

PROJECT RECONCILIATION:
BUILDING STRONGER AND HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Mrs. Cheron Dumas, who has been both my inspiration and my encouragement throughout my life and in this process. She has selflessly sacrificed and dedicated her life in support of my efforts and to her I owe a great debt. My daughters Erricka, Tressy and Aubree have also been a source of strength and encouragement and I thank them for their patience and support as I worked towards my academic pursuits.

My parents, Melvin and Odetta Dumas, and grandparents, Reverend James and Mrs. Geraldine Davis, have also been instrumental in my personal development during the formative years of my life. I stand firmly upon the shoulders of those who came before me. I want to especially thank my mother for her tireless and continued support for me and my family. Her love and encouragement has kept me moving forward along the pilgrimage of faith when I often wanted to quit.

I also want to dedicate this work to the fine people of First Baptist Church of Linden NJ where I'm honored and privileged to Pastor. This project would not be possible without the hard work, prayers and guidance that you've provided. I thank God for surrounding me with such supportive and encouraging people who are a part of our congregation.

ABSTRACT

PROJECT RECONCILIATION: BUILDING STRONGER AND HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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This project was designed to evaluate and assess the status of relationships within Christian community while creating a contextual learning experience that examines how our relationship with Jesus Christ can have a positive impact on our relationships with each other. The intent is to cultivate an environment where a redemptive community is developed and the possibility of reconciliation is realized in human relationships.

The goal and object of Project Reconciliation is to examine the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through an expositional teaching and preaching series aimed at providing biblical examples and principles of how reconciliation is applied and achieved in human relationships. This project will seek to examine the ministry of reconciliation from a spiritual and strategic perspective as a process that begins in an individual and is worked out practically and strategically in the reconciliation of human relationships.

The project is intended to help our Church understand the value and significance of relationships, while considering practical strategies which can be implemented to create an atmosphere conducive for the establishment, development and reconciliation of relationships between members in community.

The project will include three phase (1) Pre-implementation Assessment Phase where the state of relationships at First Baptist Church will be assessed utilizing a survey tool distributed to our congregation (2) Implementation phase where a expository teaching and preaching program will be developed and implemented and (3) a Post implementation evaluation phase where a post-implementation evaluation survey will be distributed, collected, analyzed with the results communicated to our congregation. Results of this project will be aimed at developing programs and processes that encourage the development of stronger and healthier relationships while providing strategies whereby broken relationships are reconciled within Christian community.

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. CONTEXT.....	4
3. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION.....	8
4. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY.....	17
5. PROJECT RECONCILIATION.....	56
6. PROJECT EVALUATION.....	76
7. CONCLUSION.....	87
8. APPENDIX	
a. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE.....	94
b. SURVEY RESULTS.....	96
c. TEACHING SERIES.....	98
d. PREACHING SERIES.....	117
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	138

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Building an authentic and healthy Christian community involves the establishment and nurturing of relationships within context. God in creation, has not created people to exist in solitude without any interaction with others. God values relationships and he has created us to be in relationship with himself and in relationship with other people. Jesus says to his disciples “Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thy self.”¹ Relationships are a gift from God that must not be taken for granted. As Christians, we are both a called out and called together people that are called into relationship with God and each other. The health of Christian community is directly related to the health of the relationships therein. Relationships in life matter. They are significant in our church because “they are the glue that holds teams together.”² I believe that Christianity finds its greatest expression in its relational interaction with others.

Relationships can be pleasant, but they also can be problematic and hinder the progress of the church and life in community. There are conflicts and challenges that

¹ Mark 12: 29-31 KJV.

² John C. Maxwell, *Relationships 101* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1.

have arisen in community that impedes the establishment and nurturing of relationships. Despite our attempts to heal and repair relationships, the reality of brokenness is a challenge that every congregation must face. People are hurting and in the need of wholeness in order to live a productive life in community. There are relationships within our church that need to be reconciled and it is our goal to examine the ministry of Reconciliation in an effort to apply principles and practice that will be conducive to creating an environment where reconciliation is possible.

The greatest expression of reconciliation is in God taking the initiative to reconcile the broken relationship between heaven and humanity through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. I believe that when we examine the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ we discover God's motivation for reconciliation, God's means for reconciliation, and God's method for reconciliation. The life and ministry of Jesus provides a model for how relationships can be reconciled in Christian community.

The goal of this project was to evaluate and assess the status of relationships within Christian community while creating a contextual learning experience that examines how our relationship with Jesus Christ can have a positive impact on our relationships with each other. The project will consist of a teaching module and a preaching module aimed at examining both the words and the works of Jesus in regards to both relationships and reconciliation. During this project we will examine the ministry of reconciliation as a process that is both spiritual and strategic. We will examine and utilize strategies that help us deal with and overcome conflict in the church when it arises. The approach and methodology utilized will be aimed at examining and applying techniques that will be instrumental in discerning our church's culture, cultivating an

environment conducive to promoting wholeness and healing, while examining postmodern approaches that can be utilized in reconciliation and helpful for building an authentic community.

The project is intended to help our church understand the value and significance of relationships, while considering practical strategies which can be implemented to create an atmosphere conducive for the flourishing of good relationships between members. Results of this project will be aimed at developing programs and processes that encourage the development of stronger and healthier relationships within Christian community.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

Demographic Data – Linden NJ

First Baptist Church is located at 929 Dill Ave. in the fourth ward community of Linden NJ. Linden is considered to be an urban city located in the heart of Union county.

There are approximately 41,600 residents who live in Linden. Gender demographic breakdown is 46.8% male and 53.2% female. The median household income is \$58,316; however 7.7% of the population has an income below the poverty level. The education level is low with only 17.6% of residents holding a college degree.¹

This data is helpful in gaining insight into the demographic dynamics that surrounds First Baptist Church.

Church History

Early in the year 1922, a small group of people who recently originated from the South, met at the home of Mrs. Martha Plowden to start a mission. About the same time, Deacon and Deaconess Harmon Johnson conducted Sunday school in their home at 1261 East 12th Avenue, Roselle, New Jersey. Their home soon became the place of worship for the members of the Plowden Mission as well.

It was not long before the living room of the Johnson's home was too small for the growing congregation. As the congregation increased, many more moves followed. In June 1923, the church was officially named First Baptist Church. The first officers of the church were Reverend T.J. Hall, Pastor, Deacon Samuel Sampson, Chairman of the

¹ First Baptist Church Demographic Data Appendix B.

Board of Deacons and Trustee O.K. McKenzie, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. On April 11, 1926, a groundbreaking ceremony was held, for a new structure.

Rev. Hall served as Pastor until 1928; he was then succeeded by Reverend Renfro. In 1931, after three years of service, Rev. Renfro brought his young protégé, Reverend M. L. Wilson to preach. Later that year, Rev. Wilson was appointed Pastor. He served as Pastor until 1936. From 1936 to 1939 Reverend James Paterson served as the Pastor. In 1940, although Reverend Samuel Eugene Schell, Jr. came to First Baptist to conduct services on a “temporary basis” he led the Church for the next 35 years. Rev. Schell had a vitalizing effect upon the congregation, bringing new life to the church community. He was a masterful teacher and spiritual leader who made his ideas come alive. Rev. Schell inspired in others a great thirst for learning with sermons reflecting keen insight, broad knowledge, and profound faith in God. He believed the church should function in a practical way, with the members developing spiritually, intellectually, and working as a unit. The number of church auxiliaries grew from five in the last 1920s to thirteen in the 1950s. Missionary work reached beyond the local area with some members of the Church participating in regional and national programs.

In 1958, the Church Constitution and By-Laws were adopted, with plans for future revisions in 1973. They provided clearly defined guidelines of the duties of the pastor, officers, committees, and meeting procedures for First Baptist. On November 11, 1971, Reverend G. George Abnathya appeared before the Church officials and was unanimously selected as Associate Minister. He soon became Assistant Pastor. Rev. Abnathya took a keen interest in each of the members and won their admiration. He showed an interest in their hopes and aspirations; and shared in the joys and sorrows of

the entire congregation. Rev. Abnathya was always there when needed. He encouraged the development of new programs and plans for the future of First Baptist Church.

On April 18, 1975, the foundation for a parsonage was poured. Construction of the parsonage was later completed in December 1975. Rev. Schell's long years of service as Pastor ended in retirement on December 20, 1975. In January 1976, Rev. Schell moved into the parsonage and provisions were made for him to reside there until he was called to be with the Lord. Rev. Abnathya was called as pastor on June 20, 1976, with formal installation services being held on June 27, 1976. The congregation who had worked closely with him for five years warmly received him and committed themselves to support his leadership.

In September 1976, a Building Fund was established; in March of 1978, a Planning Committee formed; August 10, 1984, Dill Avenue in Linden was selected as the location to construct the new building. Groundbreaking services for our current building were held on March 24, 1985. Exactly one year, one month, and twenty-four days after groundbreaking the new building was completed.

May 18, 1986 the First Baptist Church family triumphantly marched from the old building located on Lincoln Street to the new structure on Dill Avenue singing praises to God. Dedication services were held on Sunday, March 8, 1987, with approximately eight hundred First Baptist members and friends in attendance.

In 1991, Rev. Abnathya could see and feel that his health was beginning to fade. He had the foresight to call to assist him Reverend Lewis W. Steele. On May 2, 1993, Rev. Abnathya officially retired as pastor. Under his leadership, First Baptist Church

obtained a beautiful edifice and a membership of well over 700. Rev. Lewis W. Steele became “Interim Pastor” of First Baptist Church on May 23, 1993. On January 9, 1994, Rev. Steele was called as Pastor of First Baptist Church with installation services being held March 6, 1994. Pulpit associates Rev. Frederick Person, DD; Rev. Clarence W. Bauknight Sr.; Rev. Wanda King, and Minister Christine Hardy were appointed to share clergy responsibilities.

Reverend Derrick R. Dumas was installed as the eighth pastor of First Baptist Church on February, 13, 2011. It’s evident, that God’s Word is the foundation of his ministry. His desire is to help families to grow through preaching, teaching, and practical application of God’s Word. Under his direction, the congregation is “Moving Forward by Faith: Pressing Toward the Mark”... Philippians 3:14.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

As a new Pastor entering into a new environment, I felt as though that I was ultimately responsible for making everything right in the church. In order to be effective in my ministerial assignment I thought that it would be necessary for me to identify what I believed to be faults and flaws in our congregation and work towards resolution. Fresh out of seminary, armed with a degree, a bible and a DMIN project to implement, I viewed my role to be that of a resident technician equipped to fix a people who were broken. It did not take long before that lofty but faulty idea of ministry began to fade. Upon further reflection I discovered that seminary does not necessarily prepare you for the reality of ministry as experienced in a given congregation. There are some things about the pastorate that must be learned on the job.

My interaction and involvement with the people in the three years that I've pastored has taught me that I'm not the resident doctor who has been sent to heal the sick and fix the broken. I am not one who sits above the people as a righteous judge that is a mediator of God's judgment, but rather I am one who has been chosen and invited to become a part of a community of people and participate in the growth and development of that community.

In addition to feeling the pressure of having to have the answers for the ills and concerns of our congregation, it is also presumptuous to assume that the bible has all the

answers. The bible is not necessarily a book of answers that can be applied in a systematic way to a corresponding list of problems. The bible is not a tool to be used on people, however it can be utilized as an instrument to help people deal with their pain and see the possibilities of a new reality.

In view of the narrative that emerged from our context, it became obvious that relationships were an area that needed to be addressed. Creating an environment where healing, wholeness and reconciliation were possible would be the object and aim of the project. As I began to listen to the various stories that began to emerge I felt overwhelmed by what I viewed as the responsibility to provide answers. Our congregation needed to understand the meaning of reconciliation, but they also needed a model of reconciliation to see how reconciliation in human relationships could be made possible.

The Meaning of Reconciliation – Our Relationship with God

The primary biblical text that serves as the foundation upon which this project stands is in II Corinthians 5:18, 19 and it says:

And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.¹

This verse forms the basis for how and why relationships can be repaired and restored in the context of Christian community. Our positions in Christ, as being reconciled to God, is the basis of our practice as agents of reconciliation being entrusted

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 KJV.

with both the ministry and the word of reconciliation that can be utilized to build stronger and healthier relationships within community.

In understanding Paul's theology of reconciliation, it is necessary to examine the biblical context in which Paul utilized the word. The word reconciliation is utilized multiple times by Paul in his epistles to various congregations. The word in the original language is *katallage* which means to change, "A change or reconciliation from a state of enmity to one of friendship. It is the result of redemption, the divine act of salvation, the ceasing of God's wrath."² It is a result of God's work of taking upon himself our sin and establishing a relationship of peace with humanity. "Reconciliation signifies the changing of places, coming over from one side to the other. Used of ourselves, the word implies changing the judicial status from one of estrangement and condemnation to one of acceptance and justification."³

It is difficult to define reconciliation because of its very dependence upon the situation and or circumstances that form the context for which reconciliation is required. Reconciliation will mean something different in different situation. A prodigal son who returns home to his father is one example of a form of reconciliation. The divided South African nation that institutionalized the discriminatory practice of apartheid who as the result of the sacrifices and struggles of a man named Nelson Mandela and a people determined to seek freedom now live together in unity and experience liberation is another form of reconciliation. I would define reconciliation as being the coming together

² Spiros Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991), 1727.

³ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 191.

of two disparate parties to experience relationship in a new way. “It has to do with the process of overcoming alienation through identification and in solidarity with ‘the other’, thus making peace and restoring relationships.”⁴

Reconciliation can be understood as being both spiritual and strategic. It is experienced spiritually as a result of the atoning work of Jesus Christ which puts humanity in relationship with God. As a result of this work, one experiences new life in Christ where one’s damaged humanity is both restored and renewed enabling one to experience life on a new level. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church says “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”⁵ Reconciliation in this sense does not mean that as a result of God’s work that we are brought back to the same place we were prior to the relationship between God and humanity being ruptured, rather it is in the restoration of a damaged humanity that involves transforming a painful experience that will always be with us into a new reality. Reconciliation is not the denial or the erasure of memory, but rather it involves the transformation of memory whereby we view our experience through the lens of reconciliation enabling us to move forward in a positive way.

Reconciliation is also strategic whereby a reconciled people participate in the ministry of reconciliation works to create the conditions and cultivating an environment where reconciliation can be a reality that is experienced in the context of community. The ministry of reconciliation is not merely a technique that is learned and practiced in and of ourselves, rather Reconciliation as a strategic practice must always rely on the work of

⁴ John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation Restoring Justice* (St. Albans Place: SCM Press, 2002), 51.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV.

God. As a reconciled community, the church becomes the instrument and agent through who God works to reconcile the world to himself and make reconciliation between others possible.

Reconciliation in human relationships is the process whereby the broken or damaged relationship between a perpetrator and a victim is restored. It requires participation between two parties. There is no guarantee that attempts to reconcile a relationship will be met with receptivity. The possibility of rejection does not absolve one from the responsibility of seeking reconciliation. John W. Gruchy in his book entitled *Reconciliation* says:

Reconciliation, then, is more than a theological code-word for God's work of restoring men and women to himself; it refers to a way of life to which Christians are called in the world, sharing in God's work of Reconciliation.⁶

A Model for Reconciliation – Our Responsibility

God's work of reconciliation is to be lived out in the context of our world by those who have been reconciled. Reconciliation is not only experiential, but it is also expressive in our words and in our actions. Paul says that we have been entrusted as stewards, with the ministry of reconciliation, the work, and the message of reconciliation, our words. Therefore reconciliation is both an announcement and an activity that seeks the healing, wholeness and bringing together of those who are alienated in the context of human relationships. When we examined the life and ministry of Jesus we discovered that this occurred in three primary ways that provide a model for us to follow. (1) It involved incarnational pursuit, (2) selfless submission and (3) sacrificial giving. If healing, wholeness and restoration of healthy relationships in the communal context of

⁶ John W. Gruchy, *Reconciliation* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 55.

the church is going to be a reality, I believe Jesus provides us an example that can be implemented in personal relationships.

Incarnational pursuit requires that one takes the initiative to pursue the healing and wholeness that brokenness requires in human relationships. Jesus is the greatest example of that in that he came from heaven to earth to reconcile the broken relationship between heaven and humanity. God was not satisfied with nor settled with the brokenness that existed in the relationship between heaven and humanity. The pursuer does not wait for the pursued to apologize or extend a request for forgiveness, but rather for the sake of the relationship initiates the reconciliation process. The offended, God, initiates the reconciliation process by pursuing the offender. This is counter-culture in that what is common in human relationships is that the offended waits to be pursued by the offender.

Healing broken relationships requires that we take the same initiative that Jesus took when he came to where we are in order to reconcile the broken relationship between God and man and enter into the lives of others in order to be instrumental in bringing about wholeness in human relationships.

The model of reconciliation also involves selfless submission whereby one party relinquishes its rights in order for the sake of reconciling a broken relationship. Paul when encouraging the Philippian church to be of one mind and one accord utilizes the example of Jesus Christ when he says “Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, found it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in

the fashion as a man, he humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross.”⁷ The reconciliation in human relationships requires humility. Humility in that one selflessly relinquishes his or her rights for the sake of the relationship. It is a mindset that values the priority of human relationship above personal pride or ego.

I believe also that the life and ministry of Jesus as espoused in the gospels provides a model for reconciliation in human relationships in that Jesus demonstrates in life an element of sacrificial giving. Reconciliation requires sacrifice in that in order for a broken relationship to be restored it is going to cost something. The bible says when speaking of Christ “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich.”⁸

The Church is God’s reconciled community that is called to the great work of reconciliation in human relationships. Reconciliation is the breaking down of the barriers of division that separates us. Although it begins with God, it continues through us. God through the work of the Spirit in the life of believers and in the world is working out his eternal plan in bringing about peace and justice in the context of human relationship.

