

AN EXPOSITORY PREACHING MODEL FOR THE CHURCH OF SMALL GROUPS

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Abstract

Can you preach expositively to a small group? How does preaching fit into a church oriented toward small groups? This paper proposes an expositional preaching model designed to serve the small groups of a church. After a summary of validity for the small group oriented church, this paper explains the two roles of preaching for the purpose of proposing a model of expository preaching that fits the small group setting. The model will function to provide spiritual guidance and practical applications for the small group.

Introduction

The small group ministry within the local church is continually growing in the U.S. and all over the world. Small group ministries are known by various names: “cell groups,” “home groups,” “koinonia groups,” “home care groups,” “house fellowships,” and “life groups.”¹ The growth is due to the increasing need for churches to meet personal relational needs in an individualistic society. Then the question arises: where does the traditional large congregation preaching fit in churches oriented toward small groups?

This paper proposes an expositional preaching model designed to serve the small groups of a church. After a summary of validity for the small group oriented church, this paper explains the two roles of preaching for the purpose of proposing a form of expository preaching that fits the small group setting. The model will function to provide spiritual guidance and practical applications for the small group.

The Church of Small Groups

The History and Current Status of Small Groups

Almost every church that wants to engage the culture and be relevant for today’s people’s needs has within it some kind of small group ministry. This is not something modern and new. It has always been the case since the church in the New Testament (NT).

In the NT, the Greek word *oikos* (οἶκος, meaning “house,” “household or family”)² is used as an indication that the 1st century Jerusalem church met in small groups as well as in large congregations in the temple. Acts 2:46 says, “Day by day continuing with one mind *in the temple*, and breaking bread *from house to house*, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart” [Italics mine].³ Also Acts 5:42 says, “And every day, *in the temple* and from

house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” [Italics mine]. There are other numerous references that specify that the NT church met in small groups or as “the church in *someone’s* house” (h` katV oi=kon ... evkklhsi , a): Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2.

In addition to the NT church, there have been many small Christian communities and societies throughout church history which were structured to meet the personal needs for fellowship and spiritual growth. There have been such small group communities as the Waldensians which were dedicated to the practice of a life of poverty and preaching in the 12th century,⁴ Gerhard Groote’s (1340-1384) “the Brethren of Common Life” which pursued to imitate the life of Christ,⁵ Philipp Jakob Spener’s (1635-1705) *collegia pietatis* which sought after Christian piety,⁶ and John Wesley’s (1703-1791) “Band-Societies” which sought to live a life of holiness.⁷

Among the many Christian groups in history who regularly met in small groups, John Wesley’s “band” meetings were the most systematized and organized. One can sense the *methodicalness* of the meetings when he only reads the list of “Rules of the Band-Societies” which were drawn up on December 25, 1738:⁸

The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, “Confess your faults one to another, any pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” To this end, we intend, --

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

The purpose of Wesley’s band meetings was for the members to encourage one another for holy living through the regular confession of sins. In this list there is a great emphasis on sharing the spiritual condition of each member, especially regarding sins. The need for church members to share their lives for growth was not sufficiently met in the larger gatherings of Wesley’s days.

The need for communal growth and fellowship through small groups is also evident in the modern church. In an interview with Washington Times, Bill Search the author of the recently published book, *Simple Small Groups*,⁹ made some comments concerning the present status of small groups in the U.S.:¹⁰

But he says small group involvement has never dropped, pointing to major churches that ditched Sunday school programs to concentrate on home-based groups. ... Small groups are user-friendly in today’s culture of rebellion and distrust of any organization – they are hierarchically flat, home-based, approachable and personal. Churches are even hiring staff

to build small groups, he said, adding that some seminaries offer master's degrees in the topic.

People live in a culture craving for relationships. Andy Stanley affirms this by saying, "we live and work in a sea of humanity, but we end up missing out on the benefits of regular, *meaningful* relationships."¹¹ As a solution to this problem of loneliness, Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh explain that the small group provides a sense of belonging and a feeling of purpose for the modern man.¹² Small groups meet people's needs by restoring relationships, working together with other people, and by providing goals or visions that are much larger than themselves.¹³

The Dynamics of the Small Group

In order to properly understand the role that preaching plays for the small groups of the church, the commonly observed dynamics of the small group meeting must first be identified. This can be done by comparing the purpose and procedures of the small group meetings prescribed by different perspectives on small groups: Ralph Neighbour, Jeffrey Arnold, and Bill Search.

Ralph Neighbour prescribes four procedures that a small group goes through each week: the "Ice Breaker Stage," the "Worship Stage," the "Edification Stage," and the "Share the Vision Stage."¹⁴ The "Ice Breaker Stage" is a short time at the beginning of the meeting where the informal gathering of group members takes place. The goal of this time is to build relationships among members.¹⁵ The second stage, the "Worship Stage," is when the members focus their attention on God and the end results are bonded relationships with God.¹⁶ The third stage, the "Edification Stage," is when the focus of the group is on mutual spiritual growth. Neighbour states that "while scripture is a vital part of this period, it must be stressed that the focus is on using the Bible as a tool, not the focal point. *The people present are the focal point.*"¹⁷ Thus the attention of the small group meeting is on the lives of the people and the Bible is used in some way as a tool to guide the discussion of people's lives. The last stage, the "Share the Vision Stage," is when God's vision for the small group and its ministry to the unbelievers becomes the center of attention.¹⁸ Considering the fact that the immediate goal of the small group meeting is "to arouse fellow believers to love and active goodness, encouraging each other,"¹⁹ it is not difficult to see that the highlight of the small group meeting is the third, the "Edification Stage."

