Engaging Scripture Through Dwelling In The Word At The Newmarket Church Of Christ

Nathan Pickard

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ABSTRACT

This project addressed the lack of a meaningful engagement with Scripture at the Newmarket Church of Christ. I have defined “meaningful” as an engagement with Scripture that allows experiences and contexts to be a component of interpretation. The purpose of the project is to provide a means of reading whereby the importance of Scripture will be kept at the forefront, while allowing context and experience to be part of the reading of Scripture. The method of reading Scripture employed in this project is “dwelling in the Word.” Dwelling in the Word is a practice that involves a deep-listening process. Participants are asked to listen to the Scripture being read, listen to a “friendly-looking stranger” reveal what they heard, while also listening for how God is speaking in and through the text. Thirteen participants, all members of the Newmarket Church of Christ, were led through a six-week engagement of Scripture through dwelling in the Word. The text chosen for dwelling was 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

At the end of six weeks of dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, some participants belief about the nature and function of Scripture transformed from thinking there is always a single meaning to be applied, to the possibility that there could be many interpretations because of context and experience. In addition, participants made a transition from seeing the text as something to be applied to their lives, to thinking about how they are performers of the text. The process of dwelling also formed a community that was not present at the beginning of the sessions. Somewhere and somehow, the process of listening to each other allowed a tight-knit community to be formed.
ENGAGING SCRIPTURE THROUGH DWELLING IN THE WORD
AT THE NEWMARKET CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of Graduate School
Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

Nathan Pickard
May 2011
This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate’s committee, has been
accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

_______________________________________
Dean of the Graduate School

Date

_____________________________

_____________________________

Chair – Dr. Stephen Johnson

_____________________________

Trevor Thompson

_____________________________

Dr. Brady Bryce
To the Newmarket Church of Christ
for your patience and willingness
to help me minister to you and the neighborhood.
To my family who has instilled in me a love for God’s Word
and to my wife who is willing to walk beside me
as we live out the story of Scripture
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I started this journey in hopes that I could become a minister equipped for the task of serving a church. Part of me still feels inadequate to serve a community of faith. However, the journey has afforded me growth in areas I was least expecting. I attribute this to my colleagues in my cohort who believe in the ministry I am engaged in and the professors who pushed, challenged, rebuked, and encouraged me. To both groups, for your friendship and teaching, I will always be indebted.

I must also thank the Newmarket Church of Christ for affording me the opportunity to pursue this degree. Without your patience, time, and energy to be engaged in various projects, encouragement and conversation, none of this would be possible. To my friends Greg and Kerri, who made sure my papers were grammatically correct and Ed and Claude, who reviewed my historical work on Churches of Christ in Ontario, I am thankful. To my wife, thank you for your patience. To Stephen and Trevor, my two advisors, thank you for not settling for mediocre. Thank you for being exemplars of scholarship, for your critical comments, your friendship and encouragement, both through this process and in life.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the need for a ministry intervention that will lead the
Newmarket Church of Christ\(^1\) to an engagement of Scripture that is more
meaningful.\(^2\) The project intended to introduce and implement a meaningful
engagement of Scripture to a select group of individuals from the NCofC through the
practice dwelling in the Word. Chapter 1 introduces the project with an examination
of the heritage of the NCofC, the congregation’s current context, and evidence
supporting a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture,\(^3\) which then leads into
clarification of the problem, purpose, assumptions, and delimitations of the project.

Chapter 2 outlines the theological framework of the project. Chapter 3 presents the
methodological approach to the project, describing the ministry intervention,
participants, sessions, and methods of evaluation. Chapter 4 presents the findings and
results. Chapter 5 addresses implications and questions warranting further research.

\(^1\) Hereinafter labeled the “NCofC.”
\(^2\) “Meaningful” is defined as an engagement of Scripture that allows experiences and contexts
to be a component of interpretation. Critical scholarship supports this definition. Walter Brueggemann
writes concerning the psalms, “The Psalms, with a few exceptions, are not the voice of God addressing
us. They are rather the voice of our own common humanity.” Brueggemann goes on to say, “I suggest
that most of the Psalms can only be appropriately prayed by people who are living at the edge of their
Luke Timothy Johnson argues that to read the New Testament is to do so in a circular pattern: from
experience to interpretation, from interpretation to experience. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The

\(^3\) “Limited meaningful engagement with Scripture” is defined as a reading that does not take
present experiences or contexts into consideration. Instead of allowing experiences and context to be a
component of one’s interpretation, one engages a strictly restorational reading. A restorational reading
is defined as a method, a perspective that looks backward for the purpose of restoring forms,
Title of Project

The title of this project is “Engaging Scripture through dwelling in the Word at the Newmarket Church of Christ.” The phrase dwelling in the Word is an established practice of reading Scripture that has roots in the ancient practice called *lectio divina*.

Historical Context

In the early 1800s, within the religious context of the American culture, enthusiasm ran wild, and running alongside enthusiasm was emotionalism, which trumped intellect. As a result, within the religious world, confusion was apparent; consequently, religious sects were common. Bitterness and hatred among the sects was the rule. New leaders with their own biblical interpretation appeared. Camp meetings with wild emotionalism were the norm. Such was the scene in which the American Churches of Christ were born. This movement, co-founded by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, developed a passion for the “unity of the Body of Christ, an abhorrence of sectarianism and all party spirit, and a deep conviction that no unity could be achieved until the life, faith, and order of the New Testament church were restored.”

In Canada, Churches of Christ, also called the Disciples, emerged with roots stemming from a co-founder of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, Alexander Campbell, and maybe inadvertently, the nineteenth-century evangelist Walter Scott. Campbell influenced the early Disciples through his writings, which helped merge various streams of Christians from the Baptist immigrants arriving from Scotland and the radical Freewill Baptists and the Christian Connection from New York and New

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4 *Lectio divina* is a way of reading Scripture that “guards against depersonalizing the text into an affair of questions and answers, definitions and dogmas.” Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 90.
England. Scott played an inadvertent role in the early years through William Hayden.

Hayden was an experienced evangelist who traveled with Walter Scott as his song leader and exhorter. Hayden preached at the first Disciples meeting on June 9, 1843.\textsuperscript{6}

The first Disciples meeting in 1843 was particularly important, though it was not the beginning of restoration churches in Canada or Ontario.\textsuperscript{7} By the early 1830s, there were two main restoration streams in the province of Ontario. One can be traced back to the Baptists from Scotland, and the other was the Free Church movement emerging out of New England and New York after the American Revolution. Those coming from Scotland brought Calvinism, and those influenced by the American movement brought free will and a universal gospel. By 1843, representatives from the two different streams were brought together by agreeing on basic restoration principles. In addition, the June meeting of 1843 brought consensus from the churches to employ two traveling evangelists. The significance of this June meeting was that churches that had once worked in isolation united into a larger fellowship now called Disciples of Christ. The reason for unification was that they stressed the authority of the Bible and were, at least to some extent, restorationist.\textsuperscript{8}

Restoration ideals, made known through periodicals, became the lens through which early Disciples of Christ read Scripture. Exploration of Canadian periodicals

\textsuperscript{6} Edwin Broadus, \textit{How the Disciples Came Together in Early Ontario} (Beamsville, ON: Gospel Herald, 2009), 3-8.


\textsuperscript{8} Broadus, 3-8.
reveals Scripture being engaged through the lens of restoration principles. David Oliphant (1821-1885), who authored a monthly periodical writes,

> If all the worshipping assemblies in Canada would, for the period of five years, cease their labors to gain converts, and occupy the time, if it would take this time, to search the oracles with a view to becoming united, and hence actually unite on the foundation already laid, more would be done for Canada and the world through Canada than though we were in these five years to make every man a Protestant, every moralist a partisan, and every profane man a steady member of some ecclesiastic organization such as we now have.”

Oliphant understood that the church’s unity was found when Scripture was read in such a way that there are no human traditions, only the traditions outlined in Scripture. In the periodical *Bible Index and Christian Sentinel*, an article published by J.W. McGarvey outlines who is allowed to baptize. The author is showing, at least in this article, that he places a greater emphasis on historical matters as he deals very little with the life of a baptized believer. On the front cover of the inaugural periodical *The Bible Student*, a list of sixteen foundational principles is given. Principle 14 clearly shows a restoration lens of Scripture being enacted: “That whatsoever is not taught in the Bible by precept, example or necessary inference, cannot be made the Christian duty, in faith or practice of any child of God.” More recently, in the Canadian Church of Christ periodical *The Gospel Herald*, a former editor likened hand clapping to smoking a cigarette. “Both the

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instrument and hand clapping are sound pollution much as the [cigarette] smoke is air pollution.” The writer concludes:

We remind that neither scripture nor history supports the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. Those who have introduced it, have done so like the smoker, because they want it and have justified the practice by human reasoning—their wants and their wisdom rather than by reference to God’s will.13

Church historian Edwin Broadus, who has written extensively on the Ontario Churches of Christ, writes that Canadian Churches of Christ are restorationist.14 This mindset subsequently determines one method by which Scripture has been, and continues to be, engaged. Ontario Churches of Christ continue to place a strong emphasis upon Scripture. It is indispensable to understand their engagement of Scripture. Exploration through early and present periodicals reveals Scripture engaged through a restoration lens. The restoration lens engagement of Scripture is not wrong. This lens has its strengths but also its weaknesses, one being the restoration lens always reads backwards.15 As a result, how can a historical reading continually speak a new word into the present and future life of the church? As will now be shown, the current ministry context of the NCofC is struggling to hear Scripture speak a “Word of God” into its unique context and experiences.

15 Reading Scripture backwards has differing elements: to develop a historical meaning and also to restore forms and patterns of church life. Reading backwards to restore forms and patterns of church life has been part of my heritage. Once the forms and patterns have been established, Scripture primarily functions as the rule for maintaining these patterns. When this is the case, Scripture becomes disconnected from a broader engagement with experience and thus loses a meaningful engagement.
Current Ministry Context

The outward movement of the church grows from the church’s Christology.16 Who and what the church claims Christ is will reflect who and what will be the church’s vision and character. Thus every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ, and statements about who and what Christ is will in some way be statements about the nature and function of the church.17 As a result, how we read and interpret Scripture’s description of Christ becomes particularly important because this will affect the ethos of the church. If the church does not have a healthy interpretation of Scripture, it cannot help but have an unhealthy Christology.

The church’s outward movement is rooted in the story of Jesus. God sent Jesus into the world to offer his life for the sake of the world. This statement of Christology is also a statement about the nature and function of the church. God sends the church to offer its life for the sake of the world. For this ecclesiology to grow out of the above Christology, a meaningful engagement with Scripture must become a reality. Thus one’s ecclesiology is decidedly rooted in one’s engagement with Scripture.

My ecclesiology says that there is an outward movement of the church. This outward movement must be sustained by an inward dimension, which in Churches of Christ is primarily derived by Scripture. Yet Scripture is not fully sustaining, forming, or shaping the NCofC’s outward movement. I now turn to the NCofC history, ministry context, and engagement with Scripture.

Two families from two different Church of Christ congregations, Dennis and Sheila Bromley from Ajax and Clare and Elsie Preston from Pine Orchard, envisioned the

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16 The church’s ecclesiology is also formed by one’s soteriology. In this section I will only briefly focus on my Christology and how it forms my ecclesiology.

birth of the NCofC. Dennis and Sheila moved to Newmarket in 1959 and attended the Pine Orchard Church of Christ for a period of time. In 1962, the Bromleys and Prestons, with a financial gift from the Church of Christ in Pine Orchard, planted the NCofC. The work began primarily as a youth outreach and Sunday school program. Maple Leaf Public School (MLPS) within the Longford subdivision served as the meeting place for the afternoon program.

In the congregation’s first year of existence, there were approximately one hundred children served in the outreach/Sunday school program. The children were invited through door-knocking campaigns and were eventually taxied to and from the school through a bus program initiated when Magnar Knutson became the congregation’s first full-time minister in the mid to late 1960s. In 1963 other families attracted to the work joined to teach Sunday school. These families included the Nelsons, Stevens, Slaters, McLeods, and Mashinters.

