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Guiding the Members of Polkville Baptist Church in Polkville, North Carolina Toward a Greater Awareness of Their Place in the Body of Christ

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GUIDING THE MEMBERS OF POLKVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
IN POLKVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
TOWARD A GREATER AWARENESS OF THEIR PLACE IN THE
BODY OF CHRIST

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

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

BY
RICHARD LEE HAMRICK

MAY 12, 2017

APPROVAL FORM

GUIDING THE MEMBERS OF POLKVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH

IN POLKVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

TOWARD A GREATER AWARENESS OF THEIR PLACE IN THE

BODY OF CHRIST

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God created me and called me. Jesus saved me. The Holy Spirit equipped me for ministry. There are no greater acknowledgements I can make.

Polkville Baptist Church has been my place of service for most of my thirty-years in ministry. This church, and its staff and lay leadership, has been gracious to put up with me for ten months of *Better Together* planning, implementing, evaluating, and writing. I can't imagine a *better* church with which to be *together*!

Gardner-Webb University has been nurturing me for, and in, the ministry, off and on for thirty-five years. I am most appreciative of the faculty and administration that have invested in me during those years. I must also mention that I am very thankful for the cohort I was placed with while seeking this degree.

My family has been most accommodating and helpful. My wife, Sandy, helped me see the world through sociologist eyes. My son, Clayton, helped me see the world through multi-media eyes. My daughter, Abby, was away at school seeking her own degree, so we pretty much stayed out of each other's way. Much love!

I know for certain that I am *better* when I am *together* with these and so many others who have enriched my life.

ABSTRACT

A church-wide emphasis, with preaching and teaching, provided the platform for instilling in members of Polkville Baptist Church a better understanding of the individual's role in the community of faith, the goal being that a greater percentage of members take an active role in the church. The twelve-member research group was tracked individually, and the control group was tracked as a unit. Following the emphasis, care was taken to discover if there were more members involved in the life of the church than before the emphasis. There was a clear growth in understanding and in the number of active members.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Stated briefly, this project was designed and carried out with the purpose of *leading the members of Polkville Baptist Church to discover, or re-examine, their true identity in Christ, both individually and corporately, with a view toward the possible changes in perspective and understanding of their place in the Body of Christ.* The focal point of the project was a church-wide emphasis which included three Sunday morning sermons and three Sunday evening Bible studies. The title of the emphasis was *Better Together: Exploring the Role of the Individual in the Community of Faith.*

The success of the project will be assessed herein by carefully tracking growth of understanding, and willingness to be involved in ministry, primarily among a research group, and secondarily within the congregation as a whole (control group).

There are things that the project did not undertake, which might be beneficial to know from the outset. The project did not seek to discover reasons church members have for not being active participants in ministry. Were such reasons to be uncovered, through direct or indirect means, there would be the expectation by some that the project somehow addresses each of these concerns. This might well be fodder for additional work, but it cannot be contained in the scope of the current project. This project did not seek to place people in positions of service. This may in fact be an outcome, and ministry placement, particularly of the research group, was tracked in the ensuing months; but neither this placement itself, nor the means and manner of placement, are within the bounds of the experiment. Another fascinating possibility would be a study of

generational differences in the approach to ministry and the decision whether or not to participate. Again, this is better left to future work.

All the things mentioned above – things that the project did not tackle – could very well grow from this project, and would be helpful. But, I reiterate, this project was only meant to track growth of understanding, and willingness to be involved in ministry. If this project leads to discussion concerning the methods used by Polkville Baptist Church to pair individuals with ministry needs, with new policies put in place, this project will be deemed a contributing factor in this beneficial development, even after its formal completion.

The Setting

The setting for this project is Polkville Baptist Church (PBC) located in Polkville, North Carolina. This church is situated in a small rural community in northern Cleveland County. Polkville Baptist Church cooperates with the Greater Cleveland County Baptist Association, The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

My history with this church goes back thirty years. I graduated from Gardner-Webb University (then College) in May, 1986, and was called by Polkville Baptist Church in November of that year to be its Minister of Youth and Education. I held that position with the church fifteen and one-half years before being called to a church in a neighboring community to serve as pastor. I served that church for nearly five years, and was then called back to PBC to be its pastor. I have been the pastor of PBC since January, 2007.

The relationship I have with this church can be considered both positive and negative in regard to the project I have carried out. I have first-hand knowledge of the church when it was under the leadership of a long-tenured pastor, during which I was charged with creating and implementing its program of Christian Education. I now have even more intimate knowledge of the church and its members through my role as pastor. Individuals whom I helped welcome into the world have been involved in a youth group I directed, grown into young adulthood, and are now starting families of their own. Some who were young adults 30 years ago are now grandparents! I have participated in baby dedications, baptisms, marriages, and funerals. I have also witnessed the ebb and flow of dedication to the church and its ministries expressed by these members' willingness to serve.

This seems to be purely positive, but this same relationship can also be a hindrance. I wonder how differently I might approach the project had I known these people only a short time, and had less knowledge of their level of participation over the years. It is certainly a challenge that I must be aware of, so that preconceived notions do not cloud the process and the conclusions.

As stated, Polkville Baptist Church is located in a small rural town. According to the town's mayor, who is a member of PBC, the current population of the town, with town limits measured in a one-half mile radius from the center, is 542. If that same radius were expanded to two and one-half miles it would encompass roughly two thousand people. Church members however come from a wider geographic area.

Northern Cleveland County is dotted with small towns and small churches. Land is primarily used to raise crops and livestock. There are no major employers outside of

the public schools, so most residents either farm or drive out of town to work. There are a number of professional people with occupations such as teaching and nursing, but most hold blue collar jobs in large factories and smaller shops. A growing number of families are locating to this area from other states in search of a low-key, laid-back, conservative lifestyle. A fair supply of sub-par rental housing, coupled with a deficit of employment opportunity, results in many residents living in or near poverty.

The demographics of PBC do not mirror that of the community in which it is situated and which it aims to serve. Drawing from a geographic radius of ten to fifteen miles, the church tends to attract those who are more affluent (keeping in mind that affluence is a relative concept).

Within the membership are a good number of public school personnel, hospital and private practice nurses, community service providers, engineers, factory workers, farmers, mechanics, a retired veterinarian, and a nurse practitioner. Several members drive upwards of sixty miles each day to jobs paying higher wages than can be found locally. There are a number of elderly – primarily widows – who live on meager fixed incomes, and as many as a dozen other members living in poverty. All-in-all the congregation is predominantly white middle-class.

The Challenge

Of the current active members and attenders, those who have maintained at least a minimal contact with the church, there are 18 preschoolers, 28 elementary students, 26 middle school/high school students, 21 adults ages 18-25, 56 adults ages 26-45, 64 adults ages 46-65, and 43 adults ages 66 and up. This represents a total of active members and attenders of 256. One hundred eighty-four are adults.

In the fall of 2006, just before I became pastor, the “Annual Church Profile” sent to our denomination listed the church’s total membership at 621, with an average attendance of 197. Five years later – 2011 – total membership was 674, with an average attendance of 235. In these first five years we experienced nearly a nine percent growth in membership and a nineteen percent growth in attendance. It was a good stretch if such numbers are the best indicators of growth (an assertion that I would debate against, in favor of less tangible factors such as spiritual maturity).

The following four years did not produce such glowing numbers. Without going into details, suffice it to say there were surface symptoms as well as deep problems that had lain dormant; “fault” lines started shifting, and there was plenty of “fault” to go around. As I stated earlier, when I left PBC to become the pastor at another church, I had been on staff over fifteen years. At that time the pastor had been there twenty-eight years, and the music minister had a thirty-year tenure. Even the secretary, janitor, pianist and organist had been there longer than me! Toward the end of my fifteen years as Minister of Youth and Education, there was a lot of talk about apathy among the congregants. Part of God’s calling me away from PBC at that time was, I believe, because of that very thing, that maybe me being there so long was enabling the apathy.

As I pastored a church twelve miles away, the pastor of PBC resigned and the church called an intentional interim. When I returned to pastor PBC, three years after my predecessor’s departure, all the other staff members were still in place.

During the fall of 2011, the Richter scale started showing signs of tremors within the congregation, and by the next fall, the full-on effects of an earthquake had been experienced. In the fall of 2015, in that year’s reporting to the denomination, our

membership was 587 with an average attendance of 130. The four years since the first signs of an “earthquake” have seen a marked decline in membership – down twelve percent – and a decline in average attendance of forty-five percent.

By the time the “earthquake” settled, all those long-tenured staff members and employees were gone as well (some by retirement, some by resignation). If the apathy that had been talked about through the years had set in due to long-tenured staffing, then that excuse was gone. When the after-shocks had died down, it was even more necessary for people to shake the apathy out of their bones; upwards of seventy-five members had moved their membership or declared they would not be back. Many of these were active members – former and current Sunday school teachers, organization heads, committee members, even deacons and former personnel.

The challenge to the congregation, in the aftermath of what seemed at the time a cataclysmic shift, is that there are fewer, and younger, church members left to rise out of the rubble and take up the cause. With what was a congregation of more experienced leaders in greater numbers, it might well be possible to manage on a smaller percentage of actively involved members; this is not a luxury we have at present.

It certainly can be debated whether this pruning of the membership of Polkville Baptist Church was God-orchestrated, or otherwise, but the dramatic results cannot be debated. One of those results is that we have fewer people to carry out the ministry to which we feel God is calling us. Our congregation is now younger and less experienced.

There is a desire to be a vibrant, relevant and active congregation. One of the problems I see as the church’s pastor is there are fewer people willing to make that happen; desire to “be”, yet less desire to “do”; too much “me”, not enough “we.” There is

much we need to do in this regard: a revamped structure of nominating people for positions (if nominating even should be the approach) must be considered; there should be greater expectations of people; and a system for training should be in place. We are working toward these things now. A team of members has just spent over a year reworking our constitution and by-laws, and a discussion has ensued regarding issues of how people are best placed in ministry and prepared for that placement.

These procedural issues need to be dealt with, but they need to be dealt with along with a plan to better educate our members as to their place in the body of Christ. This was the purpose of my project.

So, a challenge presents itself at Polkville Baptist Church, a challenge which I am confident is shared by many, if not most, other churches. I cannot speak for other churches, but I know the problem firsthand at Polkville Baptist. The problem is that the majority of members are not involved in ministry through their church. Of the attending adult members of PBC, only thirty-two percent are active in the life of the church beyond simply attending. This is an obvious challenge to the church being able to fulfil its purpose.

There are potentially a number of factors leading to this problem. Without polling the membership, I can imagine what some of the factors might be: apathy, busyness, fear, not knowing what is available to do, to name a few. Each probable factor could be the subject of its own doctoral project. However, I will focus on one suspected cause, and suggest a possible solution.

I would suppose that lack of proper understanding is a major part of the issue, and with proper education and encouragement, at least some non-ministering members will take up their ministry implements, roll up their sleeves, and get to work!

The Goal

The goal of this project is to educate the members of Polkville Baptist Church as to the communal nature of the church and each individual's proper place in that community. Upon completion of the project, data collected from the control group (congregation) and the research group (twelve church members who committed to participate in the entire project) will show a heightened awareness and understanding of the church as a community, and the importance of each person fulfilling his or her role. It will also be noted how this change in understanding effects the outcome of the work of the nominating committee.

My specific goal, beyond the preaching and teaching, is that fifty percent of the research group, and ten percent of the control group will exhibit a desire to begin functioning within the church, or, if already serving, will seek to find a better fit for their particular personality, talents and gifts. The research group is comprised of twelve adults, so the goal is that six of those members become active, or become active in a way that is a better fit for them. The control group is made up of the 184 adult attenders, minus the twelve experimental group members, for a total of 172. The goal is that ten percent of this group, or seventeen, will either become active, or become active in a way that better mirrors their gifts and talents. This would be a total of twenty-three adults. The church would go from having fifty-eight active adults to eighty-one. Instead of a thirty-two

percent participation rate, the church would have forty-four percent of attenders being active within the “body.”

There is a challenge when one considers the subjective nature of the term, “active.” I am subjective when I determine who is and who is not active. My decision is based on what I believe it looks like to be active. Each church member will be subjective in evaluating their own level of activity. Frankly, I do not see how we could get around this, save making a list of definitive qualifiers; this would have the effect of turning the church from an organism to an organization, which would not be preferred. Scripture can speak to this (and biblical interpretation is often subjective itself), and the teaching and preaching will help somewhat in centering our thinking on the matter. The challenge of the subjective nature of the project will be embraced, and the assessment will, by necessity, indicate this.

I turn now to a thorough examination of the project as it was carried out in April, 2016, and then to a survey of the biblical/theological rationale for this project, and finally, to a discussion of the outcome as indicated on various evaluative instruments, field notes, and journal entries collected during the project.

Chapter Two

BETTER TOGETHER: EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUAL'S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

As stated in the preceding chapter, the purpose of this project was to provide an avenue for a growth of understanding as to the role of the individual in the community of faith, and as a result, be able to chart an increase in the number of adult members of Polkville Baptist Church who are taking an active role in the church. Before examining the evaluative data toward determining the success of the project, I will give a detailed description of the project – the components, the planning, the promotion and the participants.

Overview

The project revolved around a series of three Sunday morning worship services, along with teaching sessions each of those nights. Together, these six meetings constituted a church-wide emphasis on the individual's place in the community. The emphasis was called, *Better Together: Exploring the Individual's Role in the Community of Faith*.

Running alongside these teaching/preaching events was the efforts to evaluate the project which I will describe more fully in a later section. There were questionnaires and evaluation forms filled out throughout the emphasis by the control group, consisting of the church body at large, and a research group of twelve individuals. The research group also completed a guided journal throughout the emphasis. I compiled field notes during meetings which were held with various groups of individuals for planning and feedback. I also keep a journal as I made observations along the way.

With a project of this scope and importance, great care must be taken in selecting the most advantageous dates. The month of April, 2016 was selected for several reasons. First, it falls after Easter Sunday. Specifically, I waited to start the church-wide emphasis until the second Sunday of April because the first Sunday fell within the final weekend of the public schools' Easter break. The special services and events that surround Easter would be completed, and attention could turn to this emphasis without the interference of other looming big events.

Second, the emphasis ended before the phenomenon of "Memorial Days." In Upper Cleveland County every church (particularly those with cemeteries) observes a "Memorial Day," on one of the Sundays in May. I have tried to call our Memorial Day – which falls on the fourth Sunday – "Memorial Sunday," so as not to confuse it with the national holiday which usually falls the next day for us. Anyway, if one has a relative buried in a cemetery at a church observing "Memorial Day," one places flowers on the grave, and attends worship at that church, followed by a covered dish lunch. In other words, our attendance each of the Sundays in May is generally way down, except when it is our church's "Memorial Day." May is never a good time to emphasize anything other than Mother's Day and Memorial Day.

The third reason for having this emphasis in April was that the Nominating Committee begins its work in May. This work constitutes filling every position in the church with a willing volunteer. By scheduling this emphasis, which included some work with the nominating committee, in April, it served to jumpstart the work of this committee, and – as the project goal indicates – funnel more willing volunteers their way, volunteers who would be better able to make informed decisions concerning their

placement. To run this particular project in the fall, just after the Nominating Committee completes its major work for the year, would seem out-of-place, as the church's annual calendar goes.

The following sections will provide details concerning how the components of the church wide emphasis were carried out.

Parts of the Emphasis

The sermon title, worship theme, and Sunday evening teaching plan for the first Sunday of the emphasis (April 10) was, "Identity in Community." Key Biblical insight into the importance of community is found in 1 Peter 2:4-10. In this passage we find the author referring in several ways to the church as a community: built together, chosen people, royal priesthood, a holy nation, people of God. This passage provided the major biblical source material for the first sermon, and from it, the theme of the day.

On the first Sunday evening I focused my teaching on the idea of community: what community looks like, and how we gain a sense of identity in community. We took a look at the "one another" passages scattered throughout the epistles that speak to how one acts within, and promotes community.

The focus of the second Sunday of the emphasis (April 17) was, "Individuality and Commonality." Scripture passages which speak about spiritual gifts, particularly 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, were featured on this day. The various reasons for God's gifting his people all point to the necessity of each Christian doing his/her part to affect positively the whole. As individuals we act in favor of "the common good."

On the second Sunday night I taught about spiritual gifts, and how these, taken with personality, talents, passion and experience, make each person uniquely positioned

in the community. There was an opportunity to take an on-line spiritual gifts inventory in the days leading up to the session (as announced during the first session). A personality test was also administered. Emphasis was given to scripture which indicates the altruistic nature of the Christian life.

There are several metaphors in the New Testament used to refer to the church in ways that speak to the importance of individual members forming a community. Paul's favorite seems to be "the body of Christ," which we find mentioned in Romans 12:3-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, and Ephesians 4:1-6 and 12-16. With these passages, particularly the 1 Corinthians passage, we circled back to the beginning worship/teaching theme and again highlighted the importance of community during the third Sunday of the emphasis (April 24) with a call to find, "Unity in Diversity."

The final teaching session focused on the body of Christ. In some ways the session went back to the community concept from session one, but with the added idea of giftedness. We began the session with a search of the New Testament for other metaphors used of the church, and closed with an admonition to be joined together. A description of the ministries and activities that PBC offers was presented, and participants were encouraged to get involved.

Another component of the project was the numerous meetings held with different stakeholder groups: deacons, staff, nominating committee and worship team. There were five monthly deacons' meetings in which this project was discussed in some fashion or another. There were weekly staff meetings. I had three official meetings with the nominating committee concerning this project, plus others as they completed work toward their annual report. I met with a research group five times, our worship team three

times, and with various individuals on a number of occasions. I will provide more details of these meetings in the “Participants” section below.

Not originally part of the project, and not officially part of the emphasis, was a plan for our church to participate in Operation Inasmuch, a one-day community ministry blitz participated in by numerous other churches in our county. The date our church had chosen was Saturday, May 7th, just two weeks after *Better Together*. I was involved with our missions committee and ministry committee in the planning for this day. These groups were quite happy to allow this event to serve as an application activity, so-to-speak, of *Better Together*. Throughout the three weeks of the emphasis, there were sign-up sheets for individuals to sign on to be part of various project teams around the community. These sign-up sheets were also available during the Sunday evening teaching. There were options available for a wide variety of gifts, talents, abilities and even age groups. We billed the event as “an opportunity to experience the body of Christ working together.”

At this point, I would like to discuss the details that went into preparing for the six sessions and other components of *Better Together*. (Appendixes A through C include sermon and teaching outlines for each of the three Sundays, as well as an order for worship for each worship service.)

Planning for the Emphasis

Planning for the project began in January as I finalized a proposal and submitted it to the Proposal Approval Committee. As I waited for approval, I continued the planning by putting elements in place and having discussions with our deacons and church staff. During this time, I was laying out in the broadest terms, the scope of the project.

On February 17, a full seven weeks before the *Better Together* kick-off, I met with our worship team to begin planning the various elements of the worship services. We currently have an opening on our staff for Minister of Worship, so our worship leadership is being handled by a team of volunteers. This group is made up of four instrumentalists and five vocalists.

At this meeting, I shared the vision for *Better Together* as well as the weekly theme and key scripture. I presented a number of possible worship songs that would be appropriate for the weekly theme, and the team started thinking out loud and sharing possible song selections that came to their minds. The team members were provided with preliminary worship planning sheets.

I met with this team on two other occasions as we worked at finalizing the order of worship for each of the three Sundays. There was near unanimous excitement about the emphasis. One member, however, was concerned that the team would have a large volume of new music to learn. I assured the group that I did not intend that every song be a new song, and suggested that over the course of the three weeks we could repeat a song if it had special significance. I was pleased with the work this team did in planning and assisting me in tying everything together each week.

Another component of the worship services was media. I wanted to make use of multimedia to give the services greater depth. I called upon my son to help me with this piece. He is very much interested in photography, cinematography, and digital editing. He is also interested in discovering how he might use these mediums, along with social media, to reach younger generations with the gospel. I was happy to give him some experience and a chance to begin building a portfolio.

My son and I discussed various ways we could use media, particularly video clips, in worship, but also to help promote the *Better Together* emphasis. We talked through scheduling and dates for filming, as well as content for each video. In short, we produced a promotional piece for the emphasis, as well as an introductory video and sermon content video for each Sunday worship service. Shortly after the worship services on Sunday mornings, these videos were uploaded to our YouTube channel and shared on our Facebook page. This served to increase interest and reinforce learning.

There were other significant components of the services. I enlisted a different married couple each week to welcome the congregation to worship, read scripture, and lead an opening prayer. These couples spanned the different age groups and represented multiple demographics across the church body. One of these couples is young with two small children, and had only been members of our church a short time. Another couple is middle-aged, longtime members, yet not particularly active. The third couple is retirement age empty-nesters, and is very active in the life of the church.

The main scripture to be used in each Sunday's sermon was read by a different member of the church each week. These scripture readers represented various ages and activity levels similar to those described above.

During the *Better Together* emphasis our church was in the finishing stages of a major remodeling of our thirty-four year-old Family Life Center. The old brick veneer was taken down and replaced. I gathered 120 or so of the old bricks, cleaned them up, and put them in our sanctuary in two piles; half placed on an arrangement of old pallets, the other half in a wheel barrow. At the conclusion of the worship service on week one I invited everyone who would commit to "being better together" to come forward and take

a brick from one of the piles of disconnected bricks and hand it to me. I stood at the “altar table” and took each brick and stacked them to create a wall. It was our version of the “living stones” being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 4:5). After the third and final worship service I invited each person to come forward and take a brick from the wall as a reminder that they, as individuals, are part of something bigger than themselves. Our Ministry Assistant took a picture of our brick structure, with light coming through a stained-glass window in the background, and used it as a background photo for some of the song lyrics for weeks two and three.

There are at least two other ways that advanced planning helped maximize the benefit of *Better Together*. In February before the church emphasis in April, our elementary worship curriculum was designed around the value of cooperation. The tag line for the theme was *Faster, Further, Better Together*. We made sure to get some video of the kids reciting scripture and their “life app” to use in worship during the April emphasis. Also, we were putting together a new pictorial directory as we were planning for *Better Together*. We used the emphasis logo and title on the new directory, and my newsletter article to promote *Better Together* was edited for use as the pastor’s page article in the directory (see Appendix D).

