time the New Testament was being penned, "The writers assumed eldership to be a fixed, apostolic institution."²⁹

The Apostle Paul mentored and developed many men and women in the New Testament. The most recognizable disciple was Timothy (Acts 16:1-5). Yet there were many others who were influenced by Paul's leadership.³⁰ While Paul commissioned Titus to, "appoint elders in every town..." (Titus 1:5), Paul also established a new precedence of leadership in new churches. New Testament churches were led and governed by a plurality of elders. Within the group of elders was usually a "primary leader of the

²⁷ Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 56.

²⁸ Ibid., 42. Acts 11:30 is the first mention of elders in the New Testament.

²⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1997), 40.

³⁰ The Apostle Paul often ended his letters with a by name greeting to those who he had mentored and developed or who also had helped him in the missionary journeys.

team.”³¹ Support for this primary leader model comes from three things. First, the number of times the apostles’ names appear in Acts as compared to the gospels drops significantly.³² Second, events and actions that focus on each apostle also decrease in Acts when compared with the gospels.³³ The third evidence is Paul’s leadership teams from Acts 13-27 rarely had more than two on the team.³⁴ Once the apostles left the scene, their disciples, known as the church fathers, often became pastors of churches. The church fathers usually used elders and deacons to lead and serve their churches spiritually.

Paul provided the foundation for this leadership position when he wrote his letter to the Ephesian church. The letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter written to many churches in Asia Minor. The use to the word church in Ephesians is referring to the church as a whole, not a specific local church. That is why Paul used plural nouns in the passage below. Speaking of the Lord Jesus gifting the church Paul wrote:

(v11) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, *the shepherds and teachers* (Italics Mine), (v12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (v13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.... (Eph. 4:11-13)

The person who was the primary leader of the church was the pastor-teacher.

Although there are a few who do not agree that the phrase “shepherds and teachers” are

³¹ Getz, 181.

³² Ibid., 219.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 222.

one position,³⁵ most scholars interpret the two nouns as one position.³⁶ The ESV is the only translation that translates literally the Greek word *poiemen*, shepherd. Most other translations use the word pastor. The primary leader of the local church in New Testament times was the pastor-teacher. The contemporary title for this position is teaching pastor. The origin of the position of pastor started with Jesus mentoring the Apostles. The Apostles instituted elders, and within the elder body was a primary leader called the pastor-teacher, or pastor.

The Qualifications of a Pastor

The witness of a pastor's life in a church and community is important to the effectiveness of the church. Because of this, God through the authors of the New Testament outlined specific qualities that would make up the character of a pastor. Character is "The combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person ... from another."³⁷ There are two passages that largely make up the qualifications list:

(v1) The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (v2) Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (v3) not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (v4) He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, (v5) for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (v6) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. (v7) Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may

³⁵ Fancis Foulkes, "Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary," *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 119.

³⁶ The author sought six commentaries on Ephesians 4:11 and five stated the pastor-teacher should be considered one position. See bibliographic references for Ephesians.

³⁷ Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. s.v. "character." <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/character> (accessed: November 12, 2007).

not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:1-7)

Paul also identified character qualities required of elders when he wrote to Titus:

(v5) This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— (v6) if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (v7) For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, (v8) but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. (v9) He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:5-9)

The phrase Paul used in 1 Timothy 3:2 was “above reproach.” He used the phrase two times in the Titus passage above. Getz says this phrase “... means a spiritual leader should have a good reputation among believers as well as unbelievers.”³⁸ Another source stated, “It means to have nothing in one’s conduct on which someone could ground a charge or accusation.”³⁹ The phrase “above reproach” is a general idea Paul used to describe the character of the pastor in an overarching way. The Timothy and Titus lists side by side look like this:⁴⁰

³⁸ Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church*, 96.

³⁹ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:736.

⁴⁰ The Titus list has been arranged to align with the Timothy list so the duplicating traits are easier to identify.



Both of these passages give fifteen spiritual traits that an elder, pastor should possess.

These spiritual character traits can be divided into a variety of areas. The main categories are 1) inner character attitudes, 2) family directives, 3) prohibitive directives, and 4) ministry requirements. The spiritual character traits categorized look like this:⁴¹

⁴¹ This list provides non-duplicating traits.

<u>Inner Character</u>	<u>Family Directives</u>	<u>Prohibitive</u>	<u>Ministry Requirements</u>
Sober Minded	One Wife Husband	Not a Drunk	Hospitable
Self Controlled	Lead Children	Not Arrogant	Able to Teach
Respectable	House Manager	Not Violent	Not Recent Convert
Gentle		Not Greedy	Holds to Scripture
Good Reputation		Not Quarrelsome	
Lover of Good		Not Lover of Money	
Upright		Not Quick Tempered	
Holy			
Disciplined			

There are a total of twenty three spiritual character traits not counting those that are duplicates. This list provided a definite parameter for those elders. The list served as a preventive maintenance rather than a legalistic list of commandments. These qualification lists served as the guidelines for choosing elders and pastors. Such a list clearly reveals the significance of character in the leaders' lives. Notice most of the traits deal with the inner character.

Understanding the significance requires answering a question. Why was a pastor's character so important? Paul stated in detail how pastors were to keep their integrity in check. The Pastoral Letters give lists, but when Paul was in Ephesus he challenged the leaders and elders of Ephesus, "Pay careful attention to yourselves..." (Acts 20:28). Pastoral character and integrity were to be maintained with pastoral skills. Paul's writings in Timothy and Titus related to character emphasize that character was more important than tasks and abilities. This observation leads to the question: why?

The Purpose of the Pastor

Pastors not only had a responsibility to themselves, but also to their congregations. After stating that leaders should take care of themselves, Paul also said in Ephesus, “and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28b). Pastors not only had to ensure they kept themselves free from compromise of character. They were to focus on the people God had entrusted to them. Scripture required pastors to have character that allowed kingdom influence to expand in the church and communities of the early New Testament era. Warren Wiersbe said of the pastor, “...there must be nothing in his life that Satan or the unsaved can take hold of to criticize or attack the church.”⁴² Pastors were required not simply to be good men, but to be men who lived above reproach. Pastors without exemplary character would not be able to accomplish what they were called to do. Pastors’ character was to be the foundation of what they would do in ministry. Lea said, “The traits demanded of the church leaders stood in sharp contrast with the character of the false teachers.”⁴³

The purpose and mission of the New Testament pastor is found in three Greek terms. The three terms are often used interchangeably. Each word contributes its own unique nuance to the pastor’s purpose. The Greek *presbuteros* carries the connotation of an older man or someone who is mature.⁴⁴ The word is the origin for the English

⁴² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, electronic ed., *An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 1 Tim 3:1.

⁴³ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, electronic ed., vol. 34 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 106.

⁴⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 124-125.

Presbyterian. The word *episkopos* means “manager.”⁴⁵ Pastors of the first churches in the first century had the responsibility of managing the church to accomplish its purpose. The word *poimano* communicates three ideas: “Leading, feeding, and guarding the sheep.”⁴⁶ The word literally means “shepherd” as translated in most versions as “pastor” and the ESV as “shepherd” (Eph 4:11). Together these words constituted a job description for pastors. They were to be mature managers and leaders of their flocks. These were general directions, not detailed instructions.

The Apostle Paul did identify a more specific purpose for the pastor. The Titus list ends with verse 9 saying, “He [elder/pastor] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” The passage goes on to address false teachers. Verse 9 identifies the following ideas related to a pastor’s responsibilities: 1) there is an assumption pastors were taught to “hold firm” to the Scriptures, 2) Scripture was to be taught in a way that resulted in listeners receiving “sound doctrine,” and 3) Scripture was to be used to refute those who “contradict” sound doctrine. Pastors in the first century were to confront and combat false doctrine (1 Tim 1:18-20). This not only required them to prevent false doctrine in a defensive posture, but sometimes an offensive one (1 Tim 6:11). There seems to be a correlation between the character of the pastor and the work and purpose of the pastor.

The primary purpose of pastors in Acts 6:4 reveals how they employed their tasks of management, leadership, and preaching. In context, Acts 6:1-7 is about the Apostles

⁴⁵ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 149.

solving a felt need in the church that had caused a racial and social division between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The Hellenists felt they were being prejudiced against in the distribution of the food in the church. The problem was corrected by the Apostles choosing seven leaders who were responsible for organizing the food distribution. The reason for the identification of leaders and delegation of tasks was simple. The Apostles realized that, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). The primary task of the Apostles is found in their continued response. They said, “. . .but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). A literal translation of this verse is this: “But we to the prayer and the ministry of the word will continue steadfastly.” John Franklin points out how the word *ministry* comes after the phrase on prayer.⁴⁷ Yet there is an article before the word *prayer* in the Greek, which “creates the possibility that prayer and the word are twin ideas.”⁴⁸ Franklin concluded the Apostles were, “declaring the two ministries they must do as church leaders were mobilizing the church to prayer and preaching/teaching the word of God.”⁴⁹ The Apostles ministered prayer and the word to the church and community. They used scripture and prayer as the foundation for the church to corporately do work that obeyed the Great Commission.

The Apostle Paul’s advice to Timothy frequently included instruction about teaching and preaching the word of God. Paul advised skillful reading of the Scriptures in

⁴⁷ John Franklin, *And the Place Was Shaken: How to Lead a Powerful Prayer Meeting* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 8-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8

public (1 Tim 4:13), the development of the spiritual gift of preaching and teaching (1 Tim 4:14-15), precise study of Scripture that would honor God (2 Tim 2:15), the nature of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17), and the nature of preaching (2 Tim 4:2). Timothy faced many challenges, but most of them centered on his ability to know Scripture and preach it. The preaching venue was not just a church with a pulpit and a friendly crowd. Timothy at times had to confront people in a way that upset the local community. There were counter attacks on Timothy. This is one reason why Paul said, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers as example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). Paul encouraged Timothy to keep his character above reproach so none of his opponents would be able to diminish the message of the gospel by referring to Timothy’s poor character.

The role of the New Testament pastor is found in Jesus’ desire to reduplicate Himself in the lives of other people. Jesus taught sinful men how to live above reproach. Those same Apostles taught others how to live above reproach. Jesus knew that the Apostles and subsequent elders, disciples, and pastors’ message of the gospel would not be taken seriously if their character was questionable or bad. The character of the early church leaders was to be above reproach so the message of the gospel would be reinforced by its bearing good fruit.

The Small Group as the Place of Discipleship

Pastors were the main leaders in the New Testament churches. As stated previously, the main purpose of a pastor is to preach the word of God. The purpose of preaching is for people to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Preaching

should result in changed lives.⁵⁰ Is transformation so simple? Was transformation in believers in the New Testament cultivated? Where did it happen? How was it done?

The Role of the Family in the Discipleship Process

In Jewish culture the family played a great role in discipleship process. The family was led by the father. He was responsible to ensure the family followed God's commandments. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 says,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The principle of discipling in the family and home is evident in Scripture. The Jews of the New Testament had this principle ingrained deeply in their culture. Discipleship was a way of life in Jewish culture. At its most basic level, discipleship happened in the most communal of settings, the home. The principle of casual, lifestyle discipleship was the natural example Jesus and the Apostles' displayed.

Jesus' Use of Small Groups

Jesus was raised in a Jewish home. Although the Son of God, he was taught Scripture and morals from Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39-40). Jesus knew how to disciple others because 1) He was God, 2) He received instruction in the home, and 3) He led a small group to reproduce itself. Robert Coleman points out the "total number of devoted followers at the end of his earthly ministry numbered little more than the five hundred

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 107.

brethren to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection.”⁵¹ Jesus came on the scene and ministered to the masses, began to look for disciples, chose twelve Apostles, had three leaders among the twelve, culminated with the five hundred, and ended up with one hundred and twenty followers in the Acts 1-2 prayer meeting.⁵² Jesus knew the dynamics of small group leadership. Most of Jesus discipling and developing came when he was in a small group setting, not large groups. Jesus taught as he lived with his disciples.⁵³ The small group process was the system Jesus used to not only model evangelism to the disciples, but to minister to them as well. Their equipping in those short three years changed them and prepared them to help others follow Jesus also.

The Development of Small Groups in the New Testament

Spiritual growth often happened in small groups in the New Testament. Jesus led a small group of twelve for three years. His followers followed his example. The pattern for gathering in the New Testament after the resurrection is found in Acts 2:46: “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes....” Temple participation was the larger group. Meeting in homes represents the small group. In the Book of Acts, the word “house” is used eighteen times in relation to the place where the church gathered (Acts 1:13, 2:2, 2:46, 5:42, 8:3, 9:17, 36, 10:6, 9, 12:12, 16:34, 40, 17:5, 18:7, 20:20, 21:8, 16, and 28:30). There are more uses of house but only eighteen refer to the intimate setting of the home where discipleship took place. In Paul’s letters, there are

⁵¹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 28.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

five uses of “house” referring to a place of gathering for the church (Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:9, 19, Col 4:15, and Phlm 2). 2 John 10 also references the church in a house. There is no doubt that New Testament churches were located in homes.⁵⁴ The number of churches is not given in Scripture, but the number of believers was in the thousands.⁵⁵ The thousands of believers were assimilated in the church through small groups. The leaders of these small groups were usually elders.⁵⁶ The small groups that met in houses accomplished the purposes of the church and the Great Commission.⁵⁷ Small groups were the place where knowledge of scripture was provided and applied in believers’ lives. Since churches were in homes, the main message of the pastor was delivered there.⁵⁸ Preaching may have, at times, been more of a dialogue than a monologue.⁵⁹ Questions and answers were a means of applying what scripture taught. At times all believers took part in exhorting each other from scripture (Col 3:16). House churches were the places where people developed relationships.⁶⁰ Needs were met in a natural, non-programmatic way. People were in such close proximity to one another, no need could go unnoticed and unmet. The house church was not only a teaching center but also a place where pastoral

⁵⁴ Stuart Wright, Kirk Hadaway, and Francis Dubose, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1987), 41.

⁵⁵ Rad Zdero, *The Global House Church Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2004), 50-51.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

care was done. Discipleship in the early church happened in homes, not the temples.

Extending the Message in Acts

In the early church, the main leader was the pastor. The pastor's message and ministry were important for the church to accomplish its mission. The pastor, being such a high priority leader, had to live his life above reproach. A pastor whose character honored God was respected and heard by his listeners. Christians in the church met in homes for transformational times of discipleship. The last question to consider theologically is what was the method and model of content delivery in the Book of Acts? Is there a correlation between the public messages preached in Acts and what happened after the message in the homes of the Christians in Acts?

The Book of Acts records principles that demonstrate there was a direct link between the public proclamation of the gospel and the personal application in smaller groups after the message. In the Book of Acts proclamation happened in two ways. In the Book of Acts, proclamation was demonstrated through the preaching of the gospel and power healings.

Acts records eight examples of where proclamation took place in a public place or large crowds and then was explained further or applied after the message in a smaller group. Below is a list of the examples. The first list gives direct examples. The second list provides indirect examples. Below both lists is an expanded explanation of the examples. One example in the gospels is provided to show how Jesus used this method at times with his disciples. Another example connects the gospels with Acts.

There are five passages that directly give biblical support for the use of small groups who studied and applied a previously preached message.

<u>Person</u>	<u>Public Proclamation</u>	<u>Personal Application</u>
Jesus	Luke 8:4-8 Parable of the Sower	Luke 8:9-15 Parable Explained
Jesus	Matthew 6:33 Kingdom Assignment	Acts 1:3-4, 8 Assignment Explained
Peter	Acts 2:14-36 Pentecost Sermon	Acts 2:37-47 Response and Application of Sermon
Philip	Acts 8:26-28 Ethiopian Reading Scripture After Worship	Acts 8:29-40 Philip Explains Text, Ethiopian Saved and Baptized
Paul/Silas	Acts 17:10 Preaching in Berea	Acts 17:11-15 Examination of Preaching

An examination of the details helps bring the public proclamation and personal application into view more clearly. Jesus spoke the parable of the sower in a crowd of listeners in Luke 8:4-8. He afterward took His followers, the disciples, aside to explain only to them the meaning and application of the parable.

Jesus also spoke the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 in a large crowd. He specifically told His followers to “seek first the kingdom of God...” (Matt 6:33). He often spoke of the kingdom of God in the gospels. After His resurrection, He spent forty days explaining what the kingdom was to the apostles in Acts 1:3-4 and verse 8.

In Acts 2:14-36, Peter preached his first sermon at Pentecost. The purpose of the sermon was evangelistic and the main idea is found in verse 36 conveying the priority that Jesus whom they crucified was both Lord and Christ. After preaching to the crowd, some within the crowd said, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (v.37). Peter then, “With many other words...exhorted them...” (v.40). The application of the sermon came when the respondents were baptized and assimilated into the biblical community (Acts 2:32-

47).

In Acts 8:26-28, an Ethiopian Eunuch was trying to understand what he heard in the worship service he had just attended. He was pondering Isaiah 53:7-8. His public experience was still influencing him after he left worship. In Acts 8:29-40, God set up a divine appointment for the Eunuch. Philip the evangelist followed God's leading by going to Gaza to meet with the Eunuch. Upon arrival, Philip explained the text that the Eunuch heard in worship. The Eunuch professed Christ as his Savior and was baptized.

In Acts 17:10-15, there is a record of one of the most direct examples of a sermon idea being studied and applied in a smaller group afterward. In verse 10, Paul and Silas went into a Berean synagogue. Obviously some kind of preaching or teaching happened. After the message given in the synagogue, verse 11 states, "They [the Bereans] received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." The results were people professing Christ as Savior. It also caused trouble with those who did not believe. This encounter still mobilized the church to strategize where to make disciples next (v.1-15).

There are four indirect examples of where the principle of small group discipleship is present after a preaching encounter. These examples are not as influential, but are beneficial to the study of small groups and biblical discipleship.

<u>Person</u>	<u>Public Proclamation</u>	<u>Personal Application</u>
Paul	Acts 13:13-41 Sermon at Antioch Pisidia	Acts 13:42-43 Jews and Devout Converts Receive Explanation of Sermon
Paul	Acts 18:5-6 Evangelistic Preaching In Synagogue	Acts 18:7-11 Follow up, Discipleship in House Next to Synagogue

Apollos	Acts 18:24-26a Preaching in Ephesus	Acts 18:26b-28 Aquila/Priscilla Explain More Accurately
Paul	Acts 19:8 Preaching in Synagogue	Acts 19:9-10 Application in Hall of Tyrannas

Acts 13:13-41 records a sermon Paul preached at Antioch Pidisia. The purpose of the sermon was to exhort Jews to consider the claims of Christ being the Messiah as true (v.36-41). After the message, the people asked that “these things” (v.42) be proclaimed to them again. Paul and Barnabas spent more time with those who wanted more answers as to what was preached (v.42-43).

In Acts 18:5-6, Paul preached an evangelistic message in a synagogue at Corinth. The message was not well received. Paul left that synagogue saying, “Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent! From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (v.6). As he left, he went to the home of a man named Titius Justus whose house was next to the synagogue (v.7). Crispus, who heard Paul’s message in the synagogue, became a believer (v.8). Others believed and were baptized (v.8). Paul stayed there for a year and a half developing these new believers.

Acts 18:24a-26a tells of Apollos preaching eloquently in Ephesus. Apollos was a good communicator of the Scriptures. His weakness was that his message was somewhat incomplete because, “...He knew only the baptism of John” (v.25). After the message, Pricilla and Aquilla, having noticed something was missing in his message, took him aside and “...explained to him the way of God more accurately” (v.26).

In Acts 19:8 Paul preached at Ephesus for three months. The content of the message was the kingdom of God. Some at the synagogue became irritated with Paul and his message. Paul left that synagogue only to take some of his disciples with him to the

Hall of Tyannas. Paul stayed there two years developing and applying the message of the gospel with the people in the church (v.9-10).

The Book of Acts clearly reveals a pattern of public proclamation that, at times, resurfaces in smaller groups after the message. The proclamation was sometimes preaching and at other times a power healing encounter. The message was extended into peoples' lives for further explanation and application in various ways. The amount of time the smaller, more personal application took place varied also. Sometimes it was a few days and at other times it was for up to two years. The basic fact is that, at times, a proclamation idea would be the idea that surfaced later for personal discipleship in believers and non-believers lives.

Implications for Contemporary Discipleship Approaches

There is a purpose that extends like a thread from Jesus Christ to the contemporary pastor. Jesus Christ last command to His disciples was for them to “make disciples” (Matt 28:19). A disciple is first a person who has made a decision to receive Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord. Upon receiving Christ as Savior, the new believer is baptized. After baptism, the new believer is expected to join a faith community, the Church, to learn how to observe or do the things Jesus desires him or her to do (Matt 28:19-20). Jesus Christ wanted and still wants his followers to be transformed. The transformation or discipleship process is not complete until a new believer can teach another new believer what he or she was taught. Jesus' desire for His followers was for their transformation to be reproduced in others.

Pastors need to lead in the discipleship process. Daryl Eldridge once said, “Pastors should have to lead and reproduce a small group before assuming a position as

pastor of a local church. Approximately 90-95% of Pastors are not a part of a small peer group that studies the word. They teach by their lack of involvement, that small groups are not important.”⁶¹ The pastor of the church is the one person who must model discipleship. As the main disciple, the pastor’s character needs to be above reproach or the ability to preach and teach effectively is diminished. It is improbable real discipleship can take place under the leadership of a pastor whose character cannot be trusted by the congregation and community.

Twenty-one centuries after the New Testament was penned the challenges of character, preaching, and witness is still present. Contemporary personalities like Jim and Tammy Fay Baker, Jimmy Swaggert, Henry Lyons, Ted Haggard, and Darrel Gilyard⁶² all compromised the impact of the message of the gospel, not by their inadequate leadership and preaching ability, but by their failed ability to live above reproach. The church cannot afford to see any more pastors ruin congregations and communities by their lack of character. The pastor’s message is too important for the message to be unheard because of character issues. There can be no separating a pastor’s character from the preaching ministry.

The main purpose of a pastor is to make disciples through preaching the word of God for the purpose of seeing listeners lives transformed. The New Testament reveals

⁶¹ Dr. Daryl Eldridge, repeatedly stated this, from his ministerial experience, in a small men’s prayer group the author has been in for eleven years. Daryl is an expert on small groups and educational ministry. I asked Daryl how he came to this percentage and he state it came from years of asking pastors if they participated in a small group. Daryl is the President of *Rockbridge Seminary*, a fully online seminary at www.rockbridgeseminary.com.

⁶² A simple Internet search will reveal the compromise in each case of these pastoral leaders.

how the messages of pastors was communicated and applied in small house churches.