The congregation transitioned from a missional outpost to a family-sized congregation and eventually to a shepherding-size congregation. This took place over many years. It is unclear how long it took, but markers along the way show how the congregation became established and eventually lost its evangelistic fervor. The purchase of property and the erection of a building in 1967, the establishment of elders in 1976, the cancellation of the bus program in the 1980s, and two splits in 1990s were significant events that shifted the focus of the congregation from serving the neighborhood to serving families of the congregation. Today, however, the focus is changing to once again becoming a church that serves the neighborhood.

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18 Israel Galindo defines a family-size congregation as having a membership of 10-50 members and a shepherding-size congregation as 50-150 members. See Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 79-81.
During the past four years, the congregation has intentionally begun to serve the neighborhood. In 2008, a community garden was established for the condominium neighbors after the congregation undertook an ecological analysis. Wishing to see itself within the neighborhood, the congregation was reintroduced to the Longford subdivision and MLPS. To the congregation’s surprise, the neighborhood had changed from a middle-income neighborhood with home owners to primarily rental units consisting of economically at-risk families. Through an invitation from MLPS, the congregation has helped establish a lunch program, a reading recovery program, and a summer camp, all designed to serve socially and economically at-risk families.

The future of the congregation is challenging due to its location. The town of Newmarket is currently expropriating the front section of the church’s property for road expansion. The expansion will include the development of a vacant lot on the west side of the church’s property and the demolition of current businesses and industry. The development will be for high-rise housing and commercial developments alongside a bus transfer station.

Eiesland and Warner say every congregation will interact with its outside environment on three layers. First, demographically the congregation interacts with its environment through the characteristics of the people in the neighborhood in terms of numbers, age, sex distribution, and ethnic and racial profile. Second, culturally the congregation interacts with its environment through the meaning, values, and practices shared within the community; and third, organizationally, how roles and relationships are

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shaped through systems and structures within the community. The developments slated around the church’s property will bring added challenges.

Internally the congregation is also facing challenges around the church’s regular modes of engaging Scripture. Sunday school during the years 2004-2005 held attendance of less than ten percent of the congregation with no viable children’s classes. In addition to limited children’s classes, the Sunday school curriculum was failing to teach basic biblical knowledge. In 2008, the church’s Sunday evening Bible study was canceled due to lack of teachers. In the middle part of 2009, Sunday evening saw the resurrection of a Bible study but currently fewer than ten percent of the congregation attends. Wednesday evening Bible study is attended by roughly fifteen percent of the congregation, many of whom attend Sunday evening.

Problem Statement

The problem this project addressed is the limited meaningful engagement with Scripture by the NCofC. General evidence indicating a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture is anecdotal. Yet the overwhelming observation by members of the congregation and an ethnographic study reveal the congregation was having a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture.

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21 Eiesland and Warner, 42.
22 A member of the leadership team charged with overseeing the children’s program expressed dissatisfaction that his children, participating in the classes, were failing to learn what he considered to be basic biblical knowledge.
23 In this instance I am employing a definition of meaningful that has certain characteristics in relation to how I have previously defined “a meaningful engagement.” Through experience, is the congregation hearing Scripture in such a way that they have some sort of understanding of what Scripture is saying? Is the congregation allowing Scripture to be formative and transformative for their lives? Is there a longing to read and study more Scripture? Is Scripture engaging the lives of the people? Is the congregation responding favorably to the church’s modes of engaging Scripture? If the answers are yes, I would surmise there is a meaningful engagement with Scripture. If not, I would argue there is a limited meaningful engagement.
In 2008, an individual who was a new member, having been affiliated with Churches of Christ her entire life, asked if she could serve as leader for the children’s program. During informal conversations, she expressed concern regarding the adults who were leading or participating in the children’s program and their apparent lack of attention to Scripture. Fault lay not with the teachers, but the church. From this person’s perspective, the church did not equip the teachers, used every available volunteer (qualified or not), and failed to give direction, material, or supervision. As a result, the responsibility of finding material fell upon the teachers. If this was not possible, teachers put the children in a classroom to watch the biblical animated series *Veggie Tales*.

It was not just this individual who saw the church’s engagement with Scripture in jeopardy; the member of the leadership team charged with overseeing the children’s program also expressed his dissatisfaction. Again through informal conversations, he expressed dissatisfaction toward the material because he viewed the material as being insufficient. The observation was raised because the children were failing to learn the stories of Scripture because the curriculum was failing to teach the biblical stories. His evaluations were formed from observing his own children within the program.

During the fall of 2008, an anecdotal study through a small group consisting of a variety of church members in age, gender, and ethnicity sought to explore how the church operates within a systems approach. The group was asked several questions, one of which was, “What do you currently see the church doing or not doing that makes you worried?” The group’s response revealed a sense of worry there was not enough serious Bible study taking place.
A related survey was conducted from December 2009 to January 2010. Through this, a measurement of the congregation’s engagement with Scripture was assessed during Sunday morning communal worship. Questions asked in the survey were:

(1) What book, chapter and verse was the reading of Scripture taken from this morning?
(2) Would you be able to paraphrase the reading of Scripture? Please do so. (3) In two or three sentences describe how the passage of Scripture that was read will form you into the image of Christ. (4) How many times during the week did you pick up the Bible and read at least one passage of Scripture?

The above study took place within the church’s morning worship during four Sundays over a period of eight weeks. Though this is not a scientific survey, results indicate that the church’s engagement with Scripture is not as meaningful as what I believe it should be. Compiling and analyzing the data from the surveys revealed only twenty-eight percent of the congregation could recall the reading of Scripture. One could surmise respondents may paraphrase or speak about the passage of Scripture forming them into the image of Christ, in the event that they could not recall the Scripture reading, but the survey did not reveal this. The surveys revealed those who could not recall the passage of Scripture read were unable to paraphrase the reading or speak about the passage forming them into the image of God.

The reading of Scripture is an integral part of the life of the NCofC congregation. Scripture is taught in the Bible studies, Sunday school curriculum, and read as part of the morning worship. Despite this exposure, the congregation was having a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture because the same lens for engaging Scripture has been employed in all of the ways the congregation engages Scripture. This lens is two
layered. First, a backward reading is employed whereby the historical meaning of a specific passage is explained. Second, engagement of Scripture is done through a teacher-student relationship. In each of the church’s modes of engagement, a teacher instructs the participants, thus not allowing or not creating a space whereby the participants are able to bring their own experiences into dialogue with the reading of Scripture. As a result, the project addressed the congregation’s limited meaningful engagement with Scripture through an established practiced called dwelling in the Word. Through the practice dwelling in the Word, the lens of context and experience is a lens by which a group of individuals can engage Scripture.

Statement of the Purpose

The NCofC’s limited meaningful engagement with Scripture has not gone unnoticed by the congregation. As a result, preliminary attempts to rectify the problem have been explored within two settings: adult Sunday school and children’s program. During the adult Sunday school, four passages of Scripture were selected. For four months, the congregation began each Bible class with a reading of one of the chosen four passages of Scripture. The passage of Scripture was read, and the congregation was given a set amount of time to express the perceived meaning. Within the children’s program, a children’s worship was introduced. During the proclamation of Scripture, the children were ushered downstairs where engagement in Bible stories through the medium of video became the norm.

One could conclude that a limitation with attempts to rectify the problem of having a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture is these are programmatic attempts to address the problem while failing to deal with the deeply rooted method of
the church’s engagement with Scripture. Thus the purpose of this project was to
determine if or how the introduction of dwelling in the Word would allow individuals to
have a meaningful engagement with Scripture. The method by which this was
accomplished was to introduce a select few individuals to a non-restoration lens of
reading Scripture, dwelling in the Word. Through a continual engagement with the same
passage of Scripture, experiences, in dialogue with Scripture, can become the means
through which Scripture is able to speak a new word. Thus what I was trying to
accomplish is the creating of a space whereby a shift is made from a backwards reading
of Scripture to a forward reading.

Historically, Scripture has functioned at the forefront of the Churches of Christ
ethos. Ideally, this project continued to allow members of the NCofC to affirm the
importance of Scripture in their lives. Thus an additional purpose was to continue a high
view towards Scripture, by empowering the group to listen to what each other hears in the
reading of Scripture through intentional time of reflection and listening.

Basic Assumptions

This project was built upon the following assumptions that directly influence the
methodology and approach to the stated purpose. First, the project assumed the NCofC
finds its heritage in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, which historically has
read Scripture through a restoration lens. This assumption is critical because the project
sought to introduce a second lens, alongside the restoration lens, through which to engage
Scripture. The second assumption was that the NCofC acknowledges Scripture to
function with a high level of importance in their communal life. The success of this
project was determined by whether the group was willing to experiment with how Scripture is engaged, while still holding to a high value of Scripture.

Delimitations

Although the entire NCofC and its engagement of Scripture is in mind, this project introduced the practice dwelling in the Word to a select group of individuals. The group lived with a single text for a period of six weeks, allowing communal and individual experiences to be read by the text.

Conclusion

Historically, the heritage known as Churches of Christ has allowed Scripture to play a vital role in the formative life of the church. The NCofC is no different. Scripture plays an integral role in worship, classes, and doctrine. Frustration, however, is voiced because meaningful engagement with Scripture is lacking in communal worship and Bible classes. The frustration voiced is healthy as it shows the importance people want the church to place upon Scripture. The church is making it known that a meaningful engagement with Scripture is needed and desired. As a result, the church needs an engagement with Scripture that can be meaningful to its life.

The restoration lens by which Scripture has been engaged is not wrong. This lens has its strengths but also its weaknesses, one being that the restoration lens always reads backwards. How can a historical reading continually speak a new word into the present and future life of the church? This project sought to introduce the practice dwelling in the Word for the purpose of providing another lens by which Scripture can be engaged with

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24 See chapter 3 for a description of the participants.
25 Specific communal experiences will be recalled. They are as follows: a summer camp for the children of the Longford subdivision, the church’s community garden for seniors living next door in a condominium, the church’s ministry with Maple Leaf Public School.
communal and individual experiences. As a result, Scripture can begin to be read with a lens other than the restoration lens, thus providing an avenue for a meaningful engagement with Scripture.
CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The NCofC is becoming a neighborhood church that is learning to love its neighbors in profound ways. Ministering with the local public school, organizing the community gardens for the condominium neighbors, and implementing a hosted summer camp for at-risk children are some ways in which the NCofC is growing to love its neighbors.

For the NCofC to continue to love and serve its neighbors, the outward movement of its ecclesiology needs to be sustained by an inward dimension that has historically been obtained through Scripture. Scripture needs to form, transform, and sustain the church’s life of serving and loving its neighbors. Scripture will then become a foundational building block for the church to continue the journey of becoming the neighborhood church. This chapter creates an intellectual space whereby a method of reading Scripture will be read in relationship with context and experience so that Scripture can continue to be a foundational block.

Throughout the history of Christianity, Scripture has been read through a variety of lenses and by differing methodologies. As a result, there is historical precedent for a multiplicity of ways to read Scripture. Before exploring four methods of reading Scripture employed in Christian history, I will address the question of why there are
different ways of reading and interpreting Scripture. Important for this conversation is the understanding of the relationship of Scripture with the church. The proper place for Scripture is in the church. The people of God existed before the formation of Scripture. Thus Scripture arose out of God’s community. The New Testament arose out of the church; thus the New Testament was produced by the church to serve the church.

To be interpreters of Scripture, we need to understand Scripture was birthed out of an established community of God’s people. We should also understand that the communities or individuals that gave birth to Scripture were also part of a larger history. As Grant writes concerning the authors of Scripture, “they stand not only in the community which is the church but also in the community which is the world outside.” Grant adds that, in order to understand Scripture, one has to understand the overlap between the two.

The same can be said of the reasons history shows there are different ways of reading and interpreting Scripture. Differing historical circumstances produce different methods of reading Scripture. What I wish to do is briefly highlight a historical circumstance that gave birth to a multiplicity of ways to read and interpret Scripture.