Another component to planning was to gather resources for the evening teaching sessions. I developed teaching notes to be given out to each study participant. These handouts included blanks that were filled in as the teaching progressed to help keep everyone engaged. A PowerPoint presentation was created that followed along with these handouts.

To make these evening sessions more interesting, and to keep the key idea before the students in creative ways, I utilized video clips gathered from websites. Examples of these are a series of Android commercials which are lighthearted and each end with the tagline, “Be Together, Not the Same.” I also used a music video to an old song each night that undergirded the theme: “I Got You Babe,” “Lean on Me,” and “Stand By Me.” None of these media clips were created to be theological, but they served the purpose of continuing the theme and breaking up the serious minded study of scripture.

Our staff Ministry Assistant helped me pull these materials together and put them within our ProPresenter software (as well as doing this for our Sunday morning worship services) which allows for a seamless presentation of various types of media. I also had planning meetings with the Ministry Assistant concerning the resources that would be needed for the room in which the teaching would take place. He was a wonderful asset in helping make sure all the technology was present and working properly.

Besides getting all the technology set up and working properly, I set up tables in a way that each person would be facing me, and the large-screen TV on which the media would play. Each table was prepared in advance with all the materials the students would need for the session. Environmental issues (lighting and temperature) were considered. A snack supper was provided as students arrived.

So that childcare would not be an issue, the start time for the evening study, which was primarily for adults, coincided with the start time for our age group ministry meetings on Sunday nights.

Preparation for the emphasis included advanced planning for providing a spiritual gifts inventory to be taken by the church members during the emphasis. As part of the

project I taught about gifts, and encouraged our members to take a spiritual gifts inventory or survey. For this purpose, and as a learning goal in my first semester of D. Min. supervision (Fall 2015), I investigated a multitude of teaching resources and inventories, with the goal of discovering the spiritual gifts inventory to be used during the project. I glanced at several dozen, examined eight of those (along with accompanying teaching resources when available), and took five inventories myself.

I narrowed the search to three. At this point I asked the church staff to complete all three inventories, and to be prepared to discuss them, with the goal of choosing the best one for our church. This also aided in a supervision goal I had of being more deliberate with staff meetings. We chose to use the inventory that is published by Group Publishing. This instrument is taken online, the results are generated in seconds with a report emailed or downloaded, and the results are also shared in a church data base. A link to the survey was embedded in our church website. The minimal expense was taken from the church budget item, "Christian Growth Resources." This inventory was chosen because of its ease of use, its availability to be used on any device with internet access, the clarity of language, the benefit of the church data base of gifts, and the absence of questionable theological bias.

During the two staff meetings in which the spiritual gift inventories were discussed (one to consider how we might evaluate the inventories, and one to come to a consensus based on the evaluation), I was able to begin laying out the groundwork concerning the project so that each staff member would be aware and on board.

Instructions for taking this assessment were printed in our Sunday bulletin for two weeks before the emphasis and continued for several weeks after the emphasis ended.

During the teaching sessions I made available paper copies for those who did not have access to the internet, or who otherwise preferred the paper copy. I also printed out copies of spiritual gift explanations and descriptions that were part of the Group Publishing package. These were available on Sunday nights so that more detailed and individualized information could be given in a timely manner.

Throughout the planning there was detailed attention given to scheduling various meetings and having resources gathered for these meetings. I printed an “agenda and field notes” sheet for each meeting and had these in a project notebook along with a weekly project calendar, which kept me on track with meetings and also listed goals for tasks to be accomplished each week.

Promotion of the Emphasis

There are multiple aspects of the promotion of this project and the church wide emphasis that made up the bulk of the project. The traditional means by which Polkville Baptist Church promotes activities and events (newsletter, bulletin, web-site, etc.) were utilized, but attempts were made to “step it up” a notch or two in order to make sure we got everyone’s attention. The chatter in the congregation about *Better Together* in the weeks leading up to the emphasis was an indication to me that anticipation was growing.

At the end of January, my son and I traveled to Raleigh to attend a children’s ministry conference with several other church members. I was aware of the quote from Rudyard Kipling’s, *The Jungle Book*, “For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.” There is a beautiful sculpture of a pack of wolves on the campus of North Carolina State University. During our day in Raleigh my son and I made it over to campus to get video footage of this sculpture. I intended to be videoed in front

of the sculpture giving an invitation to participate in *Better Together*, making use of the Kipling quote. Background noise (particularly that of the water fall element of the sculpture), and our lack of a microphone other than the one attached to the camera, made this impossible. But, we did get video of the sculpture to be used in the promotional video.

We filmed my invitation video in my office, with me at my desk, and edited in the wolf sculpture. This video was put on our website and Facebook page three weeks before the emphasis began and it was shown in worship the Sunday before the beginning date of the emphasis. I would have shown it in worship on two different weeks, but two weeks before the emphasis was Easter Sunday and I did not wish to divert attention from the celebration of that special day. (The script of the promotion video can be found in Appendix D.)

Six other videos were produced, and while their purpose was not ultimately for promotion, but rather worship content, they were uploaded to our church website, YouTube channel, and Facebook page each week, and served to keep the emphasis in people's minds, and spread the word as the clips were shared through these forms of social media.

I sent a letter, dated March 30, 2016, to our church leadership explaining the emphasis and encouraging their attendance. My assertion was that if the elected leaders of the church – deacons, organization heads, ministry leaders, staff – could not be *together* on this, there would be less likelihood that church as a whole would ever be *together*.

We publish a newsletter six times per year. Copies are made available to be picked up around the church, and it is published to our website. The April/May 2016 issue featured a full-color *Better Together* cover and the pastor's article introducing the emphasis. This article was then edited to be used as the "pastor's page" article in our new pictorial directory.

The bulletin cover for each of the three weeks of the emphasis featured the color *Better Together* logo along with that week's theme. On the Sunday before the emphasis began, and on the first Sunday of the emphasis, there was an insert in the bulletin promoting the emphasis and providing details. The second of these bulletin inserts was primarily dedicated to providing information about how to complete the spiritual gifts assessment.

Social media was widely used throughout the emphasis. Our church website was updated, changing our homepage to feature *Better Together*, as well as adding a special *Better Together* page. This page gave a full schedule of activities, a link to the spiritual gifts assessment, and *Better Together* content videos that were added weekly as the emphasis progressed (www.polkvillebaptist.com). The cover photo on our Facebook page was updated with the *Better Together* logo and content videos were added weekly. This project gave me new insight into the power of social media, and I took the opportunity to learn how to be an administrator of our Facebook page.

Our Ministry Assistant used the logo and designed announcement "screens" that ran with our announcement loop before worship services. My son created a stop action animated version of the logo in which each element and each letter "danced" into place. This was edited onto the end of much of our media. I purchased background music for this

“logo video” from an online source which gave me copyright permission to use the music for a not-for-profit cause.

The logo itself – four different colored hands reaching in toward one another to form a cross – was purchased from an online art source, and the font used for *Better Together* was downloaded from a “free font” website. Each came with permission to use in non-commercial applications.

Promotion was carried on throughout the church facilities as well. The message on the outdoor church sign was changed each week to indicate the weekly theme. A bulletin board was created in the vestibule with the logo, dates, and weekly themes. Promotional signs were attached to each of the major entrances to our facilities. Black and white versions of many of these promotional resources are included in Appendix D.

Participants in the Emphasis

The material resources, as well as those for planning and promotion, were numerous and varied. They added richness to the project. However, the value of the human resources cannot be overstated. The very purpose and nature of the project demanded that much emphasis be placed on those who would help make it a reality, and those who would participate in and benefit from the content.

I have already mentioned the contribution of some, such as our Ministry Assistant, my son and the worship team. Let me take a moment to comment on the valuable assistance I received from other individuals and groups.

Our church staff has weekly meetings and these meetings took on a *Better Together* feel for several weeks leading up to, and then through, the emphasis. I have already made note of the staff’s input into the selection of a spiritual gifts assessment

tool. We also took opportunity during meetings to discuss the need for such an emphasis, as well as how it would fit into the whole of church life. Each week we talked about different aspects that were taking shape, and how staff members might assist.

The project dates were put on the church calendar in January so that the secretary could help me hold competing events at bay. Of course, many of the weekly and monthly meetings and events still took place. My concern was that I guard against occasional elements of church life being planned during Sunday morning worship and Sunday evening adult Bible Study during the run of the project. There were a few requests that our secretary had to deny gently.

It was important to me that our deacons have an active role in the project, as well as provide their own insight into its need and value. During the January deacons' meeting, held on Wednesday, January 6th, I discussed briefly the progress I was making toward the Doctor of Ministry Degree, and thanked them for allowing me this privilege. I explained to them the requirement that I do a "final project," and that it must be something that addresses a challenge within my ministry setting. I assured them that the time and energy I spend on this project would have a direct and positive effect on our church and on me as a minister. The nature of my project was introduced to them briefly. There was unanimous consent that it would be helpful to the church. One deacon suggested that we have some special worship services leading up to it (Baptist Men's Sunday, Baptist Women's Sunday) so that I would not have to be preparing sermons those weeks. There was informal agreement. Another suggested that having members participate in leading worship would help us toward the goal of the project to involve more people in ministry. I took them up on these suggestions.

We continued to discuss my project in monthly meetings leading up to the emphasis and during the month after the emphasis. My concern was that the deacons be prepared to participate fully, and give insight and feedback in the planning, implementation and even content. Notes from these meetings were kept in field notes and journal entries.

There were three meetings with the church's Nominating Committee planned specifically to discuss this project. The initial meeting was held on Sunday, March 13th to introduce *Better Together* to them, and to discuss how the project may impact their work, and to enlist their personal participation in the Sunday morning and Sunday evening sessions. I asked them at this time to assist me in administering the initial control group questionnaire during Sunday school the week before the official kick-off. Each member volunteered to take an adult Sunday school class to visit, announce the emphasis and administer and collect the instrument. The members of this committee also voluntarily participated in the filming of one of our worship videos.

The second meeting I had with the Nominating Committee, held on Wednesday, May 4th, coincided with the beginning of their work as a committee. The impact of the project was discussed along with their initial evaluation. A final meeting was held on Wednesday, August 17th, after their nominating work was completed and their report had been approved by the congregation. At this meeting, I asked them to help me discern the value of the project in light of the outcomes of their work.

I worked closely with a twelve member research group. In forming this group my intention was to have a good mixture of gender, age and level of church activity. I believe I was able to accomplish this goal. There were six females and six males. Half were

young adults and half were middle aged. Three were minimally involved in the church, two were not even church members, yet regular attenders, three were very new to our church family, and four were very involved in the life of the church.

To recruit the members of the research group, I sent a letter that gave details of what would be expected. As opposed to making individual contacts, I chose this method to ensure that each member would receive identical details. I sent the letter to fifteen individuals. Out of the original fifteen, eleven said yes. I had listed five additional names to be considered, if needed. The first of these to be contacted said yes, and completed the group of twelve.

This group was expected to attend all three worship services and all three teaching sessions of the emphasis. They were also required to attend five meetings of the research group. An initial meeting on March 16th was held to communicate details of the requirements and to have the members sign an informed consent document (see Appendix E).

The second meeting of the research group was held the Wednesday night before week one of the emphasis (April 6). Meetings three, four and five were held on the Wednesday nights after each week of the emphasis (April 13, 20 and 27). At each of these meetings, there was discussion and feedback concerning the content of each week's events. There were also questionnaires, evaluations and journal pages given out each week. Details concerning how these evaluation matters were handled, with a view toward confidentiality, will be discussed in a later chapter, and a sample of the evaluation instruments is included in Appendix F.

All those who attend Polkville Baptist Church, aside from the research group, made up a control group. There were at least two important differences between the control group and research group. First, the control group was not required to attend any part of the emphasis, and they had no meetings of their own. Second, they completed evaluative instruments only voluntarily, and at the conclusion of the Sunday evening teaching sessions. These details will also be discussed in the chapter concerning research methods and assessment.

As attested to in the preceding discussion, this project, which included a church wide emphasis, required a great deal of planning, promotion and participation. Another vital requisite to the project's implementation was the research needed to prepare sermons and teaching sessions, and to provide firm theological rationale for the project. To this task I now turn my attention.

Chapter Three

THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL BASIS FOR *BETTER TOGETHER*

Three months after the three-Sunday church-wide emphasis that made up the bulk of this project, I was chatting with two members of a committee who had arrived early for a meeting. The *Better Together* theme came up as we discussed how we had been seeing those words, or similar words, crop up in various arenas of life. We laughed about how Polkville Baptist Church had started something that was catching on far and wide. One of those with whom I was speaking was a deacon in the church who had heard me talk of this project in deacons' meetings for several months leading into it. He stated, "I didn't like the title, or the concept of *Better Together* until we started looking at the scripture." I appreciated his observation! Without scriptural backing, the concept of *Better Together* would just be another happy sentiment for marketers, politicians and social scientists. As it is, this concept is as old and important as the ancient biblical texts; and its contemporary relevance is mirrored throughout the history of Christianity.

Theological Themes and Biblical Concepts

There are at least three theological ideas that are important to this project. The first is ecclesiology. The word used in the New Testament for church is *ekklesia* which means, "called out" or "assembled." Within the very meaning of the word is the idea of community. It is a community that has been called out, or assembled by Jesus Christ, its founder, or foundation, and guided in its function by the Holy Spirit, to bring glory to God the Father. Faith in Jesus Christ may well be a personal matter, but the importance of the role of community in living out one's faith cannot be denied.

This community of believers is under the rule of God. The rule of God requires that members of the church be subject to his rule. Church leaders and members are led by Christ, the head of the church. And, “The fellowship of the Spirit implies a common life...a community at once redeemed and redemptive.”¹

The second theological theme is that of the activity of the Holy Spirit. “...the very existence of the church depends upon the Holy Spirit...the unity of the church rests upon the Holy Spirit.”² In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17, Paul refers to the church as God’s temple, the place where God’s Spirit resides. In this teaching the “you” is plural; the entire congregation is the temple.³ The work of the Spirit is a major part of the New Testament narrative. The Spirit is active in Jesus’ life and ministry and is a topic of his teaching. The Spirit is active in drawing new believers to Christ and the Church, and in the development and spread of the church. The Spirit works even today to regenerate, to teach, to guide and to empower. The Spirit also enables the function and purpose of the church by giving gifts to individual believers.

The third theme is the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers.” The phrase, “the priesthood of the believer,” does not appear in the New Testament, however, 1 Peter 2:5, 2:9; Revelation 1:5-6, and 20:6 seem to point to its existence as a New Testament concept. The word “priest” is never applied to an individual in the New Testament, except Jesus as high priest, but is always used in reference to God’s new-chosen people,

¹ James William McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 366.

² James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 183.

³ Ibid.

the Church.⁴ In discussing the role and function of the priesthood, Shurden supplies a four-part description: sacrificial servants, glad heralds, sympathetic confessors and courageous prophets.⁵

In all fairness, I should point out that, as I see it, an over-emphasis of this doctrinal idea can have the effect of minimizing the importance of community in favor of the individual, an outcome I would certainly hope to avoid. This bears out the existence of the tension between individualism and collectivism that is inherent in the church.

In summation of these themes: the church is made up of believers who are called out and set apart, to form a community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who prepares (gifts) each believer to fulfill a role, or function, within a holy and royal priesthood. In short, each individual has a role in the community of faith; we are *better together!*

I wish to take considerable time at this juncture to delve into 1 Peter 2:4-10, and 1 Corinthians 12, the central passages of scripture relied upon in the project. These passages will be considered in the order in which they were presented during the *Better Together* emphasis. I will also provide a study of passages from Ephesians 4, which tend to appear throughout the preaching and teaching. I will, however, begin with a description of the Old Testament concept of community.

Community: The Old Testament Voice

There is ample support for this project in Hebrew Scripture. On this side of the new covenant one is easily attuned to the concept of community simply because of the

⁴ McClendon, 368.

⁵ Walter B. Shurden, *The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1987), 81.

nature of *ekklesia*. One might, however, find community an equally important theme throughout the Old Covenant.

Covenant is a key word. Through the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-5, 17:1-8), a nation was born, and an inheritance was granted. Abraham's descendants would become a distinct people and were promised a specific geographic location to call their own. This covenant was initiated by God as a plan to create a people to call his own. It is interesting that with this covenant there was responsibility to go along with privilege (as is the case with the Christian community to come). God's people, Abraham's descendants, would be blessed, *and* would be a blessing (Genesis 12:2, 3b).

This theme of God's covenant is central to the Old Testament. It is what gives God's people their identity; it is what creates community. I will include here just two of the many examples of God's people being reminded that they are God's people: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deuteronomy 7:6, NRSV, used throughout), and from 1 Kings: "...for they are your people and heritage, which you brought out of Egypt..." (1 Kings 8:51)

Again, this covenant relationship between God and his people was not without benefit to the people, when the covenant was kept by the people. In Exodus 19:5-6, God promises that if the Israelites obey God and keep his covenant, they alone will be God's treasured possession, or people. This means they will be a royal priesthood and a holy nation.⁶ As we will see, 1 Peter alludes to this language in 2:9. Along with blessing for

⁶ D. A. Carson, "1 Peter," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1031.

keeping the covenant, there are also curses for being disobedient. This is spelled out dramatically in Deuteronomy 28.

In the early tribal period of Israel's history, community was demonstrated by the individual's inclusion in a named tribe. Adherence to TORAH was important in the functioning of the tribal unit. In the monarchical period, there was a move to hierarchical social structure and the focus of community life was the Jerusalem Temple. In the exilic period, the community was engaged in holding together their identity through the codifying of laws.⁷

Throughout the Old Testament we find a tension between individuality and sociality. There are stories in which we see the actions of an individual affecting the entire nation, but there is also an emphasis on personal responsibility and reward. "...in no period of the life of Israel do we find extreme collectivism or extreme individualism, but a combination of both."⁸ The sins that concerned the prophets were, "...in their eyes not simply individual matters, but matters that concerned the whole community."⁹

There is a phrase which is repeated from Genesis to Revelation, which speaks to the community established by God through his covenant with Abraham: "I will be their God, and they will be my people." Sometimes it reads, "They will be my people, and I will be their God." This covenantal formula is found in one of the covenant sections in Genesis in relation to Abraham, specifically when God instructs that circumcision will be the sign of the covenant (17:8). It also shows up in Old Testament prophecy: Jeremiah

⁷ Mark Finney, "Community," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. ed. by Katherine Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 711.

⁸ H. H. Rowley, "Individual and Community in the Old Testament," *Theology Today* 12 (1956), 491.

⁹ Ibid., 493.

(24:7, 31:33, 32:38), and Ezekiel (11:20, 14:11, 37:27). The New Testament picks up on the phrase as well: 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 8:10 (both quoting the Old Testament), and Revelation 21:7.

In the Jeremiah references mentioned above, there is the idea of a renewed covenant with Israel, coming out of the exile. This new covenant will be initiated by God, giving his people a new heart. “The gift of a new heart...is done by God, because Israel cannot change its heart....The purpose of the new heart is for the sake of a restored covenant....Israel’s autonomy has now been happily replaced by an embrace of covenant.”¹⁰ The new covenant will not be in the form of external laws, but an internal “...identity-giving mark, so that obeying will be as normal and as readily accepted as breathing and eating.”¹¹

Ezekiel echoes the idea of a new heart, “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.” (11:19) Through Ezekiel God goes on to insist that his covenant with post-exilic Israel will be with one nation, as opposed to the divided kingdom which existed before 587 B.C. The point made is, as Wright puts it, “...not so much ethnic and geographical, but theological, or perhaps we might say ecclesiological....the future of God’s people is a future for *one* people. One God, one people, one covenant.”¹²

Again, in both Jeremiah’s prophecy (31:31-33), and in Ezekiel’s prophecy (16:20), there is reference to a covenant that will not be like the old covenant. God’s

¹⁰ Walter Bruggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 218.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹² Christopher J. H. Wright, “The Message of Ezekiel,” in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 313.

people had gladly accepted all the privilege that went with being God's people, without acknowledging, many times, the responsibility that went with the privilege. In other words, "We will be God's people, but we will also be our god." There was punishment for this infidelity in the form of civil war and exile. But God is a God of promise and he takes his covenant seriously, hence his talk of forming a new covenant and writing it on their hearts. This talk of a new covenant pointed to a post-exilic Israel, but also to a time further along when Jesus the Christ would institute a new covenant "in his blood." Each of the synoptic gospels records this phrase from Jesus as he is serving "the last supper" to his disciples. This new covenant is made possible by Jesus' sacrifice – his broken body and spilled blood, with those following him being heirs of the covenant and members of a new community of faith, the church.

This brings the discussion to 1 Peter 2:4-10, which is rich in Old Testament quotation and allusion in its discussion of identity in community. Christ is the cornerstone of a spiritual house constructed of living stones (believers). This community is chosen, royal and holy, a treasured possession of God's, all descriptors which point back to the days of the old covenant.

Identity: 1 Peter 2:4-10

Among other things, and quite possibly pervading the whole, 1 Peter speaks to the absolutely essential nature of community in the life of the believer. To be sure, people living in the first century Roman Empire valued community, which is why the news that God is calling his people out of community into community could be seen as good news.

1 Peter 2:4-10 takes its rightful place among many other passages of scripture, old and new, which call God's people together. It cannot be ignored or misconstrued that

1 Peter 2:4-10 is concerned with the communal identity of believers, and based on that identity, their function in/as community. Any contemporary religious culture bent on individual expression and freedom would do well to take notice of the time-honored encouragement and instruction found within these seven verses.

The first epistle attributed to Peter was written from Rome, the capital city of the empire, referred to by the writer as “Babylon” (5:13). This might be telling, considering the history the Jews had in regards to the Babylonians. They were conquered by this cruel empire and taken into captivity in the sixth century BCE. Rome was hostile toward God, and in turn, his people.¹³ However, the author’s experience of hostility could very well be different than that of his audience; the audience was scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1).