The message was complemented with the pastoral care system of the small group. Pastors are the main motivators and leaders who get the gospel out to the world. Although others do share the gospel that are not pastors, pastors in their preaching are the ones who ignite the fires of discipleship and transformation in others. The pastor's voice and message is crucial to the effectiveness of the spreading of the gospel to those who are not believers and the discipleship of believers.

The best place for application of the sermon today is in the small group. The practice is biblical and practical. But what would that process look like? Is anyone doing it? How would it be done? What are the benefits for pastors and churches today? These questions will orient our probe into churches that are using sermon-based small groups to produce disciples and shepherd the church.

CHAPTER 3

CONNECTING THE SERMON TO THE SMALL GROUP

This chapter will provide analysis of churches that use the sermon-based small group (SBSG) as a way to make disciples. Strengths and weaknesses will be identified. Curriculum and processes will be examined and a best practices model will be developed based on recent research from interviews and surveys of a sampling of churches.

A New Model for Discipleship

Every church generation has the same task to make disciples. In contemporary times churches have used a variety of methods and programs. Of course all churches gather for worship. In addition to the worship experience, most churches in America use either an on-campus Sunday School or an off campus small group system for disciple making, ministry, and evangelism. A few churches use neither a Sunday School or small group system. Some offer special discipleship classes. Acts 2:42-47 has become the paradigm passage many pastors and church leaders have used as a guide for Christian development. A sense of connectedness around the Word of God that produces ministry and missions is what seems to be missing. Many pastors have realized the biggest challenge in the church is closing the “back door of the church.” The back door of the church is the idea that many people enter the church as a visitor or member, but fail to stick around long enough to become a developing disciple. The back door of the church is wide open and needs to be shut.⁶³

⁶³ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 30.

A possible option for effective discipleship is one that connects the best of Sunday School and small groups.⁶⁴ Most Sunday Schools focus on teaching the scriptures. They attempt to accomplish relationship building and ministry but the main focus is on the lesson each week. Lessons usually come from a curriculum written by a denominational agency or Christian literature business. Small groups tend to focus on relationship building and ministry. Teaching is also a component, but teaching is on the same level as relationship building and ministry. Does there have to be such a division of style between the Sunday School and small group models? There is another possible option that connects the best teaching, reaching, and ministry principles of Sunday School and small groups. Sermon-based small groups provide an option to connect the worship service and sermon to small groups. Is the SBSG a valid model? Who is using the model and is it effective? This chapter is written to present some commonalities in churches using the SBSG approach. Most of this chapter is written to present the uniqueness of each church and not repeat unnecessary details that can be found in the interviews themselves or assumed by the reader.

The Survey

A small but significant amount of churches are using a SBSG model for discipleship.⁶⁵ There are only two books that explain the SBSG approach. Larry

⁶⁴ Hal Mayer, *Making the Critical Connection: Combining the Best of Small-Group Dynamics with Sunday School* (Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2005), 8-15.

⁶⁵ There is no way to count the exact number of churches that are using the SBSG model because the model is relatively new. However, I would estimate the number is in the hundreds based on my attendance at the recent *Sticky Church* conference on October 5-6, 2008. North Coast Church and Pastor Larry Osborne hosted the conference, the Patriarch of the SBSG model. The conference is the only one of its kind that focuses on SBSG model. There were 500+ in attendance. A majority indicated they use the SGSB model.

Osborne's book *Sticky Church* came out in 2008. Dave Ferguson's *The Big Idea* was published in 2007. Twenty churches using the SBSG model were identified through Internet searches and personal networking with pastors and leaders. Of the twenty churches targeted for the survey, eleven returned surveys.⁶⁶ Ten surveys were used from various churches to identify methods, models, challenges, and best practices. The surveys consisted of twelve simple questions that allowed respondents to tell how they use the SBSG model. In some cases a follow-up interview was conducted to clarify information. The survey was used as a way to find out the practices of churches using this model. The following questions were used in this contemporary research:

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? ("No" will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text)
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text)
5. What are the challenges?
6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education
7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function?
8. Do you personally interact with a small group?
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church?

⁶⁶ See complete surveys in the Appendix.

10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups?
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?

Interviews with Ten Churches

The churches that responded to this survey reveal diversity. Twenty churches were targeted for the survey. Seventeen churches were sent surveys and ten returned a completed survey. The survey churches were from various denominations. The small churches as well as mega churches are represented in the sample responses. These churches are located all over the United States as well as one church in Canada. North Coast Church returned a survey, but I chose to interview their pastors in person.

Immanuel Baptist Church

Immanuel Baptist Church (IBC) in Glasgow, Kentucky, uses the SBSG model effectively. Tony Cecil, Senior Pastor leads the church. IBC averages three hundred in worship attendance.⁶⁷ The church uses an on-campus Sunday School model for assimilating members. One exceptional quality about this church is its website. Pastor Cecil's messages are available online via mp3 download or immediate streaming audio. The SBSG curriculum is available also for learners to download. IBC's website makes it easy for anyone wanting to stay connected to the pastor's preaching and their own personal preparation in Bible study. Everything is accessible from the church's home

⁶⁷ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 87.

page.

Pastor Tony Cecil's responses in his survey are revealing. Pastor Cecil writes the SBSG curriculum at IBC.⁶⁸ The curriculum is entitled "Coordinates." IBC does not force members to be in a SBSG. Cecil states, "We give our people the option."⁶⁹ Other groups at IBC are only allowed to use previously approved curriculum. Cecil also says the curriculum, "contains substantially more information that I am not able to include in my Sunday morning message."⁷⁰ I confirmed this when I listened to Pastor Cecil's message online.⁷¹ I read the SBSG lesson⁷² and listened to his message afterward. Pastor Cecil's SBSG curriculum "would better be classified as a more in-depth version"⁷³ of his message. Cecil's style of preaching is highly expository and didactic. The sermon I listened to was deductive in form. He does use a "main proposition...[that matches] the main proposition of Coordinates."⁷⁴

The SBSG curriculum IBC uses is quality. The material looks good. It is appealing to the eye without being too overbearing with graphics. Volume and edition number, and date organizes each lesson. Cecil uses core competencies to help students as

⁶⁸ Tony Cecil, interview by Alan Stoddard, Glasgow, KY, October 7, 2007, question 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Tony Cecil, *A Glorious Destiny*, Immanuel Baptist Church, December 9, 2007, <http://www.ibcglasgow.org> (accessed September 29, 2008). Go to the "Message Resources" link on the home page.

⁷² Tony Cecil, *Coordinates: A Glorious Destiny*, Immanuel Baptist Church, December 3, 2007, <http://www.ibcglasgow.org/ibc/coordinates/120907.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2008).

⁷³ Tony Cecil, interview, question 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

a guide to spiritual growth. One of the best features of the curriculum involves the church's vision statement.⁷⁵ It is on every week's lesson. The vision is also highly visible on the church's website. The people who use the SBSG curriculum are able to have a sense of connection to the church's mission in the world through the vision statement.

The curriculum is well written and follows a process. Cecil has good exegesis and references using footnotes. Scripture references are printed in the material. Most of the material is doctrinal at the expense of being practical. When I first read Cecil's SBSG lesson, I picked up quickly that he was from the reformed tradition. When asked to "describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)," here is how Cecil responded:

When I began writing Coordinates (over 2 ½ years ago), I tried to include all three types of questions. In terms of the knowledge questions, most of what I asked encouraged readers to slow down and observe what the text actually said. Most questions I asked could be easily answered simply by re-reading the passage. The "understanding" questions were asked more from a subjective point of view. For example, "What do you think Paul means" Usually after the subjective questions, I answered the question by telling the readers what it was that Paul actually meant. At the end of the study, I usually asked 3-5 application questions/activities. These were by far the most difficult to write. I found many of these in other studies/sermons that I read as I prepared during the week.⁷⁶

Cecil's response reveals he used structure in preparing his material. What I found intriguing was his truthfulness regarding application questions. They were the hardest to produce. Cecil did not state why it was so challenging to produce application questions. I would conclude his approach to preaching might give insight to the challenge. When

⁷⁵ The church vision statement is "Helping People Become Fully Devoted Followers of Jesus Christ."

⁷⁶ Tony Cecil, interview, question 2.

asked which he focused on more, “knowledge of the passage or application of the passage”⁷⁷ Cecil said, “Of course, I try...both. But the majority of my focus surrounds knowledge and understanding. My goal is to correct erroneous thinking surrounding the gospel....”⁷⁸ Cecil admitted that he stopped writing and using the discussion questions.⁷⁹ I believe that to be a mistake. Pastor Cecil is a good preacher who provides good doctrine and content. I believe he could have less content in the small groups and could focus on discussion questions alone.

Pastor Cecil and IBC use the SBSG model in a way that most SBSG churches do not. In responding to question seven, “How does this process [SBSG] influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader’s function?” he said this:

Our schedule on Sunday mornings is 8:15 Bible Fellowship Groups, 9:30 worship, and 11:00 Bible Fellowship Groups. All those using Coordinates as their curriculum are in the second hour (11:00 a.m.). The hope is that people have studied the Coordinates (during the week), heard a message on the passage (9:30 a.m.), and are now ready to interact with the passage as a group. There is a lot more discussion this way. At our church we do both Bible Study Fellowships and small groups. BSFs are lead by teachers. Small groups are lead by a group leader (not necessarily a teacher). Small groups, for us anyway, are where our people come together and serve one another through the execution of spiritual gifts. A BSF is a teaching environment. I stay in constant contact with the teachers who use Coordinates as their curriculum. I’m aware of any problems they are personally experiencing, and make an effort to equip them on an individual basis.⁸⁰

The process for IBC is different because the groups that choose to use SBSG curriculum

⁷⁷ Ibid., question 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., question 7.

read the material before the Sunday morning worship experience. Participants then listen to the sermon knowing much of what is coming. Then they discuss the message. Their simple approach is to read it, hear it, and discuss it. Cecil's approach is to take his members deep with the curriculum before they ever reach the IBC campus.

Pastor Cecil's leadership with his Bible Study Fellowship leaders is important. He sets the example of modeling the importance of participating in a small group by participating in one himself.⁸¹ He also leads his leaders. He said, "I stay in constant contact with the teachers who use Coordinates as their curriculum. I'm aware of any problems they are personally experiencing, or make an effort to equip them on an individual basis."⁸² As a pastor of a church without a minister of education, Cecil has to lead the Bible Fellowship Leaders so the groups remain healthy. I especially appreciate his mentioning personal involvement with leaders. Cecil also stated leaders will need help in learning how to guide a discussion.⁸³ At IBC, people immediately go from hearing the sermon to discussing it. This is one reason Cecil says the SBSG model works well with "on campus groups."⁸⁴

Pastor Cecil sees a great spiritual benefit in using the SBSG model. Pastor Cecil was asked, "How does this process [using the SBSG model] impact the small groups in your church?" Cecil replied, "I'm probably biased, but I see a noticeable difference in the spiritual growth of those who use the process and those who do not...if a person wants to

⁸¹ Ibid., question 8.

⁸² Ibid., question 7.

⁸³ Ibid., question 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., question 10.

grow spiritually, the process we have developed does a much better job at equipping them than the alternative method that other groups use (study independent from message).”⁸⁵ When people participate in the SBSG model, they end up with a “better understanding of the gospel...[and a] greater understanding of the text.”⁸⁶ Cecil even provided feedback from a participant in a SBSG. In a letter to Pastor Cecil during pastor appreciation month 2007 a congregant said, “I am finding a total newness in study of the Bible with using Coordinates. You do such a great job typing the subject verses together in a workable learning experience.”⁸⁷ Cecil followed up the comment by saying of the man, “He’s doing more than just listening to a message; he’s also studying it himself.”⁸⁸

The SBSG model does have challenges at IBC and for Pastor Cecil. He mentioned three times in the survey that time is a problem for him.⁸⁹ Serving a small to medium size church without staff could be a challenge. It is a challenge that can be overcome by good sermon preparation retreats that work months ahead. When asked, “What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?” Cecil was clear. He said, “It’s very difficult to pull off. If you [are] not willing to invest a great deal of time and effort to this task, don’t attempt it.”⁹⁰ A second challenge is related to repetition. Cecil says, “Some

⁸⁵ Ibid., question 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., question 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., questions 2, 5, and 12.

⁹⁰ Ibid., question 12.

people hate repetition.”⁹¹ Obviously, some people will not immediately gravitate to the SBSG model.

Pastor Tony Cecil is a scholarly pastor. He knows his business when it comes to the SBSG model. I do believe he points out one of the best results of using the SBSG model. He said the SBSG model allows a pastor “to speak directly to the spiritual needs of the congregation.”⁹² Since the pastor’s message is the main message of the church, I tend to agree with Cecil. A pastor should have a venue that speaks into the life of the congregation.

Southeast Christian Church

Southeast Christian Church (SEC) is located in Parker, Colorado, and uses the SBSG model to make disciples. The church is a mega church that has over fifty staff personnel⁹³ and 4200 in worship attendance each weekend. The church has 1200 people in 100-120 off campus small groups.⁹⁴ Pastor Jason McBride is a staff member at SEC who is responsible for adult small groups. He interacted with the survey and allowed follow up questions by email.

SEC has great multimedia and web support for their SBSG model. The SEC website looks great. It is simple and easy to use. The sermon series is on the home page and has a front portal to the SBSG resources. The SEC model follows a series approach. I

⁹¹ Ibid., question 5.

⁹² Ibid., question 12.

⁹³ Jason McBride, interview by Alan Stoddard, Parker, CO, October 22, 2007, question 11.

⁹⁴ Jason McBride, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Parker, CO, October 20, 2008.

listened to a sermon entitled, “Needing One Another.”⁹⁵ On one page the user can use audio, video, and can access the SBSG material in a pdf form. This access provides a clear path for those who do not get to hear a message on campus, but will participate in a small group. The Senior Pastor of SEC is Todd Hudson. He preached the sermon I watched online. His style of preaching is topical and conversational. His main passage was Genesis 2. His main idea for the sermon was something like “We have been created for relationship with God and each other.”⁹⁶ I believe the big idea should be printed on the SBSG material. It was not on the SEC material. The message was on target and did not seem to be so topical that it could not be followed with ease. I would not consider the message expository and at times in the message wondered how much biblical authority it really had. The message was thirty-five minutes long yet Hudson did not use the Bible until fifteen minutes into the message. The message ended with three cross references that I thought were strategic uses and actually set up the small group discussion. Hudson used Matthew 5:23-24, 1 John 4:20-21, and John 13:34 to talk briefly about nuances in relationships. He did not elaborate on these texts. The SBSG material writers at SEC did bring them up in the material. The writer actually used John 13:34, Hudson’s last cross-reference scripture, in the introduction of the SBSG lesson for the message. The other texts were also used. The format of the questions is simple and was only two pages in length. The material was developed in a black and white format, similar to a MS Word

⁹⁵ Todd Hudson, *Needing One Another*, Southeast Christian Church, October 12, 2008, <http://www.sechristian.org/Resources/SermonsOnlineAudioVideo/YouMe.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2008).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

document with no color. As I followed the message with the curriculum open, I was able to see how the writers developed the lesson. The lesson was simple with questions and did not include a lot of extra material outside of the sermon topic.

When Pastor McBride was asked to “Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) in question two, here is what he said:

We have a writing team, made up of ministry partners, who receive the sermon each week and it is up to them to decide which part of the sermon they will focus on. They typically choose a key passage or a key point from the sermon and use that to build the study. They use a template that includes:

1. What is this about? (short description of the sermon and study)
2. Talk about it (1-2 ice breaker type questions)
3. Explore it (2-3 questions focused on passage understanding)
4. Get it (3-4 questions focused on their life story and the passage)
5. Apply it (1-2 questions focused on applying the passage)⁹⁷

This template looks like one that comes from Serendipity or another mainline printing press. It does look effective and strategic. A template can make writing or organizing to write questions easier. Notice SEC uses a writing team. One of the main themes in the SEC survey was about their use of a writing team. McBride identified the writing process as a challenge. When asked about it in the survey he specifically stated two challenges:

1. Developing a writing team that really gets the goal of a small group study and how to write questions that reveal people’s stories and takes them on a journey to integrate the study with their daily lives. We spend a lot of time dialoguing with and training our writers in asking great questions, small group dynamics and application techniques.
2. Getting the sermon script in time to develop a good study and have it ready the same weekend as the sermon. Ideally, we would like the preaching team to prepare and deliver the sermons scripts three (3) weeks before the sermon is delivered. We have not reached that goal at this point.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Jason McBride, interview, question 2.

McBride's first challenge is recruiting the writing team and getting the team trained. I am impressed with the fact SEC has a vision to develop writers and teach them. As a mega church one could assume the church has a few writers in the congregation. Training and equipping writers is important because they may know how to write, but do not fully grasp small group interaction and targeted application. The fact that SEC believes in using a writing team with excellence is underscored by McBride's response to the last question on the survey. The question asks, "What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?" McBride reveals SEC's focus:

We spend most of our energy in developing the writing team. Finding skilled study guide writers is a challenge, not every writer can do it. Once we find them, we do everything we can to develop them, encourage them and build them up. We spend money on training, resources and appreciating them regularly. Also, it doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be consistent. If you start writing weekly study guides and your leaders are expecting them, then you can't take a weekend off and leave them hanging...if you do, they will stop using it and probably never use it again.⁹⁹

Writing the SBSG material is important to SEC. This priority is found in their willingness to not only train volunteers, but to use budget money to do it. Appreciation provides motivation and probably helps keep writers. The desire for consistency over perfection is admirable and visionary.

The second challenge deals with getting the preaching team to work ahead so the writing team can have adequate time to prepare and write curriculum. Time to prepare the material is a consistent challenge in the surveys. The challenge is not insurmountable.

⁹⁸ Ibid., question 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., question 12.

SEC obviously can produce the material in a timely manner or they would not have success with the SBSG model.

Pastor McBride identified five unique benefits of using the SBSG model:

1. It helps with small group leader recruiting. It is less intimidating for new leaders if they know the materials are available and related to something they have already heard in church.
2. It helps with weekly preparation for the leaders. There seems to be less prep work for the leaders when using sermon-based studies. [This is] Probably because they are already familiar with the topic.
3. It builds cohesiveness, unity and energy between the groups. There is energy built when the groups are studying the same material and can discuss it across groups.
4. It deepens the impact of the sermon. Instead of hearing the sermon once and being done, they are being presented with the information multiple times a week.
5. For the small group staff it provides improved quality control with resources and what is going on in individual groups. This is not a problem with most groups, but it helps eliminate some really bad choices for group materials.¹⁰⁰

As I have researched churches and literature for this project, I have found uniqueness with SEC and McBride's response in number five above. Responses one through four are normal. Response number five deals with quality control of resources. From the context of his answer McBride's speaking of doctrine. SBSG can help control doctrine either by addressing or not addressing a specific doctrine.

Leadership in small groups at SEC is driven by the purpose the church has for small groups. SEC does not focus on knowledge questions when developing SBSG curriculum. McBride responded, "We try to balance life experience with application of truth. We focus on two things: discovering each individual's personal story and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., question 4.

application of the passage to daily life.”¹⁰¹ Life transformation is the important factor for SEC small groups. It is with this in mind the leaders are recruited to not be teachers, but facilitators.¹⁰² McBride adds, “We spend less time training on resource finding...and spend more time training on facilitating a discussion and creating an environment for change.”¹⁰³

Constance Free Church

Constance Free Church (CFC) in Andover, Minnesota, uses the SBSG model for small group discipleship. The Senior Pastor is Randy Discher. The Pastor of Small Groups is Shawn Suave. Pastor Suave was gracious to interact with my survey and follow up emails. Constance Free Church runs 1500 a weekend in worship and has 400 adults in small groups using the SBSG model. CFC has an additional 225 in small groups using topical material that is not based on the sermon.¹⁰⁴

CFC uses media to enhance the SBSG experience. CFC has a good website. I listened to a sermon entitled, “Keep the Change.”¹⁰⁵ The message was part of a series entitled, “I Need to Change.”¹⁰⁶ The message was a topical message that used little scripture. The message was a message on the Great Commission as related to spiritual

¹⁰¹ Ibid., question 3.

¹⁰² Ibid., question 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Shawn Suave, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Andover, MN, October 27, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Randy Discher, *Keep the Change*, Constance Free Church, October 25-26, 2008, <http://constanceonline.com/351388.ihtml> (accessed October 27, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

growth in listeners' lives. Pastor Discher basically preached the continuum outline from the Reveal study out of the Willow Creek Community Church study.¹⁰⁷ The small group material¹⁰⁸ was on the topic with the sermon, but was not easily connected to what was said in the sermon.

On the church website the SBSG materials were easily accessible. The church offers the message on audio mp3 and the SBSB curriculum in pdf. The pdf of the material is basic. It is printed on an 8x11 white paper with the church logo on it. The material could look better. It could be more easily placed in a Bible by designing and printing it landscape. Another possible weakness could be the church does not have video footage of the message. Otherwise CFC has a strong structure to ensure their small group ministry is effective. A member can register online for a SBSG and leaders can also receive small group leader training online.

Pastor Suave writes the SBSG material for CFC. His response to question two on developing questions was detailed and long. His response does reveal the depth of the CFC material. Suave said, "We want to challenge 'conventionality,' meaning, we want to confront culture trends and our own sinful tendencies as fallen people, with scripture."¹⁰⁹ CFC uses "material from prior centuries of Christian thought and multiple Christian traditions (e.g., Quaker, Pentecostal, Episcopal, etc.)."¹¹⁰ Suave goes on to say the focus is

¹⁰⁷ Craig L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, and Eric Arnson, *Reveal: Where Are You? The Answer That Will Transform Your Church* (Willow Creek Association: Barrington, IL, 2007), 37.

¹⁰⁸ Shawn Suave, *I Need to Change*, Constance Free Church, October 24-25, 2008, <http://constanceonline.com/page.aspx?id=199305> (accessed October 27 2008).

¹⁰⁹ Shawn Suave, interview by Alan Stoddard, Andover, MN, June 19, 2008, question 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

on “spiritual disciplines and [they] encourage spiritual formation.”¹¹¹ CFC’s philosophy is to deepen a believer’s faith while at the same time keeping the delivery system simple.