Jeffrey Arnold suggests three stages for his small group meetings. They are taken from his reflection on the book of Ephesians: "A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world."²⁰ Based on this definition, Arnold says that in order for the small group meeting to be holistic it must have all three relationships (in the following order): "the individual's relationship with the group (the inward dimension); Christ's relationship with the individual and group (the upward dimension); and the individual's and group's witness to the world (the outward dimension)."²¹ For Arnold, the ultimate goal of the small groups is that "people will come to faith and then grow to maturity as Christ's disciples."²² The most important stage of Arnold's small groups is the "upward dimension" where the individuals' lives are touched by some form of the *study* of the word of God.²³

Bill Search proposes the harmonization of three patterns for a simple small group: connecting, changing, and cultivating. "*Connecting* is the growing sense of connection with an identified

group of people. ... *Changing* is the spiritual and relational renovation that transforms us into the likeness of Christ. ... *Cultivating* is the missional lifestyle.”²⁴ In his model of small groups, Search argues for communities which are able to merge “the truth of Scripture” and “the ability to discuss the challenges of life.”²⁵ Here, the basis and guideline for life change into the likeness of Christ is the word of God. In addition, the natural consummation of Search’s small group is missions.

Two important common factors emerge from the comparison of the purposes and procedures of three different perspectives on the small group. First, the centrality of the word of God in the small group is common. To say it differently, the various expressions of the small group life are the diverse applications of the word of God as a community. Second, small groups have outreach or the expansion of the kingdom of God as the goal of their meetings. Their focus is to bring more non-believers into the faith community (“Share the Vision stage,” the “Outward Dimension,” or “Cultivating”).

Expository Preaching and Small Groups

Why is expository preaching the best preaching to serve the small groups? Haddon Robinson explains what effect expository preaching has on the congregation:²⁶

Through the preaching of the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation (2 Tim 3:15) and to richness and ripeness of Christian character (vv. 16-17). Something fills us with awe when God confronts individuals through preaching and seizes them by the soul. The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching.

In this statement, Robinson states that expository preaching “best carries the force of divine authority.” Expository preaching best confronts the individual with the word of God. More specifically, the individual is directly challenged by the word of God to come to salvation and then he is faced to experience spiritual growth. Good expository preaching best meets the spiritual needs of the small groups: the individual salvation and the motivation for spiritual growth.

How does expository preaching function to support the needs of the small groups? The first role of expository preaching for small groups is to *teach* the application of the text. It functions to “secure” God’s word for the edification and discipleship of the group members. John Killinger explains the relationship between the large group preaching event and the “pastoral care” ministry: “Preaching announces the gospel and in that moment ushers in the New Order of God and his Christ; and pastoral care works for the securing of that Order once it has been introduced.”²⁷ He says that preaching “introduces” the “New Order of God and his Christ” to the audience and pastoral care is “securing” what has been introduced in the preaching event. Small groups, which are a form of pastoral care, function to “secure” the preached message of God for discipleship and mutual edification. This happens when each member shares his applications of the weekly sermons. Therefore, in order for the small groups to have a fuller life sharing discussion on the applications of the sermon, preaching should be explicit and specific in teaching small groups to apply the proclaimed message. Neighbour points out that the small group is designed for sharing lives and not studying the Bible.²⁸ Its goal is to apply (or secure)

scriptural truth and not the mere acquisition of it. Preaching should fulfill the role of teaching the applications for the small groups.

The second role of expository preaching for the small groups is to provide spiritual vision for the work of the kingdom of God. The expansion of God's kingdom is the long term aim of the weekly small group meetings. In the "macro look" of the group life dynamics section of his book, Neighbour expands the goal of the small group to include evangelism: "Goal: Building up one another, bringing the unreached to Christ."²⁹ Evangelism and the vision of expanding the kingdom of God then becomes the motivation for the small group members to meet weekly. Bill Beckham, who proposed the "two winged church" model, lists the role of the Sunday preaching (the Word of God) for the church community as revelation, celebration, information, inspiration, and introduction of vision.³⁰ Preaching should have the role of presenting God's revelation, inspiration, and vision for the small groups. Walter Liefeld also explains that the goal of expository preaching includes evangelism and kingdom of expansion: "Expository preaching is an excellent means of evangelism. ... Expository preaching declares the will of God for his people, his church."³¹ Expository preaching serves the small groups by providing spiritual direction for evangelism and the expansion of the kingdom of God.

One weakness of small groups is that the effectiveness of spiritual leadership can fluctuate from small group to small group by the personal qualities and experiences of the small group leader, for in most cases the small group leader is a layperson. This would mean that the group leader will not have the same high level of spiritual authority as the preacher who proclaims the word of God. Therefore, the preacher in the pulpit should provide the small groups with the highest level of spiritual motivation and leadership to mobilize them for kingdom work.