The hostility, or persecution, that is referenced by Peter is not a state-sponsored, imperial action against Christians. The trouble was coming from Roman society in general, from which Peter’s audience had, by the necessity of the gospel message, distanced itself.¹⁴ The persecution experienced in the provinces was due more to cultural expectations, chief of which was the worship of many gods, a regular part of civic religious practice, which of course was prohibited for Christians by the assertion that Jesus was the one Lord.¹⁵

It would seem options were at play as to how to deal with the trouble: withdraw into an alternative community; move to the margins and execute attacks on the empire; or

¹³ Joel B. Green, “1 Peter” in *Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, “First Letter of Peter,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. Katherine Sakenfeld; Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 465.

move people into positions of leadership.¹⁶ Another way of putting this is that God's people could be encouraged to turn away from the world and toward one another, or live within the larger society, or preferably, both.¹⁷

Once a person became a member of the Christian community, and could no longer participate in socially acceptable activities, they would be labeled as outsiders. In response, 1 Peter suggests to his readers that they are

...not to go out of their way to be condemnatory toward unbelievers, or offensive in the professions of their faith....Yet when Christian values conflicted with the core values of society they felt compelled by the values of their faith to reject...Christians were to remain faithful to their core convictions even when that meant abuse and suffering....As long as social and political customs did not lead to a denial of their faith, Christians were expected to conduct themselves in every way as law-abiding citizens....Christians were to exercise love toward those who persecuted them.¹⁸

The passage at hand – 1 Peter 2:4-10 – fits into a larger work, written to an audience in the midst of persecution in the latter part of the first century. The letter is one of several general, or catholic, epistles, meaning they were intended for a less specific, more widespread audience. This being the case, the subject matter does little to address specific concerns of a particular community, focusing instead on giving instruction and encouragement. Achtemeier points out that the very nature of these letters would dictate that there would be little personal or context references; in fact with 1 Peter there are no such references until the final three verses.¹⁹

¹⁶ Green, 1-2.

¹⁷ Pheme Perkins, "First and Second Peter, James and Jude," in *Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 41.

¹⁸ Achtemeier, 465.

¹⁹ Ibid, 464.

As I observe, it is easily seen that the letter as a whole, and the specific passage of this discussion, belong to the writing of one who is well versed in the Old Testament.

There are more than a dozen direct quotations of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as many other places in which the Old Testament is obviously alluded to. The letter could read as a commentary on the Old Testament, interpreted in the light of Jesus.

The passage at hand is set up by the opening words of greeting (1:1-2), praise and thanksgiving to God as a way of beginning the treatise (1:3-12), followed by instruction in living as God's holy people (1:13-2:3). Verse 22 of chapter 1 seems to point ahead to the discussion in chapter 2 concerning the believer's identity in the community of faith: "Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). Verse 1 of chapter 2 enumerates traits of the unholy life which are important to do away with as one seeks life within a community, especially a community joined together, and held together, by a holy God: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

After Peter sets forth what the community of faith looks like (2:4-10), he puts that heavenly reality against the worldly reality that Christians find themselves living as "aliens and exiles." (2:11) Therefore, with the community in place, the instruction turns to how it might live out its calling among the pagans, "...so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." (2:12)

In the letter's opening words, "To God's elect, strangers in the world..." (1:1), the apostle supplies a glimpse into his ecclesiology. "In 2:4-10 the ecclesiological sketch is

extended into a larger canvas in which we are able to discern a sharper and deeper picture of the founding, being, and purpose of the church.”²⁰

The first two verses of 1 Peter 2:4-10 serve as an introduction to the remainder of the passage, or a summary in advance of the argument. Verses 5 and 8 build the argument making use of several direct quotations from the Old Testament. Verses 9 and 10 close the passage with a crescendo of appellations, each adding to the identity of the community, and reminding the reader of the beginning verses of the passage. The only instance in the New Testament of God being referred to specifically as “Creator” is in 1 Peter (4:19)²¹ How appropriate that in this passage of discussion we begin with a community to be created; we see that it is created, and then it is named. One can almost hear God declare, “It is good.”

One would perhaps do well to put this 1 Peter passage parallel to a number of Old Testament passages, and draw lines and arrows from column to column, in an attempt to better visualize the give and take between the Testaments that we find at play here. And while at it, one might add a third column of texts from elsewhere in the New Testament that gives direct support to 1 Peter. In short, no discussion of the content of these verses could ignore their origination in other places; no such discussion could ignore how masterfully the author has woven these disparate texts together to make a new argument – or to make the argument they were intended to make all along. 1 Peter speaks of the work of the prophets that is now being brought to bear: “It was revealed to them that they were

²⁰ Douglas Harink, “1 and 2 Peter,” in *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 66.

²¹ David L. Bartlett, “The First Letter of Peter,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. ed. by Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 240.

serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you...” (1:12)

In the NRSV the passage begins, “Come to him...” making use of the imperative. The NIV maintains an adverbial reading with, “As you come to him...”²² Jesus, the one to whom the passage refers, is likened to a living stone. Stones are not animate objects; they are lifeless. They are even used to fashion the dead (lifeless) gods of pagan societies! But here the stone (*lithos*) lives; it is not in its natural state, but has been fashioned, or dressed, for construction.²³ Earlier, Peter refers to a “living hope” (1:3), and a “living and enduring word of God” (1:23).²⁴

It would seem natural at this point to wish to tie in Peter’s nickname, Rock (*petros*). Here *lithos* is used; however, in verse 8 *petra* is used with *skandalou*. In Matthew 16:13-23, we see these same words used of Peter, *Petros*, when the apostle testified to Jesus’ identity, and *skandalou*, or offense, when he rebuked Jesus.²⁵

1 Peter’s use of scripture, particularly, but not limited to the Hebrew Scripture, to build his letter is an unavoidable conclusion, and in 2:4-10 we have an artistic example. Common observation and the utilization of a simple concordance will suffice to bring to light 1 Peter’s painting.

In the opening verse, “rejected” points ahead to the use of Psalm 118:22 in verse 7b, and “precious” and “chosen” point to the use of Isaiah 28:16 in verse 6. In this way, the author prepares his readers for the argument to come, which flows naturally out of

²² Bartlett, 265.

²³ J. Ramsey Michaels, “1 Peter,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 49;(Waco: Word, 1988), 98.

²⁴ Perkins, “First and Second Peter, James and Jude”, 42.

²⁵ Richard B. Vinson, Richard F. Wilson and Watson E. Mills, “1 and 2 Peter, Jude,” in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 29c (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2010), 91-92.

this introductory verse. These two verses, Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16 are taken from the LXX. The verse from Psalm 118 is identical to the LXX; the Isaiah verse differs somewhat from the LXX, but Paul's use in Romans 9:33 does as well.

It is interesting also that the Psalm 118:22 quote is used in Mark 12:10, spoken by Jesus, and in Acts 4:11, spoken by Peter. In context, Jesus and Peter refer to the Jews as being the ones who reject the stone. In verse 4 of our passage, Peter introduces the idea of rejection by attributing it to "mortals" or men in general.²⁶ Supposedly this would be to include gentiles in the group.

A third quotation from the LXX, Isaiah 8:14, is found in verse 8a. Linked with Psalm 118:22, which appears just before it in verse 7b, the negative side of the argument can be made (rejection, stumbling, and falling).

In the final two verses of the passage, 1 Peter makes claims for the identity and vocation²⁷ of God's people. Once again, Hebrew Scripture is consulted, which of course was the only scripture at hand, and which tied the present reality to God's work among his people throughout time. This of course, gives added validity, along with the claim for apostolic authorship, to the letter in the minds of its Jewish readers.

In Isaiah 43:20-21, we find the following phrases that also appear in our passage: "chosen people"; "God's own people"; "declares the praises." In Exodus 19:6a, we find reference to the royal priesthood and the holy nation. Next, the author rounds out this passage by referring to Hosea 2:23 as the prophet records God's instruction that those

²⁶ Perkins, "First and Second Peter, James and Jude", 42.

²⁷ Green, 55.

who are not loved and not a people will be shown love and will be called God's people.²⁸

1 Peter declares that this has now, through Christ, been fulfilled.

There are several motifs here that should be addressed. The first to present itself is the building metaphor. "Christ is the 'living stone,' the foundation on which the church is built....we do not readily associate livingness with a stone. But with the phrase 'living stone' Peter speaks powerfully of the eternity ('living') and faithfulness ('stone') of Christ."²⁹ This cornerstone is precious. It is more precious than gold (1:7). We can see here a tension between what God values and what humans value, those things that are heavenly as opposed to those things which are earthly.³⁰

It is not without precedence that God would be referred to using the word "rock." Moses referred to God as "The Rock" in Deuteronomy 32:4. The Psalmists often refer to God in this way, for example, Psalm 18:2: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."³¹

Peter's audience members are called to view themselves as ones like living stones that are being built on the foundation, and in proper alignment with the cornerstone. "The cornerstone signifies the interconnectedness of the building stones to each other, and their vital relationship to the Cornerstone."³² These living stones being put in place are many. The implication is that all followers of Christ are being built together into a spiritual

²⁸ Bartlett, 266-67.

²⁹ Harink, 66.

³⁰ Bartlett, 265.

³¹ Frederic R. Howe, "Christ, the Building Stone, In Peter's Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (2000), 40.

³² Ibid.

house. There may be a momentary emphasis on the individual believer here,³³ but it fades quickly, as we see, stone-by-stone, the house taking shape.

What to make of the building? We know its material: Jesus is the cornerstone, and his followers are the walls, so to speak. But what do we make of the nature and purpose of the “spiritual house?” Well, it is to be a “holy priesthood.” There are to be “spiritual sacrifices.” The Greek word for “priesthood” is used only twice in the New Testament, here in verse 5 and then again in verse 9. It appears three times in the LXX (Exodus 19:6, 23:22 and 2 Maccabees 2:17). In Exodus the emphasis seems to be on Israel as a whole being a holy priesthood rather than individuals.³⁴ Green concurs:

Neither here nor in v. 9 can we find a basis for the Reformation doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers,” not because the doctrine lacks warrant...but because Peter’s emphasis is not on the priestly role of each believer but on the priestly identity of God’s people. Emphasis falls therefore not on the priestly role of believers within the community of believers, but on the priestly identity and role of the community of believers in the world-at-large.³⁵

There is no reference in the New Testament to “priest” using the singular noun form. “This usage...suggests that the apostles understood that the priesthood of all Christians had some corporate significance and was not merely personal and private.”³⁶

The work of this priesthood is to “offer spiritual sacrifices.” This is seen metaphorically as offering prayers, giving thanks, repentance, and good works. There are references throughout 1 Peter to the worship that should take place among God’s people: sound God’s praises (2:9); glorify God (2:12 and 4:16); revere Christ as Lord (3:15);

³³ Michaels, 99.

³⁴ Vinson, 95.

³⁵ Green, 61.

³⁶ Thomas D. Lea, “The Priesthood of All Christians According to the New Testament,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30 (1988), 15.

reverence (2:17); commitment (2:19); suffering for doing good (2:20); and the offering of a beautiful spirit (3:4).³⁷ The offerings of the priesthood in the spiritual house are acceptable to God because they are made through Jesus, the precious cornerstone. (2:5)

Another important theme found in this passage from 1 Peter is the tension between honor and shame, which played such a significant role in the culture of the time. Jesus is a stone that was rejected (shame), yet he is chosen and precious in God's sight (honor). He was crucified (shame), yet he arose and is seated at the right hand of the Father (honor). Because Jesus has been honored, those who believe in him will be honored (not put to shame). Those who do not believe, who reject him, who disobey him, will be made to stumble and fall (put to shame). Those who reject, who seek to bring honor to themselves by heaping shame upon others, will be the ones rejected (shamed) in the end. This would certainly resonate as good news to those who have experienced shame and persecution because they have turned from their ancestral faith, and by doing so risk bringing shame on their clan or village.³⁸

1 Peter uses quite a few terms in addressing the honor/shame motif. They include: *apodokimazō*, meaning to reject based on the judgement that someone or something is unworthy; *entimos*, meaning honored or esteemed; *euprosdektos*, meaning acceptable, and *kataischynō*, meaning to dishonor or put to shame.³⁹ For 1 Peter the value humans put on things is dismissed in favor of God's value. In 1 Peter's culture, the measures of value become irrelevant. God is the arbiter of status, the One who bestows

³⁷ Michaels, 101.

³⁸ Vinson, 98.

³⁹ Green, 56.

honor and dishonor. Performance here is only concerned with belief and disbelief. Status is an expression of the grace of God toward his people.⁴⁰

The result of the building, and the exclusion of the disbelieving and disobedient, is that a new community is formed. In this community God reigns and God brings honor where shame seems to prevail. God's people can live in a culture in which they are persecuted for being good because Christ their Lord was rejected and yet honored. They can endure persecution because they are a corporate entity, built together. And, we conclude with a reminder of the result of God's work for us found in verses 9 and 10.

"You are a chosen race." This means God did the choosing and it is something new. "You are a royal priesthood." This means one is royalty, serving at the Kings behest. "You are a holy nation." This means one is set apart to be holy as God is holy (1:16) and that one has a new citizenship. "You are God's own people." This is perhaps redundant, but when the news is good it is okay to hear it again – and be reminded that God has always been in the business of calling out a people for himself, which now includes both Jew and Gentile. And you are "called out of darkness in his marvelous light." This means that one is changed from the pagan culture around oneself and lives now in Jesus, who is the Light of the World.

"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (2:10)." This means that the promises of God that have been repeated generation after generation, even from the time of the prophets, have come true, and you are the beneficiary.

I began by asserting that a key theme, if not the key theme, of 1 Peter 2:4-10 is the identity of the Christian community. The over-glorification of the individual in our

⁴⁰ Green, 57.

culture has made it challenging to read this passage as it was intended. First, if there is any glory to be had, and there certainly is, it all goes to God because he has made everything possible. And, if there is any instruction for the individual found within these verses, it is only to state emphatically that one is to function in community, to be built into and even absorbed into this community, the Church.

Other themes, such as the tension between honor and shame, arise out of the key theme of community, because it is within community that God sets straight the record and assigns honor and shame based on his righteous judgement. Even the theme of living stones being built into a spiritual building calls our attention to community. I am reminded of the poem we all learned as children: “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple; open the doors and see all the people!” God’s people are joined together as closely as the wiggling fingers on our hands.

Unity in Diversity: 1 Corinthians 12

Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians cannot be extracted from the whole of the letter, particularly the chapter preceding it and the two which immediately follow. Taken as whole, there is much more clarity and understanding given to the arguments Paul is making. For the purpose here, however, I will focus just on chapter 12, which provides the text for two of the sermons that were preached during the *Better Together* emphasis within my project. First, a look at some contextual issues will be in order, followed by an analysis of the first pericope of chapter 12, which concerns spiritual gifts, and then, the second, which describes the church as “the body of Christ.”

Paul arrived in Corinth around 49-50 A.D. He wrote 1 Corinthians in early 53 or 54.⁴¹ Paul lived among the Corinthians for eighteen months. By the standards of his itinerant missionary career, eighteen months was a considerable amount of time. He certainly would have had much time to teach and train the newly established congregation. However, after Paul left Corinth, questions and disputes arose. Paul's work was not completed. The church wrote a letter to Paul, which was alluded to several times within Paul's response, asking for clarification. Some concerns were also voiced to Paul by members of Chloe's household.⁴² It was in response to these questions that Paul wrote the epistle we call 1 Corinthians.

As was the case with those to whom 1 Peter was written, honor was an important concept in the Corinthian culture as well. The absence of honor was shame. This led to boasting and pride, which are topics addressed by Paul throughout this letter to the Corinthian Christians. Many inscriptions have been found among the ruins of ancient Corinth which attest to the fact that "...public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form."⁴³

Corinth was a trade center and a thriving city. It was known for its bronze but also for pottery and other earthenware. Archeology has also shown it to have been home to more than two dozen temples, altars and shrines.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 72-73.

⁴² Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1-2.

⁴³ Witherington, 8.

⁴⁴ J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Ed. by Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 773.

As to the makeup of the congregation, there would have been a few rich members, but the greater number would have been poor. There were Romans, Hellenistic Greeks, and Jews. Wealth played a role in the struggles of the congregation. Only the rich brought law suits; only the rich owned homes large enough to accommodate the church gatherings and provide for the remembrance of the Lord's Supper; and only the rich could arrive early enough to eat the best food and be already drunk when the less-fortunate arrived.⁴⁵

To be sure, there is diversity in the Corinthian congregation. This provides at least the backstory to the circumstances leading to the teaching Paul is providing.

Paul is in the midst of trying to create community and dissipate conflict....He must show that it is to the Corinthians' benefit to work together, to agree with one another on essential matters, to respect differences on less than essential matters, and to allow the good or benefit of the other to guide one's actions.⁴⁶

It is in this setting that Paul provides the instruction found in 1 Corinthians 12. In the first eleven verses Paul writes about spiritual gifts, and then, in verses twelve through thirty, he uses the image of the church as the body of Christ to drive home the necessity of finding unity within diversity.

In the opening verse concerning gifts of the Spirit, Paul says, "...I do not want you to be uninformed." (12:1) As one reads further into the chapter, it becomes evident that the Christians are using gifts, especially that of speaking in tongues. They know something about these gifts, and perhaps believe that they know quite a bit about them. Paul, however, has information to pass along. The purpose is that the people will be

⁴⁵ Sampley, 777.

⁴⁶ Witherington, 73-75.

properly informed so that abuses will come to light and be dealt with. Abuses or misuses can crop up easily enough, and better instruction can play a part in the remedy.

For instance, it is important to know that the Spirit gives the gifts and the distribution is to the Spirit's discretion. It is also important to know that the gifts are to be used for the common good. Fitzmyer would say that the service to be performed, as mentioned in verse 5, is service that Christians are equipped to perform *in* community; not *to* the community, but *to* God, *within* the community.⁴⁷ Fee concurs: "The different kinds of gifts' are for the building up of the community as a whole..., not primarily for the benefit of the individual believer through whom the charisma is given expression..."⁴⁸ Nash adds that, "Whatever builds up the church is superior to that which builds up the individual."⁴⁹

One thing that should be clear is that Paul is not intending to provide an exhaustive list of the manifestations of the Spirit. This may be made evident when one looks at the lists of gifts provided by Paul elsewhere (Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11). The differences in the "lists" would indicate that Paul has a much deeper purpose than to be complete, if being complete is even possible. Again, the purpose Paul has is to emphasize the source and nature of the gifts. Both point to reasons outside the glorification of the individual. Thus, the need for corrective instruction; individuals had been using gifts to draw attention to themselves in order to gain personal prestige, even unmerited honor.

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary," in *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 464-65.

⁴⁸ Gordon D. Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 654.

⁴⁹ Robert Scott Nash, "1 Corinthians," in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 25a (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2009), 356.

The gift that is included next to the bottom of the 1 Corinthians list, speaking in different kinds of tongues (12:10), is the most abused because it is the most public. The final gift listed is the interpretation of tongues, which would also lend itself to public display. Instruction concerning the misuse and proper use of these gifts follows in chapter 14. Basically, corporate worship was being used as a time to draw attention to the one with the gift rather than the One who bestows the gifts.

One thing that is not the focus of Paul's teaching on gifts is specific descriptions of what each of the gifts are, which only highlights the true purpose of the teaching that I have already mentioned – to emphasize the source (the Spirit) and the function (for the common good). Witherington suggests that Paul only comments on those gifts that are causing problems and that we cannot really be sure what some of the others are: "There are as many guesses as there are commentaries."⁵⁰

I do not want to pass over too quickly the tension that exists between individuality and commonality. Each individual has work to do in service to God's kingdom (Ephesians 2:10, 4:12) and each individual is gifted by God for the work (1 Corinthians 12:7a, 11; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:7). But, there are two things which all service to the kingdom has in common: it is all for the Lord (Colossians 3:23-24) and it is for the common good (1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 2:1-4).

The two topics in Chapter 12 are by no way standalone items. Verses twelve through thirty, to which we will now turn, lend explanation to the argument put forth in verses one through eleven. There is a variety of gifts and at the same time oneness in the

⁵⁰ Witherington, 257.

body – neither at the expense of the other.⁵¹ Both sections speak of the unity that must be demonstrated in the community of faith, especially in light of the diversity that exists therein. Diversity begs for unity within the body!

The metaphor of “body” is borrowed by Paul from politics and governance.⁵² As with other things, Paul borrowed a concept that might be familiar to some and “Christianized” it. This metaphor for the church is one of four used within the same letter: God’s field (3:9); God’s building (3:9, 10-15); and God’s temple (3:16-17) also speak to Paul’s estimation of what the church is and how it is to function. Of course the favorite metaphor, if the volume of use would attest, is the “body of Christ.” Paul paints this picture here, but also in Romans and Ephesians.

There are a couple important teaching points in these verses which are repeated throughout the discourse. First, there is the juxtaposition of the “many” and the “one.” There is one body but many parts; many parts form one body (vv. 12, 14 and 20). Another recurring theme is that God has decided how the parts will go together and function. In verse 18, “...God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” And in verse 24, “....God has so arranged the body...”

Besides this teaching, or explanation of the metaphor, Paul also uses a fable of sorts in which parts of the body are found interacting with each other and reacting to the position they have been given. The foot and the ear are found complaining that because they are not the hand or eye respectively, they are not part of the body. Then we see some body parts telling other body parts that they are not needed. Obviously, a body cannot

⁵¹ Witherington, 258.

⁵² Nash, 362.

function in that way! “...all members of the body of Christ should be respected and appreciated equally....Claiming to be separate from the rest of the body...does not make it so.”⁵³ Fitzmeyer argues that the eye and head of verse 21 represent leaders in the church, and the hand and feet of the same verse represent laborers in the church.⁵⁴ Obviously, the leaders cannot say they do not need the laborers, or vice versa. All members need each other. Every part is necessary, so no part can bow out, and no part can seek to exclude another part.

Paul goes on to instruct, in verses 22-24, that the less honorable parts of the body will be given honor (not shame), the weaker parts are indispensable, and unpresentable parts are treated with modesty. “God has so composed the body as to give the neediest the greater honor, in order that the members of the body might be united in their caring for one another, in their suffering, and in their rejoicing (vv.25b-26).”⁵⁵

Witherington sums up the matter:

Some Corinthians no doubt saw themselves in a very individualist light as sufficient to themselves, especially in spiritual matters. Paul is disputing such notions. God has deliberately made the members of Christ’s body interdependent so that all would have concern for the others.⁵⁶

There must be something bringing the body together, holding it all together, moving and commanding and orchestrating the rhythm of life in the body. In the case of the body of Christ, that “something” is actually a “someone” – Jesus Christ. We are his body; he is the head of the body. To be sure, Paul does not speak of Jesus as the head of

⁵³ Nash, 363.

⁵⁴ Fitzmeyer, 480.

⁵⁵ Victor Paul Furnish, “The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *New Testament Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90.