CFC uses a template approach to preparation of SBSG material. The template follows a “hook, book, look, and took approach.”¹¹² The actual curriculum unfolds into seven sections. It begins with a review of the Sunday message. This is called “The Big Picture.”¹¹³ The material then engages the group with the hook in a section designed with a felt need ice breaker called “Spotlight.”¹¹⁴ Suave then provides a section of the small group time for discussion using a contemporary book that relates to the sermon theme. He provided a portion of the book on the last page of the material. He used a true and false interaction that was practical for daily Christian living. The discussion then is driven to the scriptures in a section called “The Word.”¹¹⁵ This section has three to four in-depth questions related to the text of the sermon or a similar text that deals with the topic. The questions are three to four sentences long and guide toward applying the text. The questions ask the participant to do something and require writing the possible actions down. This is confirmed in Suave’s response in question two where he said, “All lessons provide learning activities that effectively move learners toward putting the lesson truths

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Shawn Suave, *I Need to Change*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

into practice.”¹¹⁶ The last two sections deal with guiding group prayer during the lesson and provide the group with a memory verse from the text.¹¹⁷

The content of the CFC SBSG material is excellent. Reading it reveals the writing expertise and the creativity of Pastor Suave. He does a great job at balancing the content. His response to question three asking, “Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?” he said this: “We try to focus on both knowledge and application—understanding what a passage of scripture teaches (both meaning and implications of that meaning—timeless principles) is a necessary prerequisite to application. Knowledge without application is unhealthy, as is application without knowledge.”¹¹⁸

Suave has thought the SBSG approach through for his context. He knows what he wants to accomplish. When asked to identify the benefits of the SBSG approach, Suave gave a strategic answer that defines the SBSG model:

Constance Free Church offers curriculum for small groups based on the current sermon message. These "sermon-based" groups are built on what we call a "Lecture-Lab" model. The weekend message is essentially a lecture on Christian living, and the small group complements the weekend message by serving as a lab where small groups get to roll up their sleeves and discuss how the weekend's message works out in real life.¹¹⁹

Suave is the only survey respondent to use the phrase Lecture Lab Model. Larry Osborne also used this phrase to explain the connection between the sermon and the small group.

¹¹⁶ Shawn Suave, interview, question 2.

¹¹⁷ Shawn Suave, *I Need to Change*.

¹¹⁸ Shawn Suave, interview, question 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, question 4.

The sermon is the lecture and the small group is the lab. Preparation happens in the lecture or sermon on Sunday morning. The small group is where participants talk through understanding of the lecture. They work through gaining further understanding and how they will apply the sermon.¹²⁰

Pastor Suave then listed six benefits of using the SBSG model and explained them:

The community grows together

Since sermon-based groups all tackle the same subject, people in all groups will share similar experiences. Participants have common ground with participants in other small groups, opportunities for mutual, shared, spiritual growth develop spontaneously.

People discover spiritual gifts

Sermon-based curriculum is intentionally discussion-oriented rather than teaching-oriented (other curricula might accomplish this, but sermon curricula allows us to be very intentional in our discipleship). Every person who wants to share has an opportunity. In doing so, many discover that they have gifts like prayer, hospitality, encouragement, leadership, and discernment.

Real friendships can develop

In sermon-based groups, the groundwork for discussion is laid during the weekend service. This leaves more time for voicing our experience, investigating issues, and getting to know one another better through shared learning and laughter.

Leaders can lead

Inexperienced leaders and/or leaders with time constraints can find the development and/or selection of their own curriculum intimidating. With sermon-base curriculum provided, leaders are free to focus their attentions on developing

community in their small group. They are free to focus on the emotional and spiritual health of their group members, and apprentice future leaders.

¹²⁰ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 70.

Connecting to small groups has fewer uncertainties

When we “advertise” small groups and connect new adults to small groups, we can tell them what the small group experience will be like because we know how the small group curriculum is laid out. New small group members aren’t left guessing or wondering what will happen in small group. We also have a six week “trial small group” called “Starting Point” for people that are new to our church. This trial group is based on a prior sermon series we did on our church’s core values—and the structure of the studies are exactly the same as the structure of our other sermon-based studies. The advantage is that those new to our church learn more about who we are as a church, try a small group-style experience, and when they join a sermon-based small group they are already familiar with the format of the studies.¹²¹

Suave’s benefits are compelling. The discipleship process happens not in various programs but in the small group. The CFC model encompasses the needs of a Christ follower but harnesses meeting the needs through one simple process using the SBSG model.

Pastor Suave does have his share of challenges using this model. Suave identified a common challenge and a unique challenge. His answer to question 5 is worth noting. He said, “It is challenging to provide ample alternatives in some studies (depending on the sermon or sermon-series) to fit a variety of groups that represent different life-stages, spiritual maturity, etc.”¹²² While this is true, it is solved by philosophy. For example, Osborne’s philosophy at North Coast Church is to “not separate out all the newbie’s. It is to get them into a situation where they can rub shoulders with longtime Christians and benefit from life-on-life modeling and mentoring.”¹²³ There is no hard and fast rule to

¹²¹ Shawn Suave, interview, question 4.

¹²² Shawn Suave, interview, question 5.

¹²³ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 69.

solve this challenge. The second challenge is meeting needs identified in the group that the sermon series might not address.¹²⁴

Pastor Suave does interact with a small group. He does so as a leader by checking in on the groups and leaders of the groups. He said, “Normally my interaction is through one-on-one meetings over coffee with small group leaders during the year.”¹²⁵ CFC has a good leadership design for small group leaders. When asked about leadership development in question 7, Suave identified three functions the CBC small group leaders have to be able to do: 1) Shepherd, 2) Facilitate, and 3) Monitor. Shepherding means they serve as a type of pastor for the group, Facilitating means they guide the discussion when the group meets. Monitoring means the leader assesses the health of the group.¹²⁶

Pastor Suave writes the SBSG material for CFC. He does it in collaboration with the teaching pastor and a creative team.¹²⁷ The team plans six months ahead at the “summary level.”¹²⁸ When the team is ready to preach the series, they meet on a weekly basis to “add details for each individual sermon...the teaching pastor lays out in greater detail where the sermon is going and we have team interaction around the sermon (creative ideas, refinement of the sermon, small group questions).”¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Shawn Suave, interview, question 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid., question 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 7. For a more detailed explanation of what CFC tries to do with their small groups leaders see the complete interview in the appendix.

¹²⁷ Shawn Suave, interview, question 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

When asked in question 12, “What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?” Pastor Suave said, “Research other churches that do this to generate new ideas, but implement a model that fits the culture of your own church.”¹³⁰

Solana Beach Presbyterian Church

Mike McClenahan is the Senior Pastor of Solana Beach Presbyterian Church (SBPC) in Solana Beach, California. The church averages 1200 in worship attendance on the weekend and 900 of the 1200 participate in off campus small groups during the week.¹³¹ The church uses the SBSG approach for making disciples. Pastor McClenahan interacted personally with the survey yet his Pastor of Discipleship, Paula Taylor, writes the SBSG curriculum.¹³²

SBPC uses their website with excellence. The church website looks great, is user friendly, and promotes the sermon series on the home page. Once a user clicks on the sermon series graphic, the user gets easy access to sermon notes, SBSG curriculum, and audio of present and past sermons. The SBSG material is basic but eye catching. It is printed in pdf on a 8 x 11. The content is in outline form but is attractive in blue and black interacting colors. The sermon outline for Sunday morning is on the front and the questions are on the back. The website has a leader section that is extensive and reveals the commitment of SBPC to small group community and leadership. The Leader Notes section provides more than answers to questions. The area has five sections: 1) a message

¹³⁰ Shawn Suave, interview, question 12.

¹³¹ Mike McClenahan, interview by Alan Stoddard, Solana Beach, California, October 22, 2007, question 4.

¹³² Ibid., question 1.

overview, 2) explanation of bookmarks with the series on them and daily Bible reading scriptures to encourage people to read the Bible through in a year, 3) a service project opportunity announcement, 4) small group evaluation form completion request, and 5) an announcement of a Thanksgiving service.¹³³ Leader development and member discipleship is important to SBPC. The church does spiritual gift assessment using the SHAPE model. A person can join a small group online with ease. SBPC has streamlined the discipleship path and focuses intentionally on things they believe are important.

Pastor McClenahan preached a message entitled “My95”¹³⁴ that I listened to online to research their model. The message was also imbedded from You Tube on their message resource page. The message was one in a series entitled “Splash.” The text for the message was John 17:18. One unique thing about McClenahan is he is a big idea preacher. He used his big idea as his outline and the outline came from John 17:18. McClenahan’s preaching style is conversational. He is biblical. He did not say much without it being driven by his text of scripture. McClenahan used the word missional a few times. His focus was on serving the world as a witness. His message was relevant and left room for application in the SBSG material.

Pastor McClenahan leads his staff in creating the SBSG material. When asked, “What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)”

¹³³ Paula Taylor includes these kinds of things each week. Examples can be found on the church website.

¹³⁴ Mike McClenahan, *My95*, Solana Presbyterian Church, November 2, 2008, <http://www.solanapres.org/Ministries/Worship/MessageDownloads/302075.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2008).

McClenahan explained the process with two views in mind. With the long and short-range views in mind he said this of their curriculum development process:

First, I develop a ten week series that helps us move forward strategically. This fall our focus is evangelism. This winter will be volunteer service and stewardship. I give the worship team, communications director and minister of discipleship my series information with series concept, titles and texts. We meet together to talk about creative ideas for testimonies, drama, [and] special music. Weekly [the] process includes worship planning on Tuesday morning with a rough outline, outline finished by Thursday morning and questions developed by Thursday noon for bulletin printing. The process is very collaborative. You'll see if you download, but we ask warm up questions, digging deeper questions into the text, then application and prayer.¹³⁵

I did download the materials and it is obvious the SBPC process is the work of a team.

SBPC also follows the process McClenahan said they used. They follow a template approach. The template outline for writing the curriculum expressed in a way that seems transferable and memorable from week to week. The outline is 1) share it, 2) study it, 3) live it, and 4) pray it.¹³⁶ The process for planning a series of sermons starts with McClenahan looking months ahead. Then, he brings his team of contributors to the table so they can bring unique creativity to the material. The structure McClenahan gave looks like this:

10 weeks in the fall.
Break at Thanksgiving to New Year
10 weeks in the winter
Break at Palm Sunday to Easter
10 weeks in the spring
Break in June till Sept.

¹³⁵ Mike McClenahan, interview, question 2.

¹³⁶ See the "message download" page where the message audio, video, and SBSG questions are available on one page. All of the small group material will follow this outline.

Advantages: Series keeps people engaged. 10 weeks is [the] maximum and fits well in the seasons. The breaks give groups a rest and by the time groups come back, they can't wait to see each other.¹³⁷

McClenahan and his team help themselves by looking far ahead. They also are strategic in finding balance in content. When asked specifically about balancing knowledge or application questions, McClenahan said his team does “both.”¹³⁸ He said the first question in the material is “What stands out to you from the passage or the message?”¹³⁹ He went on to say “That simple question leads to deep discussion.”¹⁴⁰

Pastor McClenahan identified four benefits SBPC finds in using the SBSG model. The benefits he identified are motivation for a pastor concerned with discipleship. His feedback reveals the thesis of this project:

1. Unity. Our whole church is studying the same text ... in small groups means culture change and whole church transformation is possible.
2. Transformation. Deeper Learning Theory suggests that learning only takes place when a message heard, then discussed in a smaller group, and applied. Traditional sermons can only inspire, but not transform. My preaching is better because my goal is to teach and inspire. But I know my message is a set up for the real work of discussion and application. This pattern put me as the senior pastor in the critical path of discipleship.
3. Equipped lay leadership. We have 150 lay leaders (members) who are trained before they can be a leader, and then are encouraged to attend training twice a year. There we develop skills for leadership, I share the next series concept, and encourage their hearts for ministry.

¹³⁷ Mike McClenahan, interview, question 2.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

4. Collaborative Planning. Our worship services are better planned, more creative, more impacting because we are all working together.¹⁴¹

In the proposal of this project I stated the goal of preaching was for listeners to be transformed. McClenahan in his answer above in answer b supports the strengths of the SBSG model. Listening is not enough. Preaching and listening can motivate but is limited. Small group discussion about the preached idea brings transformation or life change. Application is at the center of the SBSG approach.

When Pastor McClenahan was asked about the challenges SBPC faces with the SBSG model, he provided two challenges:

1. Our future challenges will be, how do we minister to people of different spiritual maturity? We offer Alpha classes, care groups for divorce, single parents and grief, but the core is sermon based.
2. EGR (Extra Grace Required) people who don't fit well in small groups. But those are very few.¹⁴²

The challenge of addressing people at different levels of spiritual maturity reoccurred among a few of the surveyed churches. The challenged can be anticipated and marginalized if a church has a clear philosophy for using the SBSG model. There are those who do not fit in small groups, but I have found they are either not committed to biblical community in small groups or are self feeders that are able to mentor others or lead small groups.

SPBC has a clear definition of what they expect their SBSG leaders to do. Here is how he responded to question six, "How does this process influence your leader in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function?"

¹⁴¹ Ibid., question 3.

¹⁴² Ibid., Question 4.

Small group leaders are not teacher, but facilitators. Benefits:

1. More with the gifts of shepherding, encouragement and hospitality rather than teaching.
2. Reduces the “expert” syndrome of small group leaders looking to the teacher for right answers.
3. Small group leaders are the first line of pastoral care. They are praying for each other each week, often sharing a meal together, and often getting together for social events in the off season.
4. A group of mentor leaders (6-7 couples) oversees all the small group leaders. They meet weekly with Paula on Sunday nights as a small group, help facilitate training meetings and are available to leaders to help with questions or problems.¹⁴³

Connecting the sermon to the small group requires a paradigm shift. SBPC has made the change in thinking. Teachers are guides, not experts. Shepherding, fellowship, and mentoring are by-products of the SBSG model. Staff members are no longer doing the work of the ministry alone. The SBSG model fosters an environment that focuses staff leaders on equipping church members in small groups to minister to one another.

The SBSG model at SBPC is fluid and holistic. Pastor McClenahan and his wife participate in a SBSG.¹⁴⁴ He recommends staff members commit to a small group not as leaders, but as participants.¹⁴⁵ The SBPC is healthy. Groups are challenged to serve in the local community as well as internationally on mission trips.¹⁴⁶ Although the SBPC model works best using off campus groups, the model is flexible enough to allow on campus

¹⁴³ Ibid., Question 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Question 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Question 8.

opportunities after the first service. This is a SBSG hybrid that fits a Sunday School structure.¹⁴⁷

The SBPC model for SBSG use is well refined because they are strategic in planning. The church is intentional in identifying what is important in the life of the church. When asked, “What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?” McClenahan gave the following list of things to consider to those who would consider implementing some form of the SBSG approach:

- a. Take time to develop the idea.
- b. Visit churches that are doing it.
- c. Put together a pilot team who will become mentor leaders.
- d. Recruit leaders broadly. Require leaders to be trained and be members for accountability.
- e. Allow leaders to recruit their own small group members to get started, then have open enrollment on Sundays. If you do this, you’ll have 25% to 30% of your groups formed before open enrollment. It’s a win before you get started.
- f. Get the pastoral staff and church leadership on board before you move forward.
- g. Stick with it and constantly improve it.
- h. Reduce or eliminate ineffective programs to make room for this, because it has the potential of transforming the whole church.
- i. The senior pastor and another staff person have to give their lives to it to make it work.¹⁴⁸

Developing and maintaining a SBSG model is not easy. It requires time. Once it is created it becomes manageable. The SBSG model is good for forward thinking leaders who are willing to look far ahead and are not looking for huge numerical success. The process takes time to implement and precision to maintain.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Question 9.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., Question 12.

Calvary Bible Church

Calvary Bible Church (CBC) uses the SBSG approach to accomplish spiritual growth in the lives of its members. The church is located in Derry, New Hampshire. The Senior Pastor is John Talley. Carl Illian, the Associate Pastor of Discipleship, interacted with the survey. CBC runs 450 in worship and 160 in off campus small groups using the SBSG model.¹⁴⁹

CBC uses multimedia and the Internet to enhance the spiritual growth of its members. The website looks good. One glaring difference in this church and others is that the SBSG material or the sermon series was not promoted on the home page. A link to messages was the only connection. The SBSG pages were two layers behind the home page. If a user did not look for the page intentionally, a person would not find the SBSG area. Once the SBSG page is accessed, the explanation of the purpose of the groups and connection information is clear and easy.

The CBC website does have a separate message page. This page provides sermons by mp3 podcast and real player download. The church recently started using video by using UStream. I did watch the trial video sermon, but the quality was not good. The message page overall is a good page. I would recommend connecting the message archives page with the sermon based small group material instead of separating them. The message I listened to was entitled, “Real Relationships” from the text John 15:1-11.¹⁵⁰ Pastor Talley is a biblical, exegetical, and relevant preacher. His message was

¹⁴⁹ Carl Illian, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Derry, New Hampshire, December 9, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ John Talley, *Real Relationships*, Calvary Bible Church, November 30, 2008, http://www.cbcderry.org/Audio/CBC_11_30_08_Morning_PastorTalley.mp3 (accessed December 8,

good. I never wondered whether he was using the scriptures. I could not pick out a clear big idea from his sermon. As I listened, I did so with the corresponding SBSG questions open. The questions were too broad but they were related to the sermon topic and text. While the media delivery through the CBC website is adequate, it could be better. Aligning the SBSG material and the message page with the website's homepage would make the system user-friendly.

Pastor Illian fills a unique role in the development of SBSG material for CBC. He says "I am officially an Assistant Pastor. However, I serve in a voluntary capacity, having retired from the Pharmaceutical/Biotechnology industry after twenty eight years working in that field."¹⁵¹ I found it surprising he was a volunteer who served on staff. When asked specifically "Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)" he said two things that make the SBSG model a possibility to any church. Illian stated, "The Worship Pastor, Sr. Pastor and I meet together to discuss what the emphasis of the Sunday morning message will be and together we develop the small group discussion questions for that week. The questions would include all three areas you mention above with an emphasis ultimately on application."¹⁵² First, Illian stated his staff team works the process together. Teaming up makes the process easier and more manageable. Second, I found it interesting this church only works one week ahead. Planning ahead for a larger time is helpful and strategic, but it is not required.

2008).

¹⁵¹ Carl Illian, interview by Alan Stoddard, Derry, NH, August 11, 2008, question 6.

¹⁵² Ibid., question 2.

Pastor Illian identified a common challenge for churches that use the SBSG model. He said, “Challenges occur when passages from week to week are in some way repetitive thereby making it difficult to come up with new questions on similar subjects.”¹⁵³ The repetition challenge with this church could be alleviated in part by developing a more comprehensive approach to developing questions. The church could also better the process by putting more content related to spiritual growth. This could be prayer requests, ministry projects, spiritual gift development, or announcements related to the church in general.

In addition, the SBSG material CBC develops is too basic and needs to be improved. The material is available in pdf format. It is printed on plain letter paper in black and white. The church rotates four weeks of questions on its website. Each of the weeks I analyzed followed the same format of using four questions. The first two questions were always the same. Small group participants are asked, “What truths from today’s message stood out to you personally?” and “What questions did it leave in your mind?”¹⁵⁴ The approach to resurface the same questions each week has pluses and minuses. The benefit of using these two questions is that they make members listen to the sermon attentively. Participants know they will answer the questions each week in small group time. Another benefit in using the same two questions is that it simplifies preparation. The downside is those who are not good at listening with an anticipated dialogue in mind may feel left out. The last two questions asked each week related to the

¹⁵³ Ibid, question 5.

¹⁵⁴ Carl Illian, *The Real Relationship*, Calvary Bible Church, November 30, 2008, <http://www.cbcderry.org/smallgroups.htm> (accessed December 8, 2008).

text of the sermon specifically. Illian stated the CBC focus was “ultimately on application.”¹⁵⁵ I could not see an obvious focus on application. With only four questions and two being the same every week, it is difficult to create a specific focus on application.

Application may happen in the groups as people interact and small group leaders facilitate. Pastor Illian said, “Our small group leaders are primarily drawn from our Deacon Board and other Pastoral Staff members. Their role is to guide the discussions and stimulate the members to consider the truths taught and help them see how they can impact our day-to-day living.”¹⁵⁶ The strength of leaders in the church leading groups has benefits. Leaders and deacons are mature in the faith and know what people need to grow in the Christian faith. What believers need, especially new believers, are spiritual friends who are guides to spiritual maturity. Pastor Illian does lead a group.¹⁵⁷ He is on the frontline of discipleship. He said of the SBSG process, “We believe it helps our members grow in living out the truths taught in the Word of God.”¹⁵⁸ When asked, “What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?” Illian simply stated, “We believe it is an ideal method for small group studies.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Carl Illian, interview, question 2.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., question 7.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., question 8.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., question 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., question 12.

Calvary Baptist Church

Calvary Baptist Church (CBC) is located in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, and makes disciples using the SBSG model. The Senior Pastor at CBC is Rick Baker. Jonathan Stairs is the Adult Ministries Pastor and leads the SBSG ministry. Pastor Stairs interacted with the SBSG survey and provided a unique perspective of the CBC model. The church averages 1000 in worship each week and has 350 of 600 adults in small groups using the SBSG model.¹⁶⁰

CBC has a website that not only looks good, but is user friendly for the SBSG model they employ. The church promotes the sermons on the home page. The link is directly connected to download by pod casts, videos, and the notes for small groups. There is a sleek bar on the bottom of the home page providing easy access.

Pastor Stairs was asked, “Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)” He responded by saying, “The teaching pastor is the one assigned to write the questions based on his sermon. They are aimed at application. We post the small group questions in our bulletin and also on our website www.calvary.on.ca for Sunday. We also produce a Study/Leader’s guide that leader’s can subscribe to via the website.”¹⁶¹ CBC uses a rotating teaching team. The teaching pastor for the week being responsible for the SBSG discussion questions is unique. This is another form of sermon collaboration. Stairs also pointed out how CBC material has application as its goal or

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Stairs, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, December 7, 2008.

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Stairs, interview by Alan Stoddard, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, October 20, 2008, question 2.

aim. The focus on application is a consistent goal with churches that use the SBSG model.

CBC uses a template model for writing SBSG questions. I looked at the SBSG material and found two templates. This is probably as a result of two different preachers rotating the teaching responsibilities developing the material uniquely. The templates look like this:

Template 1

Quick Review
My Story
Digging Deeper
Taking it Home¹⁶²

Template 2

Points to Ponder
List of Questions¹⁶³

Template one provided a review of the Sunday message or main idea. The section titled “My Story” is a section where participants connect themselves personally to the lesson. This provides a felt need expression opportunity. The “Digging Deeper” section is where the preaching idea is resurfaced and reinforce with cross-references from other portions of the scriptures. The “Taking it Home” section is designed to discuss how to do what the text or message ask listeners to do. I listened to the message entitled, “God

¹⁶² Jonathan Stairs, *Small Group Discussion Notes: ACT Questions*, Calvary Baptist Church, November 30, 2008, http://www.calvary.on.ca/Newsletter.aspx?site_id=10169&entry_id=122248 (accessed December 9, 2008).