Relationships are the context where the love of God is tangibly demonstrated in the life of the believer. God has created us as relational beings whose lives are intrinsically interwoven together in the fabric of human existence. The Christian community is only as strong as the relationships that are cultivated in context. Authentic community and fellowship is expressed in the relationships that are nurtured and

⁷ Phil. 2: 11-8 KJV.

⁸ 2 Cor. 8:9 KJV.

cultivated in the church. Jesus said “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”⁹

Our love for God is exemplified relationally in our love for each other. One of the great privileges that we have as Christians is the privilege of being able to live in community together as the Church. The bond of solidarity that we share as brothers and sisters is something that must not be taken for granted. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic book entitled *Life Together*, in describing Christian community says “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ He continues to define what this statement means when he says “It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.”¹¹

I believe that one of the greatest gifts that God has given humanity is the gift of each other. Relationships were so important to God and Jesus Christ that Jesus when speaking of the greatest of commandments declares “The Lord your God is one. Love your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Our relationship with God and our relationships with each other are of the utmost importance and priority. Bonhoeffer

⁹ John 13:35 NIV.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 21.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

suggests that the very basis and possibility of relationship finds itself rooted and grounded in Christ.

The first step in reconciliation is to be reconciled to God. Our relationship with God is the grounds by which a healthy relationship can be maintained with each other. Jesus in one sense is the glue that holds relationships together by uniting us with God and uniting us to our fellowman. The Church is God's new humanity, reconciled community charged with being instruments and agents of reconciliation in human relationships.

CHAPTER 4

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Post-Modern Narrative Research

Objective

The objective of post-modern narrative research is to utilize research techniques that will uncover the main narrative of concern or opportunity in a given communal context. Every congregation, community of faith, has a story that has emerged over time from its communal context. “It is our belief that, in order for faith communities to define themselves and to know what to do in ministry, they must first understand the multiple stories which intersect with a given ministry situation in their specific context.”¹ The identity of a given faith community is intrinsically tied to its communal story that is based upon shared experience in a given communal context. To discern and discover the multiple stories that emerge from a given context can be instrumental in determining the role and responsibility a faith community has in the work of the ministry. In order to accomplish this in-depth congregational study is required. Larry A. Goleman says that “congregational studies are a field within theological education that combines methods of

¹ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 25.

sociology, anthropology, management theory, and practical theology to understand the culture, social dynamics, and ministry of local congregations.”²

Postmodern narrative research seeks to discover communal meaning and purpose of a given faith community by examining the stories and relationships that have evolved over time. These stories, for some who have been a part of the community, have become the very foundation upon which faith is formed. This approach seeks to not only discover present reality, but to examine the past to discern how the perception of the present reality in context has been formulated or influenced by the stories associated with its past. In order to accomplish this it is necessary to observe the network of relationships both past and present that exists while engaging in the work of listening to the stories. The ultimate aim is to bridge the gap between narrative research and practical theology in order to help a faith community to transform its narrative enabling it to experience a new reality based upon vision and purpose as it progresses into the future. “If narratives are the stories that shape our memory, practices are the pathways shape our lives into the future.”³ Listening to the stories that emerge from a given faith community helped us understand an individual’s pilgrimage of faith, a church’s past history and interaction with its community, and the various church traditions that shape its ministry. Listening to the narratives in a given faith community is done not simply to reclaim the past, but to utilize it to help discern present reality while imagining the possibilities of a new reality in the future. Diana Butler Bass who has done extensive work in the field of study Christian congregations says that “Tradition is embodied in practices. And practices

² Larry A. Goleman, *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Change* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2010), 2.

³ Larry A. Golemon, *Finding Our Story* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2010), 7.

convey meaning through narrative. Without stories, tradition and practice would mean either nothing or everything. And stories – both about the past and the future – are crafted through the imagination.”⁴

Process

There were two primary research approaches utilized in the process. (1) The post-modern narrative research approach espoused by Dr. Carl Savage and Dr. William Presnell in their book entitled *Narrative Research in Ministry* and (2) Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice espoused by Mary Clark Mochella in her book entitled *Ethnography*. The postmodern narrative research approach suggests that “community is the locus of meaning in the postmodern sense. It provides the context of experience, which is the framework that interprets.”⁵ It is important that “community” be defined appropriately in order to effectively apply approach. The community referred to in this project is the current congregational membership of First Baptist Church of Linden NJ. The Lay Advisory Committee was formulated with members that make up a cross-section of our congregation.

Evoking stories from a given faith community is a process whereby the leader must consider his or her own story. This is necessary because self-understanding will ultimately be the lens through which one visualizes and interprets the narrative that emerges from a faith community’s context. Some of the elements utilized in the postmodern research approach by leaders/researchers are summarized below:

⁴ Larry A. Golemon, *Finding Our Story*, 7

⁵ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 40.

1. The leader/researcher is a *story broker*. By drawing out the multiple narratives that intersect around a concern or opportunity, the researcher facilitates a faith community's negotiation between a *problem saturated story* (an existing negative state or condition that concerns them or a potential not yet realized) and a *preferred, emerging story* (a new state or condition that excites them and advances God's ministry among them).
2. The postmodern leader/researcher assumes a *kenotic position* as handler of people's stories. That is, to the extent possible, the researcher empties her/himself of preconceptions, paradigms of interpretation or presumptions about stories that emerge.
3. The leader/researcher remains as self-differentiated and non-reactive as possible. When people share their stories they frequently come into conflict with those whose outlook on a concern or opportunity is quite different from their own.

This process is helpful in enabling the researcher to obtain insight and understanding of a community or particular religious practice, but it can also be difficult. From a pastoral perspective it is hard to remain objective and without bias when considering one's own experience in communal context. While this approach is necessary to evoke congregation stories, it can be difficult to view them through unbiased lenses divorcing your own experience in context.

“Ethnography is a way of immersing yourself in the life of a people in order to learn something about them. Ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening your eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith.”⁶ It is the process of spending time in observation while utilizing clarifying questions that seek to comprehend the meaning of religious practice as exemplified within a given context. These religious practices are not found in the documented creeds or faith statements of a church, but rather these practices are observed in the outward expression of activity that has been repeatedly done over time and has become a part of the church's tradition. The

⁶ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 4.

ethnographic approach is a necessary step in gaining insight into the motivation that lies behind religious practice. Implementing such an approach requires both patience and time.

The difficulty in applying the ethnographic approach that arose in our communal context at First Baptist Church as a new leader was that it is difficult to reconcile the tension that exist between members who are very hungry for change with members who simultaneously held onto traditional views and practices. The difficulty for a new leader is to intentionally take enough time to immerse oneself into a given environment and patiently observe prior to implementing the very change that maybe demanded by some members. This requires discipline and discernment that is difficult to maintain while one finds themselves suspended between the vice grips of a congregation's opposing views.

Ethnography as a pastoral practice can also be instrumental in helping a leader build a diverse community where relationships are valued. This can be accomplished when a leader has spent sufficient examining the similarities and differences that exist in a given context. Careful observation can help a leader focus a divided congregation on building upon what people have in common developing mutual bond of understanding, as opposed to focusing on differences that divide. Ultimately helping a community to view it's diversity as an asset and not a liability. Building strong relational bonds in a given faith community requires that diversity is acknowledged and appreciated as opposed to perpetuating a theory that emerges from the selfish pursuits of some that seeks communal conformity. "Theorist in the field of intercultural counseling describes something analogous when they talk about "interpathy." Interpathy requires the listener to notice

differences between one's own and the counselee's cultural experience, rather trying to collapse them into a false bond based on the idea that "we are all the same."⁷

The post-modern narrative research approach while effective seemed to be more interrogative and relied on direct solicitation of information from those members in context, whereas the ethnographic approach was based more upon observation and required the researcher to spend adequate time in the research setting to adequately familiarize the researcher with the environment and behavior of those in context. In my analysis it is an approach that is to be engaged in over a longer period of time to yield the most effective results.

I met with our Lay Advisory Committee in November 2012 to begin the process of evoking stories from our faith community's context. The data collected would come from two primary sources: Lay Advisory Committee interviews and a subsequent survey distributed to the entire adult congregation. I utilized both the post narrative and ethnographic approach in preparing interrogative questions that would be utilized in eliciting their stories while observing the interaction between LAC members. Developing the research questions to be utilized required the careful observation of the people in community, the environment and the priorities that exemplify themselves in the faith community's activity.

The primary research questions utilized in the interview with the LAC to begin our conversation in discerning the First Baptist Church narrative were as follows:

⁷ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 36.

1. How would you characterize your personal experience as a member of this church?
2. How would you describe the current state of the church?
3. Is there a relationship with the historical past that has shaped or influenced the present reality?
4. How would you characterize the relationships that exist within this church? Leadership both past and present? And the Church's impact and influence, both past and present, in the city of Linden?

The initial meeting with the LAC was one that had a strong emotional response. As I began to ask clarifying questions based upon my initial observations of FBC, our journey into the past elicited feelings of both pride and pain.

I did not realize how passionate people were about the church and their experience here. The diverse composition of the group made it possible to get a holistic portrait of FBC from different perspectives. It became apparent from the outset that there were some deep seeded divisions that have settled into this congregation. These meetings were therapeutic in the sense that it gave congregants an opportunity to express themselves openly and honestly about the current state of the church. Some of the issues discussed in our meeting brought team members to tears. I did not realize it at the time, but team members affirmed the validity of our meetings and conversations and viewed them as a necessary step for our congregation to heal and move forward.

The challenges that emerged from our conversations are centered on the lack of strong pastoral leadership, church division and disunity, and the need for healing,

wholeness and restoration of congregational relationships. In lieu of the challenges that emerged, there were also fond memories of the influential impact FBC had in the community in years past. There was great admiration and appreciation expressed by LAC members for the pastoral leadership of Rev. George Abnathya. His life and legacy is still having an impact on the FBC congregation today.

As First Baptist Church seeks to move forward, there are opportunities to build upon the strong commitment and dedication exemplified in some of the senior members that have contributed to rich history of this church while developing new members and mentoring our youth.

Narrative of Opportunity

I was installed as the eighth pastor of First Baptist Church on February 13th, 2011. First Baptist Church of Linden NJ has had a rich history in the Linden community and beyond for ninety one years. In my three years as Pastor, I have heard from various sources in the church, community and beyond regarding the glorious past that this church once enjoyed. It was regarded as one of the flourishing churches in the state of New Jersey active in both Local and State Baptist conventions.

Under the effective leadership of Reverend George Abanathya, First Baptist Church moved from its original building located on Lincoln Street in Linden to its new and present edifice on Dill Avenue where its sanctuary now seats 1000. Under the leadership of Reverend Abanathya, the membership of FBC had grown to over 800 active members. The music ministry at FBC was renowned throughout the state of New Jersey and beyond working with accomplished contemporary recording artist on

various projects. While the church continued to flourish, Reverend Abanathya became ill and soon lost his battle with cancer.

Challenges with church leadership have had an adverse impact on the FBC congregation. For the next fifteen years the church began to spiral downward, this ultimately led to many people abandoning the church during this time. In listening to the different voices from within the church and those who are a part of the Linden community who have been impacted by its ministry, it is extremely clear that there is a desire for the church to return to the glory years it once enjoyed. There is a desire and yearning for FBC to become the productive and progressive Church that has had a definite impact on the community in which it dwells.

This congregation went without a Pastor for four years prior to my arrival. This has been instrumental in creating an environment characterized by distrust and division as people sought to maintain control according to personal agendas. Because of the pain that the church endured under the previous leader, I have discovered that the relationships between pastor and people, and people and people have suffered significantly. There is a prevalent need and opportunity for relationships to be healed, rebuilt and restored. Trust that had been invested in leadership was betrayed and there needs to be an intentional effort to restore trust and build relationships between pastor and people.

Goal of Narrative Research

The primary goal of narrative research is to help a congregation examine and reflect upon individual faith journeys, the historical truth of its church's past and tradition while

also examining the influence and impact the church has had upon its community. This is helpful in enabling a faith community to examine its past while discerning its meaning in the present and imagining a new future. According to Diana Butler Bass, key outcomes that are the result of careful examination of the narratives that emerge from storytelling are as follows:

1. Past stories of decline or struggle are reframed with promise.
2. Church leaders shape stories of meaning by interweaving personal, communal, and biblical accounts.
3. Leaders shape these stories through their own character, but in ways that invite others to place their lives in service to their church community.
4. The truth of the stories is shown primarily through the authenticity of leaders and the integrity of members as they lived them out.⁸

The narrative research process allowed members of First Baptist Church to reflect upon and express the stories associated with the church as they experienced them. It was a painful but profitable task that acknowledged past failures and successes while allowing the Lay Advisory Committee the opportunity to express personal feelings related to their personal experiences in the church. Committee members expressed their belief that the lack of strong pastoral leadership after the death of Rev. George Abanathya, and the immediate four year tenure the church endured without a pastor as created an environment characterized by disunity and distrust. Schisms in the church that have developed along family lines and people's pursuit of power and agenda have served to hinder the growth and health of this church. Research reveals that before the church can move forward, there must be time spent allowing the church to heal.

⁸ Larry A. Golemon, *Finding Our Story*, 8.

Relationships must be reconciled and trust between congregants and leadership must be reestablished. This process helped people talk openly for the first time in a long time regarding the pain and hurt experienced in its recent past, but it also gave them an opportunity to look forward to a healthy future. It will be necessary for leadership to help people heal and become whole while helping them to also envision a new future based upon reconciled relationships and renewed hope.

The challenge that I face as a new pastor is to recognize that where I am presently serving at First Baptist Church in Linden, NJ is not the same place that I served in the past. The culture, systems and structures that influence behavior are radically different. It is easy to make assumptions regarding culture based upon one's past experience. The people are different, the processes are different and the nature of relationships is different as well.

I spent 18 years serving in different capacities at Calvary Baptist Church in Morristown, NJ under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Jerry Carter Jr. During this formational time for me I was immersed into the culture that existed at Calvary. I spent time understanding the history and the traditions associated with the church. I became intimately acquainted with the families and members that made up the congregation of the church. Spending adequate time in observation equipped me with the knowledge and skill that enabled me to minister effectively in the setting. It became obvious to me in my short tenure as Pastor that we were not speaking the same language. My background and training influenced the language that I spoke, while tradition and church history influenced the language that the congregation spoke. Pastoral bias can lead one to believe that there is a right way and a wrong way when it comes to discerning cultural

communication, but I recognized that our differences in communication were not the result of some deficiency but were the product of people coming from different cultures communicating in different ways. I learned that our differences were not necessarily a problem that had to be solved, rather an opportunity to learn and grow within context.

I believe that investing the appropriate amount of time to understand the culture in which you minister can be instrumental in developing an informed ministry that effectively meets the needs of a congregation. As a new Pastor I believe it is important to recognize that the Pastor is not necessarily a practitioner who dispenses bible prescriptions in a given context, but rather the Pastor becomes a participant in context and participates in the development of a community of faith. The vision or idea one has for a given congregation will only be successful if it is received in the culture and climate in which it is planted.

The approach and methodology utilized in this project is aimed at building stronger and healthier relationships in our church. My goal is to help First Baptist Church become a reconciled community where healing and wholeness can be made possible. My approach will involve (1) Utilizing positive images to help First Baptist Church to examine and reimagine it's present reality in regards to relationships while embracing the possibility of working together towards a new future in building both a reconciled and redemptive community. (2) Identifying and redefining processes in a way that promotes relationship development and (3) Create forums where people can communicate and interact with each other in order to promote reconciliatory practice without the fear of retribution.

In view of the narrative of opportunity that is the basis for this project, the approach I utilized involves three distinct components: (1) Discerning church culture; (2) Cultivating wholeness; (3) Examination and application of post-modern approaches in reconciliation.

One of the inherent challenges that a new pastor faces upon assuming leadership responsibility of a given congregation is to understand the composition and the culture of the church to which you are called to serve. In order to minister efficiently and effectively, sufficient time must be invested in careful observation to be able to comprehend the environment, culture and the ministerial setting that serves to define the existence of the church. Culture is defined as “a particular form of civilization, the beliefs, customs, arts, and institutions of a society at a given time.”⁹ It is something that is developed over time and is exemplified in a congregation’s beliefs and practice.

Discerning Church Culture

Samuel R. Chand in his book entitled *Cracking Your Church’s Culture Code* says “Culture- not vision or strategy- is the most powerful factor in any organization. It determines the receptivity of staff and volunteers to new ideas, unleashes or dampens creativity, builds or erodes enthusiasm, and creates a sense of pride or deep discouragement about working or being involved there. Ultimately, the culture of an organization- particularly in churches and nonprofit organizations, but also in any organization- shapes individual morale, teamwork, effectiveness, and outcomes.”¹⁰ Oftentimes leaders fail to properly estimate the influence culture has on the receptivity of

⁹ Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 170.

¹⁰ Samuel R. Chand, *Cracking Your Church’s Culture Code* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 2.

vision. Leaders spend an enormous amount of time in preparation, but little time considering the culture of the church that you've been called to minister.

As a new pastor in my first year of ministry I made many assumptions about the church that was solely based upon my past experience. I assumed that our church's finances were controlled and managed under a budget developed and maintained by the board of trustees, this was a false assumption. I felt prepared to undertake my ministerial responsibilities, but I was not prepared to fully comprehend that culture of the church I was called to lead. I believe that understanding the culture of a given church takes both time and trials that reveal nature of culture oftentimes in the crucible of crisis. In being in my pastoral position for three years, I'm in the infancy stages of discerning the culture that exists at First Baptist Church of Linden, NJ. It is an evolving relationship that based upon a developing mutual trust between pastor and people.