⁵⁶ Witherington, 260-61.

the body in the text at hand, however, he does in Ephesians 4:15, and in Colossians 1:18 and 2:19.

Jesus is the head of the body. Or is he? You see, sometimes a foot may decide he wants to be in charge; a pinky finger, as important as pinky fingers are, may decide she wants to rule the body. It is quite understandable if you understand human nature. Humans want to be in charge of themselves. The problem is the body is not designed in any other way but for the head to be in charge. We could try it some other way, as we have been known to do, but it will just not work. It will never work. Only the head can control the function of the body.

There is always the chance that something will go wrong; that mutiny will occur and parts that are designed to work together will decide that their way is better. Some parts will never choose to function properly in the first place. Some parts will stay attached to the body but will stop working: they do not get their way, they do not like some of the other parts, they do not feel appreciated, or perhaps they feel inferior.

If the body is going to work there must be unity in the body – unity of purpose, and unity of direction. There cannot be unity if part of the body is standing in the corner with arms crossed refusing to be together! We each have to decide that we are a part of the body, and we had better do our part or the body will suffer!

The reason we have trouble, as a church, getting organized, is not because the head of the body is deficient in his ability to decide and lead and guide. Jesus is completely competent for his role as the head. The problem is with us: we have trouble coming together as body parts, and we have trouble giving Lordship to Jesus.

Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth after having been gone a while, and hearing about problems the congregation was having. First Corinthians 12 is part of a bigger text in which Paul is addressing one of the problems the Corinthian Christians are having, namely they do not value the things that lead to unity. They are not doing so well being together!

In chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks to some abuses in worship that have come to his attention. Specifically, in the latter half of the chapter, he discusses abuses of the Lord's Supper. Some are drinking up and eating before the others can get there. Then in chapter 12, Paul speaks about spiritual gifts because some are demanding more respect because of certain gifts they have, which leads Paul to write this beautiful, if not whimsical, description of the church as the body of Christ, illustrating for the Corinthians the absurdity of a body that argues between parts as to which is the most important. Paul goes back to spiritual gifts in chapter 14 as he argues against those who feel that speaking in tongues makes them better than those who do not. Disunity is on display for all in Corinth to see, including those who need Jesus, but might be turned off by the Christians' lack of being together as one.

Here is the beautiful thing: right in the middle of all his admonishment, Paul says, "And yet I will show you the most excellent way." That is the last half of the last verse of chapter 12. And then Paul unfurls one of the most eloquent passages in all of scripture – 1 Corinthians 13. We hear it a lot at weddings, appropriately so, but it was written to the church, and nestled right in the middle of some tough correction by Paul. Understand that these words are written to a people – God's chosen and treasured people – the church;

people who are expected to be together from this day forward, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, for as long as we live.

And so, chapter 12 comes to an end. In the first half of verse 31, Paul says, “Desire the greater gifts.” In searching for a meaning here, Fee points out that the very idea of seeking greater gifts would run contrary to Paul’s argument in the chapter. He suggests that this could be a citation from the Corinthian’s letter to Paul, or it could be used by Paul to differentiate his argument from their practice. Or, more likely, Fee continues, Paul may well be heading into a section in which he gives the proper framework in which the greater gifts should function – love. Love is the context in which the gifts are exercised.⁵⁷ Indeed, Paul shifts the gears in that direction with the final phrase of chapter 12: “And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (31b) Love is not a gift, but a way – not parceled out to the select few, but available to all.⁵⁸ Without love everything becomes inconsequential.

Maturity: Ephesians 4:1-16

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Ephesians 4:1-16; however, I do not wish to spend a great deal of time with this passage because many of its teachings have been covered elsewhere. Within this small space are all the concepts of this project: community, identity, unity, and the added idea of maturity! There is also this brief teaching about equipping, which speaks to me of my role as a pastor in the whole scheme of things. These verses also paint a beautiful picture of what the church can be like if everyone is growing to fulfill their individual roles: built up, unified in faith and

⁵⁷ Fee, 690-92.

⁵⁸ Nash, 365.

knowledge, mature, steady, joined together – as each part does its work. This passage does a good job of packaging, and tying a bow around the whole of the project, and various parts of it found its way into each sermon and teaching session.

There are scholars who are hesitant to attribute Ephesian's authorship to Paul for a variety of reasons. Ephesians is lacking in the personal touches of Paul's other letters, such as naming individual's in the community with whom Paul had a special relationship, and even referring to the community in personal ways and tones. There can also be arguments made as to differences in the composition of the letter, and even the theological stance, when compared to undisputed Pauline epistles.⁵⁹

It is interesting to see the variety of ways that various writers have chosen to outline this letter, each giving insight into how the pericope at hand fits into the whole. Stott provides a four-part division: new life (1:3-2:10), new society (2:11-3:21), new standards (4:1-5:21), and new relationships (5:21-6:24).⁶⁰ Mbennah offers a three-part outline: part one – new identity (1:1-3:21), part three – standards of behavior in the community (4:17-6:20), with our passage (4:1-16) being part two and stressing growth.⁶¹ Martin posits a simple two-part structure to the letter: theological ecclesiology (chapters 1-3), and “down-to-earth” ecclesiology (chapters 4-6).⁶²

It seems clear to me, reading several English versions, that verse one of chapter

⁵⁹ John R. W. Stott, “The Message of Ephesians,” in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 17-19.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁶¹ E. D. Mbennah, “The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13-16,” *Acta Theologia* 36(1) (2016), 111-12.

⁶² Ralph Martin, “Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon,” in *Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 46-47.

four is the proper beginning of the passage, and verse sixteen the proper ending. “Then” in verse 1 puts a new line of thought in play which is in relationship to the proceeding sections, and “so” in verse 17 almost certainly is a clue that the writer is moving on to matters that relate in some way to what has been said in verses 1-16.

The passage begins with a call to unity (vv. 1-6). We are called to live life together. Each person’s concern for the other is expressed in humility and gentleness. We are patient as we bear with one another in love. We make every effort to keep unity. And there is much to unify around: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is the Father of all.

We find the theme of spiritual gifts in this passage. Verse 7 reminds us that we are all given gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7, manifestations of the Spirit) and ties together with verse 11, “The gifts he gave...” Grace (*charis*) is used in verse 7, pointing to “gifts” (*charisma*) as used in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.⁶³ There is certainly a correlation between the Spirit, grace, and giftedness. Paul’s list of gifts in verse 11 is actually a list of positions within the body, which God has called some to fill, and for which he has gifted the called to carry out the service required of the position. The added point here, to which I will give some attention, is found in verse 12: “...to equip the saints.” “Equipping” is a specific task given to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – a task that is for the common good (as we will see in the latter half of verse 12 and following).

My calling is to be a pastor/teacher. Verse 11 carries a special significance for me as I serve in that role: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” This is the NRSV translation.

⁶³ Martin, 49.

Several other major English versions handle this phrase slightly differently. NIV: “So Christ himself gave the...” RSV: “And his gifts were that some should be...” ESV: “And he gave the...” NASB: “And He gave some as...” ASV: “And he gave some to be...” KJV: And he gave some, apostles...” NKJV: “And He Himself gave some to be...”

There is a question which surfaces for me: Are these gifts given to the individual, or to the church? If I only have Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 to stand on, I would say, that as with all gifts, these gifts are given to the individual for the good of the faith community. But in the context of our Ephesians text, I would have to at least consider that they could be given for either, and at most I very well may side with the church. After all, much of the remaining text (12-16) details the value of these gifts to the church. Obviously, individuals are gifted, but it cannot be overstated that the context of the “gifting” is the community.

With the first three gifts in this list – apostles, prophets and evangelists – the definite article precedes the title. With the final two – pastors and teachers – the definite article covers both, which could indicate that the two roles are given to the same person.⁶⁴

The first three gifts also seem to refer to those who were active in forming the community, while the final two are given for the continuance of, and nurturing of, the community.⁶⁵

So, we come to verse 12: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Here we find the reason(s) for which the church is given certain gifts in the form of certain gifted ones. A debate circles around the question of

⁶⁴ Martin, 53.

⁶⁵ Pheme Perkins, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Ed. by Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 422.

whether there is one, two, or three purposes given here. In the NRSV (cited above) it seems that there are either one or two reasons: for sure to equip the saints, but is the building up accomplished by those with special leadership positions (in fact, through equipping), or by the saints (as they are equipped). I would opt for both, “as each part does its work.” (16) Some have added a comma after “saints,” which delivers a three-fold purpose: 1] equip the saints, 2] the work of ministry, and 3] build up the body. Here, the work of ministry is considered a task of special leaders in the church, and the onus for the building up of the body seems to be on the special leaders as well. Older translation work tended toward the three-fold purpose. Newer translations (since mid-twentieth century) leave out the comma and have led to a reading that opens ministry, even tasks traditionally reserved for ordained clergy, to all the saints.⁶⁶ We are aware of the contemporary move toward lay ministry, but it could well be that this emphasis is propped up by a relatively new translation of Ephesians 4:12.

The overall context of the chapter speaks to the privileges and the responsibilities of the entire body of Christ. This includes Christ the Head, the gifted ones of verse 11, and the “parts.” Each has responsibility. “What is at stake...is whose responsibilities are being discussed in v. 12 and/or whether the “gifted ones” have merely the responsibility of “equipping.”⁶⁷

I can support either rendering. If the work of ministry is that which the specific gifted ones are gifted to do, then I am willing to accept that I, as a pastor, am called to

⁶⁶ Robert Mayes, “‘Equipping the Saints’?: Why Ephesians 4:11-12 Opposes the Theology and Practice of Lay Ministry,” *Logia*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2015), 8-9.

⁶⁷ T. David Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1994), 72.

equip the saints and perform the work of ministry (to which *I* am called). If the work of ministry refers to those things that all Christians are expected to do (works of charity, showing mercy, etc.), then I am happy with a reading that has me, as a pastor, equipping the saints that they may perform the tasks of ministry (to which *they* are called).

The proper meaning of the word *katartismon*, or as translated in verse 12, “equipping,” can help, or at least add to the discussion. The various forms coming from the root *katartidzo* have been given a variety of meanings elsewhere in the New Testament. Some alternate translations are: mending (of fishing nets), fashioning, preparing, uniting, perfecting (KJV, ASV), and restoring.⁶⁸ It is a relatively new development that “equipping,” or “equip” be used in the translation of verse 12 (NKJV, NASV, RSV, ESV). The NIV uses “to prepare,” which carries virtually the same meaning as “equip.” Older translations opted for different translations: “perfecting” (KJV, ASV), and even “consummation” (Latin Vulgate).⁶⁹

It could be construed that this discussion is “much ado about nothing.” There seems to be very little difference in the various meanings. Doesn’t it just come down to preference? Yet, there are nuances that make a difference in meaning; and in some minds the difference is big. I would interject that the church tradition of which one is a product can bring to bear certain points of meaning. A tradition that holds in high esteem the position of clergy, giving those who hold the “gifted positions” (11) high honor as ones gifted by God himself, and therefore above all others, would seek a translation that gives authority to these offices. Some traditions along the lines of “free church,” tend to view

⁶⁸ Gordon, 72-73.

⁶⁹ Mayes, 10-11.

the clergy as simply “one of us.” Their giftedness is perhaps no more spiritual than any others.

It is possible to go too far with the “equipping for lay ministry” model and reduce the work of the pastor to pass along simply a series of “how to” sessions on certain ministries, and then administering the proper resources, and sending lay people on their way to put checks on their check sheets. If we pastors are not careful, we find that we can take all the mystery and power out of our own calling, and strip the same mystery and power from the calling placed upon the saints.

Mayes sums up his argument against the “equipping” translation, and thus the modern lay ministry movement in this way:

Reading lay ministry into Ephesians 4:12 means that no longer are lay people to be complete and healed only by grace. Instead, they would have to be made complete and perfectly healed by works, that is, by doing the works of ministry. No longer are pastors seen as physicians of the soul.... Rather...the main task of pastors is to train, equip, motivate, and cheerlead the saints into works (of ministry). In other words, the popular translation of Ephesians transforms the pastoral office from being primarily an agent of the gospel to being primarily a motivator of the law.⁷⁰

Caution is urged. Proceeding head-strong toward either of these translations (and the meanings various traditions have tied to them), without allowing the other to temper our thinking and acting, is not advised. It should be obvious that, however “ministry” is defined, all the saints participate according to the gifts given them by the Spirit.

Pastors/teachers can certainly make use of their own gifts in equipping, or preparing, or even perfecting the saints toward that end. It should be equally obvious that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have a specific and specially designed giftedness as they are equipped, prepared, perfected by God for their task.

⁷⁰ Mayes, 13-14.

There are safe gaps put in place by these verses to keep both church leaders and lay people from abusing their positions and responsibilities. We see that ministers are Christ's gift to the church, not authority figures (11). The ministers are under Christ's control and are part of the body, not separate from it (16). And, love is commanded (2 and 16).⁷¹

The ministry model that I have had, or claimed to have had for nearly two decades – *Equipper in an Empowered Community* – gives credence to my special giftedness as a minister. It does the same for each member of the faith community. Among other things, as a minister, I am called to be an agent of God in affecting the lives of his children, toward being the people he created them to be. Each member of the body is gifted for their own ministry. I tried to remain cognizant of these arguments as I guided my congregation through the emphasis, *Better Together: Exploring the Individual's Role in the Community of Faith*. It is far too easy to be simply a disseminator of information, and I would argue that equipping is much more than that. There is a spiritual element as I serve at the behest of God himself to instill wonder and awe into his people and watch as that, along with God's power, motivates them to serve God.

Verse 12 ties together the themes of “spiritual gifts” and “body of Christ.” Equipping the saints speaks to the giftedness of the church leaders, but also to the need for every member to utilize their gifts “for the work of ministry.” The conclusion of the verse gives the rationale for equipping which leads into Paul's discussion of the body of Christ. Why are the saints to be equipped? They are equipped for the benefit of “building up the body of Christ.”

Paul speaks of Christ as the head of the body in verse 15. In verse 16, he describes

⁷¹ Martin, 54.

this body under Christ's headship as being equipped – knit together – as each part does its part. Here, we find the added idea of maturity: “building up” (12), “full stature” (13), “no longer...children” (14), “grow up” (15), and “growth in building itself up” (16).

The goal is that “all” reach maturity; in this instance “all” refers only to the body of Christ, not all parts of the world. Numerical growth may be implied along with spiritual growth, because of the inclusion of apostles and evangelists in verse 11. “However, the introduction of the body metaphor implies the notion of the qualitative development of the church as an organism from within. It should be noted that Paul uses ‘we all,’ and not ‘each one of us,’ to counter possible over-individualization as well as underscore the corporate sense of spiritual maturity.”⁷²

Verse 13 gives three goals of maturity: unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, mature manhood, and the full measure of the full stature of Christ. The first and third each refer to Christ, leading some to construe that the middle goal, “mature manhood,” also refers to Christ.⁷³

The first of the three-fold goal of maturity includes a unity of faith and a unity of knowledge. Unity of faith does not refer to unity because of faith, instead points to there being a shared body of doctrine, including knowledge of and about Jesus. The second of the goals points to the fact that, in its completed state, the church is viewed in corporate terms. We all move toward mature “person”, rather than mature “people”. The goal of “the fullness of Christ” points to Christ filling the church, or the church being filled by

⁷² Mbennah, 121.

⁷³ Stott, 169.

Christ.⁷⁴

Indicators of maturity....include the corporate stability and consistency in the truth; the ability to discern error and reject or correct it; the ability and predisposition to speak the truth in love, and the meaningful participation of all members through effective use of their individual gifts. Unity is a reality that occurs by default when there is maturity. This means that maturity will affect unity, but not vice versa.⁷⁵

There are dangers inherent in life, and in the life of the church. The mature church is prepared to withstand these dangers. Paul paints the picture of children being tossed around on the waves and buffeted by the winds of trickery, craftiness and scheming. When we are mature – in unity of faith and knowledge – we are prepared to overcome the winds and waves of false teaching and the attempts of the world to infiltrate the body.

Members of Christ’s body, including its leaders, are to commit themselves to unity and maturity in a body that is being equipped, and thereby, built up. This is a call that has echoed through the ages and continues today.

Historical Perspective

The view that the church is to function as a community – that each member is to be an active participant in the life of the church – is something that can be observed throughout Christian history. Not only can the case for *Better Together* be made from scripture, but there is sufficient evidence that an interpretation of scripture that could birth the concepts behind *Better Together* can be seen across the centuries. In particular, I have followed the concept of “laity,” and the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers,” from the patristic period, through the Reformation, the radical Reformation, and into

⁷⁴ Mbennah, 121-26.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 128.

modern times. There is a great deal of landscape to cross, so I will provide just a few snapshots along the way.

The first appearance of the term “laity” seems to be in Clement’s *Epistle to the Corinthians*, written during the last decade of the first century. There was a dispute between the non-ordained and the ordained which resulted in the first “improper removal” of a pastor. From this context the term “laity” was coined, from the Greek, *laos*, meaning “of or from the people. There is little use of the term during the first three centuries, possibly indicating that there were few problems in the interactions between laity and clergy.”⁷⁶

In the early church, there is evidence that the laity participated in the calling and electing of the bishop, took care of church property, collected offerings for paying the pastor and for charity, presented elements of communion at the altar before their consecration, participated in some readings and in the liturgy. Every member of the church had a part to play.⁷⁷ However:

After the early church period and during the Middle Ages the role of the laity greatly diminished. In some places the role of the laity was reduced to the old characterization of “pay, pray, and obey.” The laity even ceased to participate in the liturgy. The Reformation returned to the laity what they had done in the earliest days of the church.⁷⁸

The Reformation, which got its footing in the early 16th century, was in large part a corrective of the abuses of power within Church hierarchy. This abuse lent itself to an almost total disregard for the laity. Martin Luther is considered one of the most forceful voices, if not the most forceful, of the Reformation. In his writing, particularly in the

⁷⁶ Albert Collver, “Origin of the Term ‘Laity,’” *Logia* 19 (2010), 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

1520's, we find the beginning of the doctrinal concept of the "priesthood of all believers," and a return to the consideration of the value of the laity.

Luther used 1 Peter 2:9 as his main evidence that there should be no true difference between laity and clergy. If the Pope, or any other Church authority, departed from orthodoxy, the priesthood, inclusive of all believers, should be able to call for reform. Soon after Luther's ideas were published, in some areas communion began to be administered to both the priests and the lay people, and the right and responsibility to read the Bible was afforded the non-clergy class. Luther listed seven functions of the Christian priest: teach, preach, proclaim the Word, consecrate and administer communion, bind and loose sins, pray for others, sacrifice, and judge between doctrines and spirits.⁷⁹

Luther did not disavow the priesthood, he simply set it straight. There are not higher Christians and lower Christians. The only difference is in office and work. Members of the clergy are gifted by the Holy Spirit along with every member of Christ's body. The laity is called, not to a lower level and not to an inferior service.⁸⁰ There was a place for a formal priesthood in Luther's thinking. The official ministers were to carry out their duties on behalf of a congregation, which had delegated authority to them.⁸¹

In Luther's later writing, such as his 1532, *Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers*, he backed away somewhat from his earlier insistence on equality between the official and unofficial ministers. He wrote that all teaching must be carried out by officially

⁷⁹ Mark Rogers, "A Dangerous Idea? Martin Luther, E. Y. Mullins, and the Priesthood of All Believers," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010), 121-22.

⁸⁰ Norman Nagel, "Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61 (1997), 291.

⁸¹ Rogers, 123.

commissioned preachers, and the commission must come from state church hierarchy.⁸²

There seems to have been a need to work out the practicality of his reform and return to a more moderate position.

What Luther was accomplishing in Germany, Zwingli was accomplishing in Zurich. However, in Zurich there was a group that insisted that Zwingli's reforms did not go far enough. Although Zwingli preached *sola scriptura*, he held to some practices which were not scriptural, chiefly infant baptism. These "radical reformers" insisted on strict adherence to scripture at the expense of tradition. The most visible and distinctive practice of this group was "rebaptism," arising out of their disdain for infant baptism, hence their name, Anabaptists.⁸³

For Anabaptists, the church was a group of believers who had all voluntarily joined the community. The decision to join was made intentionally and with forethought because church involvement demanded sacrifice. Anabaptists were convinced that their priesthood demanded a level of commitment at least equal to, if not greater, than that of their former priests.⁸⁴

Besides the practice of only allowing baptism of the believer, Anabaptists were known for the great involvement of the lay members in the work of ministry. The involvement of the laity was important in the rapid spread of the movement, which was dependent on the missionary activity of ordinary members alongside that of the

⁸² Rogers, 126.

⁸³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 65.

⁸⁴ Alan Stucky, "Anabaptism and Emergence: Collision or Convergence," *Direction* 39 (2010), 26.

movement's leaders.⁸⁵ It was common among Anabaptists that ordinary members read scripture and even expound on it when a pastor was not present.⁸⁶ This radical reform movement was eventually able to gain footing in Holland, England and the United States. Mennonites and Baptists, who owe their existence to the Anabaptists, have long seen themselves as lay movements "in contrast to the state churches of the old world."⁸⁷

Baptists have, throughout their history, vigorously defended the priesthood of all believers. This history goes all the way back to 1608 when John Smyth, the first Baptist leader known by name, declared there to be no mediator between God and man. Shortly thereafter, Thomas Helwys (1612) wrote that only God has authority over a person's soul.⁸⁸ For these and other early Baptist leaders "...soul competency, religious liberty, and the priesthood of the believer were life-and-death matters as fundamental as the gospel itself."⁸⁹

Jumping ahead nearly 300 years, E. Y. Mullins became the principle theological voice among Southern Baptists (late 19th century/early 20th century). Possibly his most influential work was *The Axioms of Religion* (1908). In this book, Mullins argued that all that distinguishes Baptists flow from the thought that each Christian is competent under God, or the doctrinal belief in "soul competency." This led naturally to a democratic church government, the right of private judgement, and the separation of church and

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962), 99.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸⁸ J. Terry Young, "Baptist and the Priesthood of Believers," *The Theological Educator* 53 (1996), 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

state. He argued as well, that this emphasis on the individual, rather than allowing freedom to do whatever one wished, led to a deeper dependence on the Lordship of Christ.⁹⁰ It can be argued that Mullins emphasized the individual over the community of believers, or better, that he stopped short of indicating the value of individual priests to the community as a whole.