¹⁶³ Jonathan Stairs, *Small Group Discussion Notes: God Reliance or Self Reliance*, Calvary Baptist Church, November 23, 2008, http://www.calvary.on.ca/Newsletter.aspx?site_id=1016&entry_id=121810 (accessed December 9, 2008).

Reliance or Self Reliance?”¹⁶⁴ Pastor Baker’s message was biblical and relevant. His style of preaching is conversational but at no time did I sense he was speaking apart from biblical support. I did pick up his big idea. He stated, “What we hold on to the most is what we trust in.”¹⁶⁵ I listened to his message with his corresponding SBSG questions open. As I listened, I could see how his questions, following the list of questions in model two, would work well in the small group experience.

Template two provided an extensive outline of the sermon text with cross-references. The template is a random list of questions to be discussed in small group. The template looks different than template one. The list of questions and the outline looked like they were cut and pasted directly from sermon notes. I do think this template could work, but it looks less simple than template one.

While CBC focuses on application as the goal, the focus is also to balance knowledge material with application questions. Stairs said, “...some knowledge questions are added to help people remember and retain the information that was presented on Sunday.”¹⁶⁶ Concern for understanding and knowledge is wise. The SBSG model does focus more on application, but not at the expense of teaching and knowing the scriptures. When asked, “How does this process impact the small groups in your church?” Stairs responded, “Our small groups are becoming more intentional in applying

¹⁶⁴ Rick Baker, *God Reliance or Self Reliance*,” Calvary Baptist Church, November 11, 2008, <http://www.calvary.on.ca/Content/10169/Enclosures/20081123a.mp3> (accessed December 9, 2008).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Jonathan Stairs, interview, question 3.

God's Word."¹⁶⁷ Getting listeners to do something in response to the word of God is the goal.

CBC uses mostly off campus small groups in its SBSG model, but there is a Sunday School component. I asked Pastor Stairs to explain how the Sunday School component works. Here is how he responded:

Two of our Adult Sunday School classes use our sermon-based small group questions, though the other five classes do not. I am presently evaluating whether the Sunday School classes that use the sermon-based curriculum are being too redundant for those who attend a Sunday School class and small group. The rest of the classes study a Book of the Bible or topic to meet the overall objective for Sunday School which is "To explain and apply God's Word through dynamic Bible teaching so that class members will grow in Christ." I realize that Sunday School classes and small groups can be competing ministry ventures but I think mid-classes are still valuable for the benefit of developing Bible teachers (which small groups often overlook especially if the aim of small groups is to facilitate discussion around the sermon). I also think another benefit of having mid-size groups (15-60 members) is that it develops "social space" as Joseph Myers puts it in his book *The Search to Belong*. Some people will never move into an intimate place of community like a small group but are willing to give "snap-shots" of themselves socially.¹⁶⁸

Stairs points out the challenge of finding a model that works for his church. While the SBSG model works, it is not always transferable from one context to another. Most churches are doing it with their own nuances. This ensures effectiveness. Designing the delivery system in small groups or Sunday School takes time and initially will require evaluation and shifting. His point about midsize groups, groups above fifteen and not more than sixty, is well taken. The social space issue is a major concern for those using the SBSG model. Relationship building is crucial in SBSG churches. Stairs clarified his

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., question 9.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Stairs, follow up interview.

response about the Sunday School model by stating this:

I guess I am giving you more of my philosophy of how small groups and Sunday School relate to each other than maybe you asked for but specifically it works this way. Those who attend our first service and have Sunday School immediately afterward; use what they just heard in the sermon for discussion. The benefit of this format is that it reinforces the pastor's message while it is fresh in the minds of the people. The downside is the facilitator has had little time for preparation, other than listening to the 45-minute sermon intently. The other class that uses sermon-based curriculum does so a week later after the message. In other words, this class meets just before they head into the 11 AM service (and a fresh word from the Lord). This format ideally allows a group to apply the sermon throughout the week and then come to class ready to give testimony to how God used the sermon that week. It aims more at accountability!¹⁶⁹

Stairs actually describes two models in his response. First, he has a group that meets immediately after the sermon to discuss it. He states a challenge with this group is lack of preparation for the group leader. Yet since most of the groups who are using the SBSG model are focused on relationship building, the preparation does not need to be a huge challenge. I could actually see this group model working well over lunch. It saves time in the week since there is no other group time required. It also allows participants to look toward the upcoming week from a unique viewpoint. The small group meets before the week even starts.

The second model Stairs mentions is more difficult and unappealing. The second class model is one that waits an entire week to meet and resurface the previous Sunday's message. I do like the testimony and accountability approach, but do not know if this would appeal to many church members. However, if one group leader and a group of church members were interested, the group should be allowed to do it. Again, relationships are just as important, if not more important than content.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Stairs did identify two challenges in using the SBSG model. He said the challenges are, "... 1) long-time church goers still want to go to information/knowledge based studies instead of application focused studies; and 2) writing small group questions is time consuming and is a difficult skill to obtain."¹⁷⁰ Stairs challenges are in one way the same as those identified by other churches. In another way his mentioning question writing as a skill difficult to obtain is prescriptive for the common challenge in SBSG churches. Balancing good questions that relate to the Bible and life is crucial to the discipleship process. Good content is still required so the small group does not have a spiritually empty feel to it.

The SBSG model has many benefits and CBC has its own purpose found in using the model. When asked to describe the benefits Pastor Stairs responded, "Using sermon-based small group curriculum helps those in small groups to be going in the same direction, which fights against departmentalism that often occurs in larger churches. Also, speaking as one of the teaching pastors, it has caused my preaching to be more application oriented than before we began sermon-based small groups."¹⁷¹ The SBSG model, when it catches traction, produces and promotes unity in the church. Most preachers would say application is what they want to see in listeners' lives. However, the truth is most sermons deal with the biblical world and not modern world. The SBSG model makes the preacher pay attention and focus on what the listeners will experience in their lives the next week after the sermon is preached. The SBSG model also considers with greater precision what life transformation might look like in the small group after

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Stairs, interview, question 5.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., question 4.

the sermon is preached. This concern for application makes it easier for the small group leaders to shepherd the people in the group. Leaders can begin to anticipate questions and teach Christ followers to live God's truths.

Parkview Christian Church

Parkview Christian Church (PCC) is located in Orland Park, Illinois. The church averages 3500-4000¹⁷² in worship and 1350 in small groups. PCC uses the SBSG approach. PCC is lead by Senior Pastor Tim Harlow. Jon Zabrocki is the Community Life Director and oversees small groups.¹⁷³ The church website looks good, but it does not promote the SBSG model. It does promote small groups on each of its campus web pages. The church does have a good user-friendly media page with online sermons available in audio formats only. The sermons are not available for download or pod cast.

While the SBSG model is not the only model for small groups at PCC, it is used as a unique option. Zabrocki said, "Occasionally we do a small group study based on the sermon – probably 3 times per year. Each is about 4 weeks in length."¹⁷⁴ Of the churches researched, this church uses the SBSG model the fewest number of weeks in a year. This may be a benefit of the model for pastors and churches that do not want to make a total shift to the model. When asked about challenges with the SBSG model, Zabrocki said, "Getting all groups to do it. We have never forced groups to do it and our last survey

¹⁷² Beth Anne Falco, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Orland Park, ILL, December 11, 2008.

¹⁷³ Jon Zabrocki, interview by Alan Stoddard, Orland Park, ILL, August 11, 2008, question 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., question 1.

indicated about 40% not doing them.”¹⁷⁵ PCC is a church implementing the SBSG model as a work in progress. Zabrocki’s responses were generally the same as other churches surveyed. He did identify a benefit not mentioned by the other churches. He said, “We like the idea of everyone in small groups doing the same thing—it leads to a little more of a community feel.”¹⁷⁶ The only other uniqueness with PCC is the way the church writes the SBSG material. Zabrocki said the church follows a “Know/Own/Known”¹⁷⁷ template. The “Know” section is where the SBSG participants clarify understanding and knowledge of the sermon and passage the sermon was based on. The “Own” portion deals with getting a participant to personally own what was preached and what the passage states. The “Known” section is where the participant thinks through how to make the spiritual truth known to other people within their own circles of influence.

Parklawn Assembly of God

Parklawn Assembly of God is located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Walter Harvey, Senior Pastor leads the church. The church averages 1600 in worship attendance and 600 in small groups.¹⁷⁸ The church’s website is below the standard of other SBSG churches. The site’s look and functionality would seem to match a small church. This may be evidence that a church does not have to have a slick website to grow. The church does not have audio of messages, pod casts, video, or SBSG resources on its website. At first

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., question 5.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., question 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., question 2.

¹⁷⁸ Walter Harvey, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Milwaukee, WI, December 6, 2008.

glance, a seeker of small group information, material, or small group questions may be disappointed. However, Pastor Harvey's responses in the survey painted a slightly different picture.

Pastor Harvey's survey revealed his personal involvement in the SBSG model in a way that is unique to pastors. When responding to the question, "Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)" Harvey said, "I create questions from my sermon outline/material that will generate discussion (usually one icebreaker), then 2-3 questions for application, and accountability."¹⁷⁹ I found it refreshing to see a pastor who in his study thinks through how to apply the message beyond his pulpit. Harvey did not reveal a catchy outline for his SBSG material. He did have order and structure. His focus is on application.¹⁸⁰ I liked the accountability element. Most of the SBSG churches seem to have a strong prayer portion to the material and group time or some kind of accountability context.

Pastor Harvey's leadership is also found in his interacting with groups. Harvey has two groups in his routine. First, he meets with SBSG leaders in his church. He said this of the reason why he does this, "Yes, I meet with weekly a group of Cell Leaders. Every one who is ministering to a group must also be in a group so they can be ministered to also...."¹⁸¹ Harvey's philosophy is patterned after 2 Timothy 2:2 where Paul

¹⁷⁹ Walter Harvey, interview by Alan Stoddard, Milwaukee, WI, August 11, 2008, question 2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., question 3.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., question 8.

encouraged Timothy, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

In response to the question, “What do you see as the small group leader’s function?” Harvey said, “My role is to prioritize and to pastor the small group leader as I would the church member in general. They are a direct connection between the small group and me. If they are spiritually healthy and effective, then their group will be, finally the church will be as well. The small group leader (Lighthouse Cell Group) is a facilitator and untitled pastor of their small group (cell).”¹⁸² Pastor Harvey sees his role as pastor extended through the lives of the disciples he personally invests in. Reproduction is the goal of the Parklawn SBSG model.¹⁸³ Harvey is connected to another group outside of Parklawn. He said, “In addition, I have a group of pastors outside the church that I meet with monthly for accountability and growth.”¹⁸⁴ This is a great quality for Harvey to possess. A pastor needs to be in an outside group so he can have a place to share and receive without always having to give out ministry. This group can be replenishment spiritually for a pastor.

Pastor Harvey was not short on providing benefits of using a SBSG model. He said, “We experience synergy and corporate growth and unity on the spiritual or practical subject ... Our goal is not to have Bible Study but “Body Study.” We have more time for community and application rather than time spent with questions around certain Biblical

¹⁸² Ibid., question 7.

¹⁸³ Ibid., question 10.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., question 8.

verses or topics.”¹⁸⁵ At first glance this response could be one that reveals a lack of concern for Bible study. This is not true with the SBSG model. As the pastor has already dealt with the passage in the sermon, the SBSG afterward delves deeper into application and ministry to one another. When asked what impact the SBSG process has had on Parklawn, he says, “The groups develop family and community relationships. They become more and more transparent and trusting with personal issues. They accelerate spiritual maturity and discipleship. The groups help to evangelize and multiply the numbers of the church.”¹⁸⁶

Pastor Harvey provided advice for those who want to use the SBSG model. He stated wisely, “Pray for God to give and confirm His vision for your church; Subscribe (under study) to a model that you feel comfortable with; Get buy-in from first level leaders and your own family; Count the cost (you will lose some members); Be patient and wait as you work.”¹⁸⁷ I do not think a church has to lose members when implementing the SBSG model. I do think it should be handled delicately so Harvey is correct and offers a good short strategic plan for ensuring a good start.

Church of the Foothills

The Church of the Foothills (COTF) is located in Cameron Park, California. The Senior Pastor is Brian Long. The staff member who interacted with the survey is Roy

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., question 4.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., question 9.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., question 12.

Price, Pastor of Adult Ministries. COTF averages 1050 in worship and 330 in small groups.¹⁸⁸ The church uses the SBSG model as one of its options for making disciples.

COTF website promotes the SBSG model with excellence. The official title for groups at COTF is Sermon Based Home Fellowships (SBHF). The website has an easily identifiable link to the sermon based material, sermons, group evaluation form, and leadership announcements. Sermons are available in audio or video download. The quality of these two options was good.

I listened to a message in a series entitled, “Crave More Presence.” The sermon title itself was “Heaven’s Perspective on Christmas.”¹⁸⁹ I listened to the message with the SBSG notes opened in pdf form.¹⁹⁰ As I listened, I could clearly identify the connection between the sermon and the small group material. Pastor Long’s preaching style was conversational and biblical. The SBSG material followed his outline while adding cross-references that were not in the sermon for further study and message reinforcement. What I liked best about the SBSG material was that it corresponded with the sermon big idea. The cross references reinforced and extended the message. The big idea of the sermon was printed clearly on the SBSG material. The SBSG material was printed on an 8 ½ x 11 paper. It had the church logo and name, which was in color, while the worksheet portion was in black and white.

¹⁸⁸ Roy Price, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Cameron Park, California, December 11, 2008.

¹⁸⁹ Brian Long, *Heaven’s Perspective on Christmas*, Church of the Foothills, November 30, 2008, <http://www.cotf.org/sermons/video/113008.wmv> (accessed December 10, 2008).

¹⁹⁰ Roy Price, *Heaven’s Perspective on Christmas*, Church of the Foothills, November 30, 2008, <http://www.cotf.org/ministries/adult/index.php> - Questions (accessed December 30, 2008).

The COTF model for developing SBSG curriculum is similar yet unique from other churches. When asked, “Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)” Pastor Price said,

I have the sermon schedule for several months so I know where the pastor is headed and what Scripture he will focus on. By noon Thursday I receive his notes and very often his manuscript to get a fuller understanding of the direction he is taking. I then develop questions that I hope will further discussion of the passage always keeping in mind the sermon’s big idea. These questions are then sent to leaders, hosts and group members via email in PDF form. A few questions are printed and made available for those who do not have email.¹⁹¹

SBSG participants get the questions or material and interact with it after the sermon is preached. COTF obviously plans months ahead and breaks down the preparation to a manageable weekly process. What I found workable with this process the mentioning of the big idea. Pastor Long studied with Dr. Haddon Robinson at Denver Seminary, which is why he uses a big idea.¹⁹² The idea of getting Pastor Long’s manuscript and seeing where the message is going and then preparing the SBSG material is wise. I believe it provides connectivity and depth for the SBSG material and discipleship process. Having a staff member looking closely at what the preaching pastor is communicating is something any staff can try to do.

Sermon collaboration makes the SBSG process of developing and delivering material easier. Price shared about his specific process:

We are a little unique in that the senior pastor is my son-in-law and we think alike. In addition, he will often use the staff meeting on Tuesday morning to interact with

¹⁹¹ Roy Price, interview by Alan Stoddard, Cameron Park, California, August 11, 2008, question 2.

¹⁹² Ibid., question 11.

him on the text he will be preaching from. He is primarily an expositor as a graduate of Denver Seminary...which also makes this process much easier. I have used my own study to help me develop questions as well as a couple of practical resources: *The Serendipity Bible*, and *New Testament Lesson Maker* (NavPress). We also have a retired layman who spent years with a ministry in the bay area of northern California assisting churches with small group development. He often emails me suggested questions that I am free to use or not use.

Using various resources and people within his sphere of influence keeps the task of developing material from seeming overwhelming each week. The personal interaction with his son-in-law/pastor means he does not always have to come up with ideas. The resources provide a framework from trusted authorities or sources. His friend in northern California's help can mean outside ideas for material that will seem new simply because they come from another context.

When Pastor Price responded to the question on whether COTF material focuses on knowledge or application, his answer was foundational. He said,

The core value of the Sermon Based Home Fellowship is to develop relationships. The small group is the base for care, so the relationship building is critical. Each week there is an opening question designed to allow people to open up their lives in a non-threatening manner. The questions are primarily application and life-oriented. We want to avoid as much as possible the conflicts that arise over differing views of interpretation.¹⁹³

There is usually a paradigm shift for churches that use the SBSG model. The paradigm shift is to focus on relationships. The bonding and connecting that happens in the shift lays a foundation for pastoral care to happen in the group, not by the pastoral staff. The SBSG material's first question being one that is personal and life oriented is intentional. When relationships are at the forefront of the groups, peripheral problems are for the most part avoided.

¹⁹³ Ibid., question 3.

Pastor Price identified the benefits of using the SBSG model. Price stated,

There are three primary values:

1. SBHF enhances the listening quality. Those who are in the SBHF program know they will be discussing the issues in the sermon and are more attune to the message.
2. The program is more easily managed. The pastor and staff know what is being discussed in these groups. The other approach requires curriculum evaluation; buying and “selling” study guides, etc.
3. Our leaders are called and trained as discussion leaders and not teachers. This is part of #7 below.¹⁹⁴

Most churches would appreciate these values becoming “core values” within the church.

Listening quality brings depth. Easy management allows staff to be freed up to do ministry tasks. Making leaders serve as discussion leaders frees leaders up to shepherd the people in their small groups.

In his response to question seven Price referred to in the above quote was in response to the question about the role of the small group leader in the SBSG process. He said this of leaders, “The leader’s function is to keep the discussion on track, avoiding rabbit trails that divert the group from the main discussion points, handle questions that have controversial potential, and focus on building relationships within the group.”¹⁹⁵

The SBSG model is in part a balancing of relationship building for the purpose of discipleship and the reinforcing of preaching through small group material and discussions. The benefits of the SBSG model can be found in other small group models. The elements of listening quality, manageability, and leadership development are

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., question 4.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., question 7.

important in a busy, complex ministry context and community.

When Pastor Price was asked, “What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?” he said, “I think the approach is a winner. It simplifies administrative and management issues. The pastor and another staff member visited North Coast Church near San Diego where Larry Osborne has pioneered the concept and came back from that convinced this was the right approach for our church...”¹⁹⁶ I guess the advice would be to go to a North Coast Church SBSG workshop and pick Dr. Larry Osborne’s brain. It is exactly to North Coast Church where this research will turn to now.

North Coast Church

North Coast Church (NCC) is the mother church that birthed the SBSG model that has influenced many churches that use the SBSG approach. Larry Osborne is the Senior Pastor of NCC and is the patriarch of the SBSG movement. NCC averages approximately 7000 in its weekend services.¹⁹⁷ For the past twenty years NCC has averaged 80% of its average weekend attendance in small groups.¹⁹⁸ NCC is the best church using the SBSG model because they not only use it with effectiveness. They also teach other churches how to use the model.¹⁹⁹

The NCC website communicates the priority of the SBSG model with excellence.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., question 12.

¹⁹⁷ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church Conference Notes*, (Owl’s Nest: Vista, CA, 2008), 2.

¹⁹⁸ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 21.

¹⁹⁹ Larry Osborne, *Sermon-Based Small Groups Starter Kit* (Owl’s Nest: Vista, CA, 2008). This is a DVD kit that has 5 DVDs of Osborne teaching. The kit also has a data DVD with example materials for curriculum and small group leader development. NCC allows churches to use the material in creating a SBSG model. NCC also does a small seminar tailored for church staffs.

The sermon series link and the small group homework are available on the home page. The webpage is not cluttered with a lot of announcements or ministry opportunities. The website offers sermon pod casts and mp3 downloadable files for those who desire to use the resources. The church does offer video feed of the sermon.²⁰⁰ The SBSG material, NCC calls it “Home Work,” is also available for download. The sermon I watched was entitled, “Christmas in August.” It was a sermon preached by Larry Osborne and Chris Brown in a tag team format. I listened it with the SBSG material open and could immediately see the connection between the sermon and the SBSG material.

NCC uses the SBSG approach as the primary way to make disciples. The church uses what Osborne calls “two time slots.”²⁰¹ This system works on the idea that people will only give a church two slots of time. One is Sunday morning for worship. The second is so important that NCC fills the slot with small group meetings. The number of people who will give a church a third slot of time in a given week is small. NCC does not ask its church members to give up a third slot. The church runs everything through the second slot or small group meeting. Ministry and missions happen through the groups, not other events. The reason NCC does this is found in its purpose for small groups. Osborne said, “At North Coast, we made it clear from the beginning that our primary purpose would be to foster significant Christ-centered relationships. Everything else is secondary.”²⁰² For Osborne and NCC, people come before content. Relationships are so

²⁰⁰ All NCC sermons are archived for viewing at <http://searchablesermons.com/> by date, sermon title, and text. The website design and functionality enhance usage.

²⁰¹ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 91-92.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 101.

important that the church does not keep its members busy with non-essential opportunities. Discipleship by process with healthy relationships is the way the church encourages spiritual growth.

The NCC SBSG model is simple and any church can use the model. The NCC preparation design follows this pattern. Larry Osborne, the Lead Pastor, designs the sermon series consisting only of texts and possible sermon titles. Osborne brings that information to a sermon collaboration meeting with key staff personnel. The series title and sermon titles are confirmed. There are initial discussions on how to promote the series through media. That is the extent of the long-range plan.²⁰³

The short term planning sessions happen on a weekly basis at NCC. The sermon preparation team meets on Tuesdays at 11:00 am. The team spends two-thirds of the time on the sermon itself and one-third of the time on the SBSG homework. NCC has three leaders who make up their writing team. The team listens to the preparation meeting and gets the direction the sermon will take. Then the team writes the SBSG material between Tuesday afternoon and Thursday by 12:00 noon. On Thursday afternoon, the SBSG material is submitted for a final edit by the preaching pastor and then an editing team consisting of four ministry assistants. By Thursday at 5:00 pm, the material is complete and is printed for distribution in the Sunday worship folder. The material is uploaded on the web by Sunday night.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Ned Mervich, *Making the Homework Work* (Vista, CA: Owl's Nest, 2008), 1-3.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

The NCC SBSG material is designed to challenge participants from all maturity levels. NCC only uses the SBSG material for adult groups.²⁰⁵ Since relationships are the priority in NCC Growth Groups, the material is designed to extend the sermon without being an exact replay of the sermon. The SBSG material should include new material on the same topic so people do not get bored or assume they heard it all in the Sunday sermon.²⁰⁶ The NCC template for writing the SBSG material follows this outline:

Quick Review (What challenged you? What did you like? What did you not like?)
My Story/Getting to Know You (Connecting personal story to Bible)
Digging Deeper (9-12 passages not covered in sermon but relate to sermon)
Taking it Home (Application Questions on How to Do the Text)²⁰⁷

The NCC uses the SBSG model as a way to assimilate people into the church so they stick to the church. Osborne's thesis for his book *Sticky Church* is, "our churches need to be stickier."²⁰⁸ The book then unfolds the process of using the SBSG model as a way to provide biblical community to church members.