The people are the most important asset of a church. "Many leaders confuse culture with vision and strategy, but they are very different. Vision and strategy usually focus on products, services, and outcomes, but culture is about the people- the most valuable asset in the organization."¹¹ While this may seem obvious to some, people are an asset that oftentimes is taken for granted. In pursuit of results, the development of programs, the expansion of ministry and the growth of the church, the people of the church can be overlooked in favor of the programming of the church. New pastors in their desire to make an immediate impact, often seek to implement programs and plans without considering the people to whom they are designed to minister. Our preaching and

¹¹ Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code*, 4.

our programs go nowhere without people. Implementation must always include careful consideration for the culture and the people to whom ministry is being offered.

One of the observations I made while engaging in this project is that there seemed to be division between the leadership and the laity in the church. The relationship between people who occupy leadership positions in the church, and the people who occupy the pews seemed to be strained at best. There was no initial discussion as to why this was the case, but there seemed to be almost a blatant disrespect that was inconspicuous in nature but became obvious over time. People's reaction or response to various leader's suggestions or mere comments had negative connotations. Without understanding fully the history and the contemporary context in which the church now functions, it was difficult to comprehend the basis for such a rift.

In considering the seven elements espoused by Chand that can be utilized to gain insight into a church's culture, I developed a list of questions that was to be asked to both leaders and laity in order to understand the situation.

1. Who are the leaders in the church?
2. How is leadership determined?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of leaders in the church? Have they been defined and clearly communicated to both leadership and laity?
4. Who is responsible for making decisions? Is there a decision making process in place?
5. What is the perception of leadership held by laity? What are the expectations of leadership?

6. Does laity have any input into the direction and vision associated with the church?
7. Is there a forum of communication that exists between leadership and laity?
8. Who are the power brokers in the church who do not have titles? How did they attain their status?
9. What is the morale of the congregation?
10. How does the congregation feel about the direction of the church?

This list of questions was not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a starting point utilized to gain insight into the culture of our church while serving as a catalyst for more questions to emerge. Culture although often unnoticed is the most influential factor that exists in any church and can have a determinative factor on how the vision of a pastor is received. Careful consideration of culture, the beliefs, customs and traditions, can have a positive impact on the ministry of a church.

In my conversations and interviews with various congregants, there seemed to be a lack of trust in leadership as to the direction that the church was headed in. Prior to my arrival, the church languished without a pastor for four years. According to membership, fifteen years prior to that the former pastor lacked leadership skills required to unify the church and help move the church forward. The consensus of both leadership and laity was that they had been without a pastor for nineteen years.

The lack of leadership caused division and schisms in the church as people fought among themselves regarding the future of the church. Oftentimes leadership and laity clashed when it came to the direction of the church. The lack of respect and trust that was prevalent in relationship between members stifled the church from progressing positively into its future. The challenge I inherited was to rebuild trust and earn the respect of the

people in order to be instrumental as a leader in healing relationships while moving the church forward in a positive direction. “The intangibles of respect and trust transform a church culture into a beehive of thinking, creating, and working together to accomplish grand goals.”¹²

In my pursuit to discern the culture in the church, it was not only necessary for me to examine the relationship between leadership and laity, but it also became necessary for me to understand the language utilized in the church as well. Language is a vehicle of communication that if misinterpreted can become a source of division. Conversely, language can be a key element upon which relationships can be built. It is difficult for to parties speaking different languages to communicate effectively.

Understanding the culture of any congregation is to understand the idiom utilized in context by a given congregation. It is difficult to communicate if pastor and people are not speaking the same language. Idiom is defined as “(1) a language that is peculiar to a people, district, community or class. (2) An expression in the use of a language that is peculiar to itself either grammatically or having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements. (3) A style or form of artistic expression that is characteristic of an individual, a period or movement or a medium or instrument.”¹³ Care must be taken not to take the language utilized in given community for granted. Personal assumptions regarding speech or artistic expression do not always equate to mutual understanding. To understand the idiom in a given location requires that a leader must spend time listening to the people’s speech in order to determine meaning.

¹² Chand, *Cracking Your Church’s Culture Code*, 13.

¹³“idiom.” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed October 15, 2013, www.Merriam-Webster.com.

One of the challenges that emerged initially for me was my inability to fully comprehend and speak the language of my congregation. I assumed the idiom, dialect and language that I was accustomed to using in my previous church was synonymous that of my new environment. This seemed like the natural assumption for me in that I was never taught anything differently. I assumed that my understanding was synonymous with the people's understanding.

The terms and symbols utilized in worship and the interpretation and meaning of such terms became a source of division. James F. Hopewell in his book entitled, *Congregation*, says "As slight and predictable as the language of a congregation might seem on casual inspection, it actually reflects a complex process of human imagination. Each is a negotiation of metaphors, a field of tales and histories and meanings that identify its life, its world, and God."¹⁴ The language utilized in a given congregation can be a significant element in distinguishing itself from other congregations around it or like it. Understanding the idiom of a congregation is essential in understanding the narrative, both past and present, associated with the church.

One of the challenges that I had in the church had to do with my misinterpretation of the church's idiom or dialect as it related to our church's history. Language is not only verbal, but rather it also can be expressed artistically with symbols that convey a visible meaning that transcends words. In our fellowship hall there is a visible collection of pictures and documents that represent the history of First Baptist Church. It is an informative presentation that retells the story of the church with both pictures and documents. For the senior members of our congregation this presentation is

¹⁴ James F. Hopewell, *Congregation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 5.

representative of their only connection to the perceived glory days of our church. It is a symbolic and cherished relic of the past. However there are younger members in the congregation who respect and cherish the history of the church as well, but did not necessarily agree with how it was displayed within the church. This group thought that the way it was displayed was embarrassing and did not necessarily represent the best that the church could do.

I must admit I was somewhat biased in my opinion in that I believed that the history could have been displayed in a more professional manner, but being new I did not necessarily want to rock the boat. As my one year anniversary was rapidly approaching the artistic visual expression of the church's history once again became an issue. In preparing the room for the reception after the worship service the committee recommended that we cover the history in order to make the room more aesthetically pleasing to the eye. As a new pastor I went along with the suggestion of the committee without really understanding the ramifications of such an action. My intentions were not aimed at disrespecting the history of the church, but rather at the appropriate time my plan was to organize a committee that would work to enhance the presentation of the history in such a way as to bring honor and glory to God and pride and enthusiasm to our congregation and community. This was a lesson learned for me in that I did not fully understand the idiom associated with artistic expression that meant different things for different people in the church. I assumed that my sentiments and understanding of what the display meant was shared by all and understood by all. It took a meeting with all parties after the fact to explain my motives and express my ultimate desires which led to the reconciliation of the two groups.

Discerning church culture also involves examining the family structures and the inter-connected web of relationships that form the basis of congregation and community. The church is often referred to as a family. Within every family there are structures, systems and dynamics which serve to define how the family functions within a given context. The congregation is ultimately made up of individual people who are apart of individual families that function within themselves as well as in relation to other families. Understanding family dynamics in the church is vital to understanding the culture of a church. There are significant contributions made by significant people and families within the church that have served to establish ritual and tradition that deserve recognition and respect.

Family dynamics lay at the very foundation upon which the church's culture exists. As a pastor, I'm apart of three distinct but connected families: my own immediate family, our congregation, and the families that are within the congregation. Each individual in the church is an extension of his or her family. This is significant for our understanding because in dealing with individuals, you are also dealing with the family influences and emotional processes that impact behavior.

Initially when I came to First Baptist Church, I was unaware of the family divisions and family influences that had an impact on the congregational life as a whole. I initially tried to treat and visualize people as individuals without consideration of the families that they were connected to. One of the challenges that emerged while observing the relationships within our context is that there are families in the church that do not get along. It was not obvious as to why there seemed to be such division and apathy between families, but it became apparent that schisms and divisions in the church fell along family

lines. Cliques and segregated groups seemed to be entrenched in the congregation based upon familial connection and personal agenda. This manifested itself in the congregation in the form of personal disputes between families, voting for or against a proposal depending on who proposed it, and the clinging to traditional approaches without considering new approaches that could be beneficial to the church.

Edwin H. Friedman in his book entitled *Generation to Generation*, suggests that to deal with problems associated with families in community that it will be necessary to take a family therapy approach. “This approach deemphasizes the notion that our conflicts and anxieties are due primarily to the make-up of our personalities, and suggests, instead, that our individual problems have more to do with our relational networks, the make-up of others’ personalities, where we stand in the relational system, and how we function within that position. It understands the symptom bearer to be only the “identified” patient and the person’s problem to be symptomatic of something askew in the family itself.”¹⁵ This approach in understanding the causation associated with family dysfunction in a given context calls for one to look beyond the symptoms that can be responsible for division and examine the relational networks and emotional process that may be the root cause of divisive behavior. In an effort to remedy a divisive situation and dysfunctional behavior it is tempting to deal initially with symptoms without discovering and dealing with the cause. Relational networks and the interactions between family members may be the cause of dysfunctional behavior exemplified in the congregation that leads to division. In order for a pastor or any leader to effectively deal with family dysfunction that can manifest itself in congregational division, it becomes

¹⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 13.

necessary for the leader to view the family as system or network of interconnected relationships as opposed to a group of individual personalities. This enables the leader to look beyond symptoms and examine the family as a system of relationships that affect individual behavior.

In an effort to further discern church culture it becomes necessary to also examine the external influences that have the potential to impact congregational behavior. The location of church, the political influences and the relationships with other churches in Linden all are cultural influences that impact how decisions are made within our congregation. Culture can be defined as “a complex system of assumptions, practices, stories, and beliefs that guide how a common people think and act as well as what they value.”¹⁶ One source of conflict can be found when a church attempts to function according to the cultural standards established by the world. The church is a community founded upon the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is governed by God as its authority and operates according to another set of assumptions and practices that differentiate it from the world. *Cultural Syncretism* is the result of the church functioning according to the dictates and demands of the world that surrounds it. *Syncretism* is defined as being “the uncritical combination of two or more different, often opposing, beliefs and practices into one.”¹⁷ When the values and the practices of the world infiltrate the church, the church ceases to be the church God intended it to be and ultimately it experiences conflict with itself. Secular structures and systems must be utilized with caution and observed carefully to ensure that they do not undermine the

¹⁶ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002), 28.

¹⁷ Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 29.

purpose of the church which is not based upon the secular idea of individualism, but rather seeks to meet the needs of others in community.

Cultivating Wholeness

The Pastor's responsibility in leading a congregation can be compared to that of a gardener. Before any gardener engages in the work of planting seed, the gardener first engages in the work of preparing the soil in which the seed is to be planted. If the seed to be planted is going to take root and sprout up and bear fruit, it must be planted in fertile and prepared ground. The gardener must carefully consider the composition and the condition of the soil that he or she intends to plant. Prior to planting the seeds of vision the ground of community must be properly prepared. In order to cultivate wholeness in the ground of community of our church, I have discovered during this project that there are three elements that can be instrumental in preparing or cultivating wholeness in community: (1) Listening (2) Learning and (3) Leading.

Among the many systems and subsystems that dictate how the church functions and operates, the emotional system is primarily the one that has the greatest impact and influence on church operation. The way people feel often influences how people think, and how people think impacts how people act. Detecting and analyzing a Church's emotional system is often difficult because it is not something that is visible initially, but ultimately manifest itself symptomatically in either a positive or negative response by congregants to a given set of circumstances.

As a leader in our Christian community and given the linguistic and familial challenges that has served to erode relationships and cause division, it was my

responsibility to cultivate the communal ground of our church to bring about wholeness and reconciliation. I began by listening intently to what congregants had to say. Beyond our Lay Advisory Committee, I scheduled meetings, formal and informal, with different members of the congregation to hear their perspectives on the health of relationships within our congregation. I met with individuals from the different families where family differences and divisions were evident to hear their perspective on the cause of division. These meetings were not only informative and provided a great deal of insight, but they were also therapeutic in enabling people to express their thoughts and emotions. I did not realize it at the time, but giving people an opportunity to be heard can be a positive step in cultivating wholeness in a congregation.

What I learned in these various meetings was both insightful and informative. It became evident as a result of these conversations that the four year period of time where our congregation was without pastoral leadership, the lack of leadership became a mitigating factor that led to a deep divide in relationships in the church. People began to utilize this period as an opportunity to push their personal agendas within the church. Family divides and discontentment with the leadership of the church during this time began to surface and leadership began to be questioned and challenged. As a result of the turmoil many members left the church and joined other churches in the area.

Ronald W. Richardson in his book entitled, *Creating a Healthier Church*, says that:

It is essential that leaders in a church be aware of how the emotional system operates in their own congregation. They need to be aware of the part they play in

the emotional system and how they can become a more constructive force for improving the emotional life of the church.¹⁸

Conflicts and problems in the church often result in emotional instability that challenges both leadership and pastoral authority. The response of leadership to such challenges that can result in conflict and turmoil will be instrumental in determining the outcome of emotional imbalance. Oftentimes the leader becomes the target of the church's anger or dissatisfaction associated with a change or decision that's been made. It is natural for the leader to view such anger as a personal attack, but it becomes necessary to take a holistic approach and view this anger and resentment from a systems perspective that seeks to identify the problem as deficiency within the emotional system within the church.

Emotional system imbalance was exemplified within our communal context in the distrust and disrespect for the pastoral office. Because of past experience the relationship between pastor and people became contentious at best. Initially I did not comprehend why certain decisions that were made by the consensus of the leadership team were viewed by the congregants in negative ways. I could not quite understand why decisions that I made as pastor which I believed would enhance the ministry of the church was met with resistance from the people and I began to take them personally. I began to personalize people's behavior and subjectively view it as a negative impact upon myself. I began to have various conversations with both leadership and laity in order to gain insight and hear the church's story from their perspective. I learned after a series of conversations with both the leadership team and the congregation that the problem was

¹⁸ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 29.

not necessarily with the pastor, but the people had a problem with the pastoral office. They had been hurt emotionally and had not healed wholly from their wounds and as a result acted out in ways that were both detrimental and destructive. Until the relationship between pastor and people could be healed, anyone who occupied the office would meet with opposition.

I have learned during this process is that language, meaning verbal and symbolic expression, is a key element that can be instrumental in building stronger and healthier relationships in community when it is understood by those in community. Communication is a key factor utilized in the reconciliation process in that it can be used in a manner that brings people together or it can be used to drive people apart. Words are valuable and expensive and they cannot be taken for grant neither can they be used indiscriminately. Care and consideration must be taken by the leader that seeks to be utilized as an agent of reconciliation. I believe that it is imperative that pastor and people utilize and understand the same language spoken and expressed in context in order to avoid misunderstanding that can lead towards division.

I also learned from listening to different members within our congregation that division and dysfunction can be attributable to “family systems” failures that manifest themselves in divisive symptomatic behavior. Our church functions as a family and contains multiple families within it. Each family being a complex combination of relational networks that influence and impact individual behavior. In order to diagnose the cause of symptomatic behavior in the individual, it becomes necessary to understand the relational network and emotional process that lies at the foundation of an individual’s behavior.

Leading in this environment requires that the leader become an agent of reconciliation leading in the effort to help reconcile and heal broken relationships, but also as an agent of change whereby a new reality for a reconciled community is both visualized and realized through the work of ministry. This work involves helping the community see its need for reconciliation and the healing of broken relationships while imagining the prospects of a new community that lives in harmonious relationship with God and each other. In order for this to be realized there must be a *paradigm shift* in community. Research has revealed that people change in two primary ways. There is first order change and there is second order change. “In first order change, people adjust to their present situation. They learn to function better, but their basic situation does not change. A second order change is a paradigmatic shift in which a whole constellation of beliefs, attitudes, and actions are altered because of a new perception of reality.”¹⁹

One of the approaches that I have utilized in this project is to help people visualize the possibility and prospects of a reconciled community by utilizing a thematic approach in my preaching and teaching. I have utilized themes that emphasized both unity and reconciliation in order to communicate truth with the intention in leading the community in a paradigmatic shift in its understanding, appreciation and valuing of relationships. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church, says that the church is one body with many members, with every member being diverse and distinct from one another. While each member may be different, each is significant and plays an important role in the successful functioning of the body as a whole. The diversity of the body does not hinder or have a negative impact on the unity of the body, but rather the diversity and

¹⁹ Margaret Kornfeld, *Cultivating Wholeness* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 7.

distinctiveness of its members is what enables it to function as God intends. Therefore whenever a member of the body ceases to function as God intends in relationship to the other members, the body as a whole suffers. Division in the church can be a destructive force that ceases the body as a whole from functioning as God intends. As a reconciled community, those who have been reconciled must engage in the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us by Christ. The word of reconciliation must be accompanied by the work of reconciliation whereby healing communities can become agents of healing in the world.

Post-Modern Approaches in Reconciliation and Relationships

There are many Christians in our church who find themselves dissatisfied with life in community. In talking with many members of First Baptist Church I discovered that some are disappointed with the state of community as it exists in its present form. Many congregants attend church out of ritualistic practice or traditional loyalties, but find little fulfillment in life as a community. The hierarchical structures and systems people encounter in community does little to foster relationships and build of authentic community.

Discerning congregational culture and seeking to cultivate the ground of community in order to create an environment where stronger and healthier relationships can be established are essential, however the investigation and application of practical approaches utilized in reconciliation and the building of a relational community is a necessity that must be pursued. As I considered the scope of this project, I struggled with

what process and or strategy could be employed to accomplish the desired end of building a relational church.

My definition of a relational church is one where people are encouraged to develop strong relationships with other members and freely interact relationally with one another without fear or intimidation. I believe that the development of such an environment in the church is instrumental in helping people mature in their faith and fully enjoy the benefits of being an authentic part of Christian community.