Free Churches, among which Southern Baptists are numbered, have traditionally emphasized the priesthood of all believers resulting in an interdependence among church members in which each member sees himself/herself as an active member.⁹¹

The priesthood of all believers is being called into question by some Baptists today, as an attempt to arrive at conformity of belief and practice by placing greater emphasis on the authority of the pastor. “The priesthood of the believer is a threat, if not a roadblock, to an enforced conformity in belief and an authoritarian position for the pastor.”⁹² Young argues, to which I lend my agreement: “The priesthood of believers is always a corporate concept. It has an intensely personal element, but it is never isolated individualism. Ideally, it is always considered that the believer functions as a faithful and responsible part of the community of believers.”⁹³

There is a new movement today called, Emerging Church. It comes at a time of globalization, post-modernism, heightened inter-connectivity brought on by social media, and a growing distrust of denominationalism. This movement is untethered. It can be hard to describe. Yet, it cannot be overlooked. It hopes to be the answer to the decline of

⁹⁰ Rogers, 128.

⁹¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “The Calling of the Whole People of God into Ministry: The Spirit, Church and Laity,” *Studia Theologica* 53 (1999), 151.

⁹² Young, 20.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Christianity in the Western World. Without going into great detail, I am glad to report that in the Emerging Church culture, with its far-ranging belief structures and means of expression, one commonality seems to be a commitment to “engage and involve all members of the church.”⁹⁴

I mentioned much earlier in this chapter that there is a tension in church life between individualism and collectivism. Do we emphasize the individual or the community? We see this tension throughout history, even within the development of the concept of the priesthood of all believers. I cannot feel good choosing one over the other, but I do feel compelled through my study of scripture and history, to give greater attention to the need for the individual to be involved in community. Really, neither can survive without the other.

...like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

*Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.*

(1 Peter 2:5, 9-10)

⁹⁴ Stucky, 23.

Chapter Four

A CRITICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE PROJECT RESULTS

As stated in the introduction, there were goals for this project; goals that were developed long before the implementation of the *Better Together* emphasis. There has also been a brief mention of the process that was put in place to evaluate the results of the project. Having provided a detailed description of the project, along with its biblical and historical backing, the following is a close inspection of the collected data in order to determine the outcomes, and whether or not the goals were met.

One of the goals of this project was to educate the members of Polkville Baptist Church as to the communal nature of the church and each individual's proper place in that community. Data collected during the project from the control group (congregation) and the research group (twelve church members who committed to participate in the entire project) was projected to show a heightened awareness and understanding of the church as a community, and the importance of each person fulfilling their role.

Another goal was that fifty percent of the research group, and ten percent of the control group will exhibit a desire to begin functioning within the church, or, if already serving, will seek to find a better fit for their particular personality, talents and gifts. The research group was comprised of twelve adults, so the goal was that six of those members become active, or become active in a way that is a better fit for them. The control group was made up of the 184 adult attenders, minus the twelve research group members, for a total of 172. The goal was that ten percent of this group, or seventeen, will either become active, or become active in a way that better mirrors their gifts and talents. This would be a total of twenty-three adults. The church would move from having fifty-eight active

adults to eight-one. Instead of a thirty-two percent active participation rate, the church would have forty-four percent of attenders being active within the “body.”

Below I describe the research methods that were put in place, then, I give attention to the data that was collected, and finally, I make a definitive statement as to the outcomes of the project.

Research Methodology

There was a twelve-member research group that was required to attend each component of the project as well as a weekly information-gathering meeting. A control group was made up of all remaining adult members/attenders who might participate wholly, partially, or not at all, depending on individual decisions. (An initial questionnaire was administered the week before the first Sunday of the project proper and could have been completed by individuals who attended none of the services or sessions, thereby placing them in the control group, if only because they completed questionnaire questionnaire.)

The collected data was in the following forms: 1) evaluation forms, administered weekly to both the research group and the control group, concerning the worship services and teaching sessions; 2) questionnaires, administered to both groups before and during the project, designed to indicate initial understanding of the project concepts as well as growth in understanding; 3) a “guided journal” completed by each member of the research group; and finally, 4) my field notes and personal journal. (Samples of the evaluative instruments mentioned here can be found in Appendix F.)

On Sunday morning April 3rd, members of the church’s nominating committee went to each adult Sunday school class to administer *Questionnaire #1*. This was the

Sunday before the official beginning of the church emphasis. The purpose of collecting this data was to determine a baseline of understanding for the congregation at large. The research group had been instructed not to complete the questionnaire at this time, as it would be administered at their Wednesday meeting. In this way, the data was not cross-contaminated with information from both groups being combined or duplicated.

As with all the control group questionnaires, this initial form was completed in confidence, and without anyway of tracking which individuals did or did not complete the instrument. Forms were dated and collected in envelopes with corresponding dates so that potential problems and confusion in the collection and handling process would be avoided.

During the administration of *Questionnaire #1*, all adults were invited to attend each worship service and teaching session during the three-week emphasis, which was to begin the following Sunday. At the conclusion of each of the three Sunday evening teaching sessions, members of the control group were given that week's questionnaire, with an evaluation form printed on the reverse.

These questionnaires (four in all) had the same structure from week to week: nine Likert Scale statements, and three short answer questions. Some of the statements and questions were the same each week, so that movement in growth of understanding could be detected from the beginning to the end of the project. The Likert Scale statements on *Questionnaire #1* and *Questionnaire #4*, the beginning and ending instruments, were identical. The components of the questionnaires that were different on *Questionnaire #2* and *Questionnaire #3* had largely to do with the specific topic of that day's sermon and teaching.

On the reverse of the questionnaires administered on the Sunday nights, there was an evaluation form. Included were seven Likert Scale statements concerning the morning worship service and eight such statements concerning the evening teaching session. The form also asked for a brief description of what the individual thought to be the main emphasis of the morning worship service sermon: "Describe the message you received from the sermon." Space was also provided for comments: "Your overall impression/any other comments." These evaluation forms were identical each week.

The purpose of having the participants evaluate the worship experience and teaching sessions was two-fold: 1) could it be determined that the experience itself had a positive or negative effect on the outcomes, and 2) would there be lessons to learn for the future ministry of the researcher/preacher/teacher?

I decided not to design the evaluative process in a way that responses from individual control group members could be tracked from beginning to end. Any such system seemed to be unavoidably cumbersome. The result of this decision is that all control group data was better analyzed as group results, with the exception of the consideration given to individual short answers. The research group process was designed so that a particular individual could be tracked through the process. With fewer members this was more manageable.

A description of how the research group was formed was provided in chapter two, and related documents are included in Appendix E. The twelve members of this group were expected to attend each of the three worship services and teaching sessions. The questionnaires and evaluation forms that they completed were identical to those given to the control group. A major difference was that they were asked to complete these

instruments during a weekly Wednesday meeting. Besides providing the opportunity for completing these forms, these meetings were designed to give the group time to interact and discuss what was being experienced during the emphasis.

Confidentiality of information shared verbally and in writing was of paramount importance; and, each meeting included a reminder of this vital aspect of the group dynamic. A group secretary was appointed by the group during the first meeting. This secretary assigned each member a number between one and twelve. All forms that were to be completed had these numbers pre-printed in the upper right-hand corner. At the end of the meeting, after I left the room, the secretary took the forms from an envelope, distributed them by number, gave sufficient time for completion, and returned the forms to the envelope. The envelope had that day's date written on it. I kept these envelopes but did not open them until after the project, in case a group member missed a meeting and had to complete forms later, the details of which the secretary maintained.

Another fail-safe I put in place was that I printed the forms for the research group on yellow paper. Control group forms were printed on white paper. I told the research group that they were never to complete a form that was not on yellow paper. This occurred to me as I realized that research group members would be present at the times control group members were completing the forms, and research group members were to complete their forms during Wednesday meetings rather than on Sundays. I did not want to make it patently obvious to everyone in the control group who the research group members were by giving to them specially numbered forms, of which I could not know the numbers anyway.

On a couple occasions a research group member had to miss a Wednesday meeting. The secretary made sure they received their forms after Sunday night but before the next Sunday. The accounting system and data collection process worked well. At the final meeting of the research group, the members aided the secretary by going through each week's envelope and checking to see that every form was accounted for. It was only after this final accounting that I removed the forms from the envelopes.

There was a category of data collected from the research group that was in addition to what the control group was asked to complete. The research group was also given a two page "guided journal" to complete each week, before the Sundays to which it pertained. These pages, also printed on yellow paper, were given to the group members at the end of each meeting, and taken home to complete. Members had file folders in which to keep their journals until they were turned in the following week.

While the psychometric data that was collected throughout the emphasis provided necessary information to determine whether or not there was a growth of understanding concerning the individual's role in the community of faith, in order to evaluate the level of applied knowledge it was necessary to involve the church's Nominating Committee. Careful attention was given to the church's nominating process, the roles that were filled, and the instances of new people becoming involved in the life of the church. The results of the project's call for church members to complete a "spiritual gifts assessment" became an added aspect of this committee's work. Notes from meetings with this group, as well as their stated observations were used in making determinations concerning the value of the project.

The data that was collected, in the various forms and procedures described above, will be unpacked in the following sections of this chapter. Before doing so, I would also mention that I took notes during every meeting concerning this project – Deacons, Church Staff, Nominating Committee, Research Group, etc. – and will make mention of these notes when appropriate. Much of this information tends to be more logistical in nature, but an attempt was made also to record comments and insights concerning content of the emphasis. I also kept a journal in which I recorded my own personal insights as I reflected on what was taking place during the project.

I will now discuss the data collected, beginning with the evaluation forms, then the questionnaires, and finally, insights from work with the Nominating Committee, and from field notes and journal entries. This information will then lead to a discussion of the outcomes of the project as related to the stated goals.

The Participants' Evaluation of the Project Components

In asking participants to evaluate various aspects of the worship services and teaching sessions, the motivation was to see if the components themselves, irrespective of the content matter, may have had an effect on learning, and to gain feedback that would be useful in my ministry going forward. For the control group, these evaluations were completed on Sunday evenings; the research group completed the evaluations during a weekly Wednesday meeting. Both groups were given identical instruments, and the instruments were identical week-to-week. These forms can be found in Appendix F.

There were seven statements each week concerning that week's worship service and eight concerning the teaching session. These Likert Scale statements were to be rated

on a scale of one to five, one signifying “do not agree,” and five, “completely agree.” Over the course of three weeks, an individual had the opportunity to make 45 value judgements (15 per week).

There were 46 respondents on week one, 45 respondents on week two, and 37 on week three. I factored the average response to each statement from the control group, and then the research group. The lowest average answer was 4.2, and the highest average was 5. There was a 4.38 and a 4.5, but then most were in the 4.67 to 4.92 range. My conclusion is there is little to be learned. After analyzing the data, I believe that many of those completing the evaluations wanted the results to be good, or look good, possibly for my sake; or they wanted to hurry through the exercise. Of the 128 evaluation forms turned in over the course of three weeks, 52 gave a rating of “5” to every statement.

The evaluation forms also included a small space to add comments. After the worship service evaluation, respondents were asked to “Describe the message you received from the sermon.” Of the 128 completed forms, 84 included responses to this open ended statement. Not one person in the three weeks answered with the sermon title, which was printed on the bulletin cover, displayed as part of our visual media, and attached to a bulletin board for all to see as they entered the sanctuary. I appreciated this, because for the most part, the answers were in the form of a key word or statement made in the sermon, rather than simply stating a title. Ten of the 84 responses were more an evaluative statement. There were no negative comments made.

The lowest rated statement each week concerned the music in worship services. The statement read, “The selection of worship music was appropriate to the experience.” There were 10 responses with a “3” or lower. Three of these were from the same member

of the research group. It was not surprising to me that the lowest rated item pertained to worship music. Part of the difficulty Polkville Baptist Church has been working through the last five years concerns worship style, with music being a predominant part of the discussion.

Of the 1,792 remaining responses, across the three weeks and including the remaining 14 statements, 35 were “3,” and one was “2.” Five of the “3s” were on the same form. Of these 36 lower responses, 23 were concerning some aspect of the teaching sessions; 16 of the 23 were on week one. There were six “3s” in response to the statement, “Handouts were helpful.” There were six “3s” and one “2” in response to the statement, “Group activities were appropriate and helpful.” Because the vast response was on the higher end of the scale, I conclude that these on the lower end had more to do with personal preference.

After the evaluative statements concerning the teaching sessions, the respondents were given an opportunity to provide a final comment: “Your overall impression/any other comments.” Seventy-six of the 128 forms had comments written in this section. Most answers were short, and most were positive. There were several positive comments concerning handouts and group activities. Of all the responses, there were only two negative comments. On the week one evaluation, one response was, “Went longer than I was expecting so I lost focus after the first hour.” (Each session lasted approximately 1 ½ hours.) On the week three evaluation, one response was, “Too broad, need to hone in, building one topic per session...too much info at one time.”

There was not very much differentiation in the numbers with which to draw conclusions. I could see no indicators of things that would negatively impact the intended

learning; the overwhelming consensus seemed to be that the various elements of the worship services and teaching sessions had a positive effect on learning, and could be a contributing factor in the church realizing a greater number of adults being involved in the faith community.

Growth in Understanding: The Control Group

The control group was potentially equal to the number of adult members/attenders of the church, minus the research group. The group was comprised of all adults that participated in any way, even if just by being present. The average attendance of adults in worship services was 133. The first questionnaire, administered the Sunday before the emphasis, was completed by 60 control group members. There were 40 control group members at the first teaching session, 34 of whom completed that week's questionnaire. Thirty-five attended the second teaching session, with 33 responders; 29 attended week three, with 25 responders. For the purpose of setting a goal for the project, the number of adult active members in the control group was set at 172.

One component of the project goal was that there would be a measureable growth in understanding of the individual's role in the community of faith demonstrated among the adult members/attenders at Polkville Baptist Church. In order to show this growth, there were four questionnaires to be completed by participants. Some of the components of these questionnaires were designed specifically to chart growth of understanding. Because of the nature of the control group, growth was charted by observing the data collected from the group, rather than from individuals. A sample of these questionnaires can be found in Appendix F.

Each questionnaire was comprised of nine Likert Scale statements to which respondents signified their level of agreement on a scale of one to five, one being “do not agree,” and five being “completely agree.” The Likert Scale statements were identical on the first and last of the questionnaires (except for an issue discovered only while compiling the data). Four statements were on each of the four questionnaires. Five statements were included only on the first and last questionnaires. There were also short-answer questions on each. The reoccurring statements referred to key concepts of the project emphasis. Growth can be observed by way of answers moving higher from the project’s beginning to end. For the control group, these are shown as group averages.

In the project proposal phase, these questionnaires were to be completely identical from week to week. I became concerned that respondents would become familiar with the instruments and would “learn” how they wished to respond. A change was made so that on week two and week three the questionnaire would have five statements which pertained to the teaching/preaching of that week specifically. Three of the statements in the initially proposed questionnaires were “I am...” statements, indicating a level of completeness that most would not be able to grow into over the course of three weeks. I changed the wording of two of these to, “I wish to be...,” and, “I want to be...” These two statements appear on all four questionnaires. The issue was that I failed to change the wording of these two statements in the fourth instance. One might imagine the potential growth being shown in weeks one, two, and three to a statement beginning, “I wish to be...,” and then the level dropping off when in week four the statement begins, “I am...” This was a disheartening development, but I will deal with the results as they are presented.

There are at least two other issues at play in the results. One concerns the scale being only five points. If “3” is considered average or common, and some wish to answer above that, there are not many choices. If the initial answer to a statement is three or above, it is difficult to show growth. In other words, as the results bear out, the growth is typically seen as only tenths of a point. The second concern is the number of questionnaires which were completed with all “5s” being circled. Obviously, this skews the results if those individuals are answering this way for convenience. There were 18 such surveys of the 152 completed by control group members.

I will begin the control group analysis by looking at the results of the four statements that were responded to weekly. The following table (Table 4.1.) illustrates the change in the average response from week to week.

Table 4.1. Control Group Average Answers, Questionnaires 1-4

	1	2	3	4
I have an important role to play in the church.	4.08	4.42	4.58	4.42
This church needs me in order to function properly.	2.58	3.42	3.75	3.83
I wish to be (1-3) / I am (4) using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	4.58	4.67	4.83	3.5
I want to be (1-3) / I am (4) involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	4.83	4.83	4.92	3.83

The responses to each of these statements showed a slight, yet steady, increase from questionnaire one through three. The fourth questionnaire saw a slight decrease in the average response for three of the four statements. It was hoped that the increase

would continue throughout, however, the mistake in the wording of two statements on the fourth questionnaire, as described earlier, could very likely account for the numbers declining. Not to explain away completely the decline, but other possible reasons for the drop was that there were a smaller number of completed questionnaires on the fourth week, and on the final day of the emphasis there could have been a more studied answer provided. An increase in understanding can in fact be shown in that the average answer on the final questionnaire for each statement was higher than the initial questionnaire.

There were also five statements that appeared only on the first and fourth questionnaires. These results for the control group are shown below (Table 4.2.).

For the first four of these statements, there was an increase in the average response from questionnaire one to questionnaire four. The first statement gained nearly nine-tenths of a point, which would indicate that a major point

Table 4.2. Control Group Average Answers, Questionnaires 1 and 4

	1	4
The group is more important than the individual.	3.34	4.2
Our church functions as a community.	3.72	3.92
I know the role God wants me to play in the church.	3.69	3.73
God has given me what I need to carry out my role.	4.19	4.73
I am involved in things I care deeply about outside the church.	3.9	3.69

made during the emphasis, that the value of the individual cannot be fully realized outside the community, was better understood because of the *Better Together* emphasis. Statement two was more a value judgement as to the perceived state of PBC.

The third statement showed only a slight growth. I hoped that with the work done

with spiritual gifts discovery, along with discussing how personality and other issues prepare us for specific service, that there would be greater growth here. Several short-answer responses seemed to speak to why some might have answered with a lower number. One respondent wrote, “I am unsure...I do not believe I have tapped into my true passion.” Another offered, “I don’t know yet where I fit in or where I can use my spiritual gift.” These responses present an opportunity to provide further equipping to some who have a real desire to serve, but need additional encouragement.

There was growth of over one-half point to the statement: *God has given me what I need to carry out my role*. Although there may be some who cannot yet describe their role, most are confident that they are gifted and prepared to fulfill their role, whatever it may be.

The purpose for including the fourth of the above statements was to see if there was a differentiation between passion to serve inside the church and passion to serve outside the church. There was overall growth in average answers concerning desire to serve within the church. There was a drop in average response concerning desire to serve outside the church. It could well be that with all the talk about serving within the community of faith, and the call to be more involved in the church, the passion to be involved outside the church declined, or was deemed less important. It was not an intention of the emphasis to devalue a person’s activity outside the church.

There were five statements that only appeared on *Questionnaire #2*, and five that were only on *Questionnaire #3*. These statements had to do more with specific teaching points for those specific days. These results are provided here:

The lowest average answers to the single-questionnaire statements on questionnaire two (Table 4.3.) were given in response to statements that were more a personal evaluation, showing a need for personal improvement. The higher rated statements were those that reflect the teaching of scripture.

Table 4.3. Control Group Average Answers, Questionnaire 2

Jesus is the foundation of <i>this</i> church.	4.5
I am a “living stone” built into a spiritual house.	4.38
I am part of a “chosen people.”	4.59
I am offering spiritual sacrifices as part of a holy priesthood.	3.88
I have been “called out of darkness, to live in his wonderful light.”	4.82

There were single-questionnaire statements on questionnaire three as well (Table 4.4.). The highest average response to any statement on any questionnaire was given to: *Every Christian has been given ministry gifts*. Of the 33 control group responses, only one gave a response to this statement lower than “5.” The second highest rated statement on any questionnaire was: *My experiences in life can be used to minister to others*. Only four respondents answered with a number lower than “5.” These are seen as positive

Table 4.4. Control Group Average Answers, Questionnaire 3

Every Christian has been given ministry gifts.	4.97
Gifts are given for the good of the group.	4.75
The Holy Spirit gives gifts to bless the individual.	3.73
Gifts are distributed as to the needs of the group.	3.97
My experiences in life can be used to minister to others.	4.85

results because these were direct points made in the preaching and teaching.

It was hoped, based on the design of the preaching and teaching, that gifts would be seen as benefitting the group more than the individual. In fact, the lowest rated

statement of those appearing on just one questionnaire was: *The Holy Spirit gives gifts to bless the individual* (3.73). Bettering that by a full point was: *Gifts are given for the good of the group* (4.75).

A particular comment made by a control group member on *Questionnaire #1* caught my eye, and it demonstrates that, at least in some minds, there is a need for individuals in the church to come together as a community: “There needs to be a more solid, firm foundation and deeper connection – a common unity among people that bonds us – before we can function and live in community as we should.” It was also telling that when confronted with, or reminded of, the truth that Jesus is the foundation of the church, there were many who seemed to take it as a call to action. Here are samples of the responses: “This encourages participation,” “He laid his life down and we have been sloppy,” “It compels me to try,” and “There is no decision. God expects me to be active in his church.”

It is safe to say that among control group members there was a growth in understanding that every individual has a significant role to play in the life of the community. Can this same determination be made of the twelve-member research group?

Growth in Understanding: The Research Group

I will show the research group responses on questionnaires as group averages as I did with the control group; however, I will give individualized attention to each member of the group as I analyze short-answer responses and their personal journal entries. With each of the four statements that occurred on all questionnaires, and the five that appeared on just the first and last, the growth or decline, was comparable to that of the control group. The results are as follows (Table 4.5.):

Table 4.5. Research Group Average Answers, Questionnaires 1-4

	1	2	3	4
I have an important role to play in the church.	4.08	4.42	4.58	4.42
This church needs me in order to function properly.	2.58	3.42	3.75	3.83
I wish to be (1-3) / I am (4) using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	4.58	4.67	4.83	3.5
I want to be (1-3) / I am (4) involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	4.83	4.83	4.92	3.83
The group is more important than the individual.	3.83			4.08
Our church functions as a community.	3.92			4
I know the role God wants me to play in the church.	2.92			3.33
God has given me what I need to carry out my role.	3.92			4.5
I am involved in things I care deeply about outside the church.	4.25			4.08

The one result that showed the greatest difference between the control group and the research group was the statement: *I know the role God wants me to play in the church*. The control group grew by only four one-hundreds of a point, while the research group grew by over four tenths of a point. Still, the difference was not stark.