In sum, expository preaching should support the small groups of the church by providing instructions for the application of the biblical text (the "Word" need) and by providing spiritual vision and motivation for kingdom expansion (the "Works" need).³² Then the question arises, "how?" How can a preacher prepare and preach an expository sermon which is specific in meeting the spiritual needs of "Word" and of "Works" for small groups? The next section will attempt to propose a model of expository preaching which meets both needs of the small group.

A Model of Expository Preaching for the Church of Small Groups

It has been explained that expository preaching should provide the "Word" and the motivation for "Works" for the small groups. Therefore a form of expository preaching which promotes these two aspects is needed. This second section of the paper is divided into three parts: two structural principles for expository preaching, two sample sermon outlines, and examples of expository preaching to small groups from actual pastoral settings.

Two Structural Principles

Robinson says that "expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method."³³ It is the philosophy that whatever the biblical text teaches, the preacher preaches. On this premise of expository preaching, the paper intends to focus primarily on the *form* of expository preaching suitable for a church of small groups.

The form of the sermon is determined mainly by two factors: the structure of the passage itself and how the message could best be communicated to the particular audience.³⁴ Therefore, in addition to figuring out the structure of the biblical text, the question must be asked, “How can people best *hear* the material in this sermon?”³⁵ How should the sermon be formed in order to be faithful to the structure of the biblical text and yet meet the needs of the small group? The following two principles should be considered in forming a proper structure for an expository sermon suitable to communicate the “Works” and “Word” needs of the small group.

First, the sermon exposition (the *content* of the sermon) section needs to faithfully follow the structure of the text as well as its contents, in order to best communicate the divine authority of the text. Small groups need to be motivated by a sense of strong divine authority. They need to sense that *God* is directly communicating a certain spiritual truth to them (the “Works” need). This high view of preaching is possible through a high view of scripture. Biblical text oriented preaching can serve the role of God speaking *directly* to the small groups. Regarding this J. I. Packer has said, “Holy Scripture should be thought of as *God preaching* – God preaching to me every time I read or hear any part of it – God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Ghost.”³⁶ An expository preaching which best conveys this divine force of “God preaching” (or high view of preaching) would be *text (content and structure) oriented* preaching. When members sense strongly that God is speaking (or preaching) to them week after week through the faithful sermon exposition of the preacher, they will be aware of God’s “Works” for their small group and be motivated to engage in them.

Most expository preachers agree that the content of the exposition must come from the content of scripture, but not all agree that the structure of the exposition should come from the text. Robinson, in his example of a deductive sermon (with a focus of applying the text) on 1Peter 2:11-39, rearranges the order of the exposition to explain the focus of application. Although he succeeds in illustrating the point, he distorts the structure of the biblical text in the process (1Pet 2:21-25 comes before 1Pet 2:13-20). Here is his sermon outline example:³⁷

- I. We are to be subject for God’s sake to every human institution (2:11-12, 21-25).
 - A. Subjection brings glory to God (2:11-12).
 - B. Christ illustrates submission even to institutions that worked evil against Him (2:21-25).
- II. This principle of adopting a submissive spirit for God’s sake must govern us in our social relationships (2:13-20; 3:1-7).
 - A. We are to submit for God’s sake to civic leaders (2:13-17).
 - B. We are to submit for God’s sake to our employers (2:18-20).
 - C. We are to submit for God’s sake to our spouses (3:1-7).
- Conclusion (3:8-9).

Verses 2:21-25 (subpoint B under main point I) have been rearranged from its natural order as an illustrative support for main point I in the sermon outline. However, according to the text structure, the immediate context requires that verses 21-25 be the support for verse 18 (sub-point B under main point II in Robinson’s outline). Christ’s endurance of unjust sufferings in verses 21-25 is clearly providing a reason and illustration for the imperative in verse 18a: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.” In the biblical text, the illustration of Christ’s sufferings is used as a comparison to picture the harshest kind of human relational suffering –the

slavish submission under an unjust authority (v.18b). With this understanding, sub-point B under main point II could even be modified in this way: “We are to submit for *Christ’s* sake to our employers.” However, Robinson’s outline has missed this rhetorical effect because his outline is governed by another logical structure – the order of general to specific.³⁸

Form and function are inseparable: “There is no avoiding the fact that the medium is a message, if not the message.”³⁹ Therefore, on the matter of sermon content and structure, Fred Craddock argues that the sermon form must be subordinate to the movement of the biblical text.⁴⁰ Since the form (medium) of the sermon defines the message of the sermon, the preacher should be very careful that the form of the exposition corresponds with the form of the passage so as not to alter its message.⁴¹ H. Grady Davis confirmed this by saying: “When form is rightly used, it seems to be the inevitable shape of the thought, and is then indistinguishable from the thing said; it becomes the thing itself.”⁴² This means that the form has to be faithful to the genre and the logical development of the biblical text. If the text is a didactic passage, the form of exposition should be didactic; if the text is telling a story, the exposition should be presented in a narrative format; if the text is a poem, the exposition should also be presented in a way to reflect the poetic emotions and beauty of the text. It also means that the development of the sermon should follow the logical development of the text. If the passage is developed in a deductive manner, the sermon should follow the deductive pattern of development; and if the passage suggests an inductive development, the sermon should follow the same. This will aid the small groups to be motivated for divine “Works.”