Post-modern thought regarding the role of community in the life of believers has led to some practical approaches that are informative and if applied may be influential in cultivating an environment conducive for relationship building. Post-modern thinkers emphasize relationships over rules. Dr. Leonard Sweet “utilizes the word rules to talk about those modern structures we use to create order. A misguided allegiance to rule over relationship has impoverished pursuit of the life of faith for every one of us.”²⁰

First Baptist Church is a traditional church that is has a modern worldview in its approach to ministry and its view of community. By this I mean that the church utilizes traditional systems and structures to define church operation and the roles and responsibilities of its leadership and congregation. The very systems and structures that FBC employs have become instruments of division and discord as opposed to being utilized as agents in building unity. Building relationships in community in the present environment has been very difficult. “In a postmodern context there is a deep distrust for

²⁰ Tim Boal, *Building Authentic Community* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2006), 7.

structures, forms, and traditions. Rules, regulations, and forms are not nearly important to the postmodern mind as relationships.”²¹

Reimagining Reality and Redefining Process

One of the challenges a new pastor faces is helping a congregation visualize the possibilities of a new reality. Before any change can be effected in community, people have to see it as having a positive impact and being a realistic possibility. Complacency and continued suffering and struggle can drain people of their desire to experience something new. Because of the pain and suffering that has been experienced in the past, I have discovered that in my ministerial context there are people who have become complacent with communal division and congregational dysfunction. The reality of past experience has dampened the desire to pursue a new reality where wholeness and the healing of relationships are possible. As a leader in this context it is my responsibility to help cast a vision where reconciliation and restoration is visualized as being a realistic possibility. The primary means to accomplish this end is in the teaching and preaching ministry that we engage in each week. I believe that consistent exposure to biblical truth, while intentionally examining methods of application to be used in context will yield positive results.

In examining postmodern approaches toward building relational churches, there are two primary elements that postmodernist thinkers espouse: (1) Reimagining Reality and (2) Redefining Process.²² Tim Boal’s approach to building authentic community where the value of relationship transcends the reliance upon rules begins with the

²¹ Boal, *Building Authentic Community*, 11.

²² Boal, *Building Authentic Community*, 20.

envisioning of the congregation metaphorically as the image of God's family or household. Biblically there are many texts in the New Testament that depict the people of God as being a part of God's family or household.

The Apostle Paul utilizes such imagery when he writes to the church at Ephesus saying:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.²³

This passage is rich with metaphors that describe God's work in creating His family. The word alien is used to describe someone who is without a home or someone who is far away from home in a country or homeland not their own.

Boal examines the postmodern approach of the Emergent Movement in North America. This movement is influenced by postmodern thought and places significant emphasis on relationships in an attempt to satisfy those who are discontent with life in the modern church who seek a more meaningful Christian experience. In visualizing the congregation as God's family can be helpful in cultivating an environment where people view themselves as being a significant part of a greater whole where they are interrelated with God and each other. The church visualized as family can be help people place value on their relationship with God and fellow members.

While I believe that this approach can yield positive results, there are some inherent challenges that can be problematic, based on my experience but not limited to,

²³ Ephesians 2:19-22, NIV.

with implementation in the African American church. One of the problems I see with reimagining the reality of congregation utilizing the metaphor of family is that everyone in context may not have a positive experience in a family environment. Everyone who is a part of a congregation may not have a family or has experienced trauma and tragedy in the midst of family life. To refer to church as family may drive people away from church as opposed to bringing people closer together.

Boal also contends that emphasis on form, structure and systems must cease in a communal environment while emphasis on relationship building must become the primary concern. Redefinition of process, structure and systems is necessary in order to promote unity and build relationships. Protocol and process must not supersede the establishment and development of human relationships. “The difference between an object-based church and a relationship based church is the difference between the church that sells itself versus a church that brings people into a living, life long relationship with Christ and one another. A relation based church is less a place where creeds are dispensed and adherents conscripted than a place where people can connect with God and with one another, and where faith journeys can be encouraged and enabled.”²⁴ Cultivating an environment in community where relationship building becomes a primary objective as opposed to engaging in empty meaningless ritualistic practice in worship will require that the mentality of congregants be challenged and changed to that end.

²⁴ Boal, *Building Authentic Community*, 19.

Dealing with Division – FBC Practical Example

One of the structures and processes that became a source of division in the church was in the administration of communion traditionally done on the first Sunday of every month. I did not immediately observe the tension between our churches Deacons and Deaconesses, but as time progressed and I observed process, it became apparent that there was division and discord between the two groups. Being a new Pastor who came from a thriving and progressive church, I assumed that when it came to the administration of Holy Communion that there was consistency in practice that prevailed in the Baptist church tradition. The problem that surface over time was that the Deacon's at First Baptist Church believed that the Deaconesses should not touch any of the elements or participate in the administration of communion in any way. The role of the Deaconesses, as perceived by the Deacons, were to clean up the table, but not necessarily participate in the setting up and administration of communion in the church.

This view was foreign to me and somewhat hypocritical in my view because I could not understand how the deaconesses were allowed to touch the elements when they needed to be cleaned, but not at any other time in the service. This damaged the psyche of the Deaconesses who really wanted to participate in service. It also served to drive a wedge in between the Deacons and deaconesses that was apparent to the entire congregation.

In order to alleviate this challenge as a new leader, I had to help the leaders visualize the communion table as a place of unity and not of division. The Communion table was a place where family members gather to commemorate and celebrate Jesus

Christ together. I utilized the image of family that gathered around the table to dine where mutual fellowship is enjoyed. This reimagining of the reality of the communion process helped the older members of the board gain a new perspective. The reimagining of reality was followed up by the redefinition of process. I began to intently increase the role of the Deaconesses in the communion celebration. I started by having the deaconesses help the deacons setup the communion table together on Saturday mornings. This was an initial step in putting into practice what we have learned together in principle. While this is still a work in progress, there has been progress in reconciling relationships between Deacon and Deaconess. I also have begun to have Deaconesses read scripture on first Sunday's as well as our church covenant. Deaconesses are now positioned next to me as I administer the elements of communion giving them a visible role in the service. This has served to boost their self-esteem while providing a positive image of unity for our congregation.

Postmodern thinkers view the law, rules and regulations as they exist in the forms and structures of the church as stifling the true expression of Christianity in relationships. People are yearning to experience God not as some abstract idea upon which we base our beliefs, but rather as an intimate being that one can relate to in the midst of his or her existential experience. The church must be a place where the reality of God is experienced in relationship and where people are encouraged to nurture and develop relationships with each other. This enables people to experience a more authentic community where their relationship with God has a practical and pragmatic influence and impact on their relationships with each other.

Postmodern thinkers believe that the application of propositional truth without the consideration of relational ramifications can hinder life in community. Boal contends

“We must be careful in building authentic community not to throw out all propositional truth, but to make certain that truth is conveyed within the framework of loving relationship, initiated by Christ and perfected by His Spirit.”²⁵

While I agree with Boal in his assessment in affirming the need for the exposition propositional truth, there seems to be an underlying emphasis on the abandonment of present day Christianity that is driven by rules, regulations and structure. Boal’s desire to utilize positive images to reimagine the reality of contemporary church and the abandonment of church structure in favor of developing a non-hierarchical community where relationships are the primary focus lacks a practical approach or strategy that helps congregation deal with conflict when it arises in the church.

I do not think the postmodern approach as suggested in Boal’s work would be effective in the church that is steep in tradition and structure that has governed our church from its earliest existence. I think that reimagining reality with the use of images can be positive and productive, but to abandon totally systems and structures that have been traditionally upheld may not be the best approach. I plan to lead in transforming structures and systems in order to make them relationship centric.

Conquering Conflict

Identifying the root cause of conflict in congregations involves looking beyond the symptomatic behavior exemplified in community and to probe beneath the surface of behavior to try and uncover its cause. Conflict in congregations can be complex. The cause that lies at its roots can be spiritual, structural and systemic. In order to get to the

²⁵ Tim Boal, *Building Authentic Community*, 18.

root cause of conflict it will require spending sufficient time observing the spiritual, structural and systemic dynamic of the church. Jim Van Yperen in his book entitled *Making Peace* defines *system dynamic* as being “the interrelationship of external and internal forces that influence our decisions and create conflict.”²⁶

In order to deal with conflict in our congregation it was important for me to understand that conflicts in congregations can manifest itself in different ways. There can be *fight*s where one opponent seeks to destroy the other, there can be *debates* where one group seeks to persuade another and there can be games where one group seeks to outwit the other. In congregational life *games and debates* can be viewed as being safe of conflict where no harm is done in the community, but *fighting* is often accompanied by an escalation of fear and irrational behavior that can become a destructive force that damages community. In order to deal with conflict it becomes necessary to determine what people are fighting about? Who are the people who are engaged in the fight? Are there behavioral patterns that contribute to the fighting? Why are people fighting? And how are they fighting within the context of community? These questions can be instrumental in framing the circumstances and uncovering the causes of conflict within community.

Conflict is a certain reality that is present in every congregation and must be dealt with appropriately. As the new leader of my congregation, my initial tendency was to avoid conflict as best I could in the context of my community. As a new Pastor, I viewed conflict in a negative way as a reflection of my leadership or lack thereof. It did not take long in my pastoral journey to discover that congregational conflict is something that

²⁶ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2002), 37

cannot be avoided. Wherever you have people from different backgrounds with different personalities and with different agendas, there will be conflict in the community. I have discovered in the early stages of pastoring that not all conflict is bad. Conflict can be the catalyst where conversation between two competing or disparate parties emerges.

Conflict can be symptomatically expressed in the attitudes, actions and the words of those who represent of the body of the church. It can be indicative that there is an area within the community that needs Pastoral leadership and attention. In order to effectively deal with conflict when it arises and lead our congregation in overcoming it, Jim Van Yperen suggests the following process:

- “Examine, identify, and confess past failure;
- identify root needs, causes, or flaws in character, behavior or thinking;
- unlearn negative habits practiced over time;
- relearn new habits of behavior and thinking; and
- Reconstitute personal character and church culture.”²⁷

Resolving Conflict in our Congregation – FBC Practical Example

One of the strategies I utilized in this project was to create a forum where people could express their concerns in an appropriate manner in an effort to create a space where reconciliation could take place. One of the areas where I experienced conflict and division was with our leadership team of our youth ministry. There were two groups of leaders who were responsible for leading our youth choir and our praise dance ministry. Although both groups were growing and excelling in their ministerial assignments, they

²⁷ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 37

were competing for the same group of kids. Instead of working together, they visualized themselves as two disparate groups without any relational bond. The divisiveness amongst the leaders became obvious to the children they were entrusted to lead. This led one of the young ladies in the youth choir to write me a letter asking for my assistance. She could not understand why the adult leaders seemed to always argue. Given the severity of the situation, she articulated her desire for the youth to select their own leaders by themselves. She scheduled a meeting with me and three other choir members, twelve years of age and younger came to my office to discuss.

The conflict that emerged between our youth and youth leadership provided the catalyst where conversation has emerged. I immediately met with the youth leadership team and read the letter from the young lady expressing her concerns. While this was somewhat shocking to the adults, they recognized the seriousness of the situation at hand. The youth did not feel comfortable expressing their concerns to the existing leadership team. The attitudes and activity of those responsible for leading the youth did not set the proper example for them and hinder the growth and development of those who were involved.

Not only can conflict be a catalyst for conversation, conflict can also be an opportunity for change. Meeting and listening to both groups enabled me, as pastoral leader, to hear the cares and concerns from each group and gain valuable perspective on the challenges that confront our team. This was significant in helping our team identify areas that needed to be changed while providing an environment that enabled both groups to work together to implement them. Subsequent scheduled meetings with youth and youth leadership will be necessary to ensure continued success.

I have learned a valuable lesson through this experience in understanding that conflict is not something to be avoided, but rather if embraced and handled properly can be both informative and a productive agent that yields positive results. Managing conflict properly involves measuring success in clear and defined ways. David B. Lott in his book entitled *Conflict Management in Congregations* utilizes the following metrics as a gauge to measure success managing conflict:

1. People were able to make decisions that stuck 18 months after decisions were made.
2. There was a significant reduction in tension.
3. People used better problem-solving (conflict management) strategies in the future- at least for the next 18 months.
4. If there were losses of members, the numbers were regained within the next 18 months.²⁸

Utilizing this approach can be instrumental in tracking and documenting successes in the conflict resolution process.

²⁸ David B. Lott, *Conflict Management in Congregations*, (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2001), 5

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT RECONCILIATION

A Preaching and Teaching Program designed to build stronger and healthier relationships in the Christian Community.

The Terms used in the Project

Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) - the Lay Advisory committee is a select group of mostly lay persons associated with First Baptist Church, who were chosen to work as a team to plan, execute and evaluate all aspects of the professional project.

Chief Collator- is responsible for directing the collation team in the collection and tabulating of survey results. The Chief Collator is also responsible for the preliminary analysis of data collected to be presented to the congregation.

Collation Team- the Collation Team is responsible for the collection, tabulation and collation of all data contained in the survey. This team works at the direction of the Chief Collator to develop presentation material to be utilized in formal presentation to congregation.

Reflector- is a team member who is comfortable helping to analyze and reflect over the results of the assessment phase and evaluation phase data. This person will assist in helping the congregation understand what the data means while making recommendations for next steps.

Administrative Team- is a team that assists the Pastor with all administrative tasks associated with the project. This team will be responsible for the reproduction, distribution and collection of survey materials.

The Purpose

This project was designed to evaluate and assess the status of relationships within Christian community while creating a contextual learning experience that examines how our relationship with Jesus Christ can have a positive impact on our relationships with each other. The project is intended to help our Church understand the value and significance of relationships, while considering practical strategies which can be implemented to create an atmosphere conducive for the flourishing of good relationships between members. Results of this project will be aimed at developing programs and processes that encourage the development of stronger and healthier relationships within Christian community.

The scope of this project was limited to the adult membership of First Baptist Church of Linden NJ. The project commenced January 9, 2013 and concluded March 20, 2013. The project consisted of three phases: (1) Assessment/Survey Phase (2) Preaching, Teaching and Implementation Phase and (3) an Evaluation Phase. Prior to launching this project, it was necessary to spend time gaining the support and buy-in from church leaders, project team members and congregants. Gaining support for the validity of the project and the goals and objectives of the project was instrumental in implementing the necessary changes identified throughout project that can be beneficial in creating an environment where stronger and healthier relationships can become a reality.

The Assessment Phase

During the **Assessment Phase**, the project was designed to engage our congregation with a three part survey created by the Jubilee Centre designed to gather information that has been used to assess the current state of relationships in our church. The Jubilee Centre is a Christian social reform organization that is committed to the advancement of the Gospel and the application of Biblical principles that lead to transformation in social, political and economic life. The Jubilee Centre's primary claim is that "good relationships are the essence of humanity and the primary determinant of a healthy society."¹

Prior to commencing the Assessment Phase of the project, we formed a project team that was responsible for helping to assess, implement and evaluate the project. The project team consisted of the following sub groups: LAC – FBC Lay Advisory Committee; Chief Collator – responsible for analyzing and interpreting survey results; Collation Team- responsible for tabulating and collating the results; Reflector- responsible for analyzing and reflecting on results and presenting data to the entire congregation, and; an Administrative Team - responsible for distributing and collecting surveys and preparing presentation material to be presented to congregation.

The Lay Advisory Committee consists of a combination of church leadership and laity that represents a cross-section of the congregation. The Lay Advisory Committee is comprised of the following members: Mrs. Ruth Jones, Mrs. Audrey Ishmael, Mrs. Rosalind Michael, Deacon Marion Scott, Deacon Sam Thomas, Ms. Brenda Mackenzie,

¹ Jubilee Centre, accessed September 22, 2012, www.jubilee-centre.or/engage/jubilee_centre/history.

Deacon Ezra Brown and Deaconess Lorraine Journigan. These team members were instrumental in the discovery of contextual narrative and the formation of project goals and objectives.

The Lay Advisory Committee subgroups (Chief Collator, Collation Team and Administrative Staff) consists of the following members:

- Ms. Cynthia Dawkins – Chief Collator
- Trustee Russell Green – Reflector
- Trustee Angela Jordan, Team Member
- Ms. Taniesha, Team Member
- Ms. Yanet Crucet, Team Member, and
- Trustee Theodore Wilkins, Team Member

These team members were instrumental in the distribution, collection, tabulation and presentation of survey data to our congregation.

In December 2012, prior to commencing the Assessment Phase, I met with the LAC to review the project prospectus and coordinate the project timeline. This meeting was beneficial in outlining in detail the scope and parameters of the project. During this time I also had a subsequent meeting with the Collation Team to review the project questionnaire, review the process for distribution, collection, collation and tabulation of data to be utilized in reflection and analysis. During these meetings we developed a strategy to notify the congregation and launch the assessment phase of the project in January 2013.

The Project launched on January 9, 2013 where I introduced the project to the congregation during Bible study. During this introduction I discussed the purpose, proposed plan and desired outcomes of the project. We began by discussing the significance of relationships in the Christian community. Effective ministry requires teamwork. The church is the body of Christ, the members of which are dependent upon each other to carry out the church's mission. John C. Maxwell in his book, *Relationships 101*, states that "Relationships are the glue that holds teams together."² In introducing the project to the congregation, we examined some key characteristics that are exemplified in strong relationships as follows: respect, shared experience, trust, reciprocity and mutual enjoyment. Maxwell contends that these characteristics are the foundation upon which strong and healthy relationships in society can be built.

The project introduction during Bible study was followed by an announcement of the proposed project to the larger congregation on January 13, 2013. This announcement signaled the start of the assessment phase of the project and the assessment survey was distributed with instructions at this time.