Best Practices of Sermon Based Small Group Churches

The use of the SBSG for making disciples is a fairly new phenomenon in western church culture. The principle of resurfacing of a biblical idea after it has been communicated goes back to the New Testament with Jesus taking His disciples aside to further explain a parable. The church in Acts, at times, followed the same pattern.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 87.

²⁰⁷ Mervich, *Making the Homework Work*, 1-3.

²⁰⁸ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 13.

General Practices

Senior Pastor First

In the churches that use the SBSG approach, the senior pastor is the key player. He was bought in to the process of making disciples in small groups and saw the significance of using the SBSG approach. Some churches in the surveys did say the senior pastor needed to have buy-in before a staff and church could move forward in the process of implementing a SBSG model. This buy-in avoids personality and control challenges among the church leadership.

In churches that use the SBSG approach, the senior pastor is involved personally in a small group. The pastor does not set up a program or an opportunity he does not take part in himself. The pastor's personal participation gives credibility to the most important process in a church, disciple making.

In churches that use the SBSG approach, the senior pastor is involved in the discipleship of other leaders. There are times when the senior pastor is not the main leader of the SBSG leaders. Other executive pastor level leaders do lead the small group leaders. The best churches minister to the leaders consistently and closely so the small group leaders are healthy and can reproduce.

Relationship Factor Prioritized

Churches that use the SBSG approach make a philosophy shift from prioritizing content to prioritizing relationship building. These churches see discipleship as a process that is not a program. Discipleship is a part of a process of living life close enough to a few other people to make a difference in their lives. In order to properly emphasize the relationship factor, these churches keep the small groups between twelve to fourteen

participants. This number allows groups to be large enough to allow some anonymity and small enough to be intimate.

Philosophy Shift to Lecture Lab Model

The lecture-lab model shifts the main teaching or preaching event to the worship service and places the application of the message in the small group. The lecture is the preaching. The lab is the place of application. The lecture-lab model requires good preaching week-by-week. Since the small groups are the place of relationship building and application of the sermon, the preaching before the small group meeting must be strong. The lecture-lab model is a master teacher approach. The Senior Pastor, or others on a teaching team, becomes the main teachers in the church. The lecture-lab model does not change the topic from Sunday to when the small group meets. The topic from the Sunday message is the topic in the small group. Weak preaching with little content from scripture will leave the participants with little to apply. With the lecture-lab model, small groups do not have teachers, but leaders, shepherds, and facilitators. These positions require mature people who are able to lead a group to grasp a church's and small group's vision. The small group leaders must be taught how to lead small groups and reproduce them. The leaders are able to reproduce a group by apprenticing their replacements. The leaders cast a vision to their groups to birth a new group at some point. The positions require people not to teach, but to pastor and serve the people in the group. They also require someone who can lead a discussion with skill and at times know how to react to things that are unplanned by the SBSG material.

Strategically Plan Implementation

Churches that use the SBSG approach strategically plan for the process to be successful and a win without disrupting the equilibrium of the church. Most of the churches surveyed were established churches. If a new church start were to implement the SBSG model the process might be easier. Most of the churches using the SBSG model did not require that the approach to be used by everyone. The model was offered as an option. Any pastor wanting to start this type of small group approach should count the cost. The pastor should start slow and small. Before starting, do the research by examining the models and designing one that fits his own church culture and community. Handpick the first leaders and get them to enlist their own friends to start the first group. A good start with a plan for reproduction will help avoid mistakes and enhance the possibility of success.

Simple Church Approach

Churches that use a SBSG model keep other programming simple. Other events are strategic and minimal. The main ministry venue is the small group. Churches using the SBSG model do not pack their church calendars with busy events that compete with the SBSG slot. The SBSG model challenges pastors to buy off on the two-slot motif. The first slot is the Sunday morning time slot, the church's worship service. The second slot is the slot that many church members will give outside of Sunday morning. SBSG church fills the second slot with a small group participation opportunity. SBSG churches know very few members will give up a third time slot.

Effective Website

The churches that best use the SBSG approach utilized their church websites to communicate. The church communicates the preaching series which usually has an engaging, motivating, or felt need title. The series promotion is on the home page or there is a clearly visible link to the message page. The message page includes a user-friendly page linking members to an opportunity to download recent messages by pod cast, mp3, video using UStream, You Tube, or Vimeo options. Video messages are imbedded into the page. The message page also provides SBSG materials in pdf form. The effective use of a website can create a culture that encourages members to listen to the message even if they are not physically on campus. Also, the strongest churches have leadership development and leader communication. Some churches turned in attendance records online. The cutting edge SBSG churches value time and use their website to maximize it.

Curriculum Designed to Win

SBSG churches design small group material that appeals to the eye, head, and heart of participants. The material looks inviting. The cutting edge churches had SBSG material that looked contemporary while not being expensive to produce. The material included a little color in the church's logo and usually matched the website design. The look of the material was such that it could be viewed as trendy or catchy.

The material could fit in a Bible easily without being cumbersome. The material is portable not only to a person's devotional life and small group, but also the marketplace. SBSG churches develop material that is discussion oriented. The heart is appealed to with engaging content that is based on the Sunday sermon. Most churches design the material to be done before the group meets. A few other churches do not

require homework at all. SBSG churches reach the heart of participants through ministry projects and mission trips.

Vision Statement Connected to Discipleship Process

Cutting-edge churches using the SBSG model included their vision statement on the material. The vision statement was an expression of the church's discipleship process. When participants receive the SBSG material, they see the vision statement as a part of what they are doing by participating in small group. These churches seemed to have a higher level of commitment to the SBSG model as the way to do discipleship in place of other programs.

Off Campus Groups

Most SBSG churches use off campus groups that meet after the sermon is preached. Each church had a unique name for groups such as Growth Groups, Sermon Based Home Fellowships, Small Groups, or Life Groups. SBSG churches use a living room over a classroom on campus because of the intimate atmosphere a living room provides. Since relationship building is a primary core value, homes seem best for these groups to create long term, significant relationships.

Sunday School Options

Some churches that use the SBSG model use it in a Sunday School format. Emmanuel Baptist Church, Solona Beach Presbyterian Church, Calvary Baptist Church, and Parklawn Assembly of God each use the structure of Sunday School to deliver the SBSG model. The Sunday School models vary in curriculum design. One strength in using the Sunday School model is it allows participants to use on-campus rooms and

childcare options. The Sunday School option is used by a minimal percentage of the church's total groups.

Pastoral Care from Small Group

Churches that use the SBSG model develop a culture within the group where pastoral care is provided from the group. The traditional paradigm for pastoral care is that paid staff go to the hospital, visit the sick, and counsel church members. SBSG churches make the decision to expect small group leaders to provide pastoral care. This standard is communicated to members and they receive it. This is a part of the DNA of the church. This lightens the load on staff members. It expands the circle of ministry. Leaders are healthier because they serve as lay pastors. Members are healthier because more are served because churches have more lay leaders than the paid staff members.

Ministry and Missions Projects in Groups

Questions in the material are not only focused on personal life issues but also on doing ministry in the community and world. The SBSG model pushes groups to do ministry from within their groups and do not view ministry opportunities separately. The projects and trips are posted on the SBSG material so they are always visible. Ministry and missions are intentional in SBSG churches. Most opportunities for ministry and missions are funneled through the SBSG at least annually and preferably biannually.

Principles for Writing Discussion Based Material

Sermon Collaboration Process

Writing SBSG material starts with sermon preparation. Sermon collaboration within the staff team is beneficial. The churches that use the SBSG model best are those

that plan out a preaching series months ahead of time. The series is branded with a felt need in mind. Creativity is deeper and wider if more people are involved. Allowing other staff members or teaching pastors to participate in sermon preparation gives them buy-in. Ministers of prayer, discipleship, spiritual formation, as well as media experts can bring many needed angles to the Sunday morning worship experience. These cutting edge churches meet for a preaching preparation retreat twice a year. The staff meets weekly after the six-month plan has been developed to fill in the details. The preaching pastor shares the preparation process while retaining the right to make final decisions. The preaching pastor still brings his own unique personality to the message.

The Writing Team

Developing SBSG material varies from church to church. A common method among the churches that have excellent material is that they use a writing team. Use of a writing team relieves the pressure on one person having to do it. A rotating team is one approach that works. This prevents burnout and allows for writers to have down time for spiritual growth related to creativity. It also allows for professional growth in writing discussion questions. Another option is to have the team meeting on a weekly or monthly basis to write questions in collaboration with the sermon preparation team. A few pastors write the SBSG discussion questions directly from their sermon notes.

Application Focus

SBSG churches focus on applying the Sunday morning message in small group material. Knowledge and understanding questions are present in the material, but the strongest focus is on doing the word. Application is surfaced through questions designed

to bring the text to daily life. SBSG churches set up an atmosphere for transformation by reinforcing biblical truths and challenging participants to see the message extended into their lives. Discussion is desired over lecture. The lecture, or sermon, has already provided the content of the small group. The group afterward applies the text. Application happens in personal life examination and through ministry projects the group does together.

Variety of Writing Models

SBSG churches use a variety of writing models to develop curriculum. The churches that seem to be the strongest use a template. The template outline helps the writing process. A template allows the writer or writing team to know beforehand what type of questions need to be written and how many questions for each category in the template. A template makes delivery to small group participants easier. It streamlines the learning process. Small group participants know beforehand what the template looks like. They become familiar with it. The template encourages participants to participate and helps them grow spiritually by narrowing the focus for them.

Other SBSG churches use a more flexible approach when writing curriculum. Another approach is brainstorming ideas and angles for questions around the text or the sermon's big idea. The writing process is less precise. Some churches use a couple of the exact same questions each week. These one or two questions get participants to listen closely to the sermon and identify what is liked most or what is the most challenging. Churches that do this then use two to three other questions related to the text but focused on what the participant will do in response to what the text says.

SBSG material varies, but most churches use open-ended questions to cause participants to reflect and respond to the material. Some churches used icebreaker-type questions just to get people interacting. Multiple-choice questions are sometimes helpful to break up the routine. However, strategic open-ended questions make participants wrestle with the text or big idea in a way the pastor hopes they will during the week after he preaches. Some models provide a prayer prompt or opportunity in the group that is related to the message. Some also use a memory verse to reinforce the sermon and small group discussion.

Overcoming the Challenges

The SBSG model for discipleship has challenges that can be overcome with good strategy and sensitivity in decision-making. The survey churches identified six challenges connected to the SBSG model. Below are the six challenges and recommendations on how to overcome them.

The Time Factor

Pastors and ministers who use the SBSG model will find it difficult to carve out time to develop the material. A busy complex world keeps ministers busy. Sermon preparation can be a challenge. How can a preacher find time to add small group question development to his schedule? The way to overcome the challenge of time is through time management. Planning ahead at least for twice a year for ten weeks of preaching would make the task more manageable. Using a template of questions that are the same every week is another method of easing preparation of small group questions. If a preaching team is used, rotate the preparation of the SBSG questions to the one not preaching. A

small church pastor could share the question writing with a team, a writer in the congregation, or a spouse. The bottom line is if the SBSG model is important, leaders will make time to prepare for it.

Repetition

One of the complaints against the SBSG model is that it is repetitious. People do not always like studying the same topic as the Sunday sermon. One way to overcome repetition is by changing the paradigm. Pastors need to get people to buy in to the idea that relationship building is the main purpose of the SBSG. Second, material needs to be an extension of the Sunday sermon, not a regurgitation of the sermon. Participants need to know they are learning something new on the same topic. There is a misunderstanding when it comes to using the SBSG model. The model does allow for relief. The model can be used for seasons of time, not necessarily year round. This allows groups to use other studies to meet felt needs within the group. Momentum and unity that comes from using the SBSG approach can provide motivation for participants to overlook repetition.

Developing a Writing Team

The development of a good writing team can be a challenge worth overcoming. This challenge initially involves recruiting and keeping good writers. For some small churches the challenge is not having people in the church who are published writers. There are usually a few people who can write well and need only to catch the vision of writing SBSG material. Two or three volunteers with the right vision casting and training can become a great writing team.

Another option is to use professional writers from within the congregation. Larger churches will probably have a few writers who could be recruited as volunteers or if budget funds are available they could be paid. Churches that take writer recruitment and development seriously put money into the challenge. They send the team or a leader to a writing seminar or conference. Skilled authors will enjoy the opportunity to use their giftedness. They could also be asked to recruit apprentices to train to expand the writing team.

Another option is to have the staff write the material as a part of the weekly or monthly staff meeting. This can happen in collaboration. It can also happen in partial collaboration with the educational or spiritual formation pastor being responsible for final development.

Felt-Need Studies

Offering felt needs or specialty studies is a challenge to the SBSG model. This challenge will come in the form of people or groups stating they need to deal with a felt-need study. This would be a study on stewardship or marriage issues. Whatever the felt need request, the SBSG model allows for it. While the SBSG material is the preferred material, small groups should be allowed to take time away from the SBSG material to meet felt needs and break up the monotony. Allowing this once a year could be a good way to give small groups a sense of ownership.

Informational Approach vs. Process Approach

Getting church members to make the paradigm shift from informational, university-model types of education to process, a relational type of education is difficult.

The principle of relationship building as a priority over information and content is not easy to the western cultural mindset. The way to make this shift in thinking is to get people to see the value of relationship building. They need to realize people need friends as well as information. This challenge can be overcome, but it will take sensitivity. The limits of informational programs need to be exposed. This exposure needs to show that programs dispense information, but leave relationship building out. Programs do not need to be belittled. They only need to be expanded.

Jesus method of growing his followers is an excellent way to get church members to embrace the SBSG model. It is difficult for people to argue against the need to build relationships. Jesus spent time with his followers and in the process of doing life with them he taught them. Showing people the model Jesus used to provide balance between the informational, programmatic model and the relational model will help church members embrace the SBSG model. People need to understand that information and content are not being watered down or down graded. Pairing people with mature Christians in small groups centered on the content from the sermon will provide an atmosphere for transformation.

Total Participation

Getting everyone to use the SBSG process is a challenge. The way to solve this challenge is to change the requirement. None of the SBSG churches expected total participation from the congregation. There are always people who will not participate in a small group. Some will just not embrace the SBSG model, especially those in churches where the structure is set up with another established model. SBSG churches should set up an atmosphere of expectation of small group participation by all members. This

expectation should not be a requirement. It can be a godly expectation communicated with encouragement.

Conclusion

The SBSG model for discipleship is working in many churches. The model should be considered as an option by any culturally sensitive church desiring to make disciples in a simple comprehensive way. The SBSG model is new. There is not much in print about the model. George Barna suggested the SBSG model as a possible way to make disciples. He affirmed how material “related to the sermon”²⁰⁹ could be reinforced with content heavy teaching in large groups and applied in discussion in small groups.²¹⁰ Willow Creek Community Church found the SBSG model effective in moving new believers across the spectrum of Christian growth. New believers become more Christ-centered because Willow Creek realized, “We need to extend the impact of our weekend services.”²¹¹

²⁰⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 122.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Hawkins, Parkinson, and Arnson, *Reveal: Where Are You? The Answer That Will Transform Your Church*, 66-67.

CHAPTER 4

THE SEMINAR: CONNECTING THE SERMON TO THE SMALL GROUP

This chapter will provide explanation of how the seminar entitled, “Connecting the Sermon to the Small Group” was delivered. The chapter will also provide documents used in the seminar.

The seminar happened on January 13, 2009, at the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) headquarters in Grapevine, Texas. A mass marketing mail out was sent to six hundred and forty churches in North Texas. Forty-two pastors and ministers of education signed up for the seminar. Thirty-seven attended and participated. I developed a Keynote presentation for visual aid. I created a notebook for each participant. The hand out curriculum was color with a graphic of two computer cable ends as images to play on the idea of “connecting” the sermon to the small group. The Keynote presentation has a video of Larry Osborne’s two-minute testimony on the SBSG model. The SBTC provided breakfast and lunch for the participants.

The seminar followed the following outline.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Session 1 | Introduction: What are Sermon Based Small Groups and Why Use Them?
9:00-10:00 am |
| Session 2 | Who Is Using Sermon Based Small Groups?
10:00-11:00 am |
| Session 3 | Developing the Sermon Based Small Group Material
11:00-12:00 pm |

On the following pages are session design worksheets, student curriculum, and teaching outlines. The material was based on the content of chapter three.

Session One Lesson Plan

Session Title: Introduction: What are Sermon Based Small Groups and Why Use Them?

Focal Concepts: Sermon based small groups are distinct from other small groups.

Purpose: To show the reasons sermon based small groups should be used in churches.

Objectives:

1. Define the purpose of preaching.
2. Underline the definition of what a sermon based small group is and list what it does.
3. List the reasons why a church should consider using sermon based small groups.
4. Be challenged with the idea of the pastor being the primary discipleship leader in the church.
5. Read the biblical examples of resurfacing biblical ideas after the proclamation event by examining biblical passages.
6. Discuss the idea of sermon based small groups as the place where relationships are prioritized.
7. Discuss the difference between passive and active learning and will evaluate the concept in a small group discussion.
8. List how sermon based small groups follows a simple church approach.

Learning Design: Lecture, interaction with teaching outline, discussion questions, mostly deductive design

Session One Teaching Outline

Introduction

- What are SBSGs and Why Use Them?

Guiding Principles for the Sermon Based Small Group Seminar

- SBSG seminar is not about doctrine
- SBSG seminar is not about doing away with your present model
- SBSG seminar is the start of a discussion on healthy small groups
- SBSG seminar assumes participants value transformation as a result of preaching (Matt. 28:19-20)
- “Teach” them to Observe”

What is a Sermon Based Small Group?

- A SBSG is a group of 12-14 people who meet weekly to build Christ-centered relationships
- A SBSG resurfaces the sermon’s big idea
- A SBSG revisits scripture
- A SBSG reinforces application

Why use Sermon Based Small Groups?

- SBSGs are biblical
- The pastor is the primary leader in the church
- In the *Book of Acts* the gospel was proclaimed in two ways:
 - Preaching and Power Episodes
- SBSGs are biblical

Luke 8:4-8 Acts 13:13-41
Luke 8:9-15 Acts 13:42-43

Matt. 6:33 Acts 18:24-26a
Acts 1:3-4, 8 Acts 18:26b-28

Acts 2:14-36 Acts 17:10
Acts 2:37-47 Acts 17:11-15

Acts 8:26-28 Acts 18:5-6
Acts 8:29-40 Acts 18:7-11

Acts 19:8
Acts 19:9-10

- SBSGs are relational
- Authentic Relationships
- SBSGs are educational
- Discussion Driven
- Interactive
- Reproductive
- Discussion Questions for Your Table
 - 1) Do you agree that transformation begins with discussing an idea?
 - 2) Does your present small group structure take active learning seriously?
 - 3) What would your structure need to do differently to enter the active learning mode?
- SBSGs are simple
- Slowing down the process in a busy world and busy church

Session Two Lesson Plan

Session Title: Who Is Using Sermon Based Small Groups?

Focal Concepts: Analyzing churches that use sermon based small groups.

Purpose: To know the benefits of using sermon based small groups based on the testimony and best practices of churches using sermon based small groups.

Objectives:

1. Analyze three websites of churches using sermon based small groups to identify what each church prioritizes and does well.
2. List out the best practices, challenges, and principles for writing sermon based small group curriculum.
3. Evaluate their local church small group system in comparison to best practices of churches using sermon based small groups.

Learning Design: Lecture, interaction with teaching outline, survey, discussion questions, deductive delivery

Session Two Teaching Outline

Who is using Sermon Based Small Groups?

- Immanuel Baptist Church
Pastor Tony Cecil
www.ibcglasgow.org
- North Coast Church
Pastor Larry Osborne
www.northcoastchurch.com
- Solana Beach Presbyterian
Pastor Mike McClenahan
www.solanapres.org

Best Practices of Sermon Based Small Group Churches

1. Senior Pastor First
2. Relationship Factor Prioritized
3. Philosophy Shift to Lecture Lab Model
4. Strategically Plan Implementation
5. Simple Church Approach
6. Effective Website
7. Curriculum Designed to Win
8. Vision Statement Connected to the Discipleship Process
9. Off-Campus Groups
10. Pastoral Care from Small Groups
11. Ministry and Missions Projects from Small Groups

Writing Discussion Based Material

1. Sermon Collaboration Process

2. Use a Writing Team
3. Focus on Application
4. Variety of Writing Models

Overcoming the Challenges

1. The Time Factor
2. Repetition
3. Developing a Writing Team
4. Felt Need Studies
5. Information Approach vs. Process Approach
6. Total Participation

Best Practices of Sermon Based Small Groups Survey

How are you doing?

1. Senior Pastor First
Do you as a Senior Pastor show in actions you value small group discipleship?

Yes No
2. Relationship Factor Prioritized
Beyond the superficial level, can people make lasting friends in your church's small group structure?

Yes No
3. Philosophy Shift to Lecture Lab Model
Do agree with the idea of keeping the sermon topic the discussion topic in small groups?

Yes No

4. Strategically Plan Implementation

Does your church strategically plan its small group delivery ministry?

Yes No

5. Simple Church Approach

Do you think your church has too many programs that do not encompass a majority of your congregation?

Yes No

6. Effective Website

Does your church utilize its website to promote small group discipleship as a main priority?

Yes No

7. Curriculum Designed to Win

Are the people in your church excited about using your present curriculum?

Yes No

8. Vision Statement Connected to the Discipleship Process

Does your church's vision statement connect to its discipleship process in a way that members can tell?

Yes No

9. Off-Campus Groups

Does your church use off-campus groups? If not, does it try to incorporate small group principles into the structure?