Second, the sermon should seek to *apply* the explicated text using the “Application-Focused-Deductive Format” (AFDF).⁴³ Robinson and Sunukjian explain that the deductive sermon can take three different forms along the lines of the developmental questions.⁴⁴ Since the developmental question that the audience of the small group is most concerned with is the question of *life application*, a deductive sermon with the focus on application seems to be the best choice for the preacher of small groups. Although in Robinson’s model of “a principle to be applied” within the deductive development, he is referring to an application focused deductive structure for the *entire* sermon, this paper is suggesting an application-focused-deductive format (AFDF) *limited only to* the application section of the sermon. This suggestion is valid under the condition that the sermon has a *separate* application section following the exposition section. A separate deductive application section would naturally follow an inductively developed exposition (an Inductive-Deductive sermon). On the other hand, it would not be so convenient to have a separate application section for deductively developed sermons because applications are usually included right after each point.⁴⁵ However, having a separate AFDF section after the deductive exposition, functioning to restate the application, would facilitate the small groups in grasping the spiritual take-group truths for application (a Deductive-Deductive Sermon). Then the question arises: “why a deductive format of application for small groups?”

The function of the application section should be to instruct small groups how to apply the explicated text. Based on this function of *instruction*, the application section naturally takes on the deductive format, for didactic material is best presented deductively.⁴⁶ The deductive form works well when it is used to summarize the already heard exposition and is used to teach the small groups its applications. Greidanus explains that the benefit of the deductive-didactic form is that “it makes for a clear, coherent structure that provides the hearers with a solid, logical

framework for understanding the sermon.”⁴⁷ The same principle of deductive preaching could be applied to sermon application. A clear and structured teaching of the applications of the exposition should be present in the sermon. This function of the deductive-didactic form of application is what satisfies the “Word” need of the small group.

The two sermon structural principles of following the structure of the text and making AFDF applications could be understood as a harmony between divine authority and its human applications within a sermon. These two principles satisfy Long’s function of sermon form: “it has become increasingly clear that a sermon’s form should grow out of the shape of the gospel being proclaimed as well as out of the listening patterns of those who will hear the sermon.”⁴⁸ Ramesh Richard is also in agreement with these principles of sermon structure when he states: “Audience orientation affects the formal and/or external aspects of the sermon. Text orientation affects the content and internal aspects of the sermon.”⁴⁹

The process for preparing an expository sermon for small groups could be then summarized into the following simple steps:

Step 1: Construct the sermon exposition from the text structure. Develop the sermon exposition faithfully from the studied content and structure of the selected text.

Step 2: Develop the application based on the application focused deductive format. A clear and unmistakable instruction of the applications of the expounded material is helpful for small groups. Teach specific applications from the homiletical idea of the sermon. Applications do not necessarily have to be related to the small group life or the church community, but it would be preferable to include those.

Step 3: Build the introduction and conclusion around the homiletical idea and applications. The introduction should raise the need for small groups to listen to the sermon. The subject or a life problem may be presented during the introduction. The conclusion should seek to restate the homiletical idea and summarize the applications that come out from the main idea.

Step 4: Publish the application notes for the small groups. This last step is optional for preachers. However, it has been observed that many preachers to small groups have weekly sermon application guide sheets to facilitate their discussions.⁵⁰

Some Examples

Based on the proposed steps, the following are two examples of expository sermons to small groups. The first one is a deductively developed sermon exposition with AFDF applications (Deductive-Deductive).

Example 1:

Introduction

- A. (Opening Image) It gets more and more difficult to admonish your growing up son.
- B. (Need) There is the need to admonish your spiritual offspring.
- C. (Homiletical Idea) Christians become loving spiritual parents by nurturing, leading, and demonstrating.
- D. (Text) 1Cor 4:14-21.

The Exposition

- I. Christians become loving fathers through nurturing their spiritual children in Christ (14-15).
 - A. Beloved children are admonished not shamed (14).
 - B. Christians become fathers in Christ through nurturing in the gospel (15).
- II. Christians become loving fathers through leading by examples (16-17).
 - A. Fathers can say, "Follow me!" (16)
 - B. Spiritual children need to see real examples of Christian life (17).
- III. Christians become loving fathers through demonstrating God's power (18-21).
 - A. Christians demonstrate power and not arrogant words (18-19).
 - B. The kingdom of God consists in power (20-21).

The Application (AFDF): "Let's be loving spiritual parents!"

- A. Nurture your spiritual family with the gospel as a spiritual parent.
- B. Lead your spiritual family by living a holy life.
- C. Demonstrate God's power to your spiritual family members by praying for them.

Conclusion

- A. (Summary) Christians become loving spiritual parents by nurturing, leading, and demonstrating.
- B. (Closing Image) Share a testimony of a small group leader who is being a loving spiritual parent.

In this example, the sermon exposition is developed deductively because the text itself is developed that way. Having stated that he had become a spiritual father to the Corinthians in verses 14-15, Paul explains deductively the implications of his statement throughout the rest of the passage. It is important to follow the natural development of the text in the sermon exposition for the "Works" need of the small group. However, notice that there is an 'artificial' (meaning that it is not part of the sermon exposition) section of AFDF application following the exposition in the sermon outline. This part is to help small groups better apply the expounded word. This section satisfies the "Word" need of the small group meetings.

The second example below is an inductively developed narrative exposition with AFDF applications (Inductive-Deductive).