The survey that was distributed to the congregation during the assessment phase of the project was designed to help us examine relationships in our community from five different angles: (1) how direct is the communication between congregants? (2) How long are you with someone in the community? (3) Do you meet in different context or roles? (4) Is there mutual respect between you? Do you feel there is a gap in 'importance' or 'power' between those in leadership positions in the church and with those with no formal role?; (5) What goals and objectives do you share? If we focus on the range of

² John Maxwell, *Relationships 101* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2003), 1.

things we share in common, both inside and outside church life, our relationships will be stronger.³

The scope of those surveyed was limited to the adult membership of First Baptist Church. There were one hundred members who participated in the survey. All surveys were collected by our Administration team by the deadline of January 30, 2013. Upon the collection of all surveys, the Collation team began the process of tabulating and collating the results to be presented to the congregation. The final presentation of survey results was presented to the congregation during Bible study on March 6, 2013. Selected members of the LAC (Lay Advisory Committee) and Collation Team participated in the final presentation of survey results.

Assessment Survey Results

We utilized a tool from the Jubilee Center that helped us examine and analyze the state of relationships at First Baptist Church while measuring how relational we are as a Christian community. This was done by examining demographic data, congregational expectations and relational dimensions. The results in this section help us to understand what relationships are actually like at First Baptist Church. The responses in this section help us to identify which relationships are most in need of strengthening by examining them from five different relational angles: Directness, Continuity, Multiplicity, Parity and Commonality. In this section mathematical calculations are utilized to determine a ‘relational score’ for each question. This ‘relational score’ is a metric utilized to measure how relational our church is based upon survey respondents.

³ Jubilee-Centre, *Building a Relational Church: Introduction*, 2.

The 'relational score' is calculated to be a number between 1 and 4 with 1 equaling the lowest score and 4 equaling the highest. Overall, a 'relational score' for each relational dimension is utilized to further analyze the results. (See Appendix A – Building a Relational Church BARC questionnaire)

Relational Dimensions:

<u>Relational Attribute</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Relational Score</u>
Directness	This section is related to issues of accessibility, responsiveness, and the amount of face-to-face contact that exists with relationships.	3.0
Continuity	The amount, regularity, frequency and stability of contact over time.	2.9
Multiplicity	Results in this section depict the various opportunities for contact that exist between members of First Baptist Church, the level of knowledge we have about the life situations of the people we know in context, and how much we know about the skill sets people possess which may be beneficial to our church.	2.4
Parity	One of the key elements that characterize a good relationship is mutual respect. This section focuses on questions asked regarding opportunities church members have to participate in conversations and projects in the life of the church. These questions sought to ascertain the dignity and self-worth people have for themselves and others while also determining how fairly survey respondents feel they have been treated.	2.4
Commonality	Developing strong relationships in any context requires that people are united around a common purpose, goals, commitment and values. Discovery and cultivation of this 'commonality' in the church can be a key contributor to the building relationships in the Christian community.	2.6

Implementation Phase

The goal of this phase of the project was to systematically expose our congregation to Biblical truth through preaching and teaching in an effort to understand the meaning of reconciliation as it relates to our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. The goal of this phase is to examine biblically what Jesus says about relationships during the teaching phase in bible study sessions, while examining what Jesus does in human relationships in sermonic proclamation on Sunday morning. This approach will be instrumental in helping our congregation bridge the gap between principle and practice visualizing the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as a model that can be applied in the reconciliation of human relationships.

Outcomes of this phase were intended to identify and apply practical methods that can be utilized to build stronger and healthier relationships within our congregation. Preaching on Sunday mornings was followed up with teaching on Wednesday nights during our scheduled Bible study session.

Teaching Series

The teaching series began on January 9, 2013, where we introduced the project and examined the significance of relationships and the role they have in the Christian community. The teaching objectives of this series were to (1) Define the term 'Reconciliation' understanding the practical ramifications associated with our relationship with God and our relationship with each other (2) Identify key characteristics that are found in strong relationships, seeking to understand how they can be applied practically in daily living and (3) to examine Biblical relationship principles that are

espoused by Jesus Christ that could be beneficial to nurturing relationships in Christian community.

During this series, we set out to accomplish these goals by examining both Biblical and professional sources that espouse relationship principles, and subsequently offering concrete strategies that could be applied practically in the lives of our congregants to build stronger and healthier relationships in the Christian community. Furthermore, our goal during these sessions was to reinforce during Bible study the truth that was proclaimed through our sermon series on Sunday mornings.

Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake View, California, says while speaking about the importance of relationships and the necessity of relational renewal says, “You were never meant to live your life in a vacuum. In fact, you cannot fulfill your life’s purposes by yourself. You need other people’s help and they need yours.”⁴ People live out their life’ as they interact with each other.

John Maxwell in his book entitled *Relationships 101* says that “Relationships are the glue that holds teams together.”⁵ Successful relationships largely depend upon how we interact with others. The church is not a community where its members exist in isolation from one another, but rather the church is a living organism with Christ as its head that functions as people interact with one another. During the initial session we identified and focused on five characteristics that are present in strong relationships: Respect, Shared Experience, Trust, Reciprocity and Mutual Enjoyment. The goal of this

⁴ Tom Holladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 13.

⁵ Maxwell, *Relationships 101*, 7.

session was to examine these characteristics while evaluating our personal relationships based upon this criterion.

Reconciliation is defined as “the changing of places, coming over from one to the other side. Used of ourselves, the word implies changing the judicial status from one of estrangement and condemnation to one of acceptance and justification.”⁶ It is to bring back together that which has been separated restoring relationship and transforming it to be experienced in a new way. Reconciliation is not achieved by simply going back to the way things were, but rather, involving the creation of a new reality of shared experience between two parties.

Mutual understanding of others, those with who we seek to be in relationship with, is a key component in the development of strong and healthy relationships. Relationships often fail because there are things about the one(s) in whom we seek relationship that we fail to understand. We began in this session by examining four reasons why people fail to understand others: fear, self-centeredness, failure to appreciate differences, and failure to acknowledge similarities.

Fear in relationships can be the byproduct of ignorance. People often fear about other people what they do not understand. Jon Maxwell writes while describing the vicious cycle that fear produces, “When they don’t understand, they often react by becoming fearful. Once they start fearing others, they rarely try to overcome their fear in order to learn more about them.”⁷ He also writes that there are five areas that describe

⁶ Dr. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 191.

⁷ Jon Maxwell, *Relationships* 101, 9.

what people need to understand about other people in order to facilitate the building of strong relationships.

In the book entitled *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, author Tom Halladay examines six biblical principles espoused by Jesus Christ that can be utilized as practical tools to transform our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. Halladay claims that these principles can be helpful in practically “bridging the gap between what we hope for and desire in relationships and what we actually experience.”⁸ While I believe that Mr. Halladay’s book can be helpful, I’m cautious in reducing the words of Christ into mere principles to be applied in relationships because every relationship is not the same. Assumptions regarding the circumstances and context in which a relationship exists may not be conducive to the application of a mere biblical principle.

My intention in examining this work is to examine biblically the words of Christ as they are related to relationships and understand the context and circumstances in which they are spoken. I taught an eight week series that examined the words of Christ that spoke about relationships in order to gain a Christo-centric perspective on reconciliation and relationships. I developed eight outlines and taught eight lessons utilizing but not limited to the book entitled *Relationship Principles of Jesus Christ* (See Appendix- C- Project Reconciliation Bible Study Outlines.) A summarization of each lesson is detailed below.

⁸ Tom Halladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, 15.

Lesson# 1 – “Project Reconciliation Introduction” This lesson was designed to introduce my Doctor of Ministry project to our congregation formally in our bible study session. During this session we explained the purpose and intent of the project while outlining the proposed plan and reviewing and discussing desired outcomes. During this lesson we discussed the significance of relationships in Christian community and identified five characteristics that are exemplified in strong relationships (1) Respect (2) Shared Experience (3) Trust (4) Reciprocity and (5) Mutual Enjoyment.

Lesson#2 – “Understanding Others” In this lesson we discussed the nature of relationships and the need to understand potential roadblocks that exist that can hinder the establishment and nurturing of relationships in community. In addition to examining some of the barriers that hinder relationship building, we identified key elements and expectations that people have in regards to their relationships. Understanding what others expect when it comes to relationships can be helpful in building stronger and healthier relationships in community.

Lesson # 3 - “Place the highest value on Relationships.” This principle was based upon the Biblical verse “The Lord thy God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁹ In this verse Jesus emphasizes the priority of relationships. God is a relational God who has created us to be in relationship with himself and each other. Love is the foundation upon which relationships are established and the tangible expression whereby relationships are sustained and nurtured. Our goal in examining this principle was to understand our conception of love and to determine how this principle

⁹ Mark 12: 29-31, KJV.

could be achieved practically in our daily living. The contemporary fast-paced culture that we live in makes it difficult for many people to place the highest value on relationships. Jesus declares that our relationship with God and our relationships with each other should be of the highest value to us.

Lesson #4 – “Love as Jesus Loves you.” This principle was based upon the words of Jesus when he says “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so must you love one another.”¹⁰ In examining this principle, our goal was identify how Jesus has loved us in our personal and corporate experience. We examined questions in this lesson such as: Why does Jesus have to command his disciples to love? What does it mean to love as Jesus loved? How can this be accomplished practically in our daily lives? What needs to change in our lives to create space for us to love as Jesus loved? Our ultimate aim in examining this principle was to understand how Jesus has loved us in order for us to emulate his love in our relationship with others.

Lesson #5 – “Communicate from the Heart.” This principle was based upon the words of Jesus when he says “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”¹¹ This principle is helpful in helping understand the importance of words and how they are communicated in relationships. There is a connection between what is in the heart and what comes out of our mouths that impact what we say and how we say it. Jesus declares that ultimately what is in your heart will be communicated from your mouth. What we say and how we say it can have a significant impact on our relationships. Tim Halladay says that “all relationships are fueled by communication.” Additionally, he says that “all

¹⁰ John 13:34, KJV.

¹¹ Matthew 12:34, KJV.

relationships are fueled by communication.”¹² “Our words have the power to take our relationships to a new level of impact and intimacy,”¹³ and “Our words have the power to take our relationships to a new level of impact and intimacy.” In this lesson we sought to identify ways in which we could build trust in relationships with our words. Our words have the potential to have influence in the lives into which they are spoken.

Lesson #6 – “As You Judge, You will be Judged.” This principle is based on the words of Jesus when he says “Do not Judge, or you will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”¹⁴ We examined the context to determine the meaning of the term “judge” and the impact it can have on relationships. The term judge in the original language is the word *krino* which means to divide, separate, come to decision, to try in a solemn judicial manner and to pass sentence.¹⁵ The Danger associated with judgment is that we can never know with absolute certainty the motives of others. In this lesson we also focused on examining how hypocrisy hinders relationships. “Hypocrisy is focusing on the speck in another person’s eye while ignoring the plank in your own. Integrity is removing the plank from your own eye. Mercy is removing the speck from another’s eye.”¹⁶

Lesson#7– “The Greatest are Servants.” This principle was based on the words of Jesus when he says “the greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts

¹² Tim Halladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, 137.

¹³ Tom Halladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, 139.

¹⁴ Matthew 7: 1-2, KJV.

¹⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers), 930.

¹⁶ Tom Halladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, 199.

himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”¹⁷ Selfishness and self-centeredness are two human traits that can be the enemy that hinders strong relationships. Humility is the foundation upon which healthy and strong relationships are built. Humility in relationships may mean that I relinquish my right to be right for the sake of the relationship. In this lesson our goal was to identify the unselfish acts that others have done to us that have impacted our lives and emulate them in our relationships with others.

Lesson#8 – “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” This principle was based upon the words of Jesus when he said “do for others what you would like them to do for you.” While this verse has become known affectionately as the “Golden Rule”, we must continue to examine it honestly and closely as we seek to apply it in our lives. Embedded intrinsically into the words of this statement is a sense of selfishness that aims at getting ones needs met by unselfishly yielding oneself to meeting the needs of others. In relationships people often ask the question, “What’s in it for me?” In this lesson we sought to discover practical ways in which the needs of both parties in relationship could be met. Halladay says “I must give myself to meeting others’ needs if I’m going to get my needs met.”¹⁸ In other words, the only way to get your selfish needs met is to be unselfish. We discovered that the “Golden Rule” can be practically lived out in relationship by first thanking God for the other person and taking the initiative to do what is necessary to meet their needs. One unselfish act of kindness rendered to another can have a tremendous impact on someone else’s life.

¹⁷ Matthew 23: 11-12, KJV.

¹⁸ Tom Halladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*, 302.

Lesson#9 – “Project Reconciliation Review” – This lesson was designed to review all lessons and provide a forum for discussion about the content of the course. We discussed in this lesson ideas and practical approaches that could be implemented in daily life in order to effectively reconcile relationships in community.

Expository Preaching Series

During the implementation phase, I engaged in a ten week topical expository preaching series that focused on examining the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and his work in reconciling and repairing relationships. During this series I utilized doctrinal and narrative preaching focusing on the doctrinal statements espoused by Paul regarding reconciliation and various narrative texts in the gospels as the primary method to expose and communicate truth associated with the doctrine and ministry of reconciliation. I utilized both doctrinal and narrative preaching methods because I believe that utilizing both provides our congregation a balanced view of reconciliation. In doctrinal preaching the Pauline trajectory as it relates to reconciliation provides a foundational basis upon which Christian practice is derived. Doctrinally, Paul’s words of explanation describe and define both the motivation for reconciliation and the means by which reconciliation was achieved in the God-Human relationship. I believe that narrative preaching gives our congregation a portrait of what reconciliation looks like in how Jesus dealt with people in the context of relationship. While doctrinal preaching can be instrumental in informing our minds with truth, narrative preaching provides a concrete example in Christ that can inform both the mind and our practice.

William J. Carl III in his book entitled *Preaching Christian Doctrine* defines doctrinal preaching in this way:

Doctrine is not identical with the proclamation of the gospel. Doctrine serves proclamation, enriches and enlarges it, largely in a critical role, as a criterion for determining that what the church proclaims today is in harmony with scripture and its tradition, that it is truly human language about God and not about that latest trend or social ethical passion...

Doctrinal preaching, then, is Christian preaching grounded in the biblical witness to Jesus Christ; it starts with the text, doctrine, or cultural question, but tends to focus on one or more Christian doctrines regardless of its starting point.¹⁹

Preaching and teaching on the doctrine of reconciliation is in direct response to the cultural questions that emerge from the historical congregational narrative of our community and which reflect the challenges faced by congregants seeking to understand how relationships are repaired and reconciled within our Christian community. The preaching series commenced on January 20, 2013, when I preached our congregation's theme for the year entitled "The Ministry of Reconciliation – Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in the Christian Community."

The initial sermon was based on the Biblical text in 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 which says:

"And all things are from God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation."²⁰

¹⁹ William J. Carl III, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 8-9.

²⁰ 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, KJV

This initial sermon was intended to define and reinforce the meaning and necessity of reconciliation and its practical ramifications associated with our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Subsequent sermons examined the life and ministry of Christ as he encountered and engaged people in an effort to reconcile relationships and restore and affirm humanity. This would be instrumental in helping our congregation visualize and utilize the ministry of Christ as a model for how reconciliation can be achieved in human relationships.

In conclusion I believe that the implementation phase of this project has had a positive impact on our congregation as well as me personally. Relationships are the context where the love of God is tangibly demonstrated in the life of the believer. God has created us as relational beings whose lives are intrinsically interwoven together in the fabric of human existence. The Christian community is only as strong as the relationships that are cultivated in the communal context. Authentic community and fellowship is expressed in the relationships that are nurtured and cultivated in the church. Jesus said “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”²¹ Our love for God is exemplified relationally in our love for each other. The intentional and systematic look at relationships from a biblical perspective has allowed me to gain a fresh perspective on the value of relationships and the tactical approaches that can be utilized to maintain and nurture them. Personally there are some relationships that I have taken for granted and have not really invested myself in them as has been required.

²¹ John 13:35, NIV.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT EVALUATION

The purpose of the Evaluation Phase is to quantitatively evaluate the success of the Implementation Phase of the project. During this phase FBC congregants were given an eight question post-implementation phase survey utilized to assess the effectiveness of the preaching and teaching program. The survey was developed by the LAC and distributed May 1, 2013 during our bible study session.

Post-Implementation Survey Results

Quantitative Analysis

There were one hundred Post-Implementation Surveys distributed with questions and result presented below.

- (1) When asked if they had taken the initial Assessment survey utilized to assess expectations and the current state of relationships at FBC 79% indicated yes with 21% indicating that they had not. This would be helpful in understanding the percentage of people who participated in the initial survey when the project commenced.
- (2) When asked if they had been present on Sunday mornings during the sermonic series and present during bible study sessions during the teaching series on reconciliation and relationships: 91% said yes while 9% said no. This is significant in determining if those evaluating the project were actually active participants during the project.

- (3) When asked if the teaching and preaching on reconciliation and relationships that the congregation was exposed to had been effective: 54% strongly agreed; 46% agreed; 0% disagreed. While this is a positive result, the effectiveness will ultimately be exemplified in the quality of relationships over time.
- (4) When asked if they had applied any of the relationship principles taught in the bible study sessions in their personal lives: 42% strongly agreed; 56% agreed; 2% disagreed. This is a positive result that indicates that there has been an effort by congregants to put into practice in daily living what was taught in principle.
- (5) When asked has the teaching and preaching on reconciliation and relationships had an impact in any relationships you have in your family and/or congregation at FBC:
23% strongly agree; 65% agree; 12% disagree. This indicates that there has been some influence on both family and congregational life at FBC as a result of the project.
- (6) When asked if they had developed or nurtured any “new” relationships or reconciled any “broken” relationships at FBC as a result of the preaching and teaching during the implementation phase of this project: 23% strongly agree; 64% agree; 13% disagree. The response to this question indicates that there are relationships that need to be nurtured and relationships that are broken within the fellowship. While this is positive, results also indicate that there is still work to be done in this area.