The ways of interpretation were directly impacted by what was taking place within the wider culture. For example, Catholic exegesis of the Bible during the Reformation relied strongly on the authority of the church fathers. Scripture was

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28 Grant and Tracy, 6-7.
interpreted by the tradition of the church; Scripture was subservient to the church. Protestants, however, believed Scripture is a book of life through which God could speak directly to every individual. Thus John Wyclif was eager to put Scripture into the hands of the people in the vernacular language.\(^{29}\) As a result, Protestants developed the motto of *sola scriptura*. In theory, authority would rest solely upon Scripture and not the Catholic Church. The events of culture played a factor in the method by which Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and other reformers interpreted Scripture.

The events of the Reformation played a significant role, both in the culture and in the way Scripture was interpreted. One significant event, with implications in both the culture and the method of reading and interpreting Scripture was the eventual rise of rationalism. Eventually rationalism became the basis of authority, thus altering how the church read and interpreted Scripture. By the end of the eighteenth century, the rational study of the Bible had been developed. With the rise of rationalism, a historical understanding of Scripture arose.\(^{30}\) This of course had a significant impact on the interpretation of Scripture. As Grant writes, “The critical historical method, which came to be regarded as the only legitimate kind of exegesis, at once guided theologians in their reconstructions of belief and provided a means of reorganizing the material of theology found in the Bible.”\(^{31}\)

Differing historical circumstances produced different methods of interpreting Scripture. Historical events during the Reformation were the onset of *sola scriptura*, while events in the eighteenth century, as will be shown, eventually gave birth to the historical-critical method.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 92-93.  
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 110.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid.
Context determines how one reads and interprets Scripture. Throughout the different contexts of the church’s two thousand years of history, the church has turned to various methods of reading and interpreting Scripture. I will explore select interpreters of Scripture, specifically, Origen, Augustine, the early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement of the nineteenth century, and a twentieth-century method of reading as displayed through James Dunn.\footnote{James D. G. Dunn, \textit{The Living Word}, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).} By demonstrating there is historical precedent for differing ways of reading and interpreting Scripture, I wish to create an intellectual space for an alternative reading strategy alongside the restoration strategy often employed within my tradition.

The strategy of reading Scripture that I will put forward is dwelling in the Word. Dwelling in the Word takes place when a group of people continually read and live in the same passage of Scripture over a continuous period of time. By faithfully living in the same text, the metaphors and images found within the text are able to form and shape the imaginations of the participants. To create the intellectual space for the reading strategy called dwelling in the Word, historical precedence for a new way of reading Scripture needs to be situated. To this, I now turn.

**Historical Ways of Reading and Interpreting Scripture**

**Origen**

Origen (184-254 C.E.) stands as a giant among Christian thinkers. The writings of Origen were influenced by cultural and historical events, one being the persecution of
Septimius Severus. During this persecution period, Origen’s father, Leonides, died a martyr’s death. As a result, Origen always wrote as a member of a martyred church.\textsuperscript{33}

Considering himself to be a member of a martyred church, he took Scripture very seriously by devoting many hours of each day to prayer and study. In his studies, Origen developed a very specific idea about the nature of Scripture: the Scriptures were “divine writings.” It was through the Holy Spirit that the writings of Scripture came to exist and not through human beings. The Spirit inspired the authors, whether Moses or Paul, to such an extent that the Spirit was considered to be the true author.\textsuperscript{34} Viewing the Bible as the only source of revelation, Origen used Scripture to defend the church’s doctrines against all adversaries: Jewish, heretical or pagan.

Controversies forced Origen to explore the right principles for interpreting Scripture, especially the controversy with Gnosticism.\textsuperscript{35} Gnosticism, however, was not the only controversy he fought against; rabbinic Judaism was also an emerging competing community.\textsuperscript{36} As a result, we must be aware of the possibility that Origen developed his hermeneutical principles in response to the emerging rabbinic tradition.\textsuperscript{37}

Knowing this, we can now state Origen’s principles of right interpretation: Christ is the key to the unity of the Bible (linking Old and New Testaments); the use of allegory to convey spiritual truths of Scripture is correct; and the narrative of historical events is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Chadwick, 107.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} R. Hanson gives a lengthy description of the different exegetical methods various persons or sects were employing during Origen’s time. Hanson concludes, “It is quite evident, then, that Origen, when he began producing his expositions of Scripture, was not writing in an exegetical vacuum. There existed in his day and during it a lively and varied world of Scriptural exegesis.” See R. Hanson, \textit{Allegory and Event} (London: SCM Press LTD, 1959), 160.
\end{itemize}
secondary in importance to spiritual truths.\textsuperscript{38} Attention thus needs to be directed to the effort of penetrating the depths of the Scriptures that are not historical factual events but spiritual truths.\textsuperscript{39}

Origen’s hermeneutical principle, which he articulates in \textit{On First Principles}, asserts Scripture should be read through a christological lens. The writings of the Old Testament were not able to be fully understood until the advent of Jesus; only after the advent of Jesus were the prophetic words and the spiritual nature of the laws of Moses able to be comprehended.\textsuperscript{40} Christ becomes the key to understanding the Old Testament. Origen continues and says those who hold false opinions and make ignorant assertions about God fail to understand Scripture in its spiritual sense and instead interpret Scripture “according to the bare letter.”\textsuperscript{41} They are failing to read Scripture through a lens of Christ.

The hermeneutical lens by which Origen reads Scripture is then the Pauline tension between the spirit and the letter. There are literal interpretations, which begin with the basic meaning, the “plain sense.” There is also, however, the spiritual layer. It is this spiritual layer that teaches people about the hidden mysteries of God and Christ.\textsuperscript{42} The means by which the spiritual meaning of the text could be deciphered was through the practice of allegorical reading.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{38} Chadwick, 107. See also Sheridan, 198-99.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{On First Principles}, IV.1.6; Translated by G.W. Butterworth, 264.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{On First Principles}, IV.2.2; Translated by G.W. Butterworth, 271-72.
\textsuperscript{42} O'Keefe, 193-94.
Origen read and interpreted Scripture through the method of allegory because he was in relationship with the wider culture of his time. During this time, Celsus brought a charge against the Christians saying they do not wish to give or to receive a reason for their belief. Origen refuted Celsus’s charge and argued the importance of giving assent to doctrines upon the grounds of reason and wisdom rather than simple faith. For this reason, we see Origen as one who relies on individual scholarship and intelligence. While Origen and his contemporaries were eager to be intellectually respectable, one would surmise that a method of reading Scripture acceptable to the culture would arise, and it did. As the allegorical method was accepted by most philosophical schools, it is no wonder that Origen championed the allegorical method of reading Scripture.44

To what end, then, does Origen’s interpretation of Scripture lead? Daniel Shin argues extensively that Origen’s understanding and hermeneutical principles do not lead the interpreter to a static, historical, factual understanding of the Bible. Instead, the spiritual reading of Scripture reveals to the reader the “real presence of the Logos in Scripture that can effectively mediate God’s transforming grace.”45 Thus Origen has a sacramental understanding of Scripture. Scripture is able to mediate the presence of Christ. The reader, seeing and experiencing the presence of Christ through Scripture, then undergoes a transformation, a transformation from sin to perfection. There are three stages to this transformation. The first stage is purification, a continual process of healing and nourishment, followed by the second stage of receiving wisdom and knowledge of the logos. In the third stage, the person attains the likeness of God.46

44 Grant, 60-62.
46 Ibid., 408-11.
Origen, a giant among the early church leaders, considered Scripture to hold historical facts and spiritual truths. If one reads Scripture according to the “bare letter,” one will miss the possible deep truths that will lead the reader into a deeper union with God. Scripture must be read in such a way that the reader can find spiritual truths and thus be fully transformed into the likeness of God.

The end goal determined how Origen read Scripture. Thus at different times he employed different reading strategies. When desiring to disarm the criticisms of pagans and Gnostics, Origen employed a literal reading of Scripture. When wishing for a sacramental reading, Origen employed a christological lens. When wishing to seek the deep spiritual truths, he used the allegorical method.47

Origen read Scripture through multiple lenses. His reading strategies were designed to help him and the wider church remain faithful to the story of God. For this reason, he employed multiple lenses. However, the lenses Origen employed did not remain as the pattern. Within a century, a differing method of engaging Scripture arose.

Augustine

Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354-430), lived a lifelong pursuit of intellectual development. As will be noted below, Scripture played a formative role, but it was not the only source of inspiration for him. Augustine’s association with various schools of thought influenced him. In his youthful years, he was converted to the Manichees in addition to being very familiar with pagan Platonists.48 Augustine’s association with the

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Manichees began while reading the Christian Scriptures. While developing questions from his readings, the Manichees were there with their questions, and naturally Augustine joined them. This affair lasted from his university days to the time of his first great professional success.\textsuperscript{49} Breaking with the Manichees, Augustine associated himself with the Catholic Church and eventually became bishop of Hippo.

While bishop, he wrote his masterpiece, \textit{Confessions}. In \textit{Confessions} he regarded his past as training for his career as bishop.\textsuperscript{50} As a result, one scholar has said the central preoccupation of \textit{Confessions} is the Manichees, whom he dismisses in the first third of the book\textsuperscript{51} while another Augustine scholar sees Augustine’s treatment of the Manichees in \textit{Confessions} as a means to overcome criticism and incidents that could possibly betray Augustine’s new role of being bishop of Hippo.\textsuperscript{52}

Augustine’s treatment of the past in \textit{Confessions} shows the tension between the “‘then’ of the young man and the ‘now’ of the bishop.”\textsuperscript{53} This treatment of the past is found in the first nine books, with a culmination in his baptism (book 8) and the death of his mother, Monica (book 9). The first nine books then become a full confession of his past, written as if to say “here is my past . . . it justifies my present. The power of God has swept me to the place I am.”\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Confessions}, however, does not end at Augustine’s conversion to Christianity. Four more books are added that help the reader see how he struggled with temptations.

\textsuperscript{49} James O’Donnell, \textit{Augustine: A New Biography} (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 48. Augustine would have been around nineteen years of age. He remained with the Manichees until 384-85, on his appointment to the imperial chair in Milan.
\textsuperscript{50} Brown, 155. See also Henry Chadwick, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Life} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.
\textsuperscript{51} O’Donnell, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{52} Brown, 155.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 157.
\textsuperscript{54} O’Donnell, 53.
Being immersed into the *Confessions*, we begin to see how Augustine read and interpreted Scripture. For Augustine, there is not a singular historical meaning. In book 12, where discussion centers on creation, Augustine allows the possibility that the intent of the original author may not be known. As long as each exegete is endeavoring to discover the meaning of the author, what evil is it if one who is studying the Scriptures develops an idea that was not discerned by the author? Augustine continues to say it is rash to assert a particular interpretation of Moses’ account of creation when there is “a large mass of entirely correct interpretations.” In summing up book 12, Augustine writes a prayer that attests a single interpretation of Scripture is not necessarily needed or desired, but rather an interpretation that allows the reader to feed on God.

> Lord, we beg you to show us either what that one meaning is or some other true meaning of your choice. Make clear to us either the understanding possessed by your servant or some other meaning suggested by the same texts, that we may feed on you and not be led astray by error.

Augustine leaves open the possibility that there are various interpretations of Scripture. But what then is one supposed to do with the differing interpretations of Scripture? In his *On Christian Doctrine* we discover that Augustine believes the aim of being an orator of Scripture is to teach, delight, and move. Christian teachers must communicate to their hearers what Scripture is about. As the instructor teaches, delights, and moves the hearers to respond to the teachings of Scripture, Scripture has a chance to

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56 *Confessions* XII.xxv.35.
57 *Confessions* XII.xxxii.43.
be performed, performed not just by the ones who are hearing, but also by the exemplary life and prayer of the teacher teaching.\textsuperscript{59}

Augustine assumes there are various interpretations of Scripture. He also believes Scripture must be performed; performed to what end? \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, book 1, gives us the essential subject matter of Scripture: to enjoy God. God alone is to be enjoyed and the things of this world are there to ensure that we enjoy God. Humanity is to be loved, not for its own sake, but for God’s.