Yes No

10. Pastoral Care from Small Groups

Can your church members count on pastoral care coming from your small groups?

Yes No

11. Ministry and Missions Projects from Small Groups

Do your small groups do ministry and missions' projects once a year?

Yes No

After thinking through these questions, how would you rate your small group system? (1 being weak, 10 being strong)

1-----3-----5-----7-----10

What do you need to do to make adjustments in your present structure to make your small groups healthier? Make a list and talk it over with your staff.

Session Three Lesson Plan

Session Title: Developing the Sermon Based Small Group Material

Focal Concepts: Analyzing sermon based small group materials, methods, and models.

Purpose: To know how to use the purpose of the sermon as a guide for writing sermon based small group material.

Objectives:

1. List out the sermon planning process of an expository preaching series to develop sermon based small group questions.
2. Write sermon based small group questions based on the sermon they preached or heard the previous Sunday.
3. Analyze the different models for writing sermon based small group material and identify a prospect model for writing their own questions.
4. Write sermon based small group questions for assigned passages.

Learning Design: Lecture, sermon building through small groups, writing discussion questions in small groups, inductive design.

Session Three Teaching Outline

Developing the Sermon Based Small Group Material

- Series: Authentic Community
- “A Case Study in Relationship Building” from Philemon
- Write down the sermon information you preached or heard 48 hours ago?

Title:

Text:

Exegetical Idea:

Big Idea:

Sermon Purpose:

- Models And Writing Templates
- The angle of “Sermon Purpose”
- Write out 3-5 discussion questions you would like to have your people interact with next week in a small group?
- Exercise Passages: Matt 28:19-20, Deut 6:1-4, John 9:1-11, Matt 16:13-19

Expository Preaching Series Through Philemon

Sermon Title: Show Me Some Respect

Sermon Text: Philemon 1-3

Subject: How did Paul appeal to Philemon before he addressed the issue of Onesimus?

Complement: By indirectly addressing people who could influence Philemon the most.

Exegetical Idea: Paul's inclusion of Apphia, Aristarchus, and the church in his salutation helped him influence Philemon in an indirect way.

Big Idea: It's easier to ask for help when you show due respect to leaders first.

Keyword: RESPECT

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to identify leaders in the church who deserve respect and identify at least one way respect can be shown to at least one leader.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What is leadership?
2. Who are our church's leaders? (Pastors, elders, deacons, lay leaders)
3. What leaders in our church have earned your respect and why?
4. Do you think we show our leaders respect? How do we disrespect them?
5. How can you bless a leader in our church this week? Pick a leader and do it?

Sermon Title: The Prayer Factor

Sermon Text: Philemon 4-7

Subject: Why was Philemon on Paul's prayer list?

Complement: Because Philemon was a refresher of the heart.

Exegetical Idea: Paul's prayer list included Philemon because he was an encourager of the heart.

Big Idea: Spending time in prayer reflecting on a person's spiritual success will provide a bridge for reconciliation.

Keyword: APPRECIATION

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to indentify people they can pray for who have had a spiritual impact in their lives.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What does your prayer life look like?
2. Why do you think it's important to pray for someone before confronting him or her?
3. Who are the people in your life who have impacted you spiritually? What did they do that was so influential?
4. Have you ever prayed for someone "by name?" What benefits came from doing it?
5. Spend time praying for one another in your small group. Watch God work!

Sermon Title: The Big Choice

Sermon Text: Philemon 8-16

Subject: Why didn't Paul order Philemon to receive Onesimus back?

Complement: Because reconciliation works when it's a choice I make.

Exegetical Idea: Paul knew reconciliation could not be forced so he gave Philemon a choice so it would be real.

Big Idea: Choose reconciliation so it will be real.

Keyword: CHOICE

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to understand and apply to principle of "choice" in developing and maintaining relationships in the church and community.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. I want my listeners to list 3 people they need to reconcile a relationship with.
2. What preparation should "you" do internally to mend a relationship?
3. What will you actually do? Can you reconcile a relationship? Should a relationship that's broken always be mended? Or is there a time when we should let it go?
4. What is the principle of "choice" when mending broken relationships? What's the big deal?

Sermon Title: One More Time

Sermon Text: Philemon 17-20

Subject: How could Philemon refresh Paul's heart?

Complement: By eliminating every reason not to receive Onesimus back.

Exegetical Idea: Philemon could refresh Paul's heart (by eliminating) by forgiving Onesimus debts.

Big Idea: When forgiveness is put on display it encourages Christ followers.

Keyword: REFRESH (or ENCOURAGE)

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to have the ability to put forgiveness on display in their lives.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Last week we identified people we need to forgive. That kind of thing requires time to think, process, and pray through. Who is there in your past or present that you need to forgive their debts?
2. What debt is there right now that you cannot seem to forgive? What would it take for you to give forgiveness?
3. Who in your past have you ever forgiven? Can you do it again?
4. What makes forgiveness hard?
5. Pray for one another and especially those struggling with this issue. Set yourself free by forgiving someone in your prayers (if you can).

Sermon Title: Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

Sermon Text: Phil. 21-22

Subject: What should happen after a person decides to forgive a person?

Complement: Do more than you are required to do.

Exegetical Idea: Paul wanted Philemon to do more than would be required in forgiving Onesimus.

Big Idea: We experience transforming power when we go the extra mile for those we forgive.

Keyword: CONFIDENCE

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to identify ways they can go the extra mile for those they have forgiven.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Where else in the scriptures do we find the principle of “going the second mile.”
2. Why do you think Paul was “confident” in Philemon?
3. Who is there in your circle of relationships whom you could go the second mile with? What does the second mile look like?
4. When have you gone the second mile for a family member, friend, or church member? How did you do it? Was it worth it? What were the risks?
5. There are times when we seem to be unable to go above and beyond the call of duty. What keeps us from doing it and is it proper at times to not do more than is required?

Sermon Title: Name-Dropping

Sermon Text: Philemon 23-25

Subject: How did Paul end his request for Philemon to forgive Onesimus?

Complement: By mentioning other leaders whose names would impact Philemon’s decision.

Exegetical Idea: Paul mentioned the names of other leaders to make Philemon think about who might be waiting on his right decision.

Big Idea: Name-dropping is not a bad thing if you have the right names

Keyword: PRESSURE

Sermon Purpose: I want my listeners to know how to remind people of the kingdom picture when deciding to forgive or not.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think of name-dropping?
2. Can you see where name-dropping can help a person decide to forgive?
3. Have you ever dropped a name to get a result you needed to get?
4. Do you agree that reminding someone of the larger kingdom picture can make a difference in the person making a decision to forgive someone?

Sermon Preparation Worksheet

Series Title:

Sermon Title:

Sermon Text:

Subject:

Complement:

Exegetical Idea:

Big Idea:

Keyword:

Sermon Purpose:

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Sermon Purpose and Discussion Material

The Angle of “Sermon Purpose”

Biblical Preaching, Dr. Haddon Robinson

1. Study a passage (one literary unit) to the point of writing an exegetical idea (one sentence summary statement, stated in the past tense which is created by using a “subject” and “complement”)
2. Submit the exegetical idea to developmental questions: What needs to be explained, applied, or proved (Usually only one of these provides your outline angle)
3. Write your homiletical idea or Big Idea (one sentence in contemporary language)
4. Write the sermon purpose. The sermon purpose is at least one main, specific statement of what the preacher wants listeners to do as a result of the message
 - Sermon purpose brings intentionality to the sermon
 - Sermon purpose is the bridge to the listeners next week, real life
 - Sermon purpose takes the sermon from the pulpit to the living room
 - Sermon purpose takes the sermon to the workplace
 - Sermon purpose helps the church at all age groups know what to do after listening

Example:

Let’s say a preacher spoke on “Vision.” His text was Prov. 29:18, “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law.” In this message the sermon purpose is this: “I want my listeners to understand and apply how biblical vision helps them and their world.” In this message the preacher lays out the Hebrew meaning of this verse within the Old Testament context. He then applies the vision of the church to the text and shows the need for the vision. Let’s say the message was motivating and the content was excellent. Let’s say the application is fresh because the preacher studied and prayed and God blessed. Each listener received a cool looking color copy of the vision and what it looks like that fits neatly in a Bible.

After all that....

What do you think will happen to the message by Wednesday of the next week? Can I say that it will be forgotten? Or maybe it will be swallowed up by a busy week? Might I insinuate the enemy may steal it? It may get dismissed to stand with all the other messages listeners will here in a week.

What if you designed small groups who met during the week? Those groups would not study another topic. They would apply your message by using discussion questions based on your sermon purpose, which is based on your passage and application.

Models And Writing Templates

Immanuel Baptist Church (Glasgow, KY)

1. 300 in worship.
2. Pastor writes SBSG material.
3. Model: on-campus Adult Bible Fellowships meet weekly through the year.
4. SBSG Process: read, listen, discuss, and apply.

This process is based on members reading the sermon based small group material before hearing the sermon. Then, participants come to church and hear the sermon. Then, after church in on-campus groups they discuss the message. This is a Sunday School Model.

Southeast Christian Church (Parker, CO)

1. 4200 in worship.
2. Model: 1200 in off campus Small Groups meet weekly through the year.
3. Writing Team creates SBSG material.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:
 - What is this about? (short description of the sermon and study)
 - Talk about it (1-2 ice breaker type questions)
 - Explore it (2-3 questions focused on passage understanding)
 - Get it (3-4 questions focused on their life story and the passage)
 - Apply it (1-2 questions focused on applying the passage)

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Constance Free Church (Andover, MN)

1. 1500 in worship.
2. Small Groups Pastor writes material.
3. Model: 400 in SBSG's and 225 in small groups using other materials.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:
 - Hook (Felt Need ice breaker called "Spotlight")
 - Book (Quotes from contemporary books dealing with passage or idea)
 - Look (In-depth questions digging into the sermon text, ending with application)
 - Took (Praying the lesson and a memory verse)

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Solana Presbyterian Church (Solana Beach, CA)

1. 1200 in worship.
2. Minister of Discipleship writes SBSG material.
3. Model: 900 in off-campus Small Groups meet 30 weeks a year. There are a few groups that meet on-campus immediately after church. There are also a few that meet on campus during the week.
 - 10 weeks in the fall.
 - Break at Thanksgiving to New Year
 - 10 weeks in the winter
 - Break at Palm Sunday to Easter
 - 10 weeks in the spring

3. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

- Share it (time of sharing about spiritual gifts using (SHAPE)
- Study it (digging into the Sunday morning sermon text)
- Live it (applying the Sunday morning sermon text)
- Pray it (praying for one another and the world)

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Calvary Bible Church (Derry, NH)

1. 450 in worship.
2. Volunteer Pastor of Spiritual Formation writes SBSG material.
3. Model: 160 in off-campus small groups meet weekly throughout the year.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

This church has no template and uses broad questions to guide discussion. The first two questions were always the same. Small group participants are asked, “What truths from today’s message stood out to you personally?” and “What questions did it leave in your mind?” The other two questions were always related to the sermon text.

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Calvary Baptist Church (Oshawa, Ontario, CA)

1. 1000 in worship.
2. One of two Teaching Pastors writes SBSG material when he preaches.
3. Model: 600 adults in worship/350 meet in off-campus that meets weekly through the year. The church has a few on-campus groups that use the SBSG material. One class discusses the sermon text immediately after the service. Another class discusses the sermon text the next Sunday. This provides a testimony opportunity.

4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

Template 1

- Quick Review (What was the message about?)
- My Story (How does my story connect to the sermon?)
- Digging Deeper (Learning more about the sermon text)
- Taking it Home (How will I live it? Apply it?)

Template 2

- Points to Ponder (Scripture Points to Reinforce)
- List of Questions (Understanding/Application)

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Parkview Christian Church (Orland Park, IL)

1. 3500 in worship.
2. Community Life Director writes SBSG material when church uses the model.
3. Model: 1350 adults in off-campus groups that meet weekly through the year.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

Template

- Know (Clarifies knowledge and understanding of the sermon text)
- Own (Challenges to take personal responsibility for applying the sermon text)
- Known (How to make biblical truths known in own circles of influence?)

This church uses a small groups structure for discipleship, but only uses the SBSG model 3-4 times a year.

Parklawn Assembly of God (Milwaukee, WI)

1. 1600 in worship.
2. The Senior Pastor writes the SBSG material.
3. Model: 600 in off campus groups that meet weekly through the year.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

Template

“I create questions from my sermon outline/material that will generate discussion (usually one icebreaker), then 2-3 questions for application, and accountability.”

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

Church of the Foothills (Cameron Park, CA)

1. 1050 in worship.

2. Pastor of Adult Ministries writes material in collaboration with preaching pastor and staff
3. Model: 330 in off-campus small groups that meet weekly through the year.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:

After getting sermon topic and ideas a staff pastor develops questions that he hopes will further discussion of the passage always keeping in mind the sermon's big idea.

This process is based on members interacting in groups after the sermon is preached.

North Coast Church (Vista, CA)

1. 7000 in worship.
2. Pastor of Small Groups writes the SBSG material in collaboration with the sermon planning team.
3. Model: 80% of worship attendance participates in off campus small groups.
4. Writing Template/SBSG Process:
 - Quick review (What challenged you? What did you like or dislike?)
 - My Story/Getting to Know You (This relates the lesson personally to the participant)
 - Digging Deeper (Three questions using nine to twelve cross reference passages related to the topic)
 - Taking it Home (How can the lesson be applied)

Sample List of Sermon Based Small Group Churches

10 Surveyed Churches

Immanuel Baptist Church
Tony Cecil, Senior Pastor
104 Western Hills
Glasgow, Kentucky 42141
270- 678-7729
<http://ibcglasgow.org>

Southeast Christian Church
Jason McBride, Spiritual Formation Pastor
Todd Hudson, Senior Pastor
9650 Jordan Road
Parker, Colorado 80134
303-841-9292
<http://www.sechristian.org>

Constance Free Church
Shawn Suave, Pastor of Small Groups and Adult Education
Randy Discher, Senior Pastor
16150 Crosstown Blvd
Andover, Minneapolis, 55304
763-434-5995
<http://constanceonline.com/>

Solana Presbyterian Church
Mike McClenahan, Senior Pastor
120 Stevens Avenue
Solana Beach, California 92075
858-509-2580
<http://www.solanapres.org>

Calvary Bible Church
Carl R. Illian, Associate Pastor of Discipleship
Dr. John D. Talley III, Senior Pastor
145 Hampstead Road,
Derry, New Hampshire 03038
603.434.1516
<http://www.cbcderry.org/>

Calvary Baptist Church
Jonathan Stairs, Pastor of Adult Ministries
Rick Baker, Senior Pastor
300 Rossland East
Oshawa, ON L1G 2X1
905.433.2960
<http://www.calvary.on.ca>

Parklawn Assembly of God
Walter Harvey, Senior Pastor
3725 North Sherman Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53216
414-442-7411
<http://www.parklawn.org>

Church of the Foothills
Roy Price, Pastor of Adult Ministries
3939 Cambridge Road
Cameron Park, CA 95682
530- 677-3057
<http://www.cotf.org/>

Parkview Christian Church
Tim Harlow, Senior Pastor
11100 Orland Parkway
Orland Park, Illinois 60467
708.478.7477
<http://www.parkviewchurch.com>

North Coast Church--*The Patriarchal Church for Sermon Based Small Groups*
Dave Enns, Pastor of Growth Groups and Men's Ministry
Larry Osborne, Senior Pastor
1132 N. Melrose Dr.
Vista, CA 92083
760-724-6700
<http://www.northcoastchurch.com>

Other Sermon Based Small Group Churches

First Evangelical Free Church
Kirk Albrecht, Senior Associate Pastor
4001 University Dr.
McKeesport, Pennsylvania 15132
412-678-6655
<http://www.thefreechurch.com>

Cornerstone Ministries
Francis Chan, Teaching Pastor
2080 Winifred St.
Simi Valley, California 93963
805-581-9532
<http://www.cornerstonesimi.com/>

The Bridge
Pastor Loren
12765 Oaks Ave
Chino, California 91710
909-627-5500
<http://www.thebridge.tv>

Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino
Brian Morgan, Pastor
10601 N Blaney Avenue
Cupertino, CA 95014
408-366-6690
<http://www.pbcc.org/>

Community Christian Church
Dave Ferguson, Lead Pastor
1635 Emerson Lane
Naperville, Illinois 60540
630-388-5000
<http://www.communitychristian.org/>

Newton Presbyterian Church
Robert Perkins, Pastor
75 Vernon St.
Newton, Massachusetts 02458
617-332-9255
<http://www.newtonpres.org/>

Willow Creek Community Church
Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor
67 East Algonquin Road
South Barrington, IL 60010
(847) 765-5000
<http://www.willowcreek.org>

Saddleback Church
Rick Warren, Senior Pastor
1 Saddleback Parkway
Lake Forrest, California 92630
949-609-8000
<http://saddleback.com>

United Church of the Resurrection
Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor
13720 Roe Ave
Leawood, KS 66224
913- 897-0120
<http://www.cor.org/>

Flamingo Road Church
Troy Gramling, Lead Pastor
12401 Stirling Rd
Cooper City, Fl 33330
954-434-1500
<http://www.flamingoroadchurch.com>

North Point Community Church
Andy Stanley, Senior Pastor
4350 North Point Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30022
678.892.5000
<http://www.northpoint.org/>

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

The Seminar

The Seminar Design

The original design of the seminar “Connecting the Sermon to the Small Group” came directly from the research found in the first four chapters of this thesis-project. The research followed this outline:

1. The proposal raised the question of “why” use the SBSG model. It gave an initial response that the SBSG model could help Christians grow in a busy church and society.
2. The second chapter provided a biblical basis for the SBSG concepts, the pastor’s primary role in the church as a preacher, the purpose of preaching, and the use of small groups in the Book of Acts.
3. The third chapter provided research from churches that used the SBSG model. The churches answered twelve questions and then were analyzed and synthesized. The synthesizing confirmed why churches use the SBSG model. It produced a best practices list, a challenges list, and principles on how to write SBSG material.
4. The fourth chapter provided the seminar materials and other documents that were used in the seminar to allow learning during the seminar and after the seminar. The seminar revealed models using the Internet to view websites, SBSG material, and provided worksheets for developing questions based on the purpose of the sermon. Seminar participants were given a three-ring binder with the materials in it.

The seminar was presented as a three-hour seminar. The topics were derived from the research outline above. The timeline was as follows:

Session 1	Introduction: What are Sermon Based Small Groups and Why Use Them? 9:00-10:00 am
Session 2	Who Is Using Sermon Based Small Groups? 10:00-11:00 am
Session 3	Developing the Sermon Based Small Group Material 11:00-12:00 pm

The seminar was designed to be an introductory seminar on how to use the SBSG model.

The simple design was intentional for the following reasons:

1. Pastors and leaders have limited time they will give up for a seminar. A high impact introductory approach was deemed more valuable than a seminar that might be perceived as too long.
2. An introductory approach would lessen the expectation to have all the answers in one seminar. Learning a new model for small groups is challenging. The concepts presented in this seminar are structurally different from a traditional model Sunday School. Participants would need time to think through the concept of using the SBSG model.
3. A simple design would introduce the SBSG model with depth, but the notebook included enough follow up material for participants to perform research on their own. Small group development requires a strategic plan to implement. For any church wanting to develop and use a SBSG approach, follow up meetings would be required anyway.

What I Learned From the Seminar

Preparing the seminar on the SBSG approach was challenging and gratifying. The seminar was challenging because I put it together while finishing the third chapter of this thesis-project. I am used to multi-tasking in ministry, but putting together a seminar was not as easy as I thought it would be. If I were grading the seminar I would give it a B. By nature of the uniqueness of the topic and the quality of the materials, the seminar was an above average event. The event and materials were free to participants. A free seminar was a wise decision. I believe the free seminar increased the attendance.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) in Grapevine, Texas, sponsored the seminar. A friend of mine helped me with facility and service support coordination. The SBTC provided breakfast and lunch for the seminar. The SBTC staff printed the seminar notebooks for free. I learned it is good to have a friend and some support staff at the denominational level to promote and execute an event.

On the day of the event I learned a valuable lesson on preparation. When I got to the convention headquarters I was able to set up materials at tables and get my laptop in place. I ended up having a problem with my laptop interfacing with the media projection system. I use a Mackintosh computer. Mackintosh has an application called Keynote that is excellent. This application allowed my presentation to have a professional look. When I connected my laptop to the media, the picture was not showing correctly. I am not well versed in the technical side of computers, so I needed help. One of the ministers on the SBTC staff was able to help me and got the equipment going at the last minute. This was important because in the seminar participants are shown three websites of churches that use the SBSG model. Website analysis shows participants the many areas of small group promotion and leadership development performed by many SBSG churches. If I had it to do over again, I would go over a day early and ensure the equipment and computer settings were correct.

Immediate Changes in the Seminar

Session one was intended to be a motivational session explaining why churches should consider using the SBSG model. The session was deductive. I worried that I would not have enough material and would run out of time. I should have known that two years worth of research would gush out of me when I spoke. The session had six points with various sub points. The session did not go long, but it did not leave much time for discussion questions. This was a crucial mistake because I wanted the seminar to model a discussion-based environment. A convention staff leader introduced the session and that took up ten minutes of the first hour. The bottom line is I should have watched the time better. I was nervous so it took me a couple of minutes to get into a speaking rhythm.

Next time in session one I will cut back some of the content illustrations to leave time for the discussion questions and feedback from tables. Also, I will move through the material more rapidly without compromising content. I went a little too slow and was too methodical. The session is fifty minutes. I will cut the speaking time down to twenty-five minutes and will leave twenty-five minutes for discussion in small groups. Groups will also provide a quick report of what the consensus was in answering the questions.

Session two presented the results of chapter three dealing with who is using the SBSG model. The session explained the benefits of the model, best practices, challenges, and principles for writing the material. This session had too much material in it. The content was good. The seminar would not be as good without it. The challenge is the best practices list is long. Also, there is a significant amount of time taken up with walking participants through the three web sites of churches using the model. This too is crucial because participants can see that churches using this model do more than just talk about the sermon. The web sites show how SBSG churches do leadership development, pastoral care, attendance tracking, and promotion of preaching.