(7) When asked if they thought the teaching and preaching on reconciliation and relationships will help our congregation to become more cohesive and unified in Ministry: 58% strongly agreed; 42% agreed; 0% disagreed. Another strong indicator that there is great potential to build stronger and healthier relationships in our community.

(8) What can we do to build stronger and healthier relationships in our community?

This question provided congregants an opportunity to make suggestions as to how we can practically apply what we've learnt in our congregation.

In analyzing the results and feedback from the congregants who participated, quantitatively there seems to be an overall consensus that the implementation phase of the project was successful having a practical impact on the relationships in our church. The systematic emphasis and approach utilized during the project seemed to create a new found energy and excitement with congregants as we work to build relationships.

Qualitative Analysis

While the quantitative results captured in the post-implementation phase were positive, indicating that people believe that the program had a positive impact on reconciliation and relationships in context, the quality of relationships and the process of reconciliation are not solely measured by numbers, but the ultimate measure is captured qualitatively in the context of human interaction. There is something about our connectedness to each other that creates the atmosphere where life is experienced, reconciliation is made possible and the very roots of all relationships are nurtured and developed.

Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray in their book entitled *The Leading Causes of Life* say that life has a language and there are five leading causes of life that can be utilized to discern its core structure. The five leading causes of life are: (1) connection (2) coherence (3) agency (4) blessing and (5) hope. They say “that the roots of life are to be found in coherence, connection, agency (action) and hope. These five create the environment in which we can flourish regardless of the diseases, pathologies, or deficits we experience.”¹ Connection is found in our relationships with others, Coherence is what gives meaning and purpose to those relationships and life, Agency is captured in our capacity to act, Hope can be defined in that which transcends the circumstances of life and is more than wishful thinking and Blessing that involves our experience and our participation in activity that can be characterized as being both life giving and life causing.

In their book Gunderson and Pray also contend that human life is social and is meant to be lived in communion and in relationship with those who are around us. “Humans are social creatures. Capable of only brief episodes of solitude, human life thrives on our social connections to each other. In fact, human life is only found in the extraordinary number of connections humans make with their families, friends, neighbors, faith members and fellow citizens. Connections are like the breadth of air on which our very lives depend.”²

While the pulpit and the classroom are good forums utilized to influence relationships and aid in the process of reconciliation, relationships have a qualitative dimension that is realized in the atmosphere of shared experience. During the

¹ Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray *The Leading Causes of Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 7.

² Gunderson and Pray, *The Leading Causes of Life*, 65.

implementation phase there were some learning opportunities for me and our congregation that were not learned in the confines of our sanctuary or classrooms. I did not plan or anticipate experiencing the reality of reconciliation in this way, but there was one event that brought people together during this project greater than any lesson taught or sermon preached. This one central event became the catalyst for other events that would serve to help heal our congregation.

A Transformational Trip

The event occurred in the midst of the implementation phase when I was invited and scheduled to preach for my friend and colleague, the Reverend Kenneth Cooper's, pastoral installation service in Raleigh, NC. The installation services were scheduled for the weekend of March 17, 2013 and initially my wife and I were going to attend this service alone. Our church became aware of this event and the congregation decided to go along with me to support Rev. Cooper at his installation service. I did not realize it then, but the organization and planning of the trip actually served as an opportunity for people to work together. People who had never worked together before found themselves submerged in the work of planning and preparing for what would be the first church trip in years. This trip actually created an atmosphere that brought both a new sense of life and energy in our church in a way that had not been experienced at FBC in some time.

As the date of the trip approached, there seemed to be an air of excitement and energy unexpected by me that captured our congregation. The bus that we contracted was full and there were those who caravanned in their own vehicles to get to North Carolina. We traveled together with 80 people from our congregation for the weekend trip to

Raleigh. I did not ride the bus because I had already made travel arrangements ahead of time. As soon as we arrived in Raleigh I immediately began to hear how well things were going with our people. People were helping each other concerned with making sure that everyone was comfortable and had what they needed. The hospitality extended to our church was a powerful witness as to how people should be treated. The people from North Carolina did not know us or have any established relationships with us, but they extended themselves and their actions demonstrated the power of love that can be instrumental in reconciling relationships.

The casual dining and fellowshiping with each other proved to be far more effective than either a sermon or bible study could produce. On the surface what seemed to be trivial and minor successes compared to some of the division and disunity that had been experienced actually became the catalyst for the future progress in the reconciliation of relationships within our church. In reflecting upon this it became clear to me that reconciliation in relationships is more than a principle to be taught and applied, but rather it also involves practice, creating space where the principles of reconciliation can be lived out in common experience.

The trip had a very positive impact on our congregation by providing an opportunity for people to nurture the bond of human relationship. The trip provided multiple opportunities for people to fellowship and share with one another and nurture relationships that had previously languished in division and disharmony. Those who went on the trip remarked positively that they connected with people in ways they hadn't experienced because the trip provided both time and space for human interaction. During the trip and after we returned it was evident that the trip served to strengthen the bond of

human relationships in our church. People, who did not converse with each other prior to the trip, now talk to each other. Congregants who sat dispersed throughout the sanctuary are now sitting together. I believe that during this trip that we experienced that it is in our connectedness that we experienced life.

Gunderson and Pray state that, “it is in our connections that life emerges and is sustained.”³ Shared life creates the atmosphere where life multiplies and is nurtured and developed. It was also positive because in it we experienced the power of unity in our efforts to work together for a common cause in pursuit of a common goal. Our desire for unity exemplified itself unconsciously in our communal commitment in working and fellowshiping with each other in a foreign space. What was experienced during this trip to Raleigh, NC had not been experienced in our Church in Linden, NJ for some years. Communion with each other, fellowship and worship were the shared experiences in a foreign territory that somehow brought people together.

This “transformational trip” became the unintentional expression of what I was attempting to preach and teach during the first few weeks in the implementation phase of this project. The quality of human relationships is vastly dependent upon the quality of human interaction. Reconciliation and the nurturing of relationships occur in the atmosphere where there is room for people to participate and interact with one another in a shared experience.

³ Gunderson and Pray, *The Leading causes of Life*, 56.

A Personal Testimony

On Sunday October 6, 2013 one of my members approached me after service and indicated that he needed to talk. Not knowing initially the subject matter, I referred to him to my assistant to schedule an appointment. We met in my office the following Tuesday during my regularly scheduled office hours. When he sat in my office, immediately tears began to well up in his eyes. He said to me that he was moved by both the preaching and teaching on Reconciliation and wanted to know what how he could make an effort to reach out to his daughter. This man had not seen his daughter in 22 years and the pain and agony he endured had been covered and concealed to this point. He indicated that he felt a strong desire for the relationship between himself and his daughter to be reconciled.

After I listened to him intently and thanking him for trusting me with his concerns, I advised him to seek to make contact with his daughter in a manner in which he felt comfortable. I could sense that he was somewhat uneasy about initiating contact, but we prayed and asked God to give him courage and soften his daughter's heart. Two days later he called me to tell me that he had received a positive response from his daughter and they had scheduled a date for them to meet. The following week he told me that he and his daughter had met and that it was a good first step towards healing their relationship. He thanked me and I encouraged him to be patient in the reconciliation process.

Project Goals

Relational Transformation

The goal and objectives of this project were to expose our congregation to a preaching and teaching program inspired by biblical social teaching that would be instrumental in building a relational church. Desired outcomes would be for our congregation to practically apply relationship principles personally in order to reconcile broken relationships and build stronger relationships in the context of one's life. One-hundred percent of survey respondents indicated that they believed that the preaching and teaching on reconciliation and relationships would help our congregation become more cohesive and unified in ministry. I believe this is a positive result because it is indicative of a prevailing mindset that can be the catalyst for change. While this result is positive there can often be a gap between belief and behavior that can become a barrier to relational progress.

Our goal was to apply the principles that were both proclaimed and taught in the practical lives of our congregants with the purpose of reconciling relationships within context. While evaluating the results of the Post-implementation Survey, 98% of survey respondents indicated that they had applied the relationship principles taught during bible study in their personal lives. This is a desired result that has practical positive ramifications for relationships within our church. 87% of survey respondents indicated that as a result of both the preaching and teaching, that they have nurtured and developed new relationships in our congregation as well as reconciled broken relationships in our

congregation. These are positive results that indicate that our church is beginning to take the initial steps necessary in becoming a relational church.

Practical Demonstration

Another outcome of this project was to practically demonstrate how reconciliation and the strengthening of relationships can result in our congregation becoming more cohesive and cooperative in the work of the ministry. Our goal being to create a new reality whereby reconciled and healthy relationships form the foundation of a corporate community where new working relationships are formed and nurtured to have a positive impact on the Kingdom of God. Reconciliation is not simply a spiritual concept or principle, but it is also strategic and is employed with a certain outcome or desired result in mind.

The strategic component in the reconciliation process seeks to create an atmosphere where that new reality of a reconciled relationship is lived out practically in concrete expression. Robert J. Schreiter in his book entitled *The Ministry of Reconciliation Spirituality & Strategies* says that “Reconciliation, if it is to be effective, is not an abstract idea. It is about coming to terms with a very concrete past and working toward a different future within the constraints – political, economic, social, cultural, and religious – of the context.”⁴ Reconciliation is not simply the process whereby two individuals are brought back together into a new relationship, but also whereby groups of people are brought together with other groups of people into a new relationship that epitomizes new life.

⁴ Robert J Schreiter *The Ministry of Reconciliation Spirituality & Strategies* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1998), 105.

There were three subsequent strategically planned events that served to help our church practically demonstrate our commitment in working together towards a different future as a result of what we've experienced together during the preaching and teaching series on Reconciliation and Relationships: (1) Our Church Community Picnic, (2) Our Church Community Tent Service and (3) Church Community Carnival. These events provided a vehicle whereby congregational relationships were strengthened and broadened as people who never worked or participated in ministry together before came together in the planning, marketing and production of these events.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In reflecting on Project Reconciliation it has become clear that the goal of becoming a reconciled community whereby reconciliation is experience and made possible in human relationships will be an ongoing process that our congregation will continue to work at. Reconciliation is a work that is initiated by God in us as individuals and is continued through us as ambassadors for Christ. Human relationships are complex in nature and require effort to be established, maintained and nurtured. The reality of pain and conflict experienced in relationships impact the emotional, psychological and physiological dynamics of human behavior. The effects of negative experience in human relationships impact the capacity for individuals to forgive or repent in the reconciliation process.

I believe our congregation is discovering the spiritual and strategic dimensions of reconciliation. As a community, our relationship with God as a direct impact on our relationship with each other. Our love for God should be exemplified in how we treat each other. God can help us deal with the pain in our past transforming it into a catalyst that helps us minister to others. I believe that our church has discovered and will continue to learn the value of becoming a redemptive community where the possibility of reconciliation becomes reality and as a community we can become agents of reconciliation in the world in which we live.

The Process – Painful but Profitable

The development of a Lay Advisory Committee tasked with the responsibility of probing into the history and the narrative of our Church was both a pleasant and painful experience. As a new Pastor excited about working with our people in the development and implementation of a project that would help our congregation, I did not realize at the outset the work that would be required by all those involved. The formation of the LAC team itself was a challenge because there were those on the team that really did not like one another. My excitement to work with them did not translate into their excitement to work with each other.

One of the most painful but profitable experiences during the project came when we began to probe into the narrative of our congregation while attempting to identify our needs. We discovered that the narrative of First Baptist Church was one that was viewed from varying perspectives. I regarded this reality as being a positive discovery in that it provided valuable insight into how a cross-section of our congregation perceived the church. What I did not anticipate was the pain that would be emotional and psychological pain that would become evident as the narrative emerged. In one meeting there was bickering and personal attacks that revealed a concealed division and discord that existed in community. There were those in the room that expressed themselves in tearful and emotional fervor as the wound of congregation division and discord was unearthed. Our meetings were painful in the sense that they were like picking at a scab that had not been completely healed.

As a new pastor, I must admit that I didn't feel fully prepared to deal with the emotional and psychological pain that began to be expressed in this forum. However the painful realization that there was a divide that needed to be reconciled was the beginning and catalyst for the healing of First Baptist Church to take place. I believe that this process will be a positive first step in helping First Baptist Church acknowledge the pain associated with its past, while moving forward from it in an effort to experience the reality of reconciliation in our community.

Congregational Objectives & Impact

As a result of the narrative of opportunity that emerged from our context, our goal was to survey our congregation in order to accurately assess the state of relationship at our church. When I introduced the project to the entire congregation I was encouraged by the enthusiasm in which they responded to our effort. Upon further reflection it became apparent that our congregation hadn't worked together to achieve a stated goal in quite some time. As a new pastor this was something that I took for granted. The reality of my past experience was impacting my perception in my present context. The pressure to get the project started and completed can be prohibitive in taking the necessary time to carefully observe the impacts that occur.

The results were collected, tabulated and communicated to our congregation by members of our LAC and corresponding sub-committees. As observed this process there was a sense of pride and ownership by both congregants and committee exemplified in their attitude. It was very obvious that our congregation was anticipating visualizing the results. Our committee utilized a power-point presentation to socialize results. Our

church did not have a projector ourselves, but a member of the LAC was resourceful enough to borrow one from another church. This in and of itself was a major achievement because our congregation never had anything presented to them in this way before. The presentation by LAC members served to be a visible demonstration of people working together to achieve a desired end. This on the surface may seem to be a minor observation, but I believe that it demonstrated a positive change that was on the brink of taking place. Overall the initiation of a project like this has helped our people to recognize the value of relationships and our responsibility to work towards reconciling relationships that have been broken.

Personal Edification

This project has been a journey where I believe that I have learned something about myself as a person, a pastor and a member of our community. As a new Pastor, I have recognized that I find myself in a challenging position having to reconcile the tradition that I have come from with the tradition of the people that I pastor. This was not necessarily evident to me when the project began. I did not consider the attitudes and assumptions I brought with me into this experience as being the result of the tradition and culture that influenced who I am. I have come to the conclusion that my views and perspectives are influenced by the tradition in which I grew, just as the views and perspectives of the people I pastor are influenced by the tradition and culture from which they have been a part. One is not necessarily right or wrong, but there are differences that may need to be understood and reconciled over time.

Personally throughout the project I have recognized that “I” matter. Initially I thought it would be necessary for me to divorce myself emotionally, psychologically and relationally to some extent from the people and the project in order to provide an objective viewpoint and maintain an unbiased opinion throughout the scope of the project. I recognize through being engaged in such a project that “I” matter. I bring with me my emotions, thoughts and biases that I gained through my personal experiences to this project as well. What I observe, communicate and analyze is through the lens of my personal experience.

As we journeyed along through this process from assessment to implementation to post implementation evaluation, where we examined the spirituality and strategic dimensions of reconciliation that I needed to address some of the relationship issues that I have in my personal life. The lessons I taught and the sermons I preached became the therapeutic process whereby I was confronted with myself. The pain of failed relationships and failing relationships could no longer be covered by the barrenness I experienced as a result of a busy life. I have been forced to personally confront the pain of failed relationships in my past and the necessity to heal that which has been broken. This project has forced me to look myself in the mirror and introspectively examine myself as a person who may be responsible for allowing relationships around me to both falter and fail. Through this process it has become evident to me that what I gone through in life has prepared me for this project. I do not have to cover up my pain or anesthetize the pain in the cloak of ministerial activity, but rather embrace myself as being the person that God has chosen to make a difference in the life of community. I learned in this project that “I” matter.

I not only learned throughout this process that “I” matter, but I also learned that “Leadership” matters. I have discovered throughout this process that my Pastoral responsibility to lead our congregation is something that mustn’t be taken lightly or for granted. Reconciling relationship in a communal context does not occur on its own it requires effective leadership in order to bring people together in an effort to build and redemptive and reconciliatory community. An effective leader seeks to build bridges of reconciliation as opposed to dams of division. In order to build bridges of reconciliation, it may be necessary to identify and deconstruct the “dams” that divide.

As pastor I’m called to both lead and serve. In leading the people I could not avoid the conflicts and the drama that had emerged, but rather as leader I was expected to take the initiative and bring feuding parties together to resolve conflict. As a new pastor this required a great deal of listening. I discovered that there are no cookie cutter answer that is applicable to every situation. Patience, perseverance and genuine concern for people are the necessary elements that enable a pastor to lead and serve the congregation.

I also learned that a person, I’m a pastor, and I’m also a member of the community I lead. I am not above our community, but rather I’m in relationship with our community. This was difficult for me to adjust to initially because to be in relation with members of community means that I would risk people being exposed to personal flaws in character. During this process I discovered that people want access to their pastor. People want to feel as though they can get to me at any time for any reason. This is not healthy for any relationship and as pastor it became necessary for me to set the proper boundaries with people in my congregation.

Overall conclusions

Reconciliation is a subject that is too broad in scope to be covered exhaustively in a six week project. This project is simply a start of a conversation that will continue from this time forward. I believe that this project has been a positive first step in creating an environment where broken relationships can be reconciled and healed. I have come to the conclusion that the ministry of Reconciliation is a never ending work that requires a commitment from all in order to create a reconciled and redemptive community that can be used as agents of reconciliation in the world. Furthermore I have discovered that the ministry of reconciliation is much more than a set of principle to be applied, but rather it is initiated by God and dependent upon God. Reconciliation is a spiritual endeavor in that God works in us by his Spirit and enables us to be utilized as instrument of reconciliation. Reconciliation is strategic in that as a reconciled community we are called to be ambassadors for Christ entrusted with both the word and work of reconciling broken relationships. This project has laid a critical foundation for the healing of relationships in our church. It has inspired me to further explore the dynamics of reconciliation in my teaching and preaching as we “Move Forward by Faith Together.”

APPENDIX – A

Survey Questionnaires

Project Reconciliation: Post Implementation Survey Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in Christian Community

1. Did you take the initial Assessment phase survey utilized to assess expectations and the current state of relationships at FBC?