Example 2:

Introduction

- A. (Opening Image) People wonder about the future. That is why there are so many palm readers and New Agers.
- B. (Need) There is the need for Christians to provide correct spiritual direction for this age.
- C. (Theme) What responsibility do Christians have toward this generation?
- D. (Text) Gen 41:1-45.

The Exposition: Joseph fulfilled his responsibility as a man of God by interpreting pharaoh's dreams; and Christians fulfill their responsibility by providing the biblical perspective of the gospel to this generation. (Develop inductively)

- A. Pharaoh dreamed about 7 fat cows being eaten by 7 ugly cows (1-4).
- B. Pharaoh dreamed about 7 good ears of grain being eaten by 7 thin ears of grain (5-7).
- C. Pharaoh was troubled by his dreams (8).

- D. The chief cupbearer introduced the Hebrew youth who interpreted his dream (9-13).
- E. Pharaoh asked Joseph to interpret his dreams (14-16).
Explain: The world comes to God's people with spiritual questions, seeking answers.
- F. Pharaoh retold his two dreams to Joseph with the complaint that no one could interpret them (17-24).
- G. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, saying that they refer to what God would do in the future (25-26).
- H. Joseph explained that 7 years of famine will follow 7 years of abundance, and suggested to appoint an overseer (27-36).
Explain: It is the responsibility of the people of God to interpret the spiritual phenomena ("dreams") in the world from a biblical perspective and present the gospel of Christ as the solution to their problems.
- I. Pharaoh appointed Joseph over Egypt and honored him (37-45).
Explain: God and the world honors the people of God who provide spiritual solutions through the word of God.

The Application (AFDF): "Let's interpret their dreams!"

- A. Live holy lives so that people will see God through you! (Matt 5:16)
- B. Share the gospel with those who are in spiritual difficulties, knowing that God will someday reward you.

Conclusion: Christians need to present the gospel as a solution to this confused generation by living holy lives.

In an effort to be faithful to the genre of the text as well as its structure, the above narrative sermon exposition has been sequenced in terms of *moves* rather than points in the exposition section.⁵¹ In addition, since the story itself is developed inductively (the resolution of the story is at the end), the exposition also is developed this same way. A consistent adherence to the structure of the text will aid the small groups to be better confronted with the message of the text and therefore be motivated to engage in spiritual "Works" with a sense of divine urgency. Again, in order to facilitate the small groups in their "Word" need, the AFDF application has been crafted as a natural flow of thought following the expositing text. Having seen two examples of sermon outlines for small groups, now the question arises: "how do pastors of small groups actually do it?"

Sample Sermon Outlines with Small Group Discussion Material

Three sermon outlines with three corresponding small group discussion material are presented in order to understand how pastors of small groups serve their groups with their preaching. Three sermons of senior pastors of three churches of small groups have been selected for the samples.⁵² Although not all the sermons are expository sermons (one topical sermon and two expository), the purpose of this section is to understand how sermons aid the small group discussions.

Sermon Outline #1 ("Overcoming Spiritual Dullness")⁵³

- I. We bear fruit as Christ's disciples when we surrender completely to God's will (Luke 14:25-33; John 15:1-8).
- II. Maturity comes through trials and tribulations – Even Christ had to suffer (Heb 5:8-14).
- III. We are called to spiritual growth (Heb 5:11).

- IV. The mature are those who are trained to distinguish between good and evil, those who don't compromise the truth (Heb 5:13).
- V. Seek spiritual excellence by directing our faith and energy toward the promise of God (2Pet 1:5-11).

Discussion Notes #1 ("Overcoming Spiritual Dullness")⁵⁴
(Phase 2)

- Discuss main theme of sermon:
(Key Scripture: John 15:8 - "fruit," "disciple"; Heb 5:13 - "full-grown.")
- Define Spiritual maturity and how we get there? Characteristics?

(Phase 3)

- Discuss group action based on sermon.
- Discuss FEEDBACK on main theme of sermon.

Judging by the title of sermon #1 ("Overcoming Spiritual Dullness") and discovering that the answer comes at the end of the sermon (major point V); this is an inductively developed topical sermon. It is also noteworthy that most of the key concepts of sermon outline #1 are reviewed in discussion notes #1. The concepts of "fruit" and "disciple"-ship in the discussion notes are found in major point I, and the ideas of "full-grown"-ness and "Spiritual maturity" are found in point IV. This direct correspondence between sermon notes and discussion notes are what Pastor Weitsz describes as, "Sermon projects straight into cell notes."⁵⁵ In this example, the small group discussion notes follow closely the sermon notes, and therefore, the one complements the other. Notice how there is even a "Feedback" discussion on the main theme of the sermon in "Phase 3." This would help the preacher better understand his audience if these feedbacks were to be reported back to him regularly. However, one weakness of this discussion note is that it is not very specific for aiding the members to share their life applications from the sermon (the "Word" need of small groups). The discussion material does function to strengthen and remind the contents of the sermon, but it is not oriented enough toward its application. The small group discussions would have been better facilitated had the preacher developed an AFDF application at the end of his sermon.

Sermon Outline #2 ("Vision Mapping the Kingdom of God: the Farewell address at Miletus")⁵⁶
(Text) Acts 20:17-24.

(Topic) What were the essentials of Paul's ministry in Ephesus?