Session three gave principles on how to write SBSG material. The session revealed a variety of models for writing based on the models of surveyed churches. This session took a lot of time. I should not have explained all the models for writing. I should have stuck to explaining the purpose of the sermon and how to write questions from the sermon purpose. The session is one hour long, but I only had twenty minutes after lecturing. One participant said, "The material was great and should be of value to all. I liked Alan's passion. I believe it will help to close the back door for the percentage that is involved in the small groups. I would allow for more writing time by scheduling the

seminar another thirty minutes. It helps to set the schedule expectations for pastors.”²¹² I will lecture little in this session next time. I will only talk through an example and then will let tables write material. After a period of time writing questions, I will lead a reporting time. I was only able to allow groups at tables to work on questions for fifteen minutes and had to rush the report. That exercise needs an hour so all the exercises can be done. I was disappointed in my management of the third hour. I will add thirty minutes to the session to allow for a thorough walk through of a few examples and still leave an hour for exercises. I have also considered placing the third session in the second hour slot and adjusting the second hour content to end the seminar.

Feedback on the seminar was good but limited. When I do the seminar again I will do the feedback portion myself. The SBTC sent a follow up email, but no one responded. The SBTC created a set of questions and I approved them. I should have had participants do them on paper on their way out of the seminar instead of depending on automated email follow up. I did speak with about ten participants and asked them what they thought of the seminar. The response was positive. Another email I received from a participant wrapped it up well. He said, “Traditional, Anglo, Sunday School guys, got a few good ideas, but had some issues as well (challenging the traditional structure). Ethnic guys, and young generation guys; they got it.”²¹³ Holding the seminar in a traditional Southern Baptist setting, which is established in Sunday School, was challenging. I challenged the structure while being respectful of structure.

²¹² Barry Calhoun, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Grapevine, TX, January 14, 2009.

²¹³ Kenneth Priest, follow up interview by Alan Stoddard, Grapevine, TX, January 13, 2009.

The Future Seminar

The seminar was recorded on video for a future distribution for those who cannot come to a seminar location. There are future plans to offer the seminar in 2009 and beyond. I seminar is slated to offered at the small church leadership conference in the Spring 2009. I also hope to present the seminar at the E. K. Bailey Conference on Expository Preaching in July 2009. The SBTC is considering offering the seminar again in South Texas in the Houston area. The Tarrant Baptist Association is also interested in offering the seminar to its constituent churches. I plan to pursue building a website that is a resource to churches using a SBSG system. The site will have examples of material, blogging to interact on the SBSG model and scripture passages, and a section for sharing material. The seminar should have a future in traditional settings looking for a small group alternative.

Challenges Found in the Thesis-Project

The proposal submission was a struggle for me during the third residency. I had planned to write a proposal on the preaching ministry of E. K. Bailey. I then considered writing on teaching prospective ministers to prepare and deliver sermons. The topic was rejected because of the many thesis-projects dealing with the exact or similar area of study. I left Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) frustrated and rejected. I had spent a significant amount of time in the library for what seemed to be nothing.

The idea for the proposal for this thesis-project came in a unique moment. I was on the flight home from GCTS. At 30,000 feet altitude, I was disappointed that I was coming home with no idea what my proposal would be. I began reading Thom Rainer's book *Simple Church* referenced in the proposal of this project and in the bibliography.

When I read of Immanuel Baptist Church and how Pastor Tony Cecil led the church to use the SBSG model, I found an idea and question to address. I would not address a topic that dealt directly with homiletics. I would address a topic that supported preaching. Researching and writing about small groups as a way to reinforce expository preaching was appealing. The two year long journey has been rewarding, but was initially challenging.

The work of putting together the thesis-project was not at all easy. I found it difficult to write the project. If I could do it again I would write a lot more and be done earlier than I will finish this project. I prefer to write in periods of immersion, not consistently, week to week. I would rather take two full days to write rather than try to write a little each day. As a result of this, I plan to compensate when writing in the future. I would benefit more by committing time five to seven days a week to writing. Time management was difficult to master for this project. While I enjoyed the topic, I was much more impassioned for ministry in the local church. I serve in a church that does not use small groups. I felt alone at times because I could not discuss my project with my staff. I did not want to give the impression I was trying to turn our church from a Sunday School model to the SBSG approach. Ministry kept me busy on a weekly basis and I did not give the thesis-project the time it required, especially to complete in the next year after the third residency. Balancing ministry, family life, and the thesis-project was costly.

Another challenge in the thesis-project process was the lack of traditional material related directly to the SBSG model. The model is largely a West Coast small model that is young. There are very few books that deal with SBSG churches using the model. I was

not able to rely on library resources to solely provide data. I used surveys and spent a significant amount of time on websites of churches that use a variation of the SBSG model.

The Doctor of Ministry Journey

The Preacher and the Message Track

I entered the Doctor of Ministry Program at Gordon-Conwell for two reasons: 1) I wanted to study preaching under the leadership of Dr. Haddon Robinson and 2) I wanted to become a better preacher. The track “The Preacher and the Message” was intriguing. I entered the program not as much for the degree as for the experience to better my preaching. I was not disappointed.

The first residency was in 2004 and dealt with preparing a biblical sermon. I knew most of the material in the residency. The interaction with the passages within my cohort and with Professors Robinson and Litfin was well worth the time. I felt like I solidified the basics of sermon preparation during the residency. The difference was walking through the process of sermon preparation slowly for two weeks with two experts. The first residency contributed to this thesis-project by prioritizing preaching in the life of a pastor.

The second residency was in 2006 and dealt with audience analysis. I took a year break in 2005 for personal reasons. I joined another cohort who received me well. In this residency I was challenged to complete a project on audience analysis. The project helped me see how using survey data can reveal information that can provide insight on the needs of listeners. The second residency and its assigned project enhanced this project.

The audience analysis focus brought sensitivity to wanting listeners' needs met in preaching. The SBSG model focuses on the listener.

The third residency was in 2008 and dealt with teaching preaching. The residency benefitted this thesis-project in the preparation and execution of the seminar. Teaching pastors is not always easy. The experience of teaching my peers helped me overcome anxiety when teaching the seminar. The assignment to teach a portion of a basic preaching class proved helpful. It made me learn how to develop instructional objectives for the course. This task made it easier to create instructional objectives for the seminar.

Future Studies

The need for community in the church should not be overlooked as insignificant. People are craving significant, authentic relationships. Christian maturity is still a major need and goal of the Christian life. The SBSG model provides a place to meet the relational needs of people in churches. Churches and leaders should constantly study and assess how they are assimilating people into relational groups in their churches.

One possible study for the future includes measuring the spiritual growth of those in a SBSG. After a specified period of time, participants could provide feedback as to how they think they grew spiritually. This project was concerned with the opinions of professionals who are ministers. A view from the pew might shed more insight to the effectiveness of the SBSG model.

APPENDIX

Interview 1

Pastor Tony Cecil, Senior Pastor

Immanuel Baptist Church
104 Western Hills
Glasgow, Kentucky 42141
270- 678-7729
<http://ibcglasgow.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text)

Yes. Some groups utilize what I write as their curriculum. Other groups choose from an approved list of curriculum options. The majority of people read the study at home, come to church and listen to me preach it, and then attend a small group using a completely different curriculum. We give our people the option.

What I write (the study is called Coordinates) would be better classified as a more in-depth version of my message. The vast majority of the time, everything that I preach typically is also contained in Coordinates. The main proposition of my message is the main proposition of Coordinates. I do not preach from a manuscript so my sermon is not identical to the study. I also add all new illustrations that are not contained in the Coordinates. The study, however, contains substantially more information that I am not able to include in my Sunday morning message.

2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)

When I began writing Coordinates (over 2 ½ years ago), I tried to include all three types of questions. In terms of the knowledge questions, most of what I asked encouraged readers to slow down and observe what the text actually said. Most questions I asked could be easily answered simply by re-reading the passage. The “understanding” questions were asked more from a subjective point of view. For example, “What do you think Paul means” Usually after the subjective questions, I answered the question by telling the readers what it was that Paul actually meant. At the end of the study, I usually asked 3-5 application

questions/activities. These were by far the most difficult to write. I found many of these in other studies/sermons that I read as I prepared during the week.

Over the last year, however, I stopped including questions in the Bible study. Now Coordinates resembles nothing more than a written sermon. Being a pastor of a small church, I am not afforded a large pastoral staff to help in ministering to the needs of the people. I simply did not have the time to continue to develop questions for the study.

3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?

Of course, I try to both. But the majority of my focus surrounds knowledge and understanding. My goal is to correct erroneous thinking surrounding the gospel and to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.”

4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text)

Without question, Coordinates has given our people a far better understanding of the gospel. In addition to giving them greater understanding of the text, they are better prepared to listen to the message. There are some who detest repetition. It’s as if they desire to be entertained rather than educated. But many are benefiting from having the study the week preceding the message.

I received a note of encouragement yesterday (it’s pastor appreciation month) from an individual who started attending our church less than a year ago. In it he writes: “I am finding a total newness in study of the Bible with using the Coordinates. You do such a great job tying the subject verses together into a workable learning experience.” Now I believe his “newness” in studying the Bible is due largely to the fact that he is just simply new to studying the Bible. I’m not a great writer. This gentleman has simply been challenged to interact with the text for the first time in his life. He’s doing more than just listening to a message; he’s also studying it himself. I simply feel getting people to interact with the Word also gets them interacting with the Holy Spirit.

5. What are the challenges?

Time – I struggle to find enough time to write Coordinates and do the rest of my pastoral duties.

Some people hate repetition – I’ve heard a number of people share their displeasure that they are taught the same passage in Sunday School and worship. To me it’s education; to them it monotonous.

6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education?

I am a senior pastor.

7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function?

Our schedule on Sunday mornings is 8:15 Bible Fellowship Groups, 9:30 worship, and 11:00 Bible Fellowship Groups. All those using Coordinates as their curriculum are in the second hour (11:00 a.m.). The hope is that people have studied the Coordinates (during the week), heard a message on the passage (9:30 a.m.), and are now ready to interact with the passage as a group. There is a lot more discussion this way. At our church we do both Bible Study Fellowships and small groups. BSFs are lead by teachers. Small groups are lead by a group leader (not necessarily a teacher). Small groups, for us anyway, are where our people come together and serve one another through the execution of spiritual gifts. A BSF is a teaching environment. I stay in constant contact with the teachers who use Coordinates as their curriculum. I'm aware of any and problems they are personally experiencing, and make an effort to equip them on an individual basis.

8. Do you personally interact with a small group?
Yes. (A Bible Study Fellowship)

9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church?

The groups that use the process typically do have more discussion among members than other groups. I'm probably biased, but I see a noticeable difference in the spiritual growth of those who use the process and those who do not. Several leaders in our church would tell you the same thing. If a person wants to grow spiritually, the process we have developed does a much better job at equipping them than the alternative method that other groups use (study independent from message).

10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups?

It works much better on campus. People hear the message and go immediately into discussion with a group of believers.

11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?

N/A (See #6)

12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?

I believe it is a highly effective method to foster spiritual growth in the lives of those who are seeking it. It's hard to write the curriculum in house because of the time required. Doing so, however, allows you to speak directly to the spiritual needs of the congregation. Bringing in a curriculum from the outside might limit your teaching to whatever curriculum you are able to find.

It's very difficult to pull off. If you not willing to invest a great deal of time and effort to this task, don't attempt it.

Extra help will have to be given to teachers who struggle to lead a discussion. Some are great at teaching a lecture, but they struggle to lead a discussion and focus on application immediately after hearing a message on the same topic. Some only know how to get up in front of the group and repeat everything they just heard. They simply have to be trained in how to lead a discussion.

Interview 2

Pastor Jason McBride, Spiritual Formation Pastor

Southeast Christian Church
Todd Hudson, Senior Pastor
9650 Jordan Road
Parker, Colorado 80134
303-841-9292
<http://www.sechristian.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches who develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) Yes
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) We have a writing team, made up of ministry partners, who receive the sermon each week and it is up to them to decide which part of the sermon they will focus on. They typically choose a key passage or a key point from the sermon and use that to build the study. They use a template that includes:

What is this about? (short description of the sermon and study)

Talk about it (1-2 ice breaker type questions)

Explore it (2-3 questions focused on passage understanding)

Get it (3-4 questions focused on their life story and the passage)

Apply it (1-2 questions focused on applying the passage)

3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage? We try to balance life experience with application of the truth. We focus on two things: discovering each individual’s personal story and application of the passage to daily life.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text) 1. It helps with small group leader recruiting. It is less intimidating for new leaders if they know the materials are available and related to something they have already heard in church. 2. It helps with weekly preparation for the leaders. There seems to be less prep work for the leaders when using sermon based studies. Probably because they are already familiar with the topic. 3. It builds cohesiveness, unity and energy between the

groups. There is energy built when the groups are studying the same material and can discuss it across groups. 4. It deepens the impact of the sermon. Instead of hearing the sermon once and being done, they are being presented with the information multiple times a week. 5. For the small group staff it provides improved quality control with resources and what is going on in individual groups. This is not a problem with most groups, but it helps eliminate some really bad choices for group materials.

5. What are the challenges? 1. Developing a writing team that really gets the goal of a small group study and how to write questions that reveal people's stories and takes them on a journey to integrate the study with their daily lives. We spend a lot of time dialoguing with and training our writers in asking great questions, small group dynamics and application techniques. 2. Getting the sermon script in time to develop a good study and have it ready the same weekend as the sermon. Ideally, we would like the preaching team to prepare and deliver the sermons scripts three (3) weeks before the sermon is delivered. We have not reached that goal at this point.
6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education? Yes
7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function? We see the role of the small group leader as providing direction for a group and ensuring that the group is healthy and stays on track. The leader is not required to facilitate the actual discussion, but usually does. We spend less time training on resource finding and development and spend more time training on facilitating a discussion and creating an environment for change.
8. Do you personally interact with a small group? Yes
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? As mentioned, I think it makes it easy for new facilitators to start a group and it build energy and unity among the groups, as they know each person is studying the same stuff.
10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups? Don't know...We only have off campus small groups...no Sunday School groups.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum? We have a large staff (50+) and most everything is done through teams. We have a team that meets each year to plan brainstorm and plan the sermon series and topics for the next year. The team includes probably 10-12 people (senior pastor, assoc. pastor, programming director, worship pastor, spiritual formation team (5), missions pastor, promotions director, video producer, etc). We also have a team of 3 that works with the senior pastor on a weekly basis for sermon development. The writing team meets

with these teams to get ideas, vision and feedback. As the head of the writing team and being apart of the year planning team, I know the vision and goal going into each week. This requires little interaction between me and the preaching pastor. I wait for the script and then guide the writing team in developing the study guide.

12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model? We spend most of our energy in developing the writing team. Finding skilled study guide writers is a challenge, not every writer can do it. Once we find them, we do everything we can to develop them, encourage them and build them up. We spend money on training, resources and appreciating them regularly. Also, it doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be consistent. If you start writing weekly study guides and your leaders are expecting them, then you can't take a weekend off and leave them hanging...if you do, they will stop using it and probably never use it again.

Interview 3

Shawn Suave, Pastor of Small Groups and Adult Education

Constance Free Church
Randy Discher, Senior Pastor
16150 Crosstown Blvd
Andover, Minneapolis, 55304
763-434-5995
<http://constanceonline.com>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text)
Yes
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)
In developing curriculum we have a number of goals in mind. We want to challenge “conventionality,” meaning, we want to confront cultural trends and our own sinful tendencies as fallen people, with scripture. We try to include a broad historical context, we try to incorporate material from prior centuries of Christian thought and multiple Christian traditions (e.g., Quaker, Pentecostal, Episcopal, etc.). We try to formulate questions that encourage discussions in the small group rather than “lecture” by the leader. We try to include a balance across spiritual disciplines and encourage spiritual formation—we focus on balance and intentionality. Balanced in the sense that a Christian cannot be described as mature who embraces the Bible but neglects prayer, who claims to be Spirit-directed but is uncompassionate toward others. Intentional in the sense that we as people tend to have areas of strength and weakness – balanced attention to spiritual disciplines will cause us to confront our spiritual weaknesses. In that confrontation we seek growth, maturing – the turning of weakness to strength. People also have different preferred forms of learning depending based on their personality, therefore our curriculum structure tries to incorporate multiple learn processes—generally following a hook, book, look, and took approach. We structure curriculum with a theological emphasis—emphasizing major doctrines and essential biblical truth. We want to balance having small group participants explore scripture themselves, while also accurately presenting the teaching of Scripture passages being studied and not imposing arbitrary or external interpretations. All lessons guide participants to consider for their own lives the practical implications of the truths being studied. Ample time is provided in the session plan for both examination of content and consideration of applying the

content to life. All lessons provide learning activities that effectively move learners toward putting the lesson truths into practice.

3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?
We try to focus on both knowledge and application—understanding what a passage of scripture teaches (both meaning and implications of that meaning—timeless principles) is a necessary prerequisite to application. Knowledge without application is unhealthy, as is application without knowledge.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text)

Constance Free Church offers curriculum for small groups based on the current sermon message. These "sermon-based" groups are built on what we call a "Lecture-Lab" model. The weekend message is essentially a lecture on Christian living, and the small group complements the weekend message by serving as a lab where small groups get to roll up their sleeves and discuss how the weekend's message works out in real life.

Everyone in a small group can participate equally

Sermon-based small groups discuss issues related to the message from the weekend service. Every person who attends a weekend service knows what topic to expect in the small group and can express thoughts or ask questions, which the sermon may have prompted.

The community grows together

Since sermon-based groups all tackle the same subject, people in all groups will share similar experiences. Participants have common ground with participants in other small groups, opportunities for mutual, shared, spiritual growth develop spontaneously.

People discover spiritual gifts

Sermon-based curriculum is intentionally discussion-oriented rather than teaching-oriented (other curricula might accomplish this, but sermon curricula allows us to be very intentional in our discipleship). Every person who wants to share has an opportunity. In doing so, many discover that they have gifts like prayer, hospitality, encouragement, leadership, and discernment.

Real friendships can develop

In sermon-based groups, the ground-work for discussion is laid during the weekend service. This leaves more time for voicing our experience, investigating issues, and getting to know one another better through shared learning and laughter.

Leaders can lead

Inexperienced leaders and/or leaders with time constraints can find the development and/or selection of their own curriculum intimidating. With sermon-based curriculum provided, leaders are free to focus their attentions on developing community in their small group. They are free to focus on the emotional and spiritual health of their group members, and apprentice future leaders.

Connecting to small groups has fewer uncertainties

When we “advertise” small groups and connect new adults to small groups, we can tell them what the small group experience will be like because we know how the small group curriculum is laid out. New small group members aren’t left guessing or wondering what will happen in small group. We also have a six week “trial small group” called “Starting Point” for people that are new to our church. This trial group is based on a prior sermon series we did on our church’s core values—and the structure of the studies are exactly the same as the structure of our other sermon-based studies. The advantage is that those new to our church learn more about who we are as a church, try a small group-style experience, and when they join a sermon-based small group they are already familiar with the format of the studies.

5. What are the challenges?

It is challenging to provide ample alternatives in some studies (depending on the sermon or sermon-series) to fit a variety of groups that represent different life-stages, spiritual maturity, etc. Individual small groups might identify a pressing spiritual need in their group that is not necessarily addressed in the current sermon-series—studies are not tailored to specific needs of specific groups.

6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education?

My title is “Pastor of Small Groups and Adult Education”

7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader’s function?

Small group leaders serve three primary functions: 1. Shepherd—Leaders serve as shepherd of their group by facilitating the group and by monitoring the group. 2. Facilitate—Facilitating means addressing process issues such as when the group meets, where the group meets, and guide and lead the group through the sermon-based curriculum. 3. Monitor—Monitoring means checking the pulse or health of the group – how connected people are feeling, how openly people are sharing, and how much people are growing.

Getting more specific—we seek to train and develop in five critical skills as shepherds. 1. Life change – Ensure that leaders are reminded repeatedly of the vision of small groups as a place where the focus is on life-change – lives transferred by relationship with Jesus. 2. Cultivating relationships – Small groups are groups of community and training will emphasize and provide practical examples of ways to build community relationships. 3. Promote participation –

Training in skills for promoting the involvement of all members of the group. Focusing on the leader as facilitator rather than teacher. 4. Replace yourself – Identify an apprentice to train for future leadership positions. 5. Provide care – Build skills in pastoral care by equipping them to deal with challenging situations and educating them about resources available through Constance's care ministries.

8. Do you personally interact with a small group?
This is not possible with every small group, but I will frequently through the year visit small groups, either merely participating with them or guest-leading a group. Normally my interaction is through one-on-one meetings over coffee with small group leaders during the year.
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church?
I'm not sure I understand this question enough to respond to it. Hopefully I might have answered it in my longer responses to other questions.
10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups?
In theory, on campus Sunday School groups could possibly pull this off, but because the focus is on application, community, and facilitated discussions rather than teaching, this is better suited for off campus small groups.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?
I am involved in our sermon planning cycles. We will attempt to plan sermon series at a summary level at least six months in advance, currently I have a good idea (at a high level) of where sermons are going from now (June) until the end of December. We keep all of this sermon planning in a database and as we get closer to a new sermons series, the preaching/teaching pastor(s) will add details for each individual sermon (main/secondary biblical texts, main idea, subpoints), and on the Tuesday prior to a sermon we meet as a team and the teaching pastor lays out in greater detail where the sermon is going and we have team interaction around the sermon (creative ideas, refinement of the sermon, small group suggestions). In addition, throughout the entire process, if I have particular questions, I might discuss them in a more ad hoc fashion with the teaching pastor as needed.
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?
Research other churches that do this to generate ideas, but implement a model that fits the culture of your own church.

Interview 4

Pastor Mike McClenahan, Senior Pastor

Solana Presbyterian Church
120 Stevens Avenue
Solana Beach, California 92075
858-509-2580
<http://www.solanapres.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches who develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) YES, actually Paula Taylor, Minister of Discipleship writes the curriculum and I develop my outlines (both can be downloaded on our web [solanapres.org](http://www.solanapres.org))
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) Process: First, I develop a ten week series that helps us move forward strategically. This fall our focus is evangelism. This winter will be volunteer service and stewardship. I give the worship team, communications director and minister of discipleship my series information with series concept, titles and texts. We meet together to talk about creative ideas for testimonies, drama, special music. Weekly process includes worship planning on Tuesday morning with a rough outline, outline finished by Thursday morning and questions developed by Thursday noon for bulletin printing. The process is very collaborative. You’ll see if you download, but we ask warm up questions, digging deeper questions into the text, then application and prayer.

Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage? Both. The first question is usually “what stands out to you from the passage or the message?” Often that simple question leads to deep discussion.

The structure of the year goes like this:

10 weeks in the fall.
Break at Thanksgiving to New Year
10 weeks in the winter
Break at Palm Sunday to Easter
10 weeks in the spring
Break in June till Sept.