- YES NO

2. Were you present during bible study and Sunday mornings during the sermonic and teaching series on Reconciliation and Relationships?

- YES NO

3. Has the teaching and preaching on Reconciliation and Relationships that you've been exposed to been effective?

- STRONGLY AGREE DISAGREE

4. Have you applied any of the Relationship Principles taught in Bible Study in your personal life?

- STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE

5. Has the teaching and preaching on Relationships and Reconciliation had an impact in any relationships you have in the church/congregation at FBC?

- STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE

6. Have you developed or nurtured any “new” relationships or reconciled and “broken” relationships in church/congregation as result of preaching and teaching?

- STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE

7. Do you think that the teaching and preaching on Relationships and Reconciliation will help our congregation to become more cohesive and unified in ministry?

- STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE

8. What can we do to build stronger and healthier relationships in our community?

-
-

APPENDIX – B

Survey Results

Project Reconciliation: Survey Results

Demographics:

Gender breakdown of survey participants?

80% female, 20% male

What are the ages of participants?

1%	18-25
9%	26-35
23%	36-49
25%	50-64
28%	65-74
14%	75+

How far do you live from FBC?

47% 1 mile or less

Expectations:

Within the church I expect to develop relationships with?

51% with a lot of people...

With regard to my beliefs and feelings, I would expect to:

51% be open about most things

The most time I would be willing to commit to church services, meetings and activities each week would be:

54% 3-5 hours

With regard to other people's families, work and interest I would expect to know:

62% some things

I would expect to meet most people in the church at:

36% Church meetings & Social events...

Reality:

What proportion of congregation do you know the names of?

34% between $\frac{1}{2}$ of congregation & $\frac{3}{4}$ of congregation

What is the status of Relationships within FBC?

48% several good strong relationships

People avoid talking face to face when there is a difficult issue?

Agree

Most conversations I have with people in church on Sunday are superficial.

Disagree

I feel I can be open about my doubts and questions with most people in this church.

Agree

I'm in touch with a number of church members enough to build strong relationships with them.

Agree

APPENDIX – C

Teaching Series

Lesson#1 Project Reconciliation: Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in Christian Community

Intro:

- Purpose...
- Proposed Plan...
- Desired Outcomes...

Relationships:

Are Relationships Important in Christian Community?

Why?

-
-

“Relationships are the glue that holds teams together...”

What are the Characteristics of Strong Relationships?

- RESPECT
- SHARED EXPERIENCE
- TRUST

- **RECIPROCITY**
- **MUTUAL ENJOYMENT**

**Lesson#2 Project Reconciliation:
Understanding Others
Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community**

Intro:

“Relationships are the glue that holds teams together...”

What is important to you?

-
-

Relationships:

What do I need to know about others?

-
-

WHY DO PEOPLE FAIL TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS?

- Fear
 -
- Self-Centeredness
 -
- Failure to Appreciate Differences
 - Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 4:11, 12; 1 Cor. 12:1-11
- Failure to Acknowledge Similarities

○

WHAT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT PEOPLE:

“Everybody wants to be somebody”

•

“Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

•

“Everybody needs somebody.”

•

“Everybody can be somebody when somebody believes in him or her.”

•

“Anybody who helps somebody influences a lot of bodies.”

•

What can we DO to ensure that we UNDERSTAND others?

•

•

•

Lesson#3 Project Reconciliation:
The Meaning of Reconciliation
Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community
2 Corinthians 5: 18

Intro:

How do you handle conflict in relationships?

-
-

Reconciliation defined?

-
- “The action by which peace is made between personal enemies.”
-

Why is Reconciliation necessary?

-
-
-

Who is responsible for Reconciliation?

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What does it mean to be “Reconciled” to God?

- (Romans 5:10)

I. Context (2 Cor. 5:18)

Why does Paul write this?

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If Paul is writing to the Corinthian church, why does he utilize the phrase “be reconciled to God...?”

II. Content (2 Cor. 5:18-21)

How is Reconciliation accomplished?

- Reconciliation based on “*imputation*”

Imputation – accounting term - “to put to one’s account...”

III. Conclusions

What is our response?

- We have been given the “ministry” and “message” of Reconciliation...
- Is there a difference between the “ministry” and the “message” of reconciliation?
 -
- “We are ambassadors for Christ...”
 - What does this mean for us?

Lesson#4 Project Reconciliation: Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#1

- **“Place the Highest Value on Relationships”**
- The Greatest Command... (Mark 12:29 – 31)
 - **Memory Verse** *“...The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself...”*
 - **Point to Ponder** “No one is outside the bounds of my LOVE...”
 - **Why is it necessary to place highest value on Relationships? How is this done?**
 - **What does it mean to Love your neighbor as yourself?**

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#2

- **“LOVE as Jesus LOVES you...”**
- A “NEW” Command... (John 13:34)
 - **Memory Verse** *“A new command I give you: LOVE one another. As I have LOVED you, so you must LOVE one another.”*
 - **Point to Ponder** “The only way I can find the strength to forgive others is to embrace the fact that Jesus has forgiven me.”
 - **How has Jesus demonstrated his Love towards us?**

- **How can we Love others as Jesus Loves us?**

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#3

- **“Communicate From the Heart...”**
- What is in your heart? (Matthew 12:34)
 - **Memory Verse** “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”
 - **Point to Ponder** “All relationships are fueled by communication.”

Context:

When does Jesus say this?

Why?

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- **The Power of Words... (Proverbs 12:18) “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”**

- **Question to Consider – Who needs to hear me speak words that heal?**

Lesson#5 Project Reconciliation: Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

- The Greatest Command... (Mark 12:29 – 31)
 - **Memory Verse** *“...The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself...”*
- **“Place the Highest Value on Relationships”**

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#2:

- A “NEW” Command... (John 13:34)
 - **Memory Verse** *“A new command I give you: LOVE one another. As I have LOVED you, so you must LOVE one another.”*

“LOVE AS JESUS LOVES YOU...”

Context:

When does Jesus say this? Why?

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Why is this considered to be a “NEW” commandment?

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“As I have LOVED you, so you must love one another...”

Is this possible?

Who is Jesus speaking of when he says “one another”?

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How has Jesus loved us?

- Selflessly
- Sacrificially
- Unconditionally
- **Power of Jesus Command:**
 - **Point to Ponder:** Jesus does not want us to try our hardest, he wants us to learn to trust him...
 - **Prayer to Pray:** *Father I do not have the strength to do this on my own. I'm trusting in your strength to enable me to believe and think and say and DO the right thing...*

Lesson#6 Project Reconciliation:

Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#1

- **“Place the Highest Value on Relationships”**
- The Greatest Command... (Mark 12:29 – 31)
 - **Memory Verse** *“...The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself...”*
 - **Point to Ponder** “No one is outside the bounds of my LOVE...”
 - **Why is it necessary to place highest value on Relationships? How is this done?**
 - **What does it mean to Love your neighbor as yourself?**

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#2

- **“LOVE as Jesus LOVES you...”**
- A “NEW” Command... (John 13:34)
 - **Memory Verse** *“A new command I give you: LOVE one another. As I have LOVED you, so you must LOVE one another.”*
 - **Point to Ponder** “The only way I can find the strength to forgive others is to embrace the fact that Jesus has forgiven me.”

- **How has Jesus demonstrated his Love towards us?**
- **How can we Love others as Jesus Loves us?**

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#3

- **“Communicate From the Heart...”**
- What is in your heart? (Matthew 12:34)
 - **Memory Verse** “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”
 - **Point to Ponder** “All relationships are fueled by communication.”

Context:

When does Jesus say this?

Why?

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- **The Power of Words... (Proverbs 12:18) “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”**

- **Question to Consider – Who needs to hear me speak words that heal?**

Lesson#7 Project Reconciliation: Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#4

- **“As You Judge, You Will Be Judged...”**
- (Matthew 7: 1-5)
 - **Memory Verse** “Do not Judge, or you to will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”
 - **Point to Ponder** “Hypocrisy is focusing on the speck in another person’s eye while ignoring the plank in your own. Integrity is removing the plank from your own eye. Mercy is removing the speck from another’s eye.”

Context:

Why does Jesus say this?

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Judgment defined?

- ***Krino*** – to divide, separate, come to a decision... to try in a solemn judicial manner... to pass sentence.
- Is there a difference between Judgment and Discernment?

What does it mean to be Hypocritical? (Matt. 7:3)

How does Hypocrisy hinder relationships?
Integrity defined?

- What does it mean to act with Integrity?

Mercy defined?

- What does it mean to treat people with Mercy?

JESUS our example: (John 8: 1-11)

- What is the problem in this passage?
- Was the crowd who brought the women to Jesus “Judgmental”?
- In what way were the actions of the “crowd” hypocritical?

How does Jesus deal with the woman: (John 8: 6-11)

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Question to Consider: Are there places in my life where I see the tendency to be judgmental of other?

Lesson#8 Project Reconciliation: Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#5

- **“The Greatest are the Servants”**
- (Matthew 23: 11-12)
 - **Memory Verse** “The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”
 - **Point to Ponder** “Jesus teaches us to translate our desire for greatness into actions of humility.”

Context: Matt. 23: 11-12

Why does Jesus say this?

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What does it mean to *exalt* yourself?

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What does it mean to *humble* yourself?

- ***Tapeinoo*** – to bring low... to bring about a recognition of one's sinfulness...
- Matt. 18:4, James 4:10, Jesus are example Phil. 2:8

How does Humility impact relationships?

JESUS our example: (Mark 10:32-45)

- What is the problem in this passage?
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Watch where you sit: (Luke 14: 7-14)

- What is the problem in this passage?
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Question to Consider: Have I ever been willing to take the lowest place? When I did, what happened?

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Lesson#9 Project Reconciliation: Relationship Principles

Building Stronger and Healthier Relationships in
Christian Community

Intro:

RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLE#6

- **“Treat Others as You Want Them to Treat You”**
- (Matthew 7:12 NLT)
 - **Memory Verse** “Do for others what you would like them to do for you”
 - **Point to Ponder** “I must give myself to meeting others’ needs if I’m going to get my needs met.”

Context: Matt. 7: 12

Why does Jesus say this?

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Why is this verse referred to as the “Golden Rule”? How is this expressed in relationships?

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When considering relationships, what is most important to you?

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- “How do I get my NEEDS met...”?
 - **Reciprocal Rule** – “Whatever you do for me, that’s what I’ll do for you.”
 - **Ricochet Rule** – “Do to others based on what some other person has done to you.”
 - **The Hidden Motive Rule** – “I act like I’m doing it for you, but it’s really to get what I want.”
- “The only way to get your selfish needs met is to be unselfish.”
 - “I must give myself to meeting others’ needs if I’m going to get my needs met.”
 - What does it mean to “GIVE” yourself?
- How is the “Golden Rule” lived out practically in our lives? How do we overcome selfishness in relationships?
 - Gratitude – Thank God for the other person
 - Initiative – Take the initiative to meet their needs...
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Question to Consider: Who can I thank God for so that I can grab the initiative in meeting his or her needs?

APPENDIX – D

Expository Preaching Series – Doctrinal & Narrative preaching examples

Sermon#1

A Reason for Reconciliation

2 Cor. 5:18 “...who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

On tomorrow this nation will celebrate the life and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was a man who dedicated his life to non-violent protest in order to bring about change in our society. The civil protests were not an end in and of themselves, but rather redemption and reconciliation were the ends that King ultimately wanted to achieve... He believed that the aftermath of violence was chaos, but the aftermath of non-violence was the creation of the “Beloved Community.” Dr. King had a vision of the “Beloved Community...” a community where people existed and were interrelated in peace and harmony. The Beloved Community was a community where relationships were established and maintained on the basis of LOVE... King recognized that if the world was going to be a better place, it would take the healing of those who had been hurt at the hands of the oppressor... It would take the RECONCILIATION of relationships that had been broken...

Dr. King visualized a “Beloved Community” a community where brotherhood and sisterhood are an ever present reality... A community that exemplifies a spirit of LOVE and harmony in relationships that can serve to transform enemies into friends... The opposition into allies... King had a vision of a “Beloved Community...” Whatever happened to his vision...? Whatever happened to his dream...? Whatever happened to

the possibility of peace here on earth? What has happened to Dr. King's dream for in a real sense his dream has become a living nightmare... A nightmare where relationships have deteriorated with the onslaught of violence...

Here we are in the year 2013 living in the post-modern era and yet we still find ourselves dealing with death and destruction that has destroyed families and communities all across this nation... The fact that we live in a society... a climate and culture where a young man can walk into a school building and kill innocent children... The dream has become a nightmare... Whatever happened to relationships? I believe the late Rodney King said it best in the aftermath of the LA riots that were a result of the brutal beating he endured at the hands of the LA police department, when he said "Can't we all get along..." These words express a sentiment that is yet prevailing and prevalent in the world in which we live... "Can't we all just get along...?" Whatever happened to relationships? Whatever happened to our sense of community? Whatever happened to the time when people would look out for one another...? When people took care of one another... When people had each other's back because they were in relationship with one another... Whatever happened to relationships? No one can make it on their own... No one can make it by themselves... We need each other... Dr. King said himself that "We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality." We NEED each other... Personal growth cannot take place apart from meaningful RELATIONSHIPS with other people...

If the RELATIONSHIPS we have are going to be repaired... If RELATIONSHIPS are going to be healed... If relationships are going to be stronger and healthier as we move forward by faith together, it is going to take RECONCILIATION... The first step in building or repairing relationships is RECONCILIATION... RECONCILIATION is the action by which PEACE is made between personal enemies... RECONCILIATION is the removal of hostility between to persons... RECONCILIATION is when to parties that find themselves separated are brought back together... It means to change the state of RELATIONSHIP thoroughly...

When we examine this text we discover the words of Paul the apostle as he writes the epistle to the church at Corinth... Paul writes the church because although the church at Corinth was a good church, it was also a divided church... There were some folk in the church that thought they were better than other folks in the community... God had gift the congregation at Corinth, but there were those who possessed certain gifts and therefore thought they were better than the others...

But not only did Paul have to deal with divisions in the church, but Paul also had some Pastoral problems with his relationships with some of the people because there were some people who did not want to operate under the authority of the Pastor... There were some in the congregation that challenged the authenticity of Paul's message and the authority of Paul's ministry. Paul writes this letter in order to RECOPILE relationships that had been ruptured.

Paul writes this letter to remind the Corinthians of the great relationship they share with God through Jesus Christ... Paul wants the people to know that the relationship they have with God should be the foundational basis for the relationship that they share with each other...

Paul begins by declaring that because of God, he has a NEW ATTITUDE... Paul no longer views people by outside appearances... Paul no longer views the externals of life as the ultimate measure of a man's or woman's worth... Paul recognizes that it is not what is externally visible that is most important but rather it is the condition of someone's heart... Paul has come to visualize people through lens and eyes of God... Paul recognizes that all of us are created in the express image of God after his likeness and should be treated as such...

But not only does Paul speak of a New Attitude, but Paul also talk about the New CREATION, because he says that if any man or any woman be IN CHRIST, that he or she is a New CREATION... The old has passed away behold all things are NEW... Then as he reflects on the NEWNESS that is a present reality, he says ALL things come from God... Because God has a track record of making things NEW... The New Attitude comes from God... The NEW Person comes from God... Paul recognizes that ALL that he is and ALL that he has become is from God... God is able to make things NEW...

God is able to bring RELATIONSHIPS that are broken back together again... Because God specializes in RECONCILIATION... God is not satisfied with BROKENNESS...

God is not satisfied with separation... God wants to RECONCILE what is broken in our lives...

The relevant question for the text is what is the REASON for RECONCILIATION?

Why is that relationships need reconciliation in the first place? When we peruse the premises of the passage the first thing we discover is that one of the Reasons for Reconciliation is the Reality of SIN... SIN is a condition that Severs relationships... SIN is a reality that results in ultimate Separation... Separation from God and Separation from our fellowman...

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, it was SIN that ultimately led to the separation from God... (Tell Story of FALL). When I messed up in school the last person I wanted to see was my father... I ran and hid, just like Adam because I knew that I would have to deal with the consequences of my actions... SIN is not simply an act, it is a condition that we are born into. It is a condition that has served to alienate us from God and hinder our relationships with each other... When we are out of fellowship with God, it will be difficult to be in fellowship with each other.

The first step in ensuring that we are in proper fellowship with each other is to make sure we are in proper fellowship with God... Our relationship with God ultimately has an impact on our relationship with each other... It could be that the relationships you have around you are suffering because your relationship with God is lacking...

But not only do we see a Reason for Reconciliation - SIN, but we also see the Means of Reconciliation... We see how it is that Reconciliation is produced –

Salvation... The bible says that God was IN Christ reconciling the world to himself... God was IN Christ... The totality of his being dwelt IN Christ... The fullness of his LOVE dwelt IN Christ... The enormity of his POWER... Dwelt IN Christ... The bible says that God was IN Christ Reconciling the world to himself...

Notice that Reconciliation is God's WORK... Notice that God takes the INITIATIVE when it comes to Reconciliation... God does not wait for the world to apologize... God takes the initiative... God does not wait for the world to get itself together... God takes the initiative... God does not wait for us to make our appeal to him... God takes the initiative to repair the rift in our RELATIONSHIP... look at it... The Offended goes after the Offender... The one who was Rejected pursues those who have Rejected him... The one who was Hurt attempts to RECONCILE with those who Hurt him...

How is Reconciliation accomplished? God made Christ to be SIN for us who knew no SIN that we might be made the righteousness of God in him... God took our SIN and placed it on Christ, and took Christ's righteousness and placed it on us... Reconciliation has to do with IMPUTATION... Imputation can be defined as putting to someone's account... In Christ we have the Answer for our Agony... IN Christ we have a Balm for our Bruises... IN Christ we have a Cure for our Calamities... IN Christ we have Deliverance from our Dilemma... In Christ we have an Eraser for our Errors... In Christ we have Forgiveness for our Faults... IN Christ we have Grace for our Guilt...