The greatest jump from one week to the next was in the research group's responses to the statement: *This church needs me in order to function properly*. From week one to week two, the average response jumped over eight tenths of a point. Both with this statement and the one mentioned above, the research group started the emphasis

with a fairly low concept of what they may offer the church, but grew considerably as the project progressed.

The following tables show the research group average answers to the statements that appeared on only one questionnaire (Tables 4.6. and 4.7.). In most cases the

difference between the research group and control group average answers was only two-tenths of a point or less. There was one instance of a greater disparity. To the statement, *The Holy Spirit gives gifts to bless the individual,*” the research group answer was more than four-tenths greater than the control group.

On most statements, a higher rated response was preferred, but I hoped for the lowest response to this statement. For the control group, it was lowest. The 4.17 response by the research group was not terribly high, but the controls group’s 3.73 response was more in line with

Table 4.6. Research Group Average Answers, Questionnaire 2

Jesus is the foundation of <i>this</i> church.	4.75
I am a “living stone” built into a spiritual house.	4.34
I am part of a “chosen people.”	4.63
I am offering spiritual sacrifices as part of a holy priesthood.	3.67
I have been “called out of darkness, to live in his wonderful light.”	4.75

Table 4.7. Research Group Average Answers, Questionnaire 3

Every Christian has been given ministry gifts.	4.92
Gifts are given for the good of the group.	4.42
The Holy Spirit gives gifts to bless the individual.	4.17
Gifts are distributed as to the needs of the group.	4.08
My experiences in life can be used to minister to others.	4.67

expected results. The 4.08 response to the statement, *Gifts are distributed as to the needs of the group,* was lower than expected, yet higher than the 3.97 of the control group.

In the data collection process I was able to keep track of each of the twelve research group members individually. A brief analysis of each research group member is in order, including their responses to short answer questions on the four questionnaires and the journals they kept from week to week. Each week research group members filled out a “guided” journal page before attending Sunday morning worship, and another page between Sunday worship and the weekly research group meeting (see Appendix F).

Research Group Member 01

I gathered from reading responses supplied by this individual that he/she is new to the church and is interested in being more involved, but needs help to know how to make it happen. This group member indicated a belief that involvement by each individual is important, and that each is gifted by God to serve. There is a common refrain in the responses: “Still trying to seek...,” “...just need help trying to figure out...,” “...still trying to figure out...,” “...difficult to know how to start...,” “I have been in a transition period with church,” “I question how to go about it...,” and, “How to start practicing my gifts.” One of the final responses on the final journal page was, “Currently, I am trying to become more involved.”

Research Group Member 02

Group Member 02 indicated at the beginning of the project emphasis that, “We should all step up and do our part.” By the final week, this individual indicated, “I feel I am very small in doing my part and hope to do better.” During the emphasis, responses included, “It is our responsibility to be there for the church to accomplish its mission,” and, “...with my uniqueness I should find a place that suits me in the church...” The

member seemed to conclude, “Lately I am feeling the need to be more involved and take a more visible role.”

Research Group Member 03

This group member was one of the least responsive to short answers and on the journal pages. On four different responses this individual indicated that we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus. One insightful response was, “...we need to pray that God will open doors for us to be his hands and feet and then answer that calling.” This member believes that “each person has a role to fill,” and that “God has equipped each of us with all we need.” A statement on the final questionnaire leaves in doubt his/her resolve to become more involved in the church: “If I had more extra time, maybe retired, I would love to be more active in the church.”

Research Group Member 04

Many of the responses of Group Member 04 on the journal pages were written as a prayer. One such prayer reads, “Jesus you are the Cornerstone; Lord my life is yours; I want to please you in everything I do. I need your guidance.” Another telling response was, “Whatever God’s plan is I am willing to do it.” This member was also quite economical in word usage. A digest of responses on the questionnaires would be, “I am willing” to do “everything” “I can do for God’s Kingdom” but “I have room to grow.”

Research Group Member 05

The first journal page of Group Member 05 contained the following statement: “It is one of the most joyous and wonderful things in my life to spend time in church. It is my refuge. It is our responsibility to help each other; support, love and nurture each other as Jesus does us.” This member admitted of his/her work in the church: “Shamefully not

much, but as time goes forward participating with brothers in Christ.” On the last journal page are these two statements: “I am trying to become more active,” and “I have learned I have gifts that were being unused and need to be part of God’s family.”

Research Group Member 06

Group Member 06 admitted that his/her involvement is, “not as it should be,” and “I should get back to being involved in activities.” Of the value of being active, the member stated, “Being part of community and spending time together sometimes helps in forgetting trials you may be going through and gives you someone to share joys and good times with.” When prompted in the final journal to comment on the individual’s unique role, the member wrote, “God made me unique and whatever gift he gave me should be used in his church.”

Research Group Member 07

This member spent much time reflecting on the teaching of scripture and seemed to gain much from it. However, the member did little to reflect on personal application of the scripture. He/She did say that there was room to grow in the level of activity in the church, and that he/she is currently pondering what to do to be more involved. During week one, however, this member listed eleven things currently involved in with the church. This seems to be an active member who is considering how to “fine-tune” the manor of involvement.

Research Group Member 08

It was difficult for me to follow the thought patterns and sentence structures much of the time for this group member, yet there seemed to be much thinking going into responding to statements and questions. This member did state that there is room to grow

in his/her level of activity and that “time is little but we make time for what is important to us.” There was also the admission that, “I am not sure what it is that I am to do, but I am listening.”

Research Group Member 09

This individual made several comments on journal pages that point to a desire to be used by God in the church. “Being asked to participate in this research has been, I feel, God’s way of letting me know I don’t need to be fearful or unsure of where or how I can be used,” and, in speaking of spiritual gifts, “Now that I know what they are I am excited to find where God wants me in our church community.” Also, “...I want to fulfill...,” and “... it has really motivated me...”

Research Group Member 10

Group Member 10 showed the most overall growth in responses to the Likert Scale statements on the questionnaires, having selected a higher number on the final survey than on the initial survey, on six of nine indicators. This individual seemed confident in knowing that teaching and worship are his/her passions, and indicated a desire to “take more responsibility as a teacher and leader as well as an encourager.” As stated on the final week’s journal: “...it is my job to find out how I am unique so that I can use my distinct, God-given abilities to contribute...because without me the structure of the community would be incomplete. We are all equally important in the body of Christ.”

Research Group Member 11

This individual grew in response to five out of nine questionnaire statements. Short answer responses included: “I would love to help out more,” “I would love to do

more with the church and hopefully move my letter,” “I would like to help out more when needed,” and “I would like to be asked to help more.” Responses on journal pages reflected this same line of thought, with the addition, “Being active in the church is very important...”

Research Group Member 12

It is evident that Group Member 12 was processing through the information being taught during *Better Together*. One statement in particular bears this out: “I feel a church that can go on without you could possibly be working together like God wants. Not that you wouldn’t be missed but you helped when you were needed.” And, “...being an active part of the community...does not mean that you are always seen...most people are quietly active doing things that may seem small but may be huge in God’s eyes.” And, this “random thought” (group member’s words): “I feel in dealing with some individuals they feel they could lose their uniqueness if they work together in community.”

I would conclude from my work with this group, and their responses to questionnaires and journals, that a clear majority of the twelve have a desire to be more active in the church, resulting from a heightened awareness of their role in the community of faith. I believe it could be said that one-hundred percent of the group understands that God intends for them to be active in some way. The question, asked by many in the group in one way or another, is “What now?”

Movement Toward a Higher Active Participation Rate

A general observation of mine, confirmed in this body of research, is that people are better at becoming informed than they are at acting upon their newly acquired

knowledge. From everything I can gather, including the data described above, and my own observations, most everyone who participated in any way with *Better Together* grew in their understanding of their role as an individual in the community of faith. As I met with the research group for the last time, the next step became the point of discussion. There was a palpable sense that they were sitting at the edge of their seats waiting for “marching orders.” One member asked, “Now what?” and the rest of the group nodded with anticipation of the answer. So, information was gained, desire to apply it was evident, and we imagine what the results might be. One control group member’s comment on a questionnaire sums this up: “Good stuff; I just need to apply it.” I will point toward observable results in this final section of my analysis.

There are three main components to the discussion that follows: the process and results of having offered a spiritual gifts assessment as part of the emphasis, the work of the church’s nominating committee in the weeks following the emphasis, and my conversations with, and observations concerning individuals and groups, during and after the emphasis.

There was an opportunity for all attenders of the church to take an online spiritual gifts assessment. The second of three teaching sessions focused in part on spiritual gifts, and many in attendance had their results in hand or in mind during the session. Built in to the assessment was a church data base so that each person’s results can be seen by name and top three gifts. In all, 66 church members/attenders took the assessment either online, or by using a paper version, and chose to share those results through the database.

During the teaching session, several key points were made concerning the outcomes of the assessments, and questions were answered. A recurring concern was the

need to work on those gifts that scored lower for an individual. I used this opportunity to clarify that we do not have all the gifts, nor do we need necessarily to improve in areas in which we are not gifted. I encouraged those present to find ways to put their “top three” in practice as a starting point, and then see what happens.

During a post-emphasis meeting with the Nominating Committee, these assessment results were made available, and discussion centered on how this committee might use this information. The consensus was that, for the sake of the Nominating Committee, the most valuable information was simply to know who took the assessment. Since positions in the church are largely not attached to specific gifts, individuals must discover for themselves how their giftedness might be used to carry out the duties of a particular position. The committee proceeded with the belief that those who had recently considered their giftedness by taking the assessment would be in a better place to consider taking on new or different roles in the church.

For the fifteen months preceding this meeting of the Nominating Committee, the Constitution and By-Laws Committee had been meeting to revise these important documents. Much of the work at revision concerned positions that were to be nominated. A total of 78 positions were eliminated. For the most part, these were committees that were combined, or whose work was transferred to the domain of specific leaders. There were nine new leadership positions put into place. The result was a nominating report that was much smaller than the previous year’s report. The rationale was that rather than trying to nominate all positions needed for the year, key leaders are to be in place that will see to it that throughout the year people are enlisted to serve in areas that come up periodically.

Having just been through the *Better Together* emphasis, the members of the Nominating Committee were eager to talk about this new concept of having more “pop-up ministries,” and were more approving of it than I have sensed in past years. The downside to the new approach is that, for the purpose of the analysis of *Better Together*, it will be more difficult to determine right away whether or not there is an increase of active members. Much of the work to be done will come at different times during the year, rather than in the process of putting together a Nominating Committee Report.

The Nominating Committee took a serious look at the process of past years. Several things were determined. First, time would be taken to make sure there was at least a brief description of each position being nominated; the committee would not assume people know what they were being asked to do. Second, the conversation with individuals being asked to assume a role would no longer be framed, “The Nominating Committee would like to ask you to...,” but instead, “Based on what God has been showing you, the Nominating Committee asks you to pray about...” Third, a better way of surveying the congregation as to their interests should be put in place.

As the discussion turned to surveying the congregation, someone on the committee suggested that we have a meeting of all interested adults, in which we discuss positions and how one might sign up for, or show interest in volunteering. The committee decided to announce that everyone was invited to a Sunday evening homemade ice cream social that would serve this purpose. It was also decided that those who completed the spiritual gifts assessment should be sent an invitation in the mail and be called by a member of the committee, as they would be more primed having taken the assessment.

Forty-eight attended the fellowship, which was held seven weeks after the *Better Together* emphasis was completed. Thirty-three completed a survey indicating areas of interest. In the past, surveys would be given out on Sunday morning, with as many as 150 adults present, and surveys returned would number in the single digits. These surveys were used by the committee as they deliberated.

After the nominating process was over and the report approved by the church, I called a final meeting of the group for the purpose of evaluating their work, specifically as it related to the *Better Together* emphasis. When asked if *Better Together* had an impact on their work the overwhelming response was that it had indeed had a positive impact. It seemed to the committee that there was a greater willingness to accept positions. One member commented specifically, “The biggest change was how to approach people – not just looking for an answer, but encouraging people to explore what God has equipped them for and seeing how that fits areas of service.”

One member suggested that, “We can do a better job of keying in on members’ passions...our radar needs to be up all year long...” In fact, because many positions were eliminated, and require individuals to volunteer, or be enlisted, at different times during the year, this will be essential. In meeting with key church leaders this fall, I have begun making this a recurring part of our discussions: in every way we can, we are to provide opportunities for individuals to sign up to help and to serve, expanding the workforce and giving more and more attenders the opportunity to be used by God, specifically in areas related to their individual “calling.”

There are seven members on the 2016-2017 Nominating Report that were not on the 2015-2016 report at all. Another nine members have made a noticeable increase in

their level of activity when the two reports are held side-by-side. Two of these sixteen were members of the research group. Seven members are serving now in various capacities that are not nominated positions, who were not serving last year. Three of these were members of the research group.

The specific project goal was that 17 control group members become active, or become active in more fitting ways. As indicated in the numbers above, it can be observed that eighteen control group members are now serving, or serving in ways better suited to them. As for the research group, the goal was that six members become active for the first time, or become active in more appropriate ways. According to my observations, there are in fact, five members who became active or “better” active. Three other members have talked extensively to me about their intension to be involved, but are waiting on the right things to come along. One said, “The Better Together emphasis has given me a strong desire to become active in the church. I had no idea what my spiritual gifts were, but now that I do it makes sense. I just don’t yet know what it is that God wants me to do.”

Allow me to share some anecdotal observations. One research group member has started a new ministry in which he collects processed wild game meat from fellow hunters, puts it in a freezer (which he donated) in our food pantry, and keeps a check on the distribution process. Another research group member has joined the choir and is the newest instrumentalist on our worship team. Yet another member of this group has taken his first-ever nominated position as a member of the Finance Committee.

There are a number of relatively new members of the church that had been sitting back looking for an opportunity to “break in.” Some of these have talked with me about

the fact that our emphasis gave them the motivation to say yes when asked, or to volunteer for ministry. Two members of the research group were not members of the church. One of these, whose husband is a member, has told me that she plans to join, when she “gets her nerve up.” Another of these asked that she and her husband be able to meet with me on the second Sunday of the emphasis. The purpose of the meeting was to talk about their church membership. They credited *Better Together* with giving them a push in that direction. They have since joined, the husband has been baptized, and the wife is now assisting with our Children’s Bible Drill.

There is a greater understanding among the adult members of Polkville Baptist Church as to their individual role in the church, based on knowledge acquired from studying scripture, and reflecting on how God has uniquely created them for their place in the church. A number of members have become active in the church, or increased their level of activity, in the weeks following the emphasis. There is, of course, the ongoing need to encourage, and motivate, and equip God’s people toward fulfilling their purpose in the body of Christ.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

It is certain that the *Better Together* emphasis had an impact. I conclude, based on the data collected during the event, and results documented in the days thereafter, that the impact was positive, and continues to be so. However, I have also concluded that there are things that I would do differently before replicating this project, or before recommending its replication by another.

There were several issues regarding the evaluative instruments that would be clarified in a repeat of the project. The instruments did not undergo field testing before they were used with Polkville Baptist Church. In essence, field testing has been accomplished now as a result of running the project. Three things: 1) I would not use the term “questionnaire,” opting instead for “survey.” For one thing, there are very few questions on the “questionnaires,” and second, the word, “survey” is friendlier and less intimidating. 2) Additional research into the use of the Likert Scale research method is in order, but on first glance I believe I would make the scale of the Likert Scale statements one through eight instead of one through five. This provides a greater range of answers over the course of four surveys, and not having a middle answer forces one to decide which side of the scale to lean toward. 3) I have previously mentioned a mistake in wording on one of the questionnaires. A field test of the instruments would have aided in catching this mistake.

Something else I would do differently, even though it was not possible in this case due to factors out of my control, would have been to have the Nominating Committee ready to begin their work while the church emphasis was taking place. As it was, we

began serious discussions about their work the week after the emphasis concluded, but they were not ready to begin enlisting people for positions until nearly seven weeks after the emphasis. There was success in their work, and the preparatory time was valuable, but it would have been preferable to “strike while the iron was hot.” Had new approaches to enlistment been in place, a “Ministry Fair,” on the final Sunday of the emphasis would be a nice addition, and will be considered in the future.

While there are things that would be done differently, there is an overall sense that the project did, in fact, aide the church in overcoming a challenge. Ephesians 4 provides an underlying purpose for this project, and the resulting church emphasis, with its expectation that the church would reach toward maturity, partly through the work of the minister performed on the church’s behalf, and partly through the work of each part of the body. Verses 11-13 introduce this line of thought:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

I would not claim to have led Polkville Baptist Church or myself for that matter, to reach “the measure of the full stature of Christ;” however, I can say that progress was made toward that end. I have organized my concluding remarks around these points: 1) the progress toward maturity experienced by the congregation, and 2) maturation in my personal and professional life as the pastor of this flock.

Congregational Maturity

Polkville Baptist Church has faced challenges, yet these challenges have presented opportunity after opportunity to grow in the direction of being the church God

intends. Five years ago, when the church was seemingly doing quite well – with growth in membership, attendance, and total offerings – the need to mature as a congregation was not deemed as important as it is today. When all outward appearances point to good health, there is little compulsion to seek medical assistance, even as disease is quietly infecting the body from the inside.

When a sizeable percentage of long-time, active leaders of the church walked away, weaknesses were exposed – weaknesses that had been present all along, even before the departure. My observations in hindsight have led me to understand that there were symptoms on the surface of conditions that were metastasizing underneath. I concluded that a lack of purposeful “disciple-ing” over the years, coupled with a lower than necessary percentage of active members (perhaps because of the lack of disciple-ing), led to a congregation that was slowly atrophying. Those who are sick need a doctor, even if they do not know they are sick. (Understand that for over fifteen years previously I had been this church’s Minister of Youth *and* Education!)

Polkville Baptist Church was forced into an identity crisis of sorts. Areas of weakness in fulfilling its purpose were noticed for the first time by some, while the crisis confirmed this weakness for others. There was a heightened desire to seek God and be the church he had intended all along. Existing programs and activities were evaluated; some were eliminated, others strengthened, yet others added. Then reality kicked in: there simply were not enough members stepping up to fill needed ministry positions.

I have reframed the challenge that I set forth in the introduction because I grew to see the challenge slightly differently because of the *Better Together* emphasis. Even though I still blame the lack of involvement by some on their lack of understanding of

their role, therefore placing some fault with the individual, I have come to direct more of the criticism on a church culture that, 1) did not intentionally disciple its members, and 2) did not assign proper value to all individuals, hence devaluing the unique part each member could play. There are systemic problems that must be addressed and *Better Together* has aided the conversation. As pastor, I play a major role in shaping the culture in the church, and I will own up to the blame due me in the following section.

Included in the introduction was a partial list of things that would not be addressed in this project: discovery of reasons people are not involved, the placement of people in positions of service, the means and manner of this placement, and new policies concerning the nomination process and/or means of volunteering. It has been an exciting outcome of the project to know that, in addition to its stated goals being met, there has been progress made in these areas as well.

We are hearing from people as to why they have not been involved. Some of these responses were provided on evaluative instruments and others have been stated in one-on-one conversations. These reasons range from, “There seems to be the same people in charge of everything,” to “I don’t know who to talk to or when to volunteer,” and even “I’m not sure where my abilities fit.” These reasons, and others, have entered into the conversations I am having with church leadership.

Better Together provided a new language for our Nominating Committee conversations. Church leaders seem to be more comfortable entertaining new concepts for getting people working and serving in God’s kingdom within the church. The approach until now has been that everyone who will fill any position, and fulfill any ministry need in the church, will be nominated for that service, and the church will vote

on that nomination each year in August. This has the effect of cutting off the conversation about who might be active in the church, until the next year. Polkville Baptist has taken initial steps in changing this process. Fewer positions were “nominated” this year, leaving open the possibility of more individuals volunteering throughout the year as ministry needs arise and are announced.

This has already led to fundamental changes in the agenda of Church Leadership Team meetings. A major concern of mine is that these key leaders be always mindful of the need to “spread the love,” to “expand the tent,” to “deepen the pool,” that more and more members are asked to serve, and given plentiful opportunities to sign up or otherwise volunteer. It is easier to assign duties, to select members at the beginning of the church year, and then know that tasks will be done. It is more difficult – and much more rewarding – to see members becoming involved throughout the year because the effort is made to enlist their services as needed. Without many of our traditional committees in place now, we are forced into this new, and, we believe, better process. We shall see.

We are mindful of the need to better train individuals for vital positions. A newly revised *Constitution and By-Laws*, under congregational review as I write, calls for a required “Leadership Course.” This course is designed so that we may know that key leaders hold to orthodox Protestant Christian theology and traditional Baptist doctrine, and that they in fact claim a personal relationship with Jesus that can be shared in the form of a personal testimony. This course will also prepare these leaders to seek out participation by a wide range of members in carrying out their assigned area of work. As

work on this constitution revision was winding down, *Better Together* was cranking up. The church emphasis has positively impacted the push toward this revised document.

Two weeks after *Better Together* formally ended, the church participated in a community ministry blitz called *Operation Inasmuch*. Upwards of seventy-five church members participated in ministry projects of every variety with every age-group involved. Even preschoolers used their talents and made construction paper cards to be delivered that day to homebound members. I heard comments throughout the day about how the body of Christ was working just as it should. My pastor's heart was proud!

For these reasons, and others, the impact of this project will, I am certain, have lasting and positive effects on the ministry and mission of Polkville Baptist Church, as the congregation continues to mature into its role in the kingdom of God.

The teaching in Ephesians 4 concerning maturity continues with verses 14-16:

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Ministerial Maturity

Two days into my journey in the Doctor of Ministry program, I presented to my cohort my initial thoughts as to what my project might be. My mind went first to a concept of ministry that I had long held to be important, and then how I might do something to help me personally develop that skill, while assisting the church at the same time. This project has, in fact, assisted me in overcoming a deficiency in my administration of church life as I seek to lead out in equipping the saints for *their* work of

ministry. As a Master of Divinity student, I arrived at a model for my ministry: *Equipper in an Empowered Community*. It is time to take seriously something I have known to be important, but have allowed to be swallowed up in the flood of ministry tasks.

My studies for this project confirmed much of what I knew to be the biblical mandate for individual involvement in the community of faith, but it also taught me new skills. For instance, I have a much better grasp of what “equipping” entails. This study also had the effect of firming up my resolve to give priority to my equipping ministry. I have grown more confident of my stand on these issues and am less hesitant to make them part of our discourse. The maturity of the congregation, as well as my own, is at stake.