This is the law of love that has been laid down by divine authority: “Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”; but, ‘Thou shall love God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.’ So you are to concentrate all your thoughts, your whole life, and your whole intelligence upon the one from whom you derive all that you bring.\textsuperscript{60}

The rest of book 1 continues to explore the law of love. The fulfillment of Scripture is the law of love, and any interpretation that does not allow the reader or the church to be built up in one’s love of God and neighbor is mistaken. The interpretation is mistaken because love is the central theological point of Scripture. God has an inexorable amount of love, and he demands that we love in return.\textsuperscript{61}

Augustine reads Scripture through a specific lens: love.\textsuperscript{62} Scripture read through this lens is then to be performed. Performers of Scripture will love God and neighbor. Augustine recognizes that there are various interpretations of Scripture and that one could attempt to discover the original author’s intent, but as Augustine believes, readers will fail to grasp other truths. Thus the lens by which we read Scripture will either produce readings to challenge the interpreters or readings that will compromise our growth.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{On Christian Doctrine} IV.xv.32. See also Young, 270-71.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{On Christian Doctrine} I.xxiv.21. See also Young, 272-73.
\textsuperscript{61} Young, 273.
\textsuperscript{62} Soulen, 87-94.
Similar to Origen’s, Augustine’s end goal determined how Scripture was read. Augustine did not wish to have the end goal of reading Scripture mediating Christ. For Augustine, the end goal is love. Thus Augustine’s reading strategies were in some way formed and shaped by the desired outcome.

Though Augustine would be influential in how future generations would engage Scripture, his method of reading and interpreting Scripture would not be the only interpretative paradigm. Additional ways of engaging Scripture would become normative for further generations. This can be seen through exploration of the Stone-Campbell Movement during the nineteenth century.

Stone-Campbell Movement during the Nineteenth Century

In the early nineteenth century America, its people and its government, were in the throes of developing a new mindset and a new way of ordering reality. This was coming about through the developing scientific view of acquiring knowledge. Truth had to be empirically verifiable. During this time a religious movement, eventually referred to as the Stone-Campbell Movement, came into being.

Similar to Origen and Augustine, the early years of the Stone-Campbell Movement interacted and interpreted Scripture in conjunction with what was happening within their time and place. When this movement emerged, it did so at a time when the United States of America was being born. America’s national birth was the beginning of a new history for the colonists. The early leaders were free from the constraints of European culture, religion, and government, and believed that a new world was being created. As Walt Whitman wrote in *Pioneers! O Pioneers:*
All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world.\textsuperscript{63}

The Stone-Campbell Movement emerged under the opinion that a new world of justice, equality, and widespread acceptance of Christianity was being created. Its leaders believed Scripture would play a key role in the development of this new world. To understand this concept, we must understand that within the religious culture of the new America, there were widespread attempts to scuttle the elaborate, authoritative structure of the ecclesiastical establishment, for example, denominationalism and dogmatic creeds.\textsuperscript{64} To accomplish this, one would have to erase and transcend all the corruptions of history and start at the beginning of Christianity.\textsuperscript{65} How could a new movement, seeking freedom from elaborate, authoritative, ecclesiastical structures see themselves as restoring primitive Christianity? To accomplish such a task, a certain view of Scripture combined with certain methods of interpretation would be necessary. In what follows I will broadly highlight three first-generation members of the Stone-Campbell Movement and their view and interpretation of Scripture: Barton Stone, Walter Scott and Alexander Campbell.

\textsuperscript{63} As quoted in C. Leonard Allen and Richard Hughes, Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875 (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2008), 1.

\textsuperscript{64} Richard Hughes argues that within antebellum America there was more to the widespread attempts to distance oneself from the established ecclesiastical orders. Hughes argues there were so many sects and denominations fighting to be the “true, apostolic church” that there was a spiritual crisis in antebellum America. Hughes writes, “That spiritual crisis typically revolved around the quest for the true church, for the kingdom of God, or for the sacred in the midst of a profane and fallen world.” See Richard T. Hughes, “Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century” in The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition (ed. Michael W. Casey and Douglas A. Foster; Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 348-51.

Stone’s engagement with Scripture emerged over time. Receiving his education and preparing to enter into ministry once he received his ordination from the Transylvania Presbytery in Kentucky in the year 1798, he began to question the Westminster Confession, which needed to be affirmed in order to receive ordination. Stone was not sure he agreed with the confession and asked for a postponement. One was not granted; thus when asked, “Do you receive and adopt the Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Bible?” he said, “I do, as far as I see it consistent with the word of God.”

His answer, deemed acceptable at the time, was the beginning point for Stone to see Scripture as the only authoritative voice for the church. But what in Scripture is authoritative? Is the Old Testament equally as authoritative as the New Testament? Stone would adamantly reject this notion. For Stone, when Christ was alive, he and all of Israel were under the law; when Christ died, the law died with him. Thus Christians are no longer under the law of the Old Testament.

Stone developed the view that the New Testament was the authoritative voice for the church. Developing this view, Stone interpreted the words of the New Testament under a specific hermeneutical method: “common sense.” “Common sense” implies there is formal logic. With formal logic, ultimate truth can be discovered by following logical arguments. One does not need specialized training or ecclesiastical traditions to interpret

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67 M. Eugene Boring, *Disciples and the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1997), 17.
68 Ibid., 24.
Scripture. The interpreter is free to understand the Bible simply by reading the words; the plain meaning of Scripture can be obvious to anyone who reads the words.\textsuperscript{69}

Alongside Stone’s hermeneutical method of common sense was his apocalyptic worldview.\textsuperscript{70} Embracing an apocalyptic worldview, Stone affirmed a pessimistic and antimodern worldview. Stone believed that the kingdom of God, the rule of God over all human affairs, would become reality in the restored church but would be fully consummated only in the premillennial second coming of Jesus. Thus the kingdom of God was a countercultural reality that stood against all rational, scientific, and technical progress. As a result, Stone advocated for the restoration of the early church, but not the restoration of forms and structures of the early church, a restoration of simple holiness.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Walter Scott}\textsuperscript{72}

Opposite to Stone, who transitioned away from established creeds and doctrines, Scott was heavily involved in a “restorationist” church throughout his life. Scott, in his early twenties, moved to Pittsburgh and became involved in a “Scotch Baptist” church that was committed to the “restoration of New Testament Christianity.”\textsuperscript{73} This had lasting influences upon his life and ministry.

Scott’s view of the nature of the Bible is that it was a revelation from God. The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) was a collection of communications from God to

\textsuperscript{69} Richard Hughes, \textit{Reviving the Ancient Faith} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 98. As will be discussed in detail later, a “common sense” hermeneutic was very much a part of the nineteenth-century mindset.


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 85-86, 91-94.


\textsuperscript{73} Boring, 31.
human beings. As divinely inspired oracles, a specific way to interpret these oracles was undertaken: one had to approach the Bible rationally and logically. For Scott, without proof one cannot believe. Thus truth is propositional.\footnote{Ibid., 36-38. Scott was influenced by John Locke’s epistemology.}

Advocating such a hermeneutic, Scott was expressing the order and precision of the scientific method. Interpreting Scripture in this manner required one to approach the Scriptures as a scientist approaches a scientific problem. All relevant texts are to be read and studied. A general principle arises out of all the relevant texts, and this general principle represents the true teaching of the Bible. Scott’s hermeneutical approach was heavily influenced by the philosophical method of interpretation called Baconianism.\footnote{See Hughes, Reviving the Ancient Faith, 31, for a good description of Baconianism.}

Scott’s lasting influencing on the Stone-Campbell Movement was his belief and declaration that he restored the “ancient Gospel.” Scott believed this was accomplished by the hermeneutical lens in which he engaged Scripture. Scott examined all the relevant texts and discovered that, out of all the conversion stories of the New Testament, there arose a general principle of steps towards salvation: faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit, and promise of eternal life.\footnote{Boring, 41.}

\textit{Alexander Campbell}\footnote{Leroy Garrett, “Campbell, Alexander,” Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, 112-34.}

Alexander Campbell, co-founder of the Churches of Christ, was insistent on the accumulation of biblical facts. Accepting Bacon’s definition of fact as something said or something done, Campbell saw the Bible not as a set of opinions, theories, abstract or generalities, but as fact. Fact for Campbell was never the historical factuality of the Scriptures, but rather the content of the Bible. This content is the “mighty acts of God” in
history. The nature of the Bible is then testimony to these events: facts, not speculative theory.  

Working under the notion that it is necessary to restore the forms, structures, and practices of primitive New Testament Christianity, Campbell believed that only certain books of Scripture are to be studied for this purpose. Campbell divided the Bible into three blocks: Genesis 1 to Exodus 19 (the patriarchal age); Exodus 20 through Acts 1 (the Mosaic age); and Acts 2 through Revelation 22 (the Christian age). Campbell argued that only facts from Acts 2 through Revelation 22 could be binding upon the church.  

Similar to Barton Stone, Campbell saw the interpretation of Scripture through the “common sense” lens. The Bible is an object that could be studied under the rubric of a scientific method and would result in the fact that all people would develop the same conclusions. Campbell believed that with the necessary historical explanations and the vocabulary of the New Testament words explained, the meaning of Scripture would become transparent, transparent for all people, not just the scholars and educated. For Campbell, the “plain meaning” of Scripture was the historical meaning that can be derived through scientific inquiry. Combining Campbell’s view of which books of the New Testament are authoritative for the church, his method of interpretation, and his reasons for interpretation, one can see that he reads Scripture through the restorationist lens.  

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78 Boring, 66.  
79 C. Leonard Allen, Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2004), 36. Clarification is needed on this point. Allen argues persuasively that Campbell allowed only Acts to Revelation to be binding upon the church. Boring furthers this argument but clarifies that the book of Revelation according to Campbell is not binding upon the church; rather it is a book of predictions of the future. See also Boring, 62-64, 69-79.  
Barton Stone, Walter Scott, and Alexander Campbell understood the Bible as the locus of the voice of God for the church.\textsuperscript{81} With their insistence on restoring primitive Christianity and the gospel, specific ways of reading and interpreting Scripture had to be undertaken. The hermeneutical lens by which these first-generation leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement engaged Scripture was heavily influenced by early modern, Enlightenment presuppositions and the philosophical method of interpretation called Baconianism.\textsuperscript{82} Reading and interpreting Scripture under the lens of Baconianism, many of the restoration leaders of the Stone-Campbell movement used the rhetorical language of constitution, blueprint, and pattern to describe the teachings of Scripture.\textsuperscript{83} We must not forget why Stone, Scott, and Campbell read Scripture the way they did. They were anticipating the millennial reign of Christ. By restoring primitive Christianity (Stone, apocalyptically, and for Scott and Campbell, through human progress) the millennial reign of Christ would begin.\textsuperscript{84}

Origen, Augustine, and the Stone-Campbell Movement of the Nineteenth Century in Dialogue

We have explored Origen, Augustine, and the reading strategies of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the nineteenth century. Through this comparison, it becomes obvious that each of the three individuals or movements interpreted Scripture in light of their historical circumstances. In addition, each interpreted Scripture for a specific purpose. Origen interpreted Scripture in such a way that Christ would become mediated.

\textsuperscript{82} Hughes, \textit{Reviving the Ancient Faith}, 31.
\textsuperscript{84} Hughes, \textit{Apocalyptic Origins}, 85-94.
Augustine interpreted Scripture in such a way that one would love God and neighbor more fully. The Stone-Campbell Movement of the nineteenth century interpreted Scripture in such a way that the millennial dawn of Christ would emerge. In other words, the end goal determined the reading strategy.

In reading Scripture, Origen and Augustine believed the authorial meaning of the author was not necessarily the only interpretation for them or their churches. Scripture could thus be interpreted in such a way that a new meaning could be derived for them. The reading strategies of the Stone-Campbell movement, however, believed the historically reconstructed meaning was the binding meaning. In each of their respective interactions and interpretations of Scripture, Origen, Augustine, and the Stone-Campbell movement sought for themselves and others an engagement of Scripture suitable for their historical circumstances.