Advantages: Series keeps people engaged. 10 weeks is maximum and fits well in the seasons. The breaks give groups a rest and by the time groups come back, they can't wait to see each other.

3. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text)
 - a. Unity. Our whole church is studying the same text. 1200 in worship and 900 in small groups means culture change and whole church transformation is possible.
 - b. Transformation. Deeper Learning Theory suggests that learning ONLY takes place when a message heard, then discussed in a smaller group, and applied. Traditional sermons can only INSPIRE, but not TRANSFORM. My preaching is better because my goal is to teach and inspire. But I know my message is a set up for the real work of discussion and application. This pattern put me as the senior pastor in the critical path of discipleship.
 - c. Equipped lay leadership. We have 150 lay leaders (members) who are trained before they can be a leader, then are encouraged to attend training twice a year. There we develop skills for leadership, I share the next series concept, and encourage their hearts for ministry.
 - d. Collaborative Planning. Our worship services are better planned, more creative, more impacting because we are all working together.
4. What are the challenges?
 - a. Our future challenges will be, how do we minister to people of different spiritual maturity? We offer Alpha classes, care groups for divorce, single parents and grief, but the core is sermon based.
 - b. EGR (Extra Grace Required) people who don't fit well in small groups. But those are very few.
5. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education?
 - a. Pastor
6. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? (Small group training materials are found at solanapres.org small groups page.) What do you see as the small group leader's function?
 - a. Small group leaders are not TEACHERS, but FACILITATORS. Benefits:
 - i. More with the gifts of shepherding, encouragement and hospitality rather than teaching.
 - ii. Reduces the "expert" syndrome of small group leaders looking to the teacher for right answers.
 - iii. Small group leaders are the first line of pastoral care. They are praying for each other each week, often sharing a meal together, and often getting together for social events in the off season.
 - iv. A group of mentor leaders (6-7 couples) oversees all the small group leaders. They meet weekly with Paula on Sunday nights as a

small group, help facilitate training meetings and are available to leaders to help with questions or problems.

7. Do you personally interact with a small group? YES. My wife and I have been in two different groups in the last 4 years. I encourage all staff, including pastors to be in a group. This gives them the experience of small groups. Pastors probably shouldn't lead, but practice being a "real person" and not the resident expert.
8. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? Above. We also encourage small groups to serve together. We give them suggestions for seasonal and ongoing local mission opportunities. We also used small groups as the basis for a Memorial Day weekend house building trip to Mexico. 370 people (fourth grade and up) built 23 houses. In two years over 500 people have participated.
9. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups? We don't promote this as Sunday School. A few groups meet immediately after the first service on campus. Some meet on campus during the week (men's groups on Friday morning) but most are in homes. It gets the church off campus and into the world.
10. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?
11. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?
 - a. Take time to develop the idea.
 - b. Visit churches that are doing it.
 - c. Put together a pilot team who will become mentor leaders.
 - d. Recruit leaders broadly. Require leaders to be trained and be members for accountability.
 - e. Allow leaders to recruit their own small group members to get started, then have open enrollment on Sundays. If you do this, you'll have 25% to 30% of your groups formed before open enrollment. It's a win before you get started.
 - f. Get the pastoral staff and church leadership on board before you move forward.
 - g. Stick with it and constantly improve it.
 - h. Reduce or eliminate ineffective programs to make room for this, because it has the potential of transforming the whole church.
 - i. The senior pastor and another staff person have to give their lives to it to make it work.

Interview 5

Carl R. Illian, Associate Pastor of Discipleship

Calvary Bible Church
John Talley, Senior Pastor
145 Hampstead Road,
Derry, New Hampshire 03038
603.434.1516
<http://www.cbcderry.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) Yes
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) The Worship Pastor, Sr. Pastor and I meet together to discuss what the emphasis of the Sunday morning message will be and together we develop the small group discussion questions for that week. The questions would include all three areas you mention above with an emphasis ultimately on application.
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage? As stated in response to questions 2, our questions focus on both knowledge and application.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text) The advantage we have found is that it allows our people to take what is taught on Sunday Morning by our Sr. Pastor and discuss what how the lesson learned can be put into practice in their day to day lives as well as make sure there is correct understanding of what he preached about.
5. What are the challenges? Challenges occur when passages from week to week are in some way repetitive thereby making it difficult to come up with new questions on similar subjects.
6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education? I am officially an Assistant Pastor. However, I serve in a voluntary capacity, having retired from the Pharmaceutical/Biotechnology industry after 28 years working in that field.

7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function? Our small group leaders are primarily drawn from our Deacon Board and other Pastoral Staff members. Their role is to guide the discussions and stimulate the members to consider the truths taught and help them see how they can impact our day-to-day living.
8. Do you personally interact with a small group? I am one of our small group leaders.
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? We believe it helps our members grow in living out the truths taught in the Word of God.
10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups? Our small groups meet in individual homes at various times determined by the small groups themselves on Sundays.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum? As mentioned above, I develop the questions in joint session with the Sr. Pastor.
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model? We believe it is an ideal method for small group studies. You could look at our web site where the small group questions are listed weekly.

Interview 6

Jonathan Stairs, Adult Ministries Pastor

Calvary Baptist Church
Rick Baker, Senior Pastor
300 Rossland East
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
Mail: Oshawa, ON L1G 2X1
905.433.2960
<http://www.calvary.on.ca>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) Yes!
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) The teaching pastor is the one assigned to write the questions based on his sermon. They are aimed at application. We post the small group questions in our bulletin and also on our website www.calvary.on.ca for Sunday. We also produce a Study/Leader’s guide that leader’s can subscribe to via the website.
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage? The focus is on application but some knowledge questions are added to help people remember and retain the information that was present on Sunday.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text) Our church ranges from 800-1000 in weekly Sunday attendance with multiple regions of ministry. Using sermon-based small group curriculum helps those in small groups to be going in the same direction, which fights against departmentalism that often occurs in larger churches. Also, speaking as one of the teaching pastors, it has caused my preaching to be more application oriented than before we began sermon-based small groups.
5. What are the challenges? The two challenges are that 1) long-time church goers still want to go to information/knowledge based studies instead of application focused studies; and 2) writing small group questions is time consuming and is a difficult skill to obtain.

6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education? Pastor of Adult Ministries
7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function? I see my small group leader's function is to shepherd the group that God has entrusted them. However, after the Sticky Church Conference, I'm questioning whether I have made the qualifications of a small group leader too high. Maybe small group leaders should function more like facilitators of discussion?
8. Do you personally interact with a small group? Yes, I lead a group and participate in another outside of my church with pastors.
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? Our small groups are becoming more intentional in applying God's Word.
10. Does this model work best in off-campus small groups or on-campus Sunday School groups? I think it works best in off-campus small groups.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum? The pastor who is teaching on Sunday writes the curriculum and I oversee the management of curriculum being dispersed to our people.
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model? Get the Senior Pastor sold on the idea first!

Interview 7

Jon Zabrocki, Community Life Director

Parkview Christian Church

Tim Harlow, Senior Pastor

11100 Orland Parkway

Orland Park, Illinois 60467

708.478.7477

<http://www.parkviewchurch.com>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text). Occasionally we do a small group study based on the sermon – probably 3 times per year. Each is about 4 weeks in length.
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application) We generally follow a Know/Own/Known concept similar to Knowledge/Understanding/Application.
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage? Generally, we tend more towards application than knowledge.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text) We like the idea of everyone in small groups doing the same thing – it leads to a little more of a community feel.
5. What are the challenges? Getting all groups to do it. We have never forced groups to do it and our last survey indicated about 40% not doing them.
6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education? Community Life Director – oversee small groups.
7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader’s function? The process really doesn’t interact with our small group leader training. The primary function of a small group leader is a facilitator of discussion.

8. Do you personally interact with a small group? Yes, I am personally involved in several groups.
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? I don't see any major impact outside of any other type of study.
10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups? I think it can work well in either. The downside is that a solely sermon-based study doesn't give groups the ability to study what they feel is the most applicable thing in their lives.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum? Our Pastor gives us some big picture ideas and will record DVDs when we do those.
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model? Use a blended program of studies. We recently did a year end survey and specifically asked the following question: "Would you prefer a sermon-based weekly study?" 42% (120 people) responded Yes – 58% (166 people) responded No.

Interview 8

Walter Harvey, Senior Pastor

Parklawn Assembly of God
3725 North Sherman Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53216
414-442-7411
<http://www.parklawn.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches who develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) Yes
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)
I create questions from my sermon outline/material that will generate discussion (usually one icebreaker), then 2-3 questions for application, and accountability.
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?
Application
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text) We experience synergy and corporate growth and unity on the spiritual or practical subject. We develop facilitators within the church. Our goal is not to have Bible Study but “Body Study.” We have more time for community and application rather than time spent with questions around certain Biblical verses or topics.
5. What are the challenges? Some members may desire traditional Bible Study in small group settings. Some homogeneous groups may desire topics related to their area of interest versus the sermon topic.
6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education? Senior Pastor
7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader’s function? My role is to prioritize and to pastor the small group leader as I would the church member in general. They are a direct connection between the small group and me. If they are spiritually healthy and effective, then their group will be, finally the church will

be as well. The small group leader (Lighthouse Cell Group) is a facilitator and untitled pastor of their small group (cell).

8. Do you personally interact with a small group? Yes, I meet with weekly a group of Cell Leaders. Every one who is ministering to a group must also be in a group so they can be ministered to also. In addition, I have a group of pastors outside the church that I meet with monthly for accountability and growth.
9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church? The groups develop family and community relationships. They become more and more transparent and trusting with personal issues. They accelerate it spiritual maturity and discipleship. The groups help to evangelize and multiply the numbers of the church.
10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups? We have both types currently. Our goal is make the majority of them off-campus groups. Due to disabilities or security issues with seniors, some meet at the church. Off-campus groups have a better chance of growing and multiplying rather than on-campus groups. The latter tend to stagnate and become ingrown. Our goals are Christ likeness in character for each member, multiplication of the group by leadership development and discipleship of new believers.
11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?
12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model? Pray for God to give and confirm His vision for your church; Subscribe (under study) to a model that you feel comfortable with; Get buy-in from first level leaders and your own family; Count the cost (you will lose some members); Be patient and wait as you work.

Interview 9

Roy Price, Pastor of Adult Ministries

Church of the Foothills
Brian Long, Senior Pastor
3939 Cambridge Road
Cameron Park, CA 95682
530- 677-3057
<http://www.cotf.org>

Small Group Questionnaire

This questionnaire is being used to gather key information and processes from Pastors, Ministers, and churches that develop small group curriculum based on the text of the sermon. The title “small group” in this questionnaire is meant to be synonymous with Sunday School.

1. Do you write small group (or Sunday School) curriculum based on the Sunday morning sermon passage? (“No” will assume you develop curriculum not based on the sermon text) Yes.
2. Describe the process you use in developing your curriculum or questions. What type of questions do you ask? (Knowledge, understanding, application)
I have the sermon schedule for several months so I know where the pastor is headed and what Scripture he will focus on. By noon Thursday I receive his notes and very often his manuscript to get a fuller understanding of the direction he is taking. I then develop questions that I hope will further discussion of the passage always keeping in mind the sermon’s big idea. These questions are then sent to leaders, hosts and group members via email in PDF form. A few questions are printed and made available for those who do not have email.
3. Do you focus on knowledge of the passage or application of the passage?
The core value of the Sermon Based Home Fellowship is to develop relationships. The small group is the base for care, so the relationship building is critical. Each week there is an opening question designed to allow people to open up their lives in a non-threatening manner. The questions are primarily application and life-oriented. We want to avoid as much as possible the conflicts that arise over differing views of interpretation.
4. As you have used this method of connecting the small group text with the sermon text, what benefits would you identify? (Especially as opposed to using traditional material separate from the sermon text)
There are three primary values: 1. SBHF enhances the listening quality. Those who are in the SBHF program know they will be discussing the issues in the sermon and are more attune to the message. 2. The program is more easily managed. The pastor and staff know what is being discussed in these groups. The other approach requires curriculum evaluation; buying and “selling” study

guides, etc. 3. Our leaders are called and trained as discussion leaders and not teachers. This is part of #7 below.

5. What are the challenges?

6. Are you a Pastor or a Minister of Education?

I have been a pastor for over 50 years, 38 of which were spent in the senior pastor role, with 26 of those heading a multiple staff.

7. How does this process influence your leadership in equipping small group leaders? What do you see as the small group leader's function?

The leader's function is to keep the discussion on track, avoiding rabbit trails that divert the group from the main discussion points, handle questions that have controversial potential, and focus on building relationships within the group.

8. Do you personally interact with a small group?

I have in the past but am not doing so now.

9. How does this process impact the small groups in your church?

The majority of our small groups in the total adult category would not be SBHF. We have several men's groups, a larger women's Bible study that includes small group participation, and a few home groups that prefer getting study guides and doing book studies. Some of the latter will use one or two questions from the SBHF to tie in with the sermon to keep a level of cohesiveness. We cannot demand people to conform to one program since some of the groups were in place when this approach was started three years ago.

10. Does this model work best in off campus small groups or on campus Sunday School groups?

We have NO groups meeting at the Sunday school hour.

11. If you are a Minister of Education, how do you interact with the Pastor in the process of developing curriculum?

We are a little unique in that the senior pastor is my son-in-law and we think alike. In addition, he will often use the staff meeting on Tuesday morning to interact with him on the text he will be preaching from. He is primarily an expositor as a graduate of Denver Seminary and student of Dr. Robinson, which also makes this process much easier.

I have used my own study to help me develop questions as well as a couple of practical resources: *The Serendipity Bible*, and *New Testament Lesson Maker* (NavPress). We also have a retired layman who spent years with a ministry in the bay area of northern California assisting churches with small group development. He often emails me suggested questions that I am free to use or not use.

12. What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn this model?

I think the approach is a winner. It simplifies administrative and management issues. The pastor and another staff member visited North Coast Church near San Diego where Larry Osborne has pioneered the concept and came back from that convinced this was the right approach for our church. Later, when I was hired, the pastor gave me the assignment of getting the program going as a major aspect of my half-time role.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, K. Thomas. "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians." *The International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1979.
- Baker, Rick. *God Reliance or Self Reliance*. Calvary Baptist Church. November 11, 2008. <http://www.calvary.on.ca/Content/10169/Enclosures/20081123a.mp3> (accessed December 9, 2008).
- Barna, George. *Growing True Disciples*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001.
- . "Born Again Just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians." Barna Group. September 8, 2004. <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians> (accessed June 16, 2007).
- Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006.
- Buzzell, Sid. "Outcome Clarity." Class notes from Third Residency. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2007.
- Cecil, Tony. *A Glorious Destiny*. Immanuel Baptist Church. December 9, 2007. <http://www.ibcglasgow.org> (accessed September 29, 2008).
- . *Coordinates: A Glorious Destiny*. Immanuel Baptist Church. December 3, 2007. <http://www.ibcglasgow.org/ibc/coordinates/120907.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2008).
- Cho, Paul Yonggi and Harold Hostetler. *Successful Home Cell Groups*. Plainfield, NJ: 1981.
- Coleman, E. Robert. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993.
- Dibbert, T. Michael and Frank B. Wichern. *Growth Groups: A Key to Christian Fellowship and Spiritual Maturity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.
- Dirscher, Randy. *Keep the Change*. Constance Free Church. October 25-26, 2008. <http://constanceonline.com/351388.ihtml> (accessed October 27, 2008).
- Donahue, Bill. *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where No One Stands Alone*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Eldridge, Daryl. *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: Integrating Biblical Truth With Contemporary Application*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995.

- Ferguson, Dave. *The Big Idea: Focus the Message-Multiply the Impact*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Fitts, Robert. *The Church in the House: A Return to Simplicity*. Salem, OR: Preparing the Way Publishers, 2001.
- Foulkes, Francis. "Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary." *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968.
- Franklin, John. *And the Place was Shaken: How to Lead a Powerful Prayer Meeting*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005.
- Fraze, Randy. *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Getz, Gene. *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003.
- Hadaway, Kirk, Stuart Wright, Francis Dubose. *Home Cell Groups and House Churches*. Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1987.
- Hawkins, Craig, Cally Parkinson, and Eric Arnson. *Reveal: Where Are You? The Answer That Will Transform Your Church*. Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association: 2007.
- Hemphill, S. Kenneth. *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur: A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.
- Hemphill, S. Kenneth and Bill Taylor. *Best Practices: Ten Best Practices to Make Your Sunday School Work*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2001.
- Hemphill, S. Kenneth and R. Wayne Jones. *Growing an Evangelistic Sunday School*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989.
- Hudson, Todd. *Needing One Another*. Southeast Christian Church. October 12, 2008. <http://www.sechristian.org/Resources/SermonsOnlineAudioVideo/YouMe.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2008).
- Hull, Bill. *The Disciple Making Pastor*. New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1988.
- Illian, Carl. *The Real Relationship*. Calvary Bible Church. November 30, 2008. <http://www.cbcderry.org/smallgroups.htm> (accessed December 8, 2008).

- Lea, D. Thomas, and Hayne P. Griffin. "1, 2 Timothy, Titus." Electronic ed. Vol. 34 of *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001.
- Lincoln, T. Andrew. "Ephesians." *Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol 42. Dallas: Word Books, 1990.
- Long, Brian. *Heaven's Perspective on Christmas*. Church of the Foothills. November 30, 2008. <http://www.cotf.org/sermons/video/113008.wmv> (accessed December 10, 2008).
- MacArthur, John. "Ephesians." *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.
- Mack, Michael. *The Synergy Church: A Strategy for Integrating Small Groups and Sunday School*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Mager, F. Robert. *Preparing Instructional Objectives: A Critical Tool in the Development of Effective Instruction*. Rev. 3rd ed. Atlanta: CEP Press, 1997.
- Martin, Glen and Gary McIntosh. *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship Through Small Group Ministry*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997.
- Mayer, Hal. *Making the Critical Connection: Combining the Best of Small-Group Dynamics with Sunday School*. Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2005.
- McClenahan, Mike. *My95*. Solana Presbyterian Church. November 2, 2008. <http://www.solanapres.org/Ministries/Worship/MessageDownloads/302075.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2008).
- McGavaran, A. Donald and Win Arn. *How to Grow a Church: Conversations About Church Growth*. Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1975.
- Mervich, Ned. *Making the Homework Work*. Vista, CA: Owl's Nest, 2008.
- Newport, Frank. Newport. "No Evidence Bad Times Are Boosting Church Attendance." Gallup. December 17, 2008. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113452/Evidence-Bad-Times-Boosting-Church-Attendance.aspx> (accessed March 30, 2009).
- National Training Laboratory. "Learning Pyramid." Texas A & M University. March 30, 2009. <http://lowery.tamu.edu/Teaming/Morgan1/sld023.htm> (accessed March 19, 2009).
- Ockenga, J. Harold. *Faithful in Christ Jesus: Preaching in Ephesians*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1948.

- Osborne, Larry. *Sermon-Based Small Groups Starter Kit*, Vista, CA: Owl's Nest, 2008.
- . *Sticky Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- . *Sticky Church Conference Notes*. Vista, CA: Owl's Nest, 2008.
- Pastore, Raymond. "Dale's Cone of Experience." Bloomsburg University. Spring 2003. <http://teacherworld.com/potdale.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).
- Piland, M. Harry and Arthur D. Burcham. *Evangelism Through the Sunday School*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1989.
- Price, Roy. *Heaven's Perspective on Christmas*. Church of the Foothills. November 30, 2008. <http://www.cotf.org/ministries/adult/index.php> - Questions (accessed December 30, 2008).
- Rainer, S. Thom and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006.
- Rainer, S. Thom. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.
- Robinson, W. Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.
- . "Heresy in Preaching," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1997): 21-27.
- Snodgrass, Klyne. *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 196.
- Stairs, Jonathan. *Small Group Discussion Notes: ACT Questions*. Calvary Baptist Church. November 30, 2008. http://www.calvary.on.ca/Newsletter.aspx?site_id=10169&entry_id=122248 (accessed December 9, 2008).
- . *Small Group Discussion Notes: God Reliance or Self Reliance*. Calvary Baptist Church. November 23, 2008. http://www.calvary.on.ca/Newsletter.aspx?site_id=1016&entry_id=121810 (accessed December 9, 2008).
- Stanley, Andy and Bill Willits. *Creating Community*. Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2004.
- Stott, R. W. John. *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*. Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986.
- Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to Its Rightful Place in the Church*. Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1997.

- Suave, Shawn. *I Need to Change*. Constance Free Church. October 24-25, 2008.
<http://constanceonline.com/page.aspx?id=199305> (accessed October 27 2008).
- Talley, John. *Real Relationships*. Calvary Bible Church. November 30, 2008.
http://www.cbcderry.org/Audio/CBC_11_30_08_Morning_PastorTalley.mp3
 (accessed December 8, 2008).
- Taylor, Allan. *The Six Core Values of Sunday School: A Philosophical, Practical and Passionate Approach to Sunday School*. Canton, GA: Riversone Group Publishing, 2003.
- Towns, L. Elmer. *What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know: Twenty-Four Secrets That Can Help You Change Lives*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church*.
 Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984.
- Walvord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- Wiersbe, W. Warren. *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Electronic ed., An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996.
- Wright, Stuart, Kirk Hadaway, and Fancis Dubose. *Home Cell Groups and House Churches*. Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1987.
- Yount, R. William. *Called to Teach: An Introduction to the Ministry of Teaching*.
 Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999.
- . *Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher's Introduction to Educational Psychology*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996.
- Zdero, Rad. *The Global House Church Movement*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2004.

VITA

Alan Stoddard was born on October 31, 1963, in San Diego, California, and grew up in Jacksonville, Florida. He trusted Christ as his savior and Lord when he was twenty-four years old. He was called to the ministry in 1992, licensed to the ministry in 1993. He was ordained to the ministry in 1997.

Pastor Stoddard graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with two degrees. He received the Diploma and Graduate Diploma in Theology in 1997. He graduated with the Master of Divinity Degree in 2002. He has served in four churches in his ministerial career as a pastor and associate pastor. He presently serves the Cornerstone Baptist Church as the executive pastor. In March 2004, he began doctoral work with Dr. Haddon Robinson in the preaching track "The Preacher and the Message." He is expected to graduate in May 2009 with the Doctor of Ministry Degree.

Pastor Stoddard's passion is seeing people's lives changed by the power of the gospel being lived out in small group communities within the larger church community. This thesis project is the result of fifteen years of Christian training in the church and seminary communities.