- I. It was a ministry of the calling (20:23-24).
- II. It was a ministry of sacrifice (20:19, 23-24; 2Cor 4:5; 2Cor 11:23ff)
- III. It was a ministry of perseverance (20:19).

(Application) "Shouldn't we answer to God's calling for our lives in sacrifice and perseverance?" "Won't you struggle with your calling?" "What is your calling that you must defend with your life?" "Would you answer the calling with sacrifice and perseverance?"

Discussion Notes #2 ("Vision Mapping the Kingdom of God: the Farewell address at Miletus")⁵⁷

- Paul's post conversion life was a life in pursuit of God's calling. What is your calling from God after your conversion?

- The Apostle Paul had to sacrifice himself in order to fulfill his calling. What kind of sacrifices are you making in fulfilling your calling?
- Paul persevered in his ministry for the sake of the call of the gospel and was fruitful. What kind of fruit are you bearing in fulfilling your calling?
- The Ephesians were able to experience God's love through Paul's ministry. Could you identify with the Ephesians? What was your experience?

This is a deductively developed sermon with the main idea being that “we must answer to God’s ministry calling for our lives.” As with sermon outline #1 and its discussion notes, the points of the sermon are faithfully projected into the discussion questions. However, discussion note #2 is directed more toward the application for the small group members than discussion note #1. Notice that the subject of each question is in the second person pronoun, *you*. Another interesting aspect of the sermon is that the application section is composed of a series of rhetorical questions rather than imperatives. Seeing that some of these application questions find their way into the discussion notes, it could be assumed that the preacher had the small groups in mind as he was asking the questions in his sermon. Although this preacher does not have a separate AFDF application of his sermon, the didactic-deductive format of the entire sermon structure is serving to aid the small group discussions.

A weakness of the sermon is that it does not follow the structure of the original text (20:23 comes before 20:19). The preacher is using the logic of *general to specific* in presenting his material. The “Works” need would have been better satisfied had the preacher upheld a high view of preaching by following the logical follow of the text. Had he followed the text structure, it would have even slightly altered the main idea: “We can sacrifice and persevere in our ministry to God based on the calling of God.” Following the text structure not only gives the members proper applications for the text, it gives them a sense of divine confrontation and direction.

Sermon Outline #3 (“Party Animals”)⁵⁸

(Text) Luke 14:15-24.

- I. The Lord’s Invitation to his party has been: Extended to many people (14:16-17).
 - A. We are significant to Him – “Invitations to Guests”
 - B. We can find satisfaction with Him – “The Banquet”
 - C. We can find security with Him – “Ready”
- II. The Lord’s Invitation to his party has been: Evaded by some people (14:18-20).
 - A. They are so focused on making money.
 - B. They are so focused on moving up the ladder.
 - C. They are so focused on managing relationships.
- III. The Lord’s Invitation to his party has been: Expanded to all people (14:21-23).
 - A. Loving to all people.
 - B. Generously to all people.
 - C. Urgently to all people.

(Application)

- “What is the Lord communicating to me through this message?”
- Respond to the Lord – “This day I’ve heard about the great party You are hosting in heaven, and I’ve decided to ‘accept/reject’ this invitation because ...”

- Word of Wisdom for Today – Don't miss God's party!

Discussion Notes #3 ("Party Animals")⁵⁹

Read Luke 14:15-24.

- We are continuing in our study of the book of Luke and discussing the parables of Jesus. Today, we are discussing the parable known as "The Great Banquet." It asks the question, "How have you responded to God's invitation?"
1. If you invited someone over for dinner and they didn't give a response, how would you feel? What would you do?
 2. Taking into account Jesus' reply, why do you think the man says what he says in verse 15?
 3. Who are the invited guests and why don't they come?
 4. Who are the poor, crippled, blind, and lame who are invited to the party after the others didn't show?
 5. What are some of the excuses you've made or heard others make for not accepting God's invitation?
 6. If you were the servant in verse 23, what would you do to find people to attend the banquet?
 7. How can we pray for you this week?

The sermon has faithfully followed the structure of the text (developed inductively) and this not only builds up the divine urgency of the message, it provides the confidence in the hearers that this is not a sermon designed by man to manipulate the people but it indeed is the word of God. This would then better motivate the members to do "Works" for the kingdom of God.

In his discussion notes, not only does the preacher include application questions (#5, #6, & #7) directly from his sermon points, he explicitly indicates that the discussion ("How have you responded to God's invitation?") is a follow up of the command which had been exhorted in the preaching: "Respond to the Lord!" This is a good example of the sermon being synchronized with the small group discussions (satisfying the "Word" need of the small group). In the discussion notes, the preacher expands on this question by first asking about the content of the sermon (#1, #2, #3, & #4), and then the rest of the questions are asking for personal responses from the content. However, it would have even further strengthened the application discussions during the small group session had the preacher expanded on the "What is the Lord communicating to me through this message?" question through AFDF applications. It would have provided the members even more ways to respond to God's invitation.