Already we have seen there is historical precedence for a variety of methods to read Scripture. In the twentieth century, an additional method of reading Scripture arose in conjunction with historical-critical scholarship. The work of James Dunn will be explored to demonstrate a modern interpretation of Scripture influenced by historical-critical scholarship.85

85 I have chosen Dunn’s work because he concludes, in similar fashion to my own theology, that Scripture is a living Word. As Dunn writes, “As living tradition, scripture is not static, with a dead meaning to be somehow dissected from the cadaver of the text” (195). For other contemporary theology and interpretations of Scripture, see the following: James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); George W. Coats and Burke O. Long, Canon and Authority (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); William Abraham, The Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scripture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Stephen E. Fowl, Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Paul J. Achtemeier, Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Scripture (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999); Garret Green, Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000); Kenneth L. Cukrowski, Mark W. Hamilton and James W. Thompson, God’s Holy Fire: The Nature and Function of Scripture (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2002); Ellen F. Davis & Richard B. Hays, The Art of Reading Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Scot McKnight, The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Miroslav Volf, Captive to the Word of God:...
Through a historical-critical engagement with Scripture, Dunn argues Scripture has never had a single, fixed, unchanging, uniform, or single interpretation. From the very beginning Scripture arose as a living word that came to expression in diverse words, contexts, and practices. God would deliver a word to a prophet, priest, patriarch, and this word would become the means for further revelation. When God spoke to the prophets, priests, patriarchs, or others, what was heard as “word of God” was not at once written down, placed in a box, and preserved for generations afterwards. Conversely, the “word of God” spoken to a specific people within a specific context and a specific time, while being preserved, was read and interpreted in such a way that enabled future generations to hear a fresh “word from God.”

This fresh word was not the historical meaning, but rather a new meaning, able to speak to a people facing different circumstances. As Dunn concludes, the “word of God” was not being heard in the text itself but rather through its interpretation. The interpretation of God’s word to a prophet, priest, or patriarch was just as authoritative as the actual word of God spoken to the prophet, priest, or patriarch.

What is true of the Old Testament is also true of the gospels, according to Dunn. There is not one single gospel form but rather four diverse forms. When one reads these differing accounts, it becomes obvious the good news of Jesus Christ could speak with differing emphases to different contexts and situations. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the tradition is presented in such a way that it speaks to the four writers’ differing

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Dunn, 183-84.
86 Dunn, 183-84.
87 Ibid., 186.
88 Ibid., 189.
circumstances and also to their purpose in telling the story. Dunn compares Matthew’s version of the healing of the centurion’s servant to Luke’s version (Matt. 8:5-13/Luke 7:1-10) as an example. In Matthew’s briefer version, the centurion meets Jesus and addresses him personally. In Luke’s longer version, the centurion does not come to meet Jesus personally but rather sends others – the same event but differing actions of the centurion. This tension is caused by the fact that each writer has a different agenda when telling the story. Matthew wants to stress the immediacy of the centurion’s faith while Luke wants to stress the centurion’s humility. Both Matthew’s and Luke’s interpretation of the event are not concerned with historical accuracy of the actual event; rather they have the freedom and ability to reinterpret the event to speak a new word as the needs of occasion and audience demand.

Dunn concludes that the Scriptures are occasional writings. This is a result of viewing the Old Testament as a living word without a static meaning, in addition to seeing the four gospels as interpreting the life of Jesus to speak a new word as occasion and demands of their communities required. As occasional writings, the Scriptures “contain particular emphases because they were addressed to particular situations.” The authors were writing their books with a view to the needs of the community (or communities) to whom they were writing. As a result, Dunn questions to what extent the language and emphases of each book has been determined by the needs and situations of the community. Or if the books of the New Testament were written to people and understood by people with different frames of references from those of the twentieth or

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89 Ibid., 14, 187-89.
90 Ibid., 30.
91 Ibid., 9.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
twenty-first century (e.g., history, politics, social conditions, different thought patterns, customs, symbols, language, and idioms), Dunn queries, “To what extent were the writings of the New Testament conditioned by the times within which and for which they were written?” Dunn concludes,

We must recognize that the limited scope of the text may limit its applicability to the different circumstances of our own time; that its scriptural authority functions by showing us how the word of God was heard in particular circumstances of the first century, not by having prescriptive force for us today. Giving further evidence for the historicity of Scripture, Dunn explores Jesus’ and the early church’s attitude and use of Scripture. Jesus never disputes the divine origin of the Deuteronomic law. However, at certain times Jesus interprets Scripture in such a way that the Deuteronomic law is only authoritative in certain historical situations, for example, Deuteronomy 24:1, Moses’ teaching on divorce. Jesus does not deny that Moses’ teaching on divorce was a word of God, but he does clearly imply that it was a word to a particular situation, an authoritative word that was contextually conditioned (Matt. 19:3-6). There is a sense in which Jesus interprets Scripture with an awareness of historical relativity. The word of God is relative to a particular situation in which it was originally addressed.

Paul and the early church interpreted Scripture with an awareness of its historical relativity. Paul, no matter what doctrinal point or situation he was addressing, was dependent upon the Old Testament: Paul’s interpretation of food laws, Sabbath, and circumcision. In each of these three cases, it becomes clear that Paul sees the Old

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94 Ibid., 11.
95 Ibid., 13.
96 There are other times in which Jesus takes the Old Testament and interprets it in such a way that we discover Jesus believes there is a sense of historical relativity to the text. See Matt. 5:38-39; Mark 7:10-2-12. Dunn, *The Living Word*, 90-93, 97-100. See also pages 39-45.
Testament as being historically relative and interprets Scripture in such a way that it speaks a new word to a new people at a different time. In the case of food laws, it was vital that the people of God, before the coming of Christ, follow them. During the days of the Maccabees, people were put to death because of their observance of food laws. But for Paul, the truth of the gospel was at stake if Gentiles followed the food laws outlined in the Old Testament. Paul saw these laws as being historically relative.

In the case of Sabbath observance and circumcision, Paul believed the same. For the Jewish devotee, Sabbath observance was part of the Ten Commandments, yet Paul seems to say that it is not necessary. The same can be said concerning Paul’s theology of circumcision. When one reads Paul’s theology on this issue and sees that he does not believe circumcision is necessary to remain a devotee of God, one sees Paul’s view of the Old Testament Scriptures as having a sense of historical relativity.

Jesus, Paul, the gospel writers, and the writers of the Old Testament all become interpreters of Scripture. All take a “word of God” and interpret it in such a way that the historical meaning does not become binding but rather is able to speak a new word for a new people in different contexts. How then should one interpret Scripture? Dunn proposes a hermeneutical circle that sees the givenness of the historical text, the meaning of the text, and the hearing of the text in dialogue.

97 Gal. 2:1; 1 Cor. 8-10; Romans 14. Dunn, The Living Word, 46-49.
100 Ibid., 165-76. It is interesting to compare Dunn’s triadic formula of interpreting Scripture to James Sanders’s and Gary Holladay’s triadic formula. Sanders wants the interpreters to see Scripture through hermeneutics, texts/traditions, and context/situations. Holladay says theological reflection takes place when interpreter, context and text/tradition are intertwined. On a historical note, it is interesting to compare how Achtemeier sees the formation of Scripture through a similar triadic formula: tradition, situation, and respondent. See Achtemeier, 91-121. Sanders, “Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy,” in Canon and Authority (ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 20-41; Carl Holladay, A Critical Introduction to the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 15-22.
Dunn concludes the Scriptures are historical in nature. To understand the historical nature of the texts, Dunn asserts, we must understand that the writings of Scripture arose within specific historical situations, cultures, rhetoric, and idioms. In order for the interpreter to understand the meaning of the text, the texts must be read within the context of the language usage of their time.\footnote{Dunn, \textit{The Living Word}, 166. Dunn furthers this argument by exploring textual criticism. He concludes that if we fail to see the historicity of the text, “the particular text becomes no more than a lump of potter’s clay, vulnerable to being shaped entirely by the whim of the interpreter (potter). In short, the very identity of the text is at stake, and historical study and scholarly method are unavoidable if the New Testament is to be read at all” (168).}

In dialogue with the historicity of the text are the meaning and hearing of the text. The authors of Scripture intended a meaning. Their situations and circumstances called for them to speak a word from God, a meaningful word. Interpreters of Scripture must seek to understand the historical meaning of the author.\footnote{Ibid., 169-71.} In dialogue with this is the reader/hearer of the text. Meaning is not just in the past or in the text as an object; meaning is produced in the reader’s presence as the text is read.\footnote{Ibid., 171.} When all three (historical situation, historical meaning, and reader/hearer) are in dialogue, a good exposition and therefore a good interpretation can be found and spoken.\footnote{See Dunn, 176.}

The Scriptures, according to Dunn, are historical in nature, but they are also a “living tradition,” a “living word.” Dunn states the traditions of Jesus were and continue to be the lifeblood of the people of God. It was and is living because it is the tradition by which the early church lived and we live today. For the early church, the tradition of Jesus could and did speak with differing emphases to differing contexts and situations.\footnote{Ibid., 188-89.} Today the tradition of Jesus continues to speak to the differing emphases and contexts the
people of God face. Scripture then is both descriptive and prescriptive. It describes a word of God for a specific people at a certain time and place and continues to speak a new word from God to the church in the twenty-first century, not necessarily the historical meaning. Wisdom and discernment are essential to hear a fresh word from God.

Historical Ways of Reading Scripture Summary

A brief and albeit selective choosing of individuals has revealed Scripture is interpreted through a variety of lenses and methodological approaches. Origen sought to read Scripture through a sacramental lens: Scripture mediating the presence of Christ. Augustine chose to read Scripture through the lens of love while the Stone-Campbell Movement of the nineteenth century read Scripture to restore first-century Christianity. Dunn reads Scripture through the modern historical-critical method of the twentieth century.

By demonstrating there is a variety of methods of reading Scripture, I have created a space in which an emerging strategy of reading called dwelling in the Word can be employed that will take into context a burgeoning post-Christian, postmodern worldview. Within the context of an emerging post-Christian, postmodern worldview, the community of interpretation imaginatively repositions its life within the memory of Jesus. Within every new context or experience, the Christian community will interpret the story of Jesus for the purpose of envisioning how the community can live its life so that the memory of Jesus can be performed.  

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What method of reading Scripture will allow a community of faith to read and interpret Scripture for the purpose of performing the story of Jesus? Will Origen or Augustine’s hermeneutical method suffice? Will the method of reading Scripture employed by the first generation leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement be sufficient? Will a historical-critical approach to the Scriptures as outlined by Dunn be adequate for the twenty-first century?

Having made a space, through historical precedence, whereby various reading strategies can be employed, I now turn to the practice of reading Scripture called dwelling in the Word. This is no means the only reading method that can be practiced to help the church faithfully live out the story of Jesus. It simply is a method of reading Scripture that I wish to employ because it not only takes into account one’s experiences, but also includes deep-listening exercises: listening to the Scriptures, to each other, and for the voice of God to speak, in addition to allowing the metaphors and images of the text to awaken the imaginations of the readers.

This type of reading strategy is rooted in the reader-response category of biblical criticism. Reader-response criticism believes the reader plays a role in the creation of meaning and significance of the text.\textsuperscript{107} There is a role for the reader in the development of meaning. The reader is not a static and autonomous entity that remains unchanged from the biblical text. The reader, in the process of reading, may be changed by the

\textsuperscript{107} Edgar McKnight, “Reader-Response Criticism,” in \textit{To Each Its Own Meaning} (ed. Steven McKenzie and Stephen Hayne; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 230. Stanley Fish, in his earlier work, believed that the essential factor in meaning is found in the process of reading. Compare this to Wolfgang Iser, who believes the essential factor in reading is the interplay between the intended meaning of the author and the intended meaning of the reader. Stanley Fish, \textit{Is There A Text In This Class?} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Wolfgang Iser, \textit{The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response}. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1978); Edgar McKnight, \textit{Postmodern Use of the Bible} (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988).
experience of reading. Thus the text is allowed to interact with the reader’s own experiences and context. Through the successful interplay between text and reader, neither the text nor the reader stands above the other. The text is not some shell that can be pried open to reveal a nut. The reader is not some isolated individual that stands outside of community, experience, or context. Instead, the text gives meaning to the reader’s experience while the reader’s experience potentially brings new meanings and interpretations to the text.