I have come to realize that my lack of equipping has played a role in the dysfunction of the congregation. It is so much easier just to do the work myself, or to rely on the same few trusted leaders who always come through. The problem with taking the easy way is that many individuals are not given opportunities within the church to fulfill a role for which God has gifted them and to which he has called them. At the same time, the easy way puts the church at risk of having some members become too powerful and controlling because of their disproportional involvement. My immersion in this project has made me fully aware of these issues, and I plan to be much more intentional in my preparing of individual members to fulfill their unique role. As a matter-of-fact, I have very much enjoyed having recent conversations with multiple individuals concerning their involvement in the church, to the extent that I am anxious to have many more such talks. And, earlier today I was reading a church leadership book that challenged me to make hands-on involvement in ministry as much a part of the equipping process as

anything else; I continue to be equipped myself.

Over the years, I have written and promoted several church-wide teaching and preaching emphases, led the congregation through them, and then loosely evaluated their results. With the *Better Together* emphasis, I have added the important step of building evaluation into the procedure. It has been a valuable learning experience for me, and has initiated an important ministry skill development.

As church members were being encouraged to take an on-line spiritual gift assessment, I was taking the assessment for myself. I was not surprised that administration and encouragement were my top two gifts. I was somewhat surprised that wisdom and discernment tied with teaching as the third. For many years, I have considered administration, encouragement and teaching to be my gifts. I wonder if having been in ministry for three decades has helped increase my self-awareness in the areas of wisdom and discernment. None-the-less, I believe my spiritual giftedness prepares me to be an equipper.

Over the course of the *Better Together* emphasis, and the months since the emphasis ended, the members of Polkville Baptist Church have challenged me: “Give us a clearer vision for the church and how each member can be involved.” “Now what,” they have asked. When a pastor is being held to his own preaching and teaching, you know he hit on something that was needed. With this emphasis, I have exposed myself and my congregation to truth that demands to be acted upon. I do not believe we can – I hope we cannot – forget what we have learned. We, meaning every member of the community of faith, truly are *Better Together*.

Appendix A

WEEK ONE COMPONENTS: IDENTITY IN COMMUNITY

Worship Plan

Sermon Title: *Identity in Community* | Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4-10

We are created, saved and rewarded as individuals. We are called as individuals. But, our calling is always, among other things, to a community. As Christians we form our sense of identity in relationship to the group – the church.

Gathering Words: _____

Welcome

Scripture: Hosea 2:18-23

Prayer

Song: *All the People Said Amen*, Matt Maher

Introductory Video: *Man on the Street – Things That Go Better Together*

Rick will introduce the video and wrap up after the video

(Youth Minister is the man on the street, asking the question, “What are some things that go better together?” Filming takes place before and after various church functions. Answers vary from serious to comical.)

Dismiss Kingdom Kids

Song: *Brethren We Have Met to Worship*, Atkins/Moore

Song: *By Our Love*, Peter Scholtes

Prayer/Offering

Sermon Introduction Video: *Better Together Photos* (played during offering)

(Pictures of individuals and families taken on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday are each shown for a couple seconds each; with background music. At the end the camera pulls back and all the individual pictures form the words, “Better Together.”)

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4-10, read by _____

Special Music: *You’re All to Us*, Chris Tomlin

Message: *Identity in Community*, Rev. Rick Hamrick

Invitation: *Oh Come to the Altar*, Elevation Worship

Benediction

Sermon Outline

Identity in Community

Introduction

Things that go better together

“I’ve Got You Babe”

Video: “Better Together Photos”

God’s plan

To bless the world through a people he would call his own

Deuteronomy 7:6

Key words: chosen and treasured

God stays with the plan even when his people are disobedient

Jeremiah 31:33, 32:38-39a; Ezekiel 37:26-27

Key phrase: “I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Key Idea: God is with his people!

Identity found in community – in being God’s people

From **1 Peter 2:4-10**

Living stones being placed together

Jesus is the foundation; the cornerstone

Benefits/Responsibilities

Great benefits to being God’s people

But also, great responsibility with being God’s people

Sometimes we want the first but skip the latter

We offer spiritual sacrifices as a royal priesthood

We declare God’s praises

God’s plan for you

To give you an identity

An identity that is wrapped up in the church, because the church is God’s plan

Commitment – first to Jesus the Foundation, then to the church that is being built on that foundation

Jesus is our greatest common denominator

Commitment/Invitation

I want to ask that you consider making a commitment this morning, first of all to Jesus, the cornerstone, the sure foundation, and secondly to Jesus' church. You are part of it, because you are in Christ, but what does your commitment look like?

I'm going to lead in a prayer of commitment, and if God is leading you today to commit yourself to him and to this community of faith, his church in this community, I am going to ask that you respond after the prayer. The response is this, that each one of you who is able come forward and take a brick from one of these piles of disconnected, disassembled brick, and hand it to me to be placed together on the altar table – symbolizing your commitment to offer yourself, your body to the Lord and be built together with others in this assembly...your commitment to identify with this community.

PRAYER:

Our good, good God, we thank you for your plan to redeem mankind to yourself and we are grateful that we are part of that plan – first that we are redeemed, and then that you call us to spread the good news of redemption. We thank you for your provision of the church – for the support and encouragement we get from being together, at those times when we get it right.

We ask that you speak to us now about our commitment to your church. Show us your way. Show us your way for us, as individuals and as a community. Make us one, Lord. Make us one. And make the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians our words in prayer to you this morning.

(Read Ephesians 4:1b-6.)

We lay down our lives so that you might pick them up and do with them as you please.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

(Congregants take bricks from either of two piles that are on each side of the altar and hand to the pastor who places the bricks on the table to form a structure. Participants return to their seats.)

What a wonderful structure, when we offer our lives to be connected to our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Teaching Outline

This is an abbreviated version of the teaching notes for the first Sunday night teaching session of the emphasis. A handout was given to each student that followed this outline (excluding teacher's notes). The scripture for each reference given was included in full, with key words left blank for students to fill in. A PowerPoint presentation also followed the outline.

Identity in Community

SLIDE: Better Together

Lite Supper

**Commercial: Android Be Together – Friends Forever
Better Together Animated Logo**

Pass out handouts/housekeeping matters/spiritual gifts inventory instructions

Prayer

SLIDE: Identity in Community

What is Christian community?

Each table, talk about it and come up with a statement to share with the group.
Your thoughts...

First, Jesus!

Then, commitment... purpose... commonality...

But also diversity.

Acts 2:42-47

What is more important...the individual or the community?

Your thoughts...

In scripture extreme individualism is not taught... however,
In scripture extreme collectivism is not taught. (Rowley, 491)

Which came first, the chicken or the egg – the individual or the group?

The individual – Adam, but God said that it is not good for man to be alone, so he created headaches... I mean woman!

We saw this morning that God has practically always had a plan of blessing the entire world through a distinct people that he would call his own.

Yet, individuals come to Christ on their own. Individuals are created and sustained and love and saved and rewarded by God.

But, there is the reality that what we do as individuals affects the entire community!

Questions? Thoughts?

Read: *No Man Is an Island*, John Donne

**Music Video: *No Man is an Island*, Tenth Avenue North
Better Together Animated Logo**

How might we gain a sense of identity from community?

Where does identity come from?

Can identity change? Based on community?

(Talk about the change in identity the early Christians went through.

Refer to 1 Peter 2:4-10)

Would there ever be a time when you would not want your identity wrapped up in community?

How are we to live in community?

Each verse/passage on a slide – fill in blanks on student handouts

John 13:34-35, 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10, 16, 13:8, 15:7, 14, 16:6a; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 12:25; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:13, 15, 26, 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 32, 5:21; Philippians 2:5; Colossians 3:9, 16; 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 18, 5:11, 13b, 15; Titus 3:3; Hebrews 3:13, 10:24-25, 13:1; James 4:11a, 5:6, 16; 1 Peter 1:22, 3:8, 4:8-9, 5:5; 1 John 1:7, 3:11; 2 John 1:5

What things can disrupt and/or destroy community?

Have students go back through scripture and circle things that are negative toward community.

Then, make sure they have the following:

Pride (Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 5:5)

Conceit (Romans 12:16; Galatians 5:26)

Division (1 Corinthians 12:25)

Biting/Devouring (Galatians 5:15)

Provoking/Envy (Galatians 5:26)

Lying (Colossians 3:9)

Paying back wrong for wrong (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

Malice, Envy, Hate (Titus 3:3)

Not meeting together (Hebrews 10:25)

Slander (James 4:11)

Grumbling (James 5:9; 1 Peter 4:9)

Anything we could add to this list?

What is the value of community to the individual?

Your thoughts...

Back to the original topic: What is a Christian Community? A Christian community is a place in which a Christian can be authentic and be accepted as an individual of value and be held accountable to grow in Christ.

Anything we should add to that?

READ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

A wrap-up statement/Challenge/Application

**Commercial: *Android Be Together – Fingerprints*
*Better Together Animated Logo***

Remind about instructions concerning Spiritual Gifts inventory

Sign-ups for Operation INASMUCH

Tell about questionnaire and evaluation/confidentiality/I'll leave after I hand them out/where to put them when finished/importance of completing them

Prayer

**Hand out evaluative pieces and leave as they are filled out
QUESTIONNAIRE #2 and EVALUATION #1**

Appendix B

WEEK TWO COMPONENTS: INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMONALITY

Worship Plan

Sermon Title: *Individuality and Commonality*

Key Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Individual members of the community are gifted in unique ways to assist the group in carrying its mission. Our personal mission as Christians cannot be divorced from the church's mission. Our uniqueness as individuals is "for the common good."

Song: *No Man is an Island*, Tenth Avenue North

Gathering Words: _____

Welcome

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-4

Prayer

Introductory Video: *Kingdom Kids Cooperation*

(Kids were videoed in February as they were learning about cooperation. They recite a Bible verse along with their "life app.")

Kingdom Kids are Dismissed

Song: *Lord, I Need You*, Christy Nockels

Song: *By Our Love*, Peter Scholtes

Prayer/Offering

Quiet Music During the Offering

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, read by _____

Sermon Introduction Video: *Better Together Cardboard Testimonies*

(Members of the Nominating Committee and the Research Group were filmed holding a piece of cardboard. First side listed ways they are unique. They flip it over and it says, "I am unique, but I am Better Together.")

Message: *Individuality and Commonality*, Rev. Rick Hamrick

Invitation: *Make Us One*, Twila Paris

Benediction

Sermon Outline

Individuality and Commonality

Introduction

Video: "Better Together Cardboard Testimonies"

Individuality

We each have work to do

Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 4:12a

We are each gifted by God to do our work

1 Corinthians 12:7a; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:11

Read story about the animals from Charles Swindoll, *Standing Out* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1983), 51.

Commonality

For the common good

1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 2:1-4

All for the Lord

Colossians 3:23-24

Commitment

God gives you work to do. He gives you the ability to do it. You are part of a group of believers who need you. Your purpose – your function – must be fulfilled if the group is to be all it can be.

You are a unique individual. Celebrate who God has created you to be. But remember, you are gifted as an individual for the common good. *No man is an island...*when you fail to utilize your individuality for the common good, everyone else suffers. When you join TOGETHER with others and do your part, everyone else is the BETTER for it. We are BETTER TOGETHER.

God wants something from his children. He wants cooperation. He wants the efforts of "one" to multiplied tenfold; a hundred-fold! If you are not using your God-given talents and gifts and experiences and passions and personality to advance his Kingdom work, together with all other believers, it is time to make a change. It is time to make a commitment to God and this church. If you need my assistance as your pastor to help you figure something out, you've got it. It's time! Christ's coming is drawing near and there are lost and hurting and dying

people out there. It's time for you to rise up as an individual created by God, for God, and join hands and hearts with your fellow followers.

If you are led by God this morning to make such a commitment I am going to ask every one of you who is able to make your commitment known this morning – to come forward around this altar and all around this sanctuary and join hands, or lock arms, but join together in some way. And when we are together, I will pray.

PRAYER

Teaching Outline

This is an abbreviated version of the teaching notes for the second Sunday night teaching session of the emphasis. A handout was given to each student that followed this outline (excluding teacher's notes). The scripture for each reference given was included in full, with key words left blank for students to fill in. A PowerPoint presentation also followed the outline.

Individuality and Commonality

SLIDE: *Better Together*

Refreshments & Coffee

**Commercial: *Android Be Together – Monotune*
Better Together Animated Logo**

Pass out handouts/housekeeping matters/Spiritual Gifts inventory instructions

Prayer

SLIDE: Personality and Commonality

At each table:

Discuss what makes each of you unique? What is one unusual thing that everyone on your table has in common? (Have each table share this one thing with the group.

What makes you...you?

Rick Warren/Eric Rees – S.H.A.P.E.: Spiritual Gifts, Heartbeat, Abilities, Personality, Experiences (*S.H.A.P.E.: Finding and Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life*)

Carol Cartmill/Yvonne Gentile – S.T.R.I.D.E.: Spiritual Gifts, Talents, Resources, Individuality, Dreams, Experiences (*Serving From the Heart*)

Here's how I list it: (PRESENTATION SLIDE)

Spiritual Gifts, Abilities/Talents, Personality, Passion, Experiences

That's: (PRESENTATION SLIDE)

S.A.P.P.E. -- Spiritual Gifts, Abilities/Talents, Personality, Passion, Experiences

Spiritual gifts

Review of key concepts concerning Spiritual Gifts

Scripture with Key Points (to be filled out on Student Handouts)

1 Corinthians 12:1

Key Point: God wants us to be informed about spiritual gifts.

1 Peter 4:10

Key Point: We have gifts so we can serve others.

1 Timothy 4:14a

Key Point: God does not want our gifts to go to waste.

Ephesians 2:10

Key Point: Our giftedness is part of God's plan.

Have you taken the inventory?

What are your gifts, according to the inventory? Do you agree with the results?

You can access a description of your gifts.

Let's say you have the spiritual gift of mercy...

The church doesn't have a "Mercy Committee"

But we do have committee(s) that need members who have the gift of mercy

Abilities/Talents

What are your talents? If you don't know, ask someone close to you.

How might talents go together with gifts to equip you for ministry?

Personality

Guide students to complete the Personality Quiz attached to their handout.

(created and provided by Smalley Institute, www.smalley.cc)

Direct the students' attention to the descriptions of the four types.

Share an example of how each personality type might react in a situation.

How might personality go together with gifts and talents to equip you for ministry?

Passion

Others call this "heart," or "what you love"

What drives you? What gets you excited? What do you live for?

Examples...

What are your passions?

How might passion go together with gifts and talents/abilities and personality to equip you for ministry?

Experiences

What kind of experiences have you had that uniquely qualify you to minister to others?

Do you have an example?

How might experiences go together with gifts and talents and personality and passion to equip you for ministry?

SLIDE: What makes you...you?

Wrap up this section showing how everything about you goes together to make you...you.

MEDIA: Read pages 81-83 from, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, by Robert Fulghum (concerning Giants, Wizards, Dwarfs...and Mermaids)

Lead into the commonality aspect.

SLIDE: For the Common Good

For the common good

Proverbs 22:2, 29:13; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:12; Ephesians 3:6, Ephesians 4:7, 11-13; 1 John 1:6-7

How might your uniqueness contribute to the common good?

Think back over your S.A.P.P.E. (PRESENTATION SLIDE)

Students fill in blanks on their handouts (Spiritual Gifts, Abilities, Personality, Passion, Experiences)

**Begin thinking about how you might best use your uniqueness within the church
Are you aware of opportunities that currently exist?**

Do we need to broaden our ministry to include what you are best at?

Must glorify God and serve His kingdom / Must be for the common good

Commercial: It's Smarter to Travel in Groups

Better Together Logo

Hand out instructions concerning Spiritual Gifts inventory

Sign-ups for Operation INASMUCH

Tell about questionnaire and evaluation/confidentiality/I'll leave after I hand them out/where to put them when finished/importance of completing them

Prayer

Hand out evaluative pieces and leave as they are filled out

QUESTIONNAIRE #3 and EVALUATION #2

Appendix C

WEEK THREE COMPONENTS: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Worship Plan

Sermon Title: *Unity in Diversity* | Key Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Is there unity or is there diversity? Or can there be unity IN diversity? The analogy of the church being a body points to the possibility – even the necessity – that in our diversity there is unity.

Bible Drill Recognitions

Gathering Words: _____

Welcome

Scripture: Psalm 133

Prayer

Introductory Video: *Everything is Better Together*

(An animated video of everything that is better together. Phrases appear one after another, such as: “Ministry is Better Together,” “Life is Better Together,” “Worship is Better Together,” etc. Ends with “Everything is Better Together.”)

Song: *Build Your Kingdom Here*, Rend Collective

Dismiss Kingdom Kids

Song: *If We Are the Body*, Casting Crowns

Prayer/Offering

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, read by _____

Special Music: *All That I Am*, Rend Collective

Sermon Introduction Video: *Man on the Street – What Part of the Body Are You?*

(The man on the street is back. This time the question is, “If you are a part of the body, what part are you?” Again, there are some serious and some comical answers.)

Message: *Unity in Diversity*, Rev. Rick Hamrick

Invitation: *Simplicity*, Rend Collective

Benediction

Sermon Outline

Unity in Diversity

Introduction

Video: “Man on the Street: If you are part of the body, what part are you?”
How the body operates

Two decisions

We must decide to let Christ be the head of the body
We must decide to do our part

Christ must be allowed to be the head

There must be something bringing the body together, holding it all together, moving and commanding and orchestrating the rhythm of life in the body. In the case of the body of Christ, that “something” is actually a “someone” – Jesus Christ. We are his body; he is the head of the body.

Examples of how the head controls the body

Jesus is the head of the body.

Or is he? You see, sometimes a foot may decide he wants to be in charge; a pinky finger, as important as pinky fingers are, may decide she wants to rule the body. It is quite understandable if you understand human nature. Humans want to be in charge of themselves. The problem is the body is not designed for anyway but for the head to be in charge. We could try it some other way, but it will just not work. It will never work. Only the head can control things.

There is only ONE head of the body. The job is taken. It’s a permanent position. There is no application because there is no job opening – ever! Jesus was, is, and forever will be the head of the body. It doesn’t really matter if you like it or not, it is just how it is.

So, let’s just say it right now: no one in this body will try to be the head of the body because we will all trust Jesus to be the head of his own body. Can we make that commitment today? If we all just make this commitment we will avoid the first danger – and we can be together as we are intended to be together.

We all must do our part

There is always the chance that things will go wrong; that mutiny will occur and parts that are designed to work together will decide that their way is better. Some parts will never choose to function properly in the first place. Some parts will stay attached to the body but will stop working. They don’t get their way.

They don't like some of the other parts. They don't feel appreciated. They feel inferior. I could make a list of potential problems a mile long.

If the body is going to work there must be unity in the body – unity of purpose, unity of direction. There cannot be unity if part of the body is standing in the corner with arms crossed refusing to be together! We each have to decide that we have a part in the body and we for sure had better do our part OR THE BODY WILL SUFFER!

The reason we, as a church, can't always get organized is not because the head of the body is deficient in his ability to decide and lead and guide. Jesus is completely competent for his role as the head. The problem is we can't come together as body parts.

Context of 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Admonition in chapters 11 and 14

Here's the beautiful thing: Right in the middle of all this admonishment, Paul says, "And yet I will show you the most excellent way." That's the last half of the last verse of chapter 12. We heard it read earlier. And then Paul unfurls one of the most eloquent passages of scripture in all of scripture. We hear it a lot at weddings, appropriately so, but it was written to the church and nestled right in the middle of some tough correction by Paul. Listen to these words, and understand they are written to a people – God's chosen and treasured people – the church – that are expected to be together from this day forward, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, for as long as we live:

Read 1 Corinthians 13

Commitment/Invitation

We not only have to make a commitment to Jesus as the head of the body, but we must commit to each other. Both of these commitments are necessary if we are to avoid the dangers of community and be *Better Together*!

Commitments we must make to Jesus and one another...

There are decisions and commitments to make. (Extend an invitation for salvation, church membership, rededication, etc.)

(After the invitation/response time, invite everyone to come forward one more time, this time to take a brick that was placed on the altar table two weeks earlier.) Let these bricks represent to you that you are only a part of the whole. And, we are *Better Together*! (Read the following scripture as a benediction...)

Read Ephesians 4:12b-16

Teaching Outline

This is an abbreviated version of the teaching notes for the third Sunday night teaching session of the emphasis. A handout was given to each student that followed this outline (excluding teacher's notes). The scripture for each reference given was included in full, with key words left blank for students to fill in. A PowerPoint presentation also followed the outline.

Unity in Diversity

SLIDE: *Better Together*

Refreshments & Coffee

Commercial: *Android Be Together – Rock, Paper, Scissors*

***Better Together* Animated Logo**

Pass out handouts/housekeeping matters/Spiritual Gifts inventory instructions

Prayer

SLIDE: Unity in Diversity

Portraits of the Church

What would your portrait of the church look like? Discuss at tables. Hear reports.

God's Field

1 Corinthians 3:9

What is those gifted in irrigation decided to only water in one particular spot; and those gifted with sowing only sowed seed in one area. Suppose they were working different areas!

God's Building

1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 2:21; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5

God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; Habakkuk 2:20

Flock

Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3

See also scripture about Jesus, the Good Shepherd – John 10:1-18.

God's Family**Galatians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:10; Hebrews 2:11; 1 Peter 2:17, 5:9**

Remember all the passages that refer to Christians as brothers and sisters (some 120 instances in the NIV); also, those that refer to believers as joint heirs with Jesus (Acts 3:25, Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:29, Titus 3:7, Hebrews 6:17). Jesus suggested that his true family was made up of those who followed him (Matthew 12:49, Mark 3:34, Luke 8:21).

Body of Christ**1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:15, 5:30; Colossians 1:18, 24, 2:19, 3:15****SLIDE: Portraits of the Church****What would your portrait of the church look like?**

Read: The Day the Crayons Quit, written by Drew Daywalt, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers (pictures from book are projected)

Better Together* Animated Logo*SLIDE: Portraits of the Church**

There are some things common in all the biblical portraits we have looked at. God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is an indispensable part!