In all three examples the discussion notes facilitated in providing and reminding the sermon content. The latter two examples went to the next step of aiding the members to apply the sermon content in their lives in a specific manner. The last sermon example intentionally made a connection to the small group discussion. This was done by asking the members to make applicational responses during the sermon. This question was followed up by the weekly small group meeting. The last example is consciously making the effort to prepare the sermon hearers for their small group meetings. However, had the preacher gone a step further in making AFDF applications, an even fuller sharing of life applications in the small groups would have been possible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to propose a model of expository preaching for a church of small groups. The two needs of the small group that preaching should satisfy are the “Word” need and the motivation of “Works” need. Small groups need biblical material from which to draw life applications. Expository sermon can meet that need by providing an application focused deductive format (AFDF) application section after the exposition of the text. In addition, Small groups need spiritual motivation and direction to expand the kingdom of God. This need is met when expository preaching is effectively used to communicate to the members the sense of divine authority. It has been explained that this high view of preaching is possible through a high view of scripture (text content and structure based preaching).

The three sermon samples have revealed that small groups would profit by the preacher making the conscious effort of including an AFDF application in his sermon. It would also be beneficial to have a published sermon discussion note for the weekly group meetings, which follows up on the message applications.

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End Notes

¹ “Small group ministry” refers to a supportive ministry of the larger local church. It does not include the house church movement (also known as “simple church,” “relational church,” “organic church,” or “biblical church”), which sees the small group itself as a self-contained local church. However, the small group ministry does include the traditional church model which uses small group gatherings for various programs and the cell church model which is comprised of both small groups and the large congregation. For comparison of different church models see Rad Zdero, *The Global House Church Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004), 127-8.

² BDAG, s.v., οἰ=κοj.

³ All the scripture are from the NASB.

⁴ For a detailed discussion on the practices of the Waldenses, see Alexis Muston, *A Complete History of the Waldenses and Their Colonies: Prepared in Great Part from Unpublished Documents* (London: Blackie & Son, 1875), 18-21.

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the practices of the Brethren of Common Life, see chapter “A Customary for Brothers” in *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 155-175.

⁶ The following is the first known reference to Spener’s mention of private meetings: “How much good it would do if good friends would come together on a Sunday and instead of getting out glasses, cards, or dice would take up a book and read from it for the edification of all or would review something from sermons that were heard!” Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, Translated, Edited, with an Introduction by Theodore G. Tappert. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 13.

⁷ Wesley defines his society meetings in this way: “a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.” John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 269.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁹ Bill Search, *Simple Small Groups: A User-Friendly Guide for Small Group Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

¹⁰ Julia Duin, “Group Movement Showing Its Age,” *The Washington Times*, 15 February 2009, [on-line]; accessed 8 July 2009; available from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/feb/15/duin-group-movement-showing-its-age/>; internet.

¹¹ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004), 24.

¹² Martin and McIntosh explain that people need a sense of belonging because the family structure has shifted from the extended to the nuclear family, and then to the fractured family. The sense of neighborhoods has disappeared through the mobility of society and its urbanization. The culture has become more of a spectator culture and material has become more valuable than personal relationships. Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh, *Creating Community: Deeper Fellowship Through Small Group Ministry* (B&H Publishing Group, 1997), 25-28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁴ Ralph Webster Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from Here?: A Guidebook for Cell Group Churches* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1990), 225.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 225-6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225 .

¹⁸ *Ibid.*.

¹⁹ Neighbour takes the goal of his “Shepherd group” meetings from Hebrews 10:24-25. *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁰ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ This is confirmed by Arnold’s suggested time given to the “upward – study” dimension found in his “Sample Three-Dimensional Schedule.” “In it he proposes that the “upward – study” time consume the largest portion among the three dimensions (45 minutes, while the other dimensions each take up 15 minutes). *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁴ Search, *Simple Small Groups*, 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

- ²⁶ Haddon W Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20.
- ²⁷ John Killinger, *The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry* (Waco, TX.: Word Books, 1969), 69.
- ²⁸ Ralph Neighbour, *Shepherds Guidebook*, Revised ed. (Houston, TX: Touch Outreach Ministries, 1994), 173.
- ²⁹ Neighbour, *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 232.
- ³⁰ Bill Beckham, surveyed by author, survey, Waco, TX, 24 June 2009.
- ³¹ Walter L Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 13-15.
- ³² Using the terminology suggested by Ralph Neighbour, “Word” will be used to refer to the need of the small groups to share life applications from the preached word for mutual edification, and “Works” to refer to spiritual motivation for kingdom work. Neighbour, *Shepherds Guidebook*, 170.
- ³³ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.
- ³⁴ Greidanus lists several ways the form of the sermon influences the audience: 1) “form co-determines the hearers’ response,” 2) “form shapes the hearers’ expectations,” 3) “form gains and holds interest,” 4) “form determines the degree of participation demanded of the hearers,” 5) “form shapes the hearers’ attitudes.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 141-2.
- ³⁵ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness Of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 96.
- ³⁶ J. I. James Innell Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 97.
- ³⁷ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 123.
- ³⁸ H. C. Brown, Jesse J. Northcutt, and H. Gordon Clinard, *Steps to the Sermon*, Revised. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1996), 124.
- ³⁹ Fred B Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching* (Enid, OK: Phillips University Press, 1971), 142.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ There have been others such as Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, and Fasol who said that the sermon should be *rearranged* from the points of the text according to the “logical orders” (i.e. “order of importance,” “order of general to specific,” “specific-to-general order,” “order of problem to solution,” and etc). See Brown, Northcutt, and Clinard, *Steps to the Sermon*, 122-36. However, this *rearrangement* not only violates the natural movement and logical flow of the text, it will probably limit the preacher’s freedom by having him *select* a form from a set number of logical orders. Craddock and others in the “New Homiletics” have done well to suggest creative forms of preaching which better reflect and follow the rhetoric of the text. See Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 182 and O. Wesley Allen, *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 3-4.
- ⁴² H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 9.
- ⁴³ It is not suggested that the entire structure of the sermon to the small groups should always be developed in a deductive manner. The structure of the sermon exposition should follow the structure of the text. However, it is suggested that every sermon in its application section (which follows the exposition) should pursue a deductive pattern with its focus on applying the text. Because of the “Word” need of the small groups, it is advised that every sermon to small groups should have an application section.
- ⁴⁴ The developmental questions are: “What does this mean?” (an idea to be explained), “Is it true?” (a proposition to be proved), and “So what?” (a principle to be applied). See Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 118-24 and Donald Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007), 156-9.
- ⁴⁵ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 110.
- ⁴⁶ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 144.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ⁴⁸ Long, *The Witness Of Preaching*, 104.
- ⁴⁹ Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 98.
- ⁵⁰ Out of the 11 attending cell group pastors that the author personally surveyed and interviewed at the Cell Symposium 2009 in Waco, TX, 9 pastors had some kind of guide sheet for the cell group meeting which followed up on the main weekly sermon. The Cell Symposium was a conference led by Dr. Ralph Neighbour, Jr. on Jun 23-25, 2009, hosted by Cell Church Missions Network and Touch Outreach ministries. Key presenters included such