Dwelling in the Word

Church Innovations, a missional institute designed to help churches embody the mission of God in the world, developed the practice called dwelling in the Word. The nominal text for dwelling in the Word is Luke 10:1-12, though the practice is not restricted to this text.

Over a period of time, the same text is read. Critical exegesis is not part of the dwelling process. Seeking historical references to explain an image from the text is not necessarily undertaken. “Dwelling is less about learning information . . . and more about learning about one another and what God might be up to in the midst of us.”

The practice dwelling in the Word involves deep listening. The practice involves listening to the passage and reflecting silently upon it. In addition, the practice involves finding a partner that is not well known and “listening that person into speaking freely about what thoughts or feelings came during the reading.” Not only is there a deep listening to the reading of the passage and to what another person hears; there is a deep

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110 Ibid., 22.
111 Ibid., 11.
listening for the voice of God. Participants are listening for God’s living Word to speak.112

Living over a period of time with the same text shapes the imagination and life of the group. The story becomes their story and will eventually define who they are. By living within the same text, the group is met by the same words and images and will eventually be “greeted, embraced, poked, and provoked into thinking in new ways, asking questions of one another, listening one another into free speech, listening even to the Holy Spirit’s call.”113

Reading and listening to the same text, the participants become limited to one set of images and information. Thus a set of boundaries is created in which metaphors and images from the text are able to dance. “It confines, in a certain way, the information for a group of people, and through that confinement and focus, they begin to see everything differently, by the power of the Holy Spirit as it opens the imaginations of everyone in that metaphoric place.”114

To engage in the practice of dwelling in the Word, we must take the following steps. First, a passage is chosen that is related to the story of the community of faith. As the group convenes, the meeting begins with the reading of the passage alongside a moment of silence that allows participants to prepare their hearts and minds. Participants are then invited to find a person they know least well, “a friendly-looking stranger.” Finding the person they know least well, they listen to the person tell what he or she has heard in the passage. After a short duration, the group reconvenes and participants report

112 Ibid., 13.
113 Ibid., 15.
114 Ibid., 35.
to the larger group what their partners have spoken. Following this, the group wrestles together with what God might be up to and speaking for the group that particular day.\textsuperscript{115}

**Conclusion**

In every context, the people of God must become interpreters of Scripture for the purpose of remaining faithful to the story of God. The history of the church reveals interpreters of Scripture have done just this. History also reveals contexts determine there are new meanings derived from Scripture so that, within new contexts, the people of God can continue to be faithful to the story of God.

Scripture is a living word. It is able to be read and interpreted so that a fresh “word of God” can be spoken in differing contexts. Exploration of Dunn’s scholarly work on a theology of Scripture reveals this. In addition, we have seen how Origen, Augustine, and some early leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement of the nineteenth century all interpreted Scripture for a new, or fresh, “word of God.” Scripture mediated Christ, taught how to love, and helped people expect the millennial reign of Christ. As a result, Scripture became meaningful.

My heritage, Churches of Christ, growing out of the Stone-Campbell Movement of the nineteenth century, began with the view that Scripture must be read for the purpose of restoring primitive Christianity. Restoring primitive Christianity is not wrong in itself, for it has many merits. However, having such a limited view of Scripture does not allow Scripture to be engaged within different contexts that the church faces on a continual basis. In the case of the NCofC, the community experiences a limited engagement with Scripture. Scripture is limited in sustaining the outward impulse of the church. Several factors have already been outlined showing why this takes place.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 9-10.
What has been demonstrated is that there is historical merit for various strategies of reading Scripture. Origen, Augustine, the Stone-Campbell movement of the nineteenth century, and James Dunn all employed various reading strategies that arose out of their historical contexts. The brief survey of interpretation above demonstrates the multiplicity of interpretative approaches in the history of the church and creates a space in which a new strategy of reading Scripture can be undertaken, a strategy that seeks to take in the unique experiences of the community of faith.

The purpose of this project is to lead a select group of individuals in a way of reading Scripture, other than the restoration lens, and to observe how this impacts the meaningfulness of Scripture in the group’s engagement of Scripture. As the group engages Scripture, Scripture may be read and interpreted in such a way that in the new contexts in which the church finds itself, it will discover how to be faithful in living out the story of God.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The intent of this project was to lead a select group of individuals from the NCofC in a practice of reading Scripture for the purpose of a meaningful engagement with Scripture. The congregation is experiencing a limited engagement with Scripture through its current practices of studying and reading. I have described above some of the reasons for the limited engagement as well as the frustrations individuals are expressing. It is my belief that an initial and helpful place whereby a meaningful engagement with Scripture can be attained is with the introduction of an established method of reading Scripture, dwelling in the Word. This chapter describes the rationale, ministry intervention, sessions employed, description of participants, and the method of evaluation.

Rationale

The NCofC is experiencing limited meaningfulness in their engagement with Scripture. This limited meaningful engagement is because the restoration lens does not allow Scripture to be in dialogue with experiences and contexts. As a result, Scripture is limited in its formative function. The communal reading strategy dwelling in the Word was chosen to develop a practice that will enhance Scripture’s meaningfulness by allowing experiences and contexts to be in dialogue with Scripture.
Dwelling in the Word is practiced when a group of people listens to the Word of God communally. There is a double listening process: first, listening to the Scripture being read, and second, to listening to “a reasonably friendly-looking stranger into free speech.” In listening to a “friendly-looking stranger,” participants are invited to pay attention to what the other person has heard from the reading. Then participants share with the larger group what they heard from the “friendly-looking stranger.” Patrick Keifert says, “By regular repetition, this practice becomes a habit of forming Christian community within the Word of God and forming our decision and actions within the biblical narrative.”

The practice dwelling in the Word was chosen for several reasons. The practice grows out of an established universal church practice, lectio divina. Lectio divina is comprised of four elements: lectio (reading the text), meditatio (meditating on the text), oratio (praying the text), and contemplatio (living the text). The elements making up lectio divina are not to be practiced in a succeeding order but rather in a “looping spiral in which all four elements are repeated . . . in various sequences and configurations.” By engaging Scripture through lectio divina, Readers guard against depersonalizing the text into an affair of questions and answers, definitions and dogmas, in addition to taking control of the text and justifying actions. Lectio divina becomes a way of reading that allows Scripture to permeate lives for the purpose of inviting us to live the Word of God. Important to note is how lectio divina can be practiced on an individual level.

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115 This term originates out of the material produced by Church Innovations. The term refers to finding someone the partner knows least well. See Ellison and Keifert, Dwelling in the Word, 9.
116 Patrick Keifert, We Are Here Now (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon, 2006), 163.
117 Peterson, 91. See also Peterson’s larger discussion on lectio divina, 81-117.
Dwelling in the Word grows out of *lectio divina* but is diverse in that it is a communal practice, not an individual practice. This is a crucial dimension because the practice allows the church to speak and hear Scripture with one another.\(^{118}\) The reading and interpretation of Scripture is not done in isolation but rather is accomplished through communal means. By reading and listening to Scripture communally, the congregation develops a habit whereby it has the tools and ability to converse, make decisions, and take action that is shaped by the living Word of God. By listening to what each other heard in the proclamation of Scripture, they allow Scripture to be present in the church’s spiritual discernment for the future.

In addition to the reason above, there are two more motives for the choosing of dwelling in the Word. First, the trajectory from backward analysis of looking at Scripture to a forward reading of Scripture is made possible. Churches of Christ have historically read Scripture through the backward looking lens: the restoration lens. Dwelling in the Word changes the trajectory to a forward looking engagement. Second, Scripture is brought into dialogue with the experiences of the Christian community. Scripture is not read in isolation from experiences, but rather is given the opportunity to speak a new word as the community’s experiences are brought into dialogue with the reading.

**Description of Participants**

The participants were selected and invited to participate in the sessions by employing a purposive sample.\(^{119}\) A purposive sample includes the selection of individuals who represent a broad range of perspectives. Utilizing the purposive sampling, I increased the inclusivity of this project.

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\(^{119}\) Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, forthcoming), 60-61.
Former elders and current leadership team members were invited. Those of an ethnic background other than Anglo-Saxon who had recently immigrated received an invitation. Also receiving an invitation to be participants were financially stable individuals along with individuals living on the margins of poverty, in addition to a cross section of longtime and new members. Overarching the selection of individuals is my perception that these individuals portray a high view of Scripture. This perception is derived out of living with the people for over six years and engaging them on a regular basis through conversations pertaining to Scripture. The individuals chosen were also individuals who I perceived would be committed to participating in the seven weeks of dwelling in the Word.

I invited twenty individuals with hopes fourteen would agree to participate. Thirteen individuals agreed. The makeup of the thirteen participants was six males, ranging in age from early thirties to mid seventies, and seven females, ranging from middle age to mid seventies. Out of the thirteen participants, there were individuals financially stable while others were on the margins of society, a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and African-American, those born in Canada and those who have immigrated to Canada. The participants ranged from formal leaders of the congregation to new members.

Ministry Intervention

Seven sessions were scheduled in which dwelling in the Word was practiced. The first six sessions were scheduled for Sunday afternoons, running consecutively from September 12 through October 24. The exception was the fourth session, when the session had to be moved to Monday evening due to Canadian Thanksgiving.

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120 Appendix A. Along with the invitational letter was a consent form that was filled out prior to participation in the group.
The first six sessions of dwelling in the Word took place over the course of six weeks. The purpose was to provide a means whereby a meaningful engagement with Scripture could be experienced. Over the course of six weeks, the participants were led through the proper sequence of steps dwelling in the Word employs. These steps were 1) a moment of silence, 2) reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 3) invitation to speak to a “friendly-looking stranger” about what they heard in the text, 4) reporting to the larger group what their partner said, and 5) discerning together what the group is hearing and learning from Scripture this day.

Focused dwelling, arising out of communal or individual experiences, comprised four of the six sessions. These experiences were discussed before dwelling in the Word took place. Sessions 2 through 5 were focused dwelling. Session 2 concentrated on experiences individual participants were currently facing. Session 3 focused on the communal experience of hosting a summer camp for the children of Longford Subdivision. Session 4 focused on the communal experience of providing a space for the church’s condominium neighbors to grow their own vegetables. Session 5 focused on the communal experience of the church’s ministry with Maple Leaf Public School. Sessions 1 and 6 were open dwelling sessions. Open dwelling sessions allowed the participants to hear and interact with 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 without formal dialogue about individual or communal experiences.

Description of Sessions

Session 1

The primary structure of session 1 was to introduce dwelling in the Word to the participants, sign appropriate consent forms, ask questions, and begin to dwell in 2
Corinthians 4:7-12. Finishing the preliminary legal work, participants were invited to dwell in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. After a moment of silence and the reading of the text, participants were invited to speak to a “friendly-looking stranger” about what they heard in the text. During the moment of silence, I invited the participants to consider how they might hear the passage shape their lives.

Session 2

Session 2 began with formal dialogue centering upon experiences the participants were facing. I began with the statement “If you are willing, please share with the group what experiences you might be facing during this time of your life.” After nearly five minutes of dialogue, the group was led through the steps of dwelling in the Word.

Session 3

Session 3 began with open dialogue around the communal experience of the congregation’s summer camp for the children of the Longford subdivision. The participants told stories about hosting the summer camp. After ten minutes of dialogue and storytelling, the group was led through the steps of dwelling in the Word. Before the moment of silence, I directed, “In this moment of silence, reflect upon our communal experience of our summer camp for the children of the Longford subdivision.”

Session 4

The objective of session 4 was to dwell in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 through the communal experience of the church’s community garden for seniors living in the condominiums next door. Open conversation about the gardens with stories about building the garden boxes, inviting the neighbors to use them, and the on-going maintenance of the gardens took up nearly ten minutes of the allotted time. After a time
of storytelling, participants were led to dwell in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. In the moment of silence, the group was asked to reflect upon the experience of hosting a community garden for seniors living in the condominiums next door.