Field – God causes the growth**Building – Jesus is the Foundation****Temple – God's Spirit dwells there****Flock – Jesus is the Good Shepherd****Family – God is Father/Jesus is brother****Body – Christ is the Head****There must be unity! There are parts, but there must be unity!****The call for unity in diversity**

John 17:20-23; Romans 12:3-5; Philippians 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 25; Ephesians 4:4, 12-16

SLIDE: The Call for Unity in Diversity**Draw to a conclusion**

My commitment to community

In the space provided in the student handout, each student should write a personal commitment to God and the church. It can be a prayer, a paragraph, bullet points...

Media: Wintergatan – Marble Machine

Better Together Logo

PRAYER

READ FROM BIBLE (emphasizes the word, “together” in v 18): Ephesians 3:14-21

Hand out instructions concerning Spiritual Gifts inventory

Sign-ups for Operation INASMUCH

Tell about questionnaire and evaluation/confidentiality/I’ll leave after I hand them out/where to put them when finished/importance of completing them

**Hand out evaluative pieces and leave as they are filled out
QUESTIONNAIRE #4 and EVALUATION #3**

Appendix D

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Script for Promotional Video

(Pastor at desk) Hello everyone! My name is Rick Hamrick and I am the pastor at Polkville Baptist Church. I want to spend just a moment with you today, inviting you to a very special series of church services that we have coming up the last three Sundays of April.

Recently I was on the campus of NC State University, home of the Wolfpack. And, while we were there we went over by the football stadium and there is this wonderful statue (video of statue) of a group of wolves ascending a rock formation. It made me think of the Rudyard Kipling quote from *The Jungle Book* (quote is superimposed on video of statue), “**...the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, ...the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.**” I think of that and it makes me think a little bit about church because, you know, the strength of the church really is in the individual members, but yet the strength of the members is really...by being in the church itself.

(Back to pastor at desk) Of course, maybe, a pack of ravenous wolves is not the best way to refer to the church. Maybe I could just say, “One for all, all for one.” Or maybe, “We’re all in the boat together.” Well, I’ve chosen to say, “Better Together.” And so, we are going to look each of those three Sundays, April 10, 17 and 24, at what it means as individual members of the church to be *Better Together*.

The Apostle Paul had a lot to say about the church...its nature...its function...and one of his favorite ways of referring to the church was as a body. This is most evident in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. I’ll just read a few of these verses (scripture is shown as pastor reads):

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ....the body is not made up of one part but of many....Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14, 27)

So again, I want to encourage you to come out on April 10, 17 and 24. There will be morning worship at 10 o’clock each of those days. Then at night, at 6 o’clock we are going to have teaching sessions, all revolving around this theme, *Better Together*. And, together we are going to learn the individual’s role in the community of faith. I hope to see you here.

(ends with logo video)

Letter Sent to Church Leadership

Polkville Baptist Church

Post Office Box 245 • Polkville, North Carolina 28136
4214 Polkville Road
Phone 704 538-7464 • Fax 704 538-9988
www.polkvillebaptist.com

Rev. Rick Hamrick
Pastor

Rev. David Bell
Youth Minister

March 30, 2016

Dear Church Leader,

I am writing to let you know about a very important church emphasis coming up soon; April 10, 17, and 24 to be specific. It is entitled ***Better Together: Exploring the Individual's Role in the Community of Faith***. The emphasis will include Sunday Morning Worship Services at 10, and Sunday Evening Teaching Sessions at 6. During the course of the three weeks we will be exploring themes such as "Identity in Community," "Individuality and Commonality," and "Unity in Diversity."

Work has gone into this emphasis for over a year. I have sensed God working in me and through circumstances over the past year to bring this to fruition at this time. It has been an amazing process to see God work things out and give me confirmation.

I'll be honest — this emphasis also comprises a major component in the culminating project of my Doctor of Ministry Degree. Though it could seem that this is all just a school assignment, we were instructed from Day One that this project must take up an issue that will benefit the congregation; I have been convinced of it's potential benefits from Day One!

To be even more honest — I can complete this project and defend its value to a committee of Divinity School professors and deans, and graduate in May 2017, whether or not the leadership of our church chooses to participate in the emphasis. BUT (and in this case that is a big word), the value of the emphasis to the church will be greatly diminished if there is not support of the leadership — to attend each Sunday morning and each Sunday evening, and encourage others in the church to attend. *In other words, not for my benefit, but for the church's benefit.*

I am excited, to say the least, to imagine what God can do through these weeks together. Would you join me in praying that God will break through with his Spirit and speak to each of us, thereby strengthening the community of faith? Pray that obstacles to attendance will be pushed aside. Pray that Satan will be bound. Pray that the details not get in the way of God. Pray that we might come together as never before. And, I'll be praying for you!

Together — In Christ,

Rick Hamrick

to know HIM and to make Him known

Church Newsletter Cover Page



VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 2
April/May 2016

The Trumpeter

The newsletter of
Polkville Baptist Church ♦ Polkville, NC



Better Together

Exploring the individual's role in the community of faith

A three-week emphasis — **April 10, 17 and 24**
Morning Worship @ 10:00
Evening Teaching Session @ 6:00 pm



digging deep **and** *reaching out*
to know HIM to make HIM known
Polkville Baptist Church

Church Newsletter Pastor's Article

Rick's Write

Dear Church Family,

Hey church family!

It is impossible to have a really good marching band unless all the instrumentalists – woodwind, brass, percussion – are stepping out together, and each playing their part. It is impossible for a football team to be championship caliber without good defense, offense, and special teams coalescing around a single goal. It is impossible for a building to be built to last without a full complement of craftsmen – carpenters, electricians, plumbers, etc. – each contributing their part in a timely manner.

It is impossible for the body of Christ to fulfill its purpose to the fullest unless each part of the body is contributing to the whole; each functioning as created and equipped and gifted by God. The band has its director; the football team has its coach; the building craftsmen have their contractor. The church, the body, has its head – Jesus Christ.

In so much of life, results are just simply *better* when they are arrived at *together*! Peanut butter *and* jelly, potatoes *and* gravy, bread *and* butter, banana *and* pudding, to name some of my favorites! Like the beautiful harmony of blended voices, the survival instincts of the wolf pack, the thousands of parts of a stock car working to propel the driver around the track, and the efficiency of an ant colony – each individual part or piece or person is vital, but they are *better...together*!

So it is with the body of Christ. We each have unique personalities and abilities and experiences along with special gifts given us by God. This uniqueness points to the absolute necessity that we join our voices and hands and hearts, because we really are *better together*!

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

With you,

Bulletin Insert – Sunday Before Emphasis Began



A THREE-WEEK CHURCH EMPHASIS

Sunday, April 10, 17 & 24

Worship @ 10:00 am

Teaching @ 6:00 pm

**Exploring the
individual's role in the
community of faith**

What does "community" look like?

What part do I play?

What do I have to offer?

*How can we become a more authentic
community of believers?*

**Good questions! We'll take a look at these
and others...April 10, 17 & 24!**

**More information can be found at:
www.polkvillebaptist.com**

Bulletin Insert – First Sunday of Emphasis



Sunday, April 10, 17 & 24

**You've made it to the first day!
But remember it continues tonight @ 6!**

One important way to know your role in the community of faith is to know your spiritual gifts!

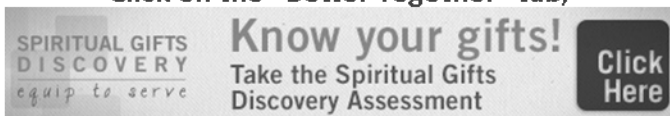
We are offering an easy to use "Spiritual Gifts Discovery" tool. It takes only 10-15 minutes.

There are three ways to access it:

ONE: Go to

www.polkvillebaptist.com

Click on the "Better Together" tab,



TWO: Provide us with your email address
and we can send you a link.

No computer? No internet? No email address?

THREE: You can use a computer here tonight
or we can give you a paper version!

**Exploring the individual's role
in the community of faith**

Appendix E

RESEARCH GROUP DOCUMENTS

Text of Research Group Recruitment Letter

On April 10, 17 & 24 our church will be involved in a special emphasis I have titled, *Better Together: Exploring the Individual's Role in the Community of Faith*.

Because you are an "individual in the community of faith," I am inviting you to have a special role in this emphasis, as a member of a twelve-person research group that will help me evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and preaching of the emphasis, as well as the benefits to you as an individual and to the church as a whole.

Here's a look at what will be required of you as a member of the research group:

- 1] Attend worship services (10 am) and teaching sessions (6 pm) on each of the three Sundays of the emphasis.
- 2] Attend five meetings (45 minutes each) of the research group on Wednesday evenings – March 16 @ 7 pm, April 6 @ 7 pm, April 13 @ 8 pm, April 20 @ 7 pm, and April 27 @ 7 pm.
- 3] Complete questionnaires each week concerning the content material of preaching and teaching. Make entries in a journal between Wednesday meetings.

Arrangements have been made for child care.

Your participation will not require that you speak publically, or share anything with the group that you do not wish to share. Your participation, including answers on questionnaires and journal entries, will be held in strict confidence.

I hope that you will give serious consideration to participating in the *Better Together* emphasis by being a member of the research group. Your presence in this group will benefit the whole of the emphasis in a great way. It will also be a wonderful blessing to me as I conduct the research! I also believe that you will be blessed by saying, "Yes."

After prayerful consideration, would you please call me or text me (000 000 0000) with your answer by March 2nd. Also, if you have any questions please call or text.

Thank you!

Research Group Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Research performed by Richard Lee Hamrick March 16 through April 27, 2016

Research Title: *Guiding the Members of Polkville Baptist Church, in Polkville, North Carolina, Toward a Greater Awareness of Their Place in the Body of Christ*

Church Emphasis Title: *Better Together – Exploring the Individual's Role in the Community of Faith.*

Please read the following information, and if giving your consent to participate, sign and date below.

- ☐ I understand that I am participating in this group as a research subject. The research begins with an initial meeting of the research group on Wednesday, March 16, 2016, and concludes with a final group meeting on Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The purpose of the research is to track the effectiveness of teaching and preaching to my understanding of my role in the church and my willingness to be active in the church.
- ☐ I understand that participation in this research group is completely voluntary.
- ☐ As a research group member, I understand that I am expected to attend:
 - Initial Research Group Meeting – Wednesday, March 16 at 7:00 pm
 - Research Group Meeting – Wednesday, April 6 at 7:00 pm
 - Worship Service – Sunday, April 10 at 10:00 am
 - Teaching Session – Sunday, April 10 at 6:00 pm
 - Research Group Meeting – Wednesday, April 13 at 7:00 pm
 - Worship Service – Sunday, April 17 at 10:00 am
 - Teaching Session – Sunday, April 17 at 6:00 pm
 - Research Group Meeting – Wednesday, April 20 at 7:00 pm
 - Worship Service – Sunday, April 24 at 10:00 am
 - Teaching Session – Sunday, April 24 at 6:00 pm
 - Final Research Group Meeting – Wednesday, April 27 at 7:00 pm
- ☐ The benefits of this research to me as a research subject will be in the form of increased understanding and awareness of my role in the church. It would also be expected that a logical outcome would be that the church benefits as individual members benefit.
- ☐ I understand that I will experience no harm if I determine within the project dates that I can no longer participate. I also understand that provisions will be made for my continued participation if an unforeseeable circumstance necessitates my absence at one or more of the above meetings/sessions. I understand that if I am unable to attend required meetings, and I am

unwilling to “make up” missed sessions, my participation in the group may be terminated. Issues regarding my ability to complete requirements of participation can be discussed in private with the researcher without fear of judgement.

- ☐ I understand that all information I share verbally/audibly within the group is expected to be held in confidence by all members of the group; that all information I share will be held in confidence by the researcher; that all information I share in writing will be completed and submitted anonymously; that my name will never appear in writing regarding this research, or in the final presentation of the research results; that my name will never be shared verbally in regards to this research.
- ☐ The only foreseeable harm that might come to me as a research subject is that comments I make could be shared by members of the group with individuals outside the group. A continual reminder of the confidential nature of group discussions will be put before the group in an effort to minimize this risk.

I agree to the terms of participation as outlined above. I understand the rights and privileges of participation in this research group.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

White Copy – Participant
Yellow Copy – Researcher

Appendix F

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

The assessment instruments that follow are samples of those given to members of the research group. These were numbered in the upper right hand corner so that each member of the group would always have the form with the same number.

Dates on which the assessments were administered are included.

The control group copies are identical except they have different administration dates, and they are not numbered.

The research group was asked to complete a “guided journal” each week. These pages are included. These were not available to the control group.

Better Together
Questionnaire #1

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 6

Please respond to the following statements by circling the number that best represents your level of agreement:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The group is more important than the individual.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Our church functions as a community.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have an important role to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know the role God wants me to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
5. God has given me what I need to carry out my role.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This church needs me in order to function properly.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I wish to be using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am involved in things I care deeply about outside the church.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I want to be involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	1	2	3	4	5

How would you describe an "active" church member? _____

How would you describe your level of activity in the church? Is it sufficient? Room to grow? _____

Other thoughts or observations? _____

Better Together
Journal Week #1, page 1

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 6

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements before attending worship on April 10th:

Jesus is the cornerstone. Each Christian is a "living stone" being built together on that foundation. _____

Being part of the church brings with it both privilege and responsibility. _____

It is important that as an individual I am an active part of the community. _____

Other thoughts as we get ready to begin our emphasis: _____

Better Together
Journal Week #1, page 2

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 6

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements after attending worship on April 10th, and before attending the group meeting on Wednesday, April 13th:

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10 and record your thoughts. _____

For me, spiritual sacrifices offered by a royal priesthood are: _____

Ways I am functioning together with the church to accomplish God's mission: _____

Other thoughts I have had: _____

Better Together
Questionnaire #2

Research Group **09**
 Wednesday, April 13

Please respond to the following statements by circling the number that best represents your level of agreement:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. Jesus is the foundation of <i>this</i> church.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am a "living stone" built into a spiritual house.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have an important role to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am part of "a chosen people."	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am offering spiritual sacrifices as part of a holy priesthood.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This church needs me in order to function properly.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I wish to be using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have been "called out of darkness, to live in his wonderful light."	1	2	3	4	5
9. I want to be involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	1	2	3	4	5

What does it mean to you that Jesus is the foundation of the church? _____

How would this effect your decision whether or not to be active in the church? _____

Other thoughts or observations? _____

Better Together
Evaluation #1

Research Group **09**
 Wednesday, April 13

Please evaluate your experience during the Sunday, April 10 worship service:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The selection of worship music was appropriate to the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Multimedia was helpful in communicating the message.	1	2	3	4	5
3. There was a noticeable overall theme of the worship service.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I was made to feel welcomed in worship.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The sermon was delivered without distractions.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The preacher spoke clearly and with appropriate voice control.	1	2	3	4	5
7. There was a clear call for a decision, or to apply the message.	1	2	3	4	5

Describe the message you received from the sermon. _____

Please evaluate your experience during the Sunday, April 10 teaching session:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The arrangement of the room was helpful to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The use of multimedia added to the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Handouts were helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Group activities were appropriate and helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The teaching content was meaningful and challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The teacher spoke clearly and with appropriate voice control.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The teacher was prepared and at ease with the content.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The teaching content was appropriate follow-up to the sermon.	1	2	3	4	5

Your overall impression/any other comments: _____

Better Together
Journal Week #2, page 1

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 13

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements before attending worship on April 17th:

God has a plan for involving me in the ministry of the church. _____

God has given me what I need to be involved in his plan. _____

It is important that as an individual I am an active part of the community. _____

Other thoughts as we get ready to begin our emphasis: _____

Better Together
Journal Week #2, page 2

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 13

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements after attending worship on April 17th, and before attending the group meeting on Wednesday, April 20th:

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and record your thoughts. _____

For me, spiritual gifts are: _____

If not already, take the spiritual gifts tests found at www.polkvillebaptist.com. Record your thoughts: ____

Other thoughts I have had: _____

Better Together
Questionnaire #3

Research Group **09**
 Wednesday, April 20

Please respond to the following statements by circling the number that best represents your level of agreement:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. Every Christian has been given ministry gifts.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Gifts are given for the good of the group.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have an important role to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to bless the individual.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Gifts are distributed as to the needs of the group.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This church needs me in order to function properly.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I wish to be using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My experiences in life can be used to minister to others.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I want to be involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	1	2	3	4	5

What are your gifts and talents? What are things you care deeply about? _____

Are there ways to utilize your gifts, talents and passions within our church? _____

Other thoughts or observations? _____

Better Together
Evaluation #2

Research Group **09**
 Wednesday, April 20

Please evaluate your experience during the Sunday, April 17 worship service:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The selection of worship music was appropriate to the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Multimedia was helpful in communicating the message.	1	2	3	4	5
3. There was a noticeable overall theme of the worship service.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I was made to feel welcomed in worship.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The sermon was delivered without distractions.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The preacher spoke clearly and with appropriate voice control.	1	2	3	4	5
7. There was a clear call for a decision, or to apply the message.	1	2	3	4	5

Describe the message you received from the sermon. _____

Please evaluate your experience during the Sunday, April 17 teaching session:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The arrangement of the room was helpful to learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The use of multimedia added to the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Handouts were helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Group activities were appropriate and helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The teaching content was meaningful and challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The teacher spoke clearly and with appropriate voice control.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The teacher was prepared and at ease with the content.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The teaching content was appropriate follow-up to the sermon.	1	2	3	4	5

Your overall impression/any other comments: _____

Better Together
Journal Week #3, page 1

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 20

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements before attending worship on April 24th:

God's plan is that the church reach unity even while being diverse. _____

I am a unique individual with a unique role to play in the church. _____

It is important that as an individual I am an active part of the community. _____

Other thoughts as we get ready to begin our emphasis: _____

Better Together
Journal Week #3, page 2

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 20

Please write prayerful responses to the following statements after attending worship on April 24th, and before attending the group meeting on Wednesday, April 27th:

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and record your thoughts. _____

It is possible at times to feel unimportant, and at times too important, in the body of Christ: _____

Ways I am functioning together with the church to accomplish God's mission: _____

Other thoughts I have had: _____

Better Together
Questionnaire #4

Research Group **09**
Wednesday, April 27

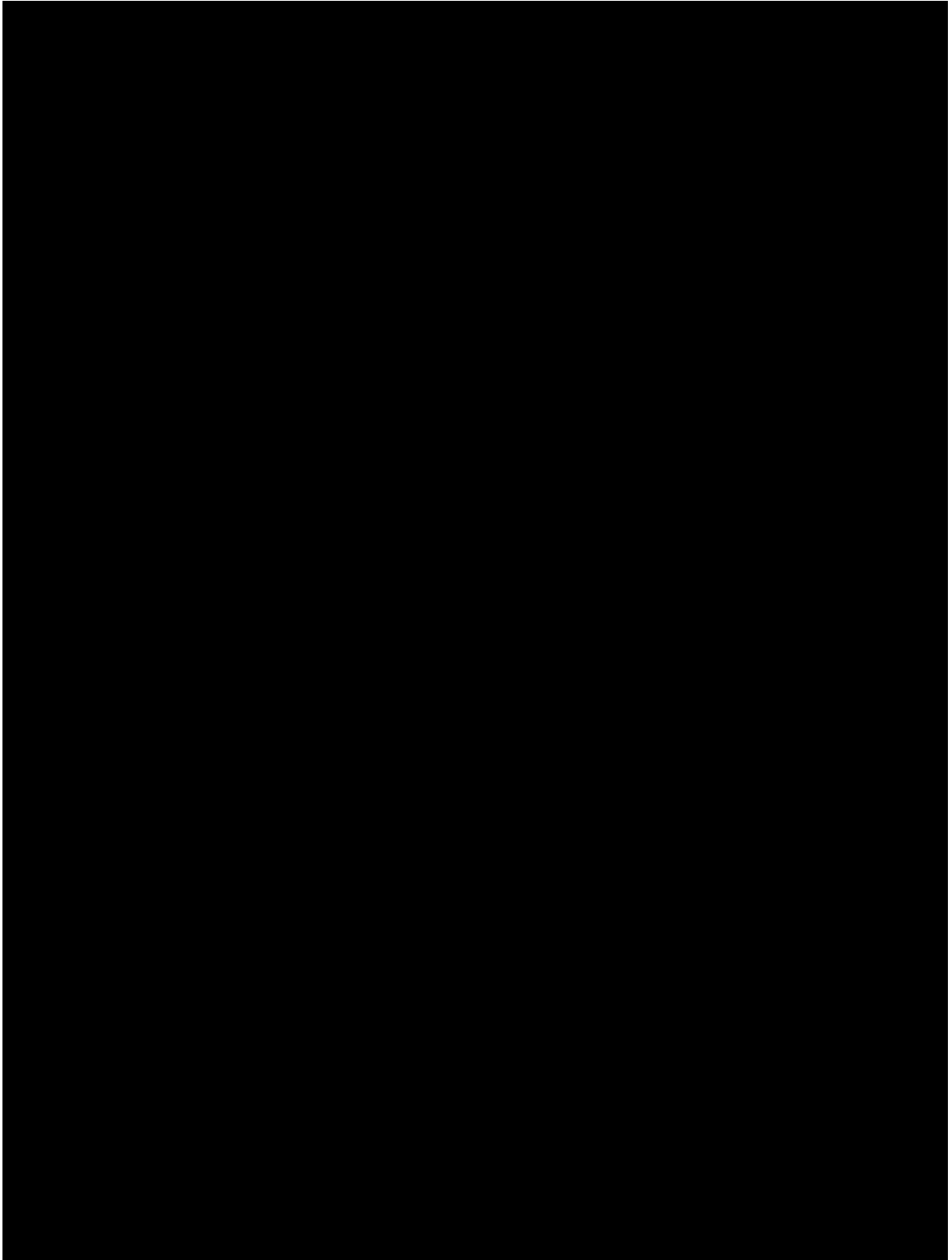
Please respond to the following statements by circling the number that best represents your level of agreement:

	Do not agree		Completely Agree		
1. The group is more important than the individual.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Our church functions as a community.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have an important role to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I know the role God wants me to play in the church.	1	2	3	4	5
5. God has given me what I need to carry out my role.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This church needs me in order to function properly.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am using my talents to help the church fulfill its purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am involved in things I care deeply about outside the church.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am involved in things I care deeply about within the church.	1	2	3	4	5

How would you describe your level of activity in the church? Is it sufficient? Room to grow? _____

Are there specific things you would like to do in the church to become more active? _____

Other thoughts or observations? _____



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