The bible says that God was IN Christ... reconciling the world to himself... There was nothing you and I could do to repair the relationship that was severed, So God sent

Christ... There was nothing you and I could do to bridge the gap that had been created, so God sent Christ... You and I could not pay the SIN debt that we owed... So God sent Christ... The song writer says that Jesus paid it ALL... ALL to him I owe, SIN had left a crimson stain... He washed it white as snow...

But when we examine this text, not only do we see the Means of Reconciliation – Salvation through Christ, but we also see the RESULTS of RECONCILIATION –

Transformation... Because the bible says that “If any man or woman is IN Christ he or she is a New CREATION...”

- NEW POSITION before God... NEW PERSPECTIVE on life, on Christ and on relationships with others... and NEW PURPOSE... To live life for God’s Glory

The Results of Reconciliation leads to our RESPONSIBILITY... The fact that we are Reconciled to God... The fact that we are now in a Right Relationship with God brings with it RESPONSIBILITY because the bible says that God has given us the Ministry of Reconciliation... The WORK... And God has given US the Message of Reconciliation... The WORD... We need both... The Ministry and the Message... The WORK and the WORD... Because if relationships are going to be RECONCILED it will take both WORK and the WORD... WORK in relationships must built on the WORD and the WORD in relationships must be accompanied by WORK...

In other words, now that we have been RECONCILED to God, God wants to use us to be instruments of Reconciliation in the relationships that we have... God wants to use us as his instruments and agents to bring Reconciliation to the world...

Paul says we are Ambassadors for Christ... An Ambassador is someone who is sent to represent the kingdom... The Ambassador does not represent him or herself... The Ambassador represents the one who sent him... The Ambassador is sent to announce the good news that we have been reconciled to God... The fact that we have been RECONCILED to God ought to motivate us to be RECONCILED to each other... Our relationship with God should have an impact with our relationship with each other... The bible declares that we ought to LOVE God with the totality of our being and LOVE also our neighbor as ourselves... What you do and what you say will go a long way in repairing and rebuilding the relationships in your life...

Don't be satisfied with broken relationships in your life... take the initiative and do whatever it takes in order to reconcile broken relationships... **The ultimate REASON for RECONCIATION is LOVE... For God so LOVED the world that he GAVE his only begotten son...**

LOVE is the redemptive force that can RECONCILE your enemies... If we are going to RESTORE and RECONCILE relationships it is going to take LOVE... LOVE has the POWER to build bridges of UNITY that hatred has torn down... GOD RECONCILED US because GOD LOVED us... And he did it on a hill call Calvary... On Calvary Jesus took the horizontally took the hand of man and vertically took the hand of GOD and joined them together... On Calvary... The veil of the temple was torn in two and uninhibited access to the father was re-established... On Calvary... The relationship that was ruptured was now repaired... On Calvary... The ransomed was rendered... our salvation

was purchased... SIN was taken care of... On Calvary... God's LOVE was demonstrated for our deliverance...

LOVE is the REASON for RECONCILIATION... Look at LOVE... Because God LOVED us... LOVE came down from heaven to earth just for you and I... LOVE was born in the city of Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth and baptized in the Jordan... LOVE traveled the dusty plains of Palestine... LOVE healed the sick... LOVE raised the dead and LOVE set those who were captive FREE... They led LOVE from judgment hall to judgment hall... LOVE did not utter a mumbling word... LOVE went to Calvary on Friday... They drove nails in LOVE's hands... A spike in LOVE's feet... And because he LOVED us... He cried father forgive them because they know not what they do... Because he LOVED us he died one Friday...

Sermon#2

The Road to Reconciliation John 4:1 "Now he had to go through

Samaria..."

One of the greatest gifts that God has ever given us is the gift of relationships... Whether we recognize it or not, God has blessed us tremendously when he gave us the gift of

each other... Relationships are important because everything we do requires teamwork... Relationships are the glue that holds teams together... There is no "I" in team... If we are going to be successful as a church it will be the result of teamwork... It will be the result of strong relationships that are built on the foundation of God's WORD...

You have to be careful with relationships because everyone who says that they're your friend is not really your friend... Some folk will call themselves your friend as long as they can get something from you... Some folk will call themselves your friend, smile in your face and talk about you like a dog behind your back... You have to be careful who you enter into relationship with because there are those who do not necessarily have your best interest in mind...

Relationships are also difficult because the enemy is always at work trying to destroy relationships... All of us whether we realize it or not have to deal with the attack of our adversary... The bible says he is like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour... And every now and then the enemy will attempt to insert himself into our situation and circumstance in order to ruin the relationships that God has blessed us with... Can I get a witness?

Relationships are not easy... Relationships are not easy to establish... Not easy to maintain... and relationships are not easy to RECONCILE... We should never settle or become satisfied with relationships that have been broken... We should never settle for

broken relationships in our life... broken relationships in our communities or broken relationships in our churches... Because we need each other... Despite our differences... Despite our weaknesses... Despite our personalities... We need each other... God can do great things through a church when a church comes together... God's will and God's work can be accomplished through a church that comes together...

The truth of the matter is that relationships are hard... relationships are not easy... Relationships do not establish themselves by themselves... Relationships do not heal themselves by themselves... Relationships do not nurture themselves by themselves... If relationships in our lives are going to be established, nurtured and RECONCILED it will take people who are willing to do the necessary WORK that is required to do so... The bible declares that "God was IN Christ reconciling the world to himself..." and God has given us the "ministry" of Reconciliation... And God has given us the "message" of Reconciliation...

In other words God has given us the WORK and the WORD that is designed to bring people back into a right relationship with himself... God has also given us a WORK and a WORD that is designed to bring people into a right relationship with each other... We need to understand that if relationships are going to be established, maintained and reconciled we will have to be willing to travel down the Road of Reconciliation... The Road of reconciliation is a road where you will have to go where others refuse to go... The road of Reconciliation is a road that you will have to travel in order to do what other folk are not necessarily ready to do... The Road of reconciliation is a road that you must

travel in order to say what other folk won't say in order to bring folk back together... In order to repair that which was broken...

When we examine this text we discover Jesus who is willing to travel down the Road of reconciliation in order to establish, maintain and RECONCILE a relationship that had been broken... The bible says that the word had gotten out throughout town that Jesus and his followers were baptizing and gaining more disciples than John... The Pharisees viewed the conversion of souls from a competitive perspective and viewed any movement that was gaining attention as a threat to their perceived political position and power... We ought not to be surprised by this because there will always be people who are watching what you do through the eyes of jealousy because they are not necessarily thrilled about how God is working in your life...

Jesus whose life and purpose was divinely appointed refused to get into a confrontation with the religious leaders prematurely so the record is that he decided to leave Judea and travel back to Galilee once again... To avoid conflict, Jesus relinquishes his right to remain and retreats to Galilee... The bible says that prior to his departure that Jesus declares that he must go through Samaria... The KJV says that "I must needs go through Samaria." It was a necessity for him to go through Samaria... It was what I call a DIVINE DETOUR... It was a Detour because Jews would not normally travel through Samaria to get to Galilee...

To go through Samaria would be the most direct route to Galilee, but it was not considered to be the best route... Jews who traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee would

travel around the city of Samaria to avoid coming into contact with the Samaritans who they despised... They considered the Samaritans to be their enemies... Why were they enemies? Where did this prejudice come from? Where did the hostility and hatred for the Samaritans come from? Samaria was a region between Judea and Galilee where Jews of mixed blood lived... The Jews despised the Samaritans because they viewed them as being half breeds... They were a people who intermarried with others during the Assyrian captivity and therefore forming a mixed race of people who became known as the Samaritans...

This was a Divine Detour and Jesus had a Divine Appointment with a woman at the WELL... It was a Deliberate Route... Because Jesus declares that he must go through Samaria... It was a Dangerous Route because of the animosity that existed between Jew and Samaritan... but it was also a Draining Route because Jesus and his disciples would be forced to travel the dry and dusty desert in order to get to their intended destination...

What I LOVE about the LORD... What I LOVE about Jesus... Is that he is willing to travel down some roads that others may not travel in order to SAVE someone who finds themselves in need... The LORD is willing to go where other folk won't go to get to someone who is in need... And you and I ought to thank God right now because if truth be told... If we're honest this morning we know that the LORD traveled to where we were in order to get us to where we needed to be... Jesus was willing to make a Divine Detour in to the situations and circumstances of your life in order for us to discover who

he is and in order to transform us into the people he desires us to be... Am I right about it? We did not find God, God found us... Am I right about it? Amazing GRACE how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me... I once lost but now I'm found... Bound but now I'm FREE... The record is that the LORD took a Divine Detour in order to minister to somebody who was in need...

If relationships are going to be RECONCILED you have to be willing to GO where the people are... GO WHERE THEY ARE... Folk are not necessarily going to come to you... You have to be willing to take the initiative and GO to where they are... If folk are going to be SAVED, you have to GO to where they are... If relationships are going to be healed, you have to be will to take the first step and go to the one who is in need of healing... Stop waiting for folk to come to you... Stop waiting for someone to apologize to you... You sometimes have to be the one who initiates reconciliation... The truth of the matter Reconciliation starts with you... Jesus declares I have got to go through Samaria...

But not only do we see Jesus's Divine Detour... But we also see a DIVINE DIALOUGE between Jesus and a woman at the WELL... The bible says that Jesus came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's WELL was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the WELL. The bible says that it was about the sixth hour or 12:00pm noon. And the record is that there came a certain Samaritan women to the WELL to draw some water...

Look at this woman... It was a woman's job to ensure that the household had enough water to survive... It was the woman's responsibility to make the trip to the

WELL daily to ensure the family had what it needed to survive... It was the woman's job to draw from the WELL and carry the water pots back to her home... Look at the woman's occupation... Look at her Journey to the WELL is was both ritualistic and routine... (Women have always been instrumental to the preservation of a people... Women have always worked hard to make sure that their families were taken care of... Our women are not frail or fickle we have some strong women who are full of faith who were willing to do whatever it took to provide for the family)

The bible says that it was 12 noon when she came to the WELL... This was not the most opportune time to make the trip to the WELL because it was the time when the sun shone the brightest... It was considered to be the hottest time of the day... Most women made the trip at 6:00pm in the evening when the sun had set... Why would this woman come to the WELL at noon? Well not only did this woman have an occupation, but she also had a Reputation... And it was because of her reputation that she journeyed to the WELL at noon in order to avoid coming into contact with people who had shunned her... Because of her many failed relationships with men, people in the city looked down on her... She was ostracized... She was marginalized... She was treated like someone who did not matter... Look at her journey to the WELL... She comes to the WELL wounded... HURT by life and ashamed of her PAST... She comes to the WELL filled with guilt and shame because she sought satisfaction in relationships only to find failure... So she comes to the WELL alone... She comes all by herself... There are No friends or family members to accompany her... She's forced to suffer and struggle with her failures all by herself...

But what I LOVE about the LORD he does not hold her PAST against her... Jesus is not hung up on our hang ups... The record is that Jesus enters into DIVINE DIALOUGE with a woman who was wounded at the WELL... Jesus has a WORD of LIBERATION for a woman at the WELL... Jesus seeks to enter into and reconcile a broken relationship by entering into conversation with a wounded woman suffering at the WELL... Jesus talks to her when no one else will... Jesus has a WORD for her when everybody else turned their backs on her... Jesus has a WORD of LIBERATION for someone who is struggling at the WELL...

And some of us are just like this sister in the text, wounded by our failures in life shunned by those who hurt us seeking to live life in isolation because we no longer want to be around people... Living our lives with shame and guilt associated with the mistakes we made in our PAST... The enemy wants to keep you in isolation in order to keep you from living a productive life in your present because of the mistakes you made in your PAST... But I stopped by to tell somebody that you do not have to be held captive as a prisoner of your PAST because the LORD is able to set you free... IN Christ... Your faults are not fatal... IN Christ your failures are not final... IN Christ... There is liberty because the bible says that if any man or woman be IN Christ, he or she is a new creation the old has gone away behold ALL things are new... You may have fallen down in your PAST but IN Christ you can get back up again... IN Christ you are no longer held captive by the mistakes you have made in the PAST... (Ray Lewis illustration – despite failures in his

PAST he continues to give God the praise for what the Lord has done in his life... Some people have a problem with Ray because he keeps talking about the LORD.)

Look at the text... The bible says that as the woman approaches that WELL, Jesus does not wait until she says something to him... Jesus INITIATES contact with her by asking her for a drink of water...

Notice Jesus does not quote scripture... Jesus asks her for a drink of water... Jesus does not beat her over the head with the bible... Jesus asks her for a drink of water... In other words in order for Jesus to establish this relationship he does so by first making Relevant Conversation... He speaks in a language that she understands... He does not start with doctrine... He makes Relevant Conversation... The woman came to the WELL seeking to draw water, so Jesus asks this woman for a drink... He makes Relevant Conversation with the one he was trying to reach.

If stronger and healthy relationships are going to be established in our lives... If broken relationships are going to be healed, you and I have to learn how to INITIATE contact and make RELEVANT conversation... If we are going to reach people, we have to learn how to talk in language they understand... Many relationships falter and fail because we fail to communicate with language that is able to be understood...

But not only does Jesus Initiate Contact and make Relevant Conversation... Jesus also breaks down the social barriers that separate them... When Jesus asks the woman

for a drink, the woman replies “you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink? (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jews not only did not associate with Samaritans, but because they viewed Samaritans as being defiled, they would not utilize any utensils that were used by Samaritans. Jesus breaks down the social barriers that separate by asking her for a drink, but he also breaks down the social barriers that separate because it was illegal for a woman to speak to a man in public...

Jesus not only has a WORD of Liberation... Jesus also has a WORD of REVELATION... Relevant Conversation at the WELL is followed by Divine DECLARATION at the WELL... Jesus responds to the woman by saying “that if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would’ve asked him and he would have given you Living Water.” Jesus begins to move the conversation into another direction... The woman replies “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the WELL is deep. Where can you get this living water?” She was focusing on the physical while Jesus was talking spiritually with her now... Jesus has a WORD at her WELL...

Jesus declares that “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Not only do we see this wounded woman who comes to the WELL, but we also need to see the WELL itself... The WELL represented for the woman that which could sustain life... Water was a precious commodity in ancient biblical times that was a

necessity for life... It was necessary for this woman to travel to the WELL in order to sustain her life...

Jesus declares a WORD at the WELL in stating that he has something to offer that cannot be obtained in the WELL... Jesus says he has “Living Water...” He says that the water in the WELL will only satisfy you temporarily... But the “Living Water” I give will satisfy you eternally... The woman wanted this living water because she thought if she received it she would no longer have to make the journey to the WELL... She was hoping that she would be FREED from the mundane task of journeying to the WELL... But what Jesus offers is FREEDOM within life, not FREEDOM from life... The “Living Waters” that Jesus promises are not physical but rather spiritual resources that supply spiritual power enabling us to face the challenges of life, not escape them...

Jesus has a WORD at your WELL... Jesus wants us to stop drawing and drinking from WELLS in this life that can only provide temporary sustenance or satisfaction... But rather draw and drink from the “Living Water” that he offers that satisfies eternally... Stop seeking satisfaction and sustenance in things and find satisfaction in me... Stop trying to find satisfaction in cars, cash, Caribbean cruises and creature comforts and find satisfaction in the one who created you... Stuff will let you down... But the savior will never let you down... Am I right about it?

Well look at this woman... She says I have got to have this “Living Water” she says to Jesus “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus looks at the woman and drops a bomb when he says “go call

your husband..." The woman replies, "I have no husband." Jesus says "You're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you are with now is not your husband..." Before Jesus can enter into relationship... before Jesus can reconcile a broken relationship... Jesus has to deal with SIN... Jesus cannot ignore SIN, it has to be dealt with... Notice Jesus deals with her SIN in private... he does not make a public spectacle of her... He does not blow up her spot... Jesus does not put her blast... He deals with her SIN in private... He does so because Jesus does not seek condemnation... Jesus always seeks restoration and reconciliation... Jesus has to show her to herself... before there can be Conversion, there must be Conviction...

But not only do we see Divine Declaration at the WELL... Finally we see that Divine REVELATION leads to Divine TRANSFORMATION at the WELL... Because the woman would go onto say that I know when the messiah comes he will show us all things... Jesus says to the woman e one you're looking for you're looking at... I am the messiah that has traveled down the Road of Reconciliation in order that you might have life and have it more abundantly... I am the one who offers "Living Waters..."

Well look at this woman now REVELATION led to her TRANSFORMATION... The bible says that after talking to Jesus that she drops her water pots and she rushes to the city and tells the citizens there about somebody who could save anybody... She ran back to the city that shunned her and preached the good news of the Gospel... Her journey to the WELL led to her JOY at the WELL... She came seeking sustenance for her body... She left with salvation for her soul... She came seeking water to quench her thirst; she left

with a savior who could save her soul... She came seeking WATER; she left with a WORD... Because she met Jesus she was instrumental in helping other meet him to... Because her relationship was reconciled... She had a responsibility to travel down the same Road of Reconciliation that led her into a relationship with Jesus... She did not wait for the people to apologize... She went and told them about somebody who changed her life... Because when you meet Jesus your life will never be the same... There ought to be witness in the house who can testify that you met Jesus one day on the Road of Reconciliation... The ROAD that led to our Liberation... our Salvation and ultimately our Transformation... You ought to thank Jesus because he was willing to travel down the Road of Reconciliation... Didn't he do it...? He came down through forty and two generations... Traveling down the Road to Reconciliation...

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