**Session 5**

The objective of session 5 was to dwell in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 by reflecting upon the church’s ministry with Maple Leaf Public School. To begin, I told stories about how the church had first started to serve Maple Leaf. Other participants involved in this ministry also told stories about how they participate, the way the children are affected and also what they perceive the congregation’s ministry to be accomplishing in the neighborhood. After nearly fifteen minutes of storytelling, participants were led in the steps of dwelling in the Word. During the moment of silence, the participants were asked to reflect upon the church’s ministry with Maple Leaf Public School.

**Session 6**

Session 6 had the primary objective of being an open-dwelling session. As participants arrived, friendly conversation ensued until I invited the participants into the process of dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. During the moment of silence, I asked the participants how they heard the passage shaping their lives. At the conclusion of session 6, each participant was given a questionnaire to complete. Each participant obliged.

In each of the sessions, seating arrangements were one of two setups: chairs were placed in a semi-circle or participants were invited to gather around tables pushed up against one another. Each setting allowed participants to face each other. Sessions 1, 2, 5 and 6 had participants sit in a semi-circle for the reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and report to the group as a whole. Sessions 3 and 4 had participants gather around two tables
pushed up against one another. All sessions took place in the large room of the basement in the church building.

Method of Evaluation

The method of evaluation used in this project for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness was a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach refers not to the quantity of research but rather to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions.\(^{121}\) In qualitative evaluation, data begins as raw, descriptive information about programs and people. The researcher who begins with raw data will be an active participant by making firsthand observations and sometimes becoming a “participant observer.”\(^{122}\) Raw data can be derived from open-ended interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or focus groups.

I employed the method of triangulation for evaluation. Triangulation is a term originally used for map making, navigation, and military practices.\(^{123}\) A position is able to be determined by triangulating with two other fixed points. In the context of this project, triangulation is engaging in multiple data collection methods for the purpose of measuring a single concept or construct. While gathering the multiple sets of data through various sources, I compared and contrasted one set of data with the other in order to produce a full and balanced interpretation of the data.\(^{124}\)

In this project, I used data triangulation. Data triangulation is a measurement of varying data sources. Each data record reveals a slightly different facet of the same


\(^{123}\) Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 54-55.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.
reality.\textsuperscript{125} By combining the different lines of sight, I was able to obtain an enhanced, more substantive picture of the group’s engagement with Scripture.

By using triangulation, I increased the trustworthiness of the research.\textsuperscript{126} Triangulation involves three different data sources that provide three different angles of vision. In this project, the angles of vision were myself as researcher, insiders and an outside consultant. These angles of vision helped determine whether the participants had a meaningful engagement with Scripture through the practice dwelling in the Word.

Engaging the method of triangulation, I have been able to analyze the data and provide a “thick description.” A thick description allows the data being collected to give a detailed interpretation. As Berg notes, a thick description will convey information in such a way “that a wink can be distinguished from a twitch, and a parody of a wink is distinguishable from an actual wink.” A thick description will allow individuals to have a complete picture of the observed events, actors involved, rules followed, and even know the social contexts involved.\textsuperscript{127}

Field Notes\textsuperscript{128}

In each session I took field notes. The notes taken were detailed and descriptive concerning my observations. I tried to avoid judgmental observation and generalizing. In the margins of the page, I tried to capture the comments of the participants. Additionally, I watched the demeanor displayed by the participants and made notes in the margins. The seating arrangements and interaction of the participants with their partners were noted along with the content of conversation in the larger group. I made mental notes of

\textsuperscript{125} Berg, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 87, 114.
\textsuperscript{128} Appendix B contains the protocol for taking field notes. Appendix E is the analysis of the field notes.
silences and slippages and captured these in the field notes immediately following each session. Casual conversation within ten minutes of each session was also noted when participants left the building.

Supplementing the field notes were audio recordings of each session. I imagined that the groups might respond differently from week 1 to week 6. Audio recordings of the responses of the group could reveal key data that would not be captured through the questionnaire, my own observations, or the outside observer. Each week the sessions were recorded. Recording began as the group gathered as a whole and not in dialogue with their “friendly looking stranger.”

Within twenty-four hours of each session, I listened to each audio recording and made notes that I saved in a Microsoft Word document. I listened for recurring words and phrases, jotted down the participants’ comments, noted slippages and silences, and listened to see if the participants were speaking in the past, present, or future tense.

Questionnaire

At the conclusion of session 6, I provided an open-ended questionnaire as a second method of triangulation.\textsuperscript{129} I chose this method of evaluation because it allows passive participants to respond freely. Distribution of the questionnaire began immediately after the sixth session concluded, and participants were asked to complete and return them before they left the room. Unfortunately, five participants were not part of session 6, for unknown reasons. To solicit these five participant responses, I sent the absent participants a copy of the questionnaire via email, asked them to fill it out and return it to me as soon as possible. Three out of the five participants filled out the questionnaire within forty-eight hours. Two of the participants failed to return the

\textsuperscript{129} Appendix C
questionnaire, and after attempts to obtain the questionnaire with no success, I chose to forego their responses.

Having collected the questionnaires, I began to analyze them through a coding mechanism using a developed protocol. The protocol allowed words, phrases or events to be categorized. In addition, I grouped the experiences of the participants so that effective analysis of their engagement with Scripture could be achieved.

Independent Expert

Mark Love served as an outside, independent expert to assess the effectiveness of this project. He currently teaches and presides as the Director for Missional Leadership at Rochester College, Rochester, Michigan. Love is well acquainted with the practice dwelling in the Word through his doctoral work at Luther Seminary and also through his consulting practices. In addition, Love is acutely familiar with Churches of Christ and their ecclesiology and methodology of reading Scripture.

Love arrived on a Saturday afternoon and led a seventh session. During this session, he selected the passage 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 for the practice of dwelling. I asked him to generate a report with his perceptions of whether the participants had a meaningful engagement with Scripture. I asked for expert feedback along the following lines of query: How did you perceive the group’s engagement with Scripture? Did you perceive their engagement to be meaningful? Did you perceive the text to speak to and from their current experiences?

To assist Love in his composition of the report, I provided him with chapters 1 and 2, along with the methodology I employed in this project. By doing this, I allowed

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130 Appendix D
131 Love holds a doctor of ministry degree from an accredited university and is currently a doctoral candidate, specializing in Congregational Mission and Leadership.
him to be aware of how I am using the term “meaningful engagement.” A meaningful engagement with Scripture is allowing present experiences to be a component of interpretation. In trying to understand the meaning of Scripture, is the group relying on their experiences to be part of the dialogue in understanding what the selected passage is saying, in addition to how the passage is formative for the church? Thus Love did not analyze whether the group is effectively participating in the practice dwelling in the Word. Instead, he analyzed, through the practice dwelling in the Word, whether the group was able to articulate a possible meaning of the selected passage in dialogue with their experiences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to lead a select group of individuals into a meaningful engagement with Scripture. A total of seven sessions were conducted in which the group was led in the practice dwelling in the Word. Scripture was not read through the restoration lens but rather provided a chance to interact and speak a word to the individual and communal experiences of the participants.

I used the qualitative method of evaluation to measure whether this project has been effective in leading the group to a meaningful engagement with Scripture. Chapter 4 presents the findings and results.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Chapter 1 outlined the context of the Newmarket Church of Christ. Chapter 2 provided a theological space whereby a method of reading of Scripture called dwelling in the Word could be practiced. Chapter 3 outlined the methodology of the project while presenting a qualitative research method for evaluating the effectiveness of the project. The current chapter evaluates the results triangulated through field notes, a questionnaire, and an outside consultant’s report.

Evaluation Findings

The method employed to evaluate whether dwelling in the Word enhanced the participants’ engagement with Scripture in a meaningful manner is a qualitative method of evaluation. A qualitative method of evaluation is not dependent upon the quantity of research but rather the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions.\textsuperscript{132} To undertake a qualitative method of evaluation, I used triangulation of data. Triangulation involves three sets of data evaluations that measure the project’s effectiveness. The three sets of data evaluation are field notes derived from me as researcher, a questionnaire from the participants, and a report from an outside consultant. What follows will be the findings from the three methods of evaluation.

\textsuperscript{132} Berg, 3.
The Minister as Researcher: Field Notes

Two sets of field notes were taken for each session. The first set arose from observing the participants. The second set came about through listening to the audio recording following each session. The audio recording supplemented the field notes, observing the participants in the process of dwelling in the Word. Each set of field notes was then coded according to the protocol outlined in appendix D.

Session 1

While the group gathered for the reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, the participants came equipped with their own Bible. After initial explanation of dwelling in the Word followed by a moment of silence and the reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, participants were invited to find a “friendly-looking stranger,” a person they know least well. As the participants found a “friendly-looking stranger,” the pairs of individuals broke off into private rooms. Observing the participants in pairs made obvious that participants body language was studious: having their head and body leaning over the Scriptures. Conversation amongst one another was nonexistent. Finally, when the participants sought to tell each other what they had heard in the reading of Scripture, they were quick to inform one another what they perceived to be the authorial intent.

Clearly, the participants were reading backwards. Evidence of this is when one participant revealed to the group that she had come with careful exegetical work on the passage. As a result, when it came time to share what they had heard with a “friendly-looking stranger,” the participant revealed her careful exegetical work on what Paul meant.

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2 See appendix E for field notes taken from each session along with audio file notes from each session. The field notes followed the protocol for reporting that is outlined in appendix D.
The participant, with her carefully crafted exegetical work, was not alone. Participants were quick to read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 as describing the life of Paul and to some extent the life of Jesus, but to imagine the passage describing their lives was unimaginable to the group. This is evident through the silence pertaining to the present experiences of the participants. The majority of the participants did not speak about their present experiences, only about what they perceived Paul to have meant.

Session 2

The field notes, supported by the audio-file field notes, reveal the participants’ failure to read backwards. Presumably the apostle Paul wrote the words of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to describe his life. The participants, however, were silent pertaining to Paul’s hardships and struggles. Instead, the participants spoke about their own experiences: both present and past and how they felt “perplexed,” “crushed,” and “broken.” The participants utilized the adjectives Paul employed to describe his situation for the purpose of describing their own lives. The experiences of the participants were framed through the adjectives Paul used to describe what he was facing.

Failing to mention the apostle Paul did not stop the group from referring to the story of Jesus. One participant noted that we suffer just as Jesus suffered. This participant did not employ a restorational reading but rather a christological reading. Instead of saying that we should suffer because the early church suffered, the participant was rooting his own experiences and the experiences of the group as a whole into the story of Jesus. The participant recognized that suffering allows us to reflect the story of Jesus.
Session 3

Week 3’s dwelling session concentrated on the church’s ministry with the local neighborhood through its annual summer camp. The participants were able to see themselves and the church as being given over to death through the summer camp. The summer camp, as the participants noted, is a means by which death is at work in the life of the church so that the neighborhood can be given life.

While the participants focused on 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 through the lens of a summer camp, the group read the story of Jesus into their experience. While talking with their “friendly-looking stranger,” participants told each other how they see the story of Jesus being lived out through the church’s ministry of serving the children. Participants told stories of what it was like to give themselves away so that the children could have life.

The apostle Paul has been forgotten. The authorial intent of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 was not considered. As a result, there is no backwards reading of the text and no restorational lens employed. Instead, the participants began to explore various interpretations of “treasures in jars of clay.” Participants mentioned that the treasure could be children, glory of God, gifts, and even the possibility of the treasure being the summer camp.

The audio-recording field notes reveal how the adjectives and images employed by Paul to describe his life were the precise adjectives and images the participants used to describe what it was like to host a summer camp. “Afflicted,” “hard pressed,” “struck down” are descriptive words used to describe their experience of hosting the summer camp.
Session 4

The silence of the group pertaining to the authorial intent was surprising. Instead of focusing on the authorial intent of the selected passage, participants allowed the experience of providing a space for the neighborhood to grow their own vegetables to dominate the conversation.

The conversation this week was unique. It revolved around evangelism. Three out of the four pairs of participants heard the text speaking about evangelism. One participant saw the gardens as a seed of the gospel. Another participant revealed how the gardens are an opportunity to build relationships with the community for the purpose of bearing fruit. In conversation, bearing fruit is a metaphor of evangelism. Another participant related the gardens as the church’s way of giving itself over to death. Through the act of providing a space for hospitality in the form of a garden, the church’s neighbors are finding life.