pastors as Eddie Leo (who is the lead pastor of AbbaLove Church in Indonesia which has over 70,000 cell groups), Dion Robert (who is the senior pastor of Works and Mission Baptist Church in Ivory Coast, Africa which gathers over 185,000 cell groups), Mario Vega (who is the senior pastor of Elim Church in El Salvador, Central America which has drawn 7% of a metropolitan area and is the largest Spanish cell congregation in the world), and Dennis Watson (senior pastor of Celebration Church in New Orleans, LA). See “Cell Church Symposium – Jun 23-25, 2009,” Little Falls Christian Centre, [on-line]; accessed 25 July 2009; available from <http://cellsymposium.com/internet>.

⁵¹ Concerning the concept of narrative “moves,” see David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1987), 23-24 and Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 125-6.

⁵² Three pastors of three different world regions and cultures (S. Africa, S. Korea, and New Orleans, U.S.) have been selected.

⁵³ This is a simplified version of the sermon outline provided by Pastor Harold F. Weitsz of Little Falls Christian Center in Roodepoort, South Africa preached on Jun 21, 2009. Little Falls Christian Center is a 23 year old cell church with 6,000 members and 262 cell groups (the statistical data was collected via a survey that Pastor Weitsz personally filled out for the author). The sample sermon outline and the small group discussion material have been downloaded from the church’s website. See “Little Falls Christian Centre – SermonsAudio,” [on-line]; accessed 25 July 2009; available from <http://www.littlefallsnetwork.com/lfcc/sermons.cfm?Page=Audio>; Internet.

⁵⁴ This is a truncated version of phases 2 & 3 in the “Notes for Cell Leaders & BCC Leaders.” See “Little Falls Christian Centre – SermonsAudio,” [on-line]; accessed 25 July 2009; available from <http://www.littlefallsnetwork.com/lfcc/sermons.cfm?Page=Audio>; Internet.

⁵⁵ Harold Weitsz, surveyed by author, survey sheet, Waco, TX., 22 June 2009.

⁵⁶ This is a translated sermon outline from the sermon manuscript provided by Pastor Dong-Won Lee of Global Mission Church in Bundang, South Korea preached on July 26, 2009. Global Mission Church is a 15 year old cell church with 25,000 members and 2,800 cell groups. Statistical data is from Pyo, Sung-Jung, “Revealing the Secret of 2,800 cells to Korean Churches” The United Christian Newspaper, [on-line]; accessed 28 July 2009; available from http://www.igoodnews.net/WZ_NP/section/view.asp?tbcode=tb01&cseq=6&seq=11862&ver=v2; Internet. Pastor Lee’s sermon manuscript and small group discussion material have been downloaded from the church’s website. For the sermon manuscript see “Global Mission Church Sermon Broad Cast,” [on-line]; accessed 28 July 2009; available from http://www.jiguchon.org/gmc_sermon/s_list.asp?gubun=sun; Internet.

⁵⁷ This is a truncated translated version of the “Cell Discussions.” For the entire material see “Cell Discussions,” [on-line]; accessed 28 July 2009; available from http://cell.jiguchon.org/gmc_bbs/gmc_info_content.asp?i_type=cell&id=5765&page=1; Internet.

⁵⁸ This is a simplified version of the sermon outline provided by Dennis Watson of Celebration Church in New Orleans, LA preached on Jun 20, 2009. Celebration Church is a 30 year old cell church with over 3,000 members. The sample sermon outline and the small group discussion material have been downloaded from the church’s website. See “CelebrationChurch.Org PodCast,” [on-line]; accessed 25 July 2009; available from <http://media.celebrationchurch.org/?p=135>; Internet.

⁵⁹ This is a selection from the “Life Groups Agendas.” For the entire material see “Life Group Agendas – celebrationchurch,” [on-line]; accessed 28 July 2009; available from <http://celebrationchurch.org/life-group-agendas>; Internet.