The text is in dialogue with the experience of the congregation. In dialogue, the experience is framed through the language of 2 Corinthians 4. The participants, through the ministry of the community garden, are seeing their lives as embodying the words of 2 Corinthians 4. As a result, the passage is not applied to their lives. Instead, the passage gives the participants a means to say, we are giving ourselves over to death just as Paul and Jesus have done. The participants were beginning to see themselves as performing the story of Jesus.

Session 5

The silence of the group pertaining to the story of Jesus was noticeable. The participants failed to mention the story of Jesus. In addition, the participants did not
mention the apostle Paul, probe what they consider being the authorial intent of the passage or even highlight how Paul was crushed, perplexed, and given over to death.

The participants voiced that they found it difficult to “apply” this passage to their lives and the ministry the church has with MLPS. More than one participant told their partner this week it was difficult to hear the passage in conversation with the ministry the church has with the public school.

Interestingly, however, the participants recognize life is given to the children, both physically and spiritually. Physically, the children are receiving life through the sandwich program. Spiritually, the children are fed when the church volunteers to help children learn how to read. It appears that even though the participants voiced difficulty in reading 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 in the context of the church’s ministry with MLPS, the participants recognized that as the church gives its life away in various forms, the children of MLPS find life.

Surprisingly, as the participants finished telling the wider group what their partner heard in the reading, participants reflected how they are perceiving the text in a deeper manner than simply looking for the historical meaning. One participant voiced to the group that she was seeing this passage, not applied to her life, but as describing the life she is to live. This revelation was striking when I compared it to the first week of dwelling in the Word, when all the participants focused on the authorial intent of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. In addition to one participant who saw this passage as describing the life the church is to embody, another individual discerned after listening to the group that possibly death is at work in the children’s lives. Listening to the stories of poverty, on both a financial and educational level, the participant explained he sees the children
carrying the death of Jesus around. As a result, life is at work in the church. If the children are not carrying around the qualities of death, then the church has no life. Only through death can the church find life.

Session 6

The final week of dwelling in the Word revealed the participants were struggling with how to read Scripture. The participants once again did not mention the life of Paul, the life of Jesus, communal experiences, or the authorial intent of the selected passage. While participants remained silent on these areas, there was also a slippage. One participant voiced skepticism as to whether 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 had formative power.

In opposition to the single slippage by one individual, participants voiced their budding thoughts about how to continue to read and interpret Scripture. Two participants compared and contrasted how they have historically read Scripture: discovering the single authorial meaning and applying this meaning to their lives. The participants contrasted this to the emerging belief that experience can change the meaning. An additional participant revealed that a meaning has surfaced in light of present and past circumstances. “But,” the participant continued, “I might read Scripture two weeks from now and develop a different view because my experiences are changing.” These comments by the participants show they recognize the role experience is playing in the interpretation of Scripture.

Participants: Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the second piece of data evaluation to measure the project’s effectiveness in helping a select group of individuals experience a meaningful engagement with Scripture. The questionnaire was designed with open-ended questions

\[135\] See appendix F.
intended to solicit broad responses from the participants for a thorough and detailed analysis. The participants each received the questionnaire following session 6.

“Describing Experience” Question

The questionnaire began with a request for the participants to describe the experience of dwelling in the Word. The responses from the participants expressed frustration and puzzlement at the beginning of the sessions. However, a shift took place. Participants revealed they began to anticipate dwelling in 2 Corinthians because of what could be learned by listening to each other.

Sifting through the responses, I realized the responses contain honest feedback. Participants are honest in expressing their frustration. One respondent described the sessions as being “too forced,” which he described as at odds with being “Spirit-led.”

The participants recognized the shift in thinking brought on by participation in the six sessions. One respondent captured it well with the response:

I have seen a gradual change in the way we have read and applied the Scripture each week. Week 1 was very methodical and literal. We read it “as is,” tried to decipher its meaning, took notes, etc. As we moved on, week after week, our views and interpretations became more personal, more relevant.

The participants used words such as “meaningful,” “amazement,” “enjoyable” to describe their experience in the sessions. These descriptors, also employed in noun and verb form, describe the sessions in a positive manner.

“Has the Passage Become Meaningful” Question

The second question sought to discover, through the practice of dwelling, whether the participants believed 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 was meaningful. “As you engaged in the

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136 Appendix F, questionnaire 1.
137 Appendix F, questionnaire 9.
practice of dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt with become more meaningful? Explain.”

The question was limited in that the participants did not understand what definition I had applied to the word meaningful. Surprisingly, the participants described that the process of dwelling had caused 2 Corinthians 4 to become meaningful because experience had been allowed to be a part of the reading. Participants responded that arriving at the text, they perceived it to be a difficult passage to understand. Listening to each other, reading the text in dialogue with experiences, and eventually seeing the passage as describing their lives helped the passage become meaningful.

Participants summarized that the passage became meaningful when they were able to see their lives within the words of 2 Corinthians 4. Hearing each other speak of their experiences and seeing the communal experiences being described through the words of 2 Corinthians 4 provided an avenue for the participants to be able to describe the words of Paul as becoming meaningful to their lives.

“Future Reading” Question

The third question sought to open the imaginations of the participants to discover how they perceive dwelling in the Word could become a means to offer the wider church a meaningful engagement with Scripture. “How would dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?”

The responses were varied, with some misunderstanding the question and others suggesting dwelling become a common practice in current worship and Bible studies.

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138 “Meaningful” is defined as an engagement of Scripture that allows our present experiences and contexts to be a component of interpretation.
The respondents who understood the question referred to the possibility of dwelling in the same text over time as being an occasion whereby the text has time to form and shape us. Respondents also mentioned how the aspect of listening to each other opens us up to the possibility of creating a listening community. The community that listens will then become a community that is open to the possibility of an interpretation that will grow out of various contexts and experiences.

“Dwelling to Have Shaped Experiences” Question

The final question sought to measure whether the participants would be able to articulate if their past and potentially future experiences would be reframed in light of 2 Corinthians 4. “How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?”

The respondents had a difficult time answering this question. Though struggling, they articulated a theme I hoped to see – the experiences of the participants’ lives are being reframed in light of the text. Participants were able to express their lives through the imagery of 2 Corinthians 4, in addition to expecting future experiences to reflect the words Paul employed to describe his life. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 is not seen by the participants as distant from their lives but rather as descriptive of the life they embody and will continue to embody.

Independent Expert: Report from Outside Consultant

The third piece of data evaluation to measure the project’s effectiveness in helping a select group of individuals experience a meaningful engagement with Scripture was through an outside consultant, an independent expert. Mark Love, who is familiar

139 See appendix G.
with the ecclesiology of Churches of Christ, working towards completion of a Ph.D. in
missional theology and extremely familiar with the practice dwelling in the Word, was
asked to be the independent consultant.

The report created by the independent expert, after leading a seventh session with
a separate passage chosen at his discretion, gives a viewpoint that is theologically
informed while showing an emerging belief of the nature and function of Scripture within
the life of the NCofC. The report also conveys the ability for dwelling in the Word to
allow the participants to have a meaningful engagement with Scripture.

The report outlines what the independent expert recognized by participation and
observation while guiding the participants through the practice of dwelling in the Word.
First, dwelling with the group was “rich,” rich in the sense that the group was disciplined
to report stories of one another’s experiences. After listening to the group repeat what
they heard their partner say Love concludes, “the group was indeed allowing this text to
read their lives in some fairly significant ways.”

To help assess whether the group developed a meaningful engagement with
Scripture, Love asked the group the question “What has surprised you about dwelling in
the Word?” Love reports the participants recognized the text as developing meaning and
clarity through time spent in the same passage. Participants revealed to Love they were
surprised that over time the passage became clearer in ways that other methods of study
had failed to accomplish. Love concludes, through conversation with the participants, that
the practice dwelling in the Word allowed the participants to develop a level of
understanding of 2 Corinthians 4 that otherwise might not have happened through other
methods of studying Scripture. Love writes, “dwellling in the Word for them was not a pooling of ignorance, but a practice that produced sharper understanding.”

An Analysis of the Data: Results

Triangulation allows data collected to be analyzed for the purpose of comparing and contrasting so that a full and balanced evaluation can be completed. Triangulation allows each piece of data collected to reveal a different facet of the same reality. Combining the different lines of sight measuring the group’s reading and listening to Scripture can help determine if the participants engagement with Scripture has been meaningful. The three pieces of data obtained from three different angles of vision, the project leader, an insider perspective, and an outsider perspective, were put in dialogue to measure the group’s meaningful engagement with Scripture.

Comparing field notes against the questionnaires reveal equivalent observations that the group developed a meaningful engagement with Scripture. The two pieces of data captured how the participants began the practice dwelling in the Word seeking the authorial intent of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. A shift, however, took place. Field notes and the questionnaire reveal that the participants allowed experience to be in dialogue with the text, thus allowing the text to speak in ways the participants have not experienced before.

The field notes and questionnaires each reveal different experiences of allowing the text to play with the imaginations of the group. Each week, through diverse experiences, the group heard the text speak differently. In 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 Paul uses the phrase “treasures in jars of clay.” Paul uses this phrase in a specific manner, but what the group discovered is that through experience, both treasure and jars of clay could be something different. As a result, the group began to see the text define their experience.
Jars of clay became a summer camp, community garden, or ministry with Maple Leaf Public School.

A second example giving credence that the participants saw the text in dialogue with experience is the shift made from applying the text to performing the text. Both the field notes and questionnaires show the participants began the dwelling in the Word sessions with the text and their lives as two separate categories. After six weeks of dwelling, a few of the participants shifted from seeing the text not applied to their lives, but rather defining their lives. This is evident as two sources of data, field notes and the questionnaire, reveal the group continually referred to the story of Jesus in conjunction with their experiences.

Paul roots his life in the story of Jesus. He sees himself carrying the death of Jesus in his own body by giving himself over to death. As a result, the life of Jesus is revealed. Participants, after the first week, continually employed Paul’s imagination. Just as Paul embodied the story of Jesus when he gave himself over to death, so the participants see themselves as embodying the death of Jesus. As a result, the life of Jesus is revealed in the neighborhood, which finds life.

The text became meaningful. The text became a rich source of metaphors and images allowing the participants a means to express their lives through the language of the text. Dwelling caused the participants to see their experiences through the descriptive adjectives Paul used to describe his life. The text became not something to apply but rather to define who and what the participants are.

The report written by Love generated a separate piece of data revealing this to be true. Love, leading the group in the process of dwelling in the Word, reports that he saw
the text reading the lives of the participants in significant ways. Love reports that the
group conveyed to him that over time clarity was achieved. Asking the group to give
phrases from the 2 Corinthians 4 text that stood out to them from memory, the group
gave the entire text. Love writes, “Their familiarity with the text had brought a level of
understanding through the use that perhaps a series of lessons from this text would not
have. Dwelling in the Word for them was not a pooling of ignorance, but a practice that
produced sharper understanding.”140

Data from the questionnaires reveal the participants had a meaningful engagement
with Scripture. The responses of the questionnaire reveal the participants found the
experience of dwelling to be a rich, productive exercise. Dwelling prodded the
participants to want to read more Scripture, stimulated their interaction with Scripture,
and provoked a means to develop deeper relationships with other participants. Some of
the comments on the questionnaire are as follows:

- I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience to the point where I have looked
  forward each week as a new session unfolded. It amazed me to hear the
different “takes” or expressions of each participant and realize how much
there was to learn weekly.141

- I thoroughly enjoyed each session. Sitting each week with a different
  person gave me great insight into the few verses—greater than I ever
  imagined.142

- Being a participant was an enjoyable one. . . . It was interesting and I was
  NEVER bored.143

- I thought the sessions were meaningful and generally I enjoyed getting
  together with church family in a different atmosphere. The process itself

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140 Appendix G.
141 Appendix F, questionnaire #2.
142 Appendix F, questionnaire #3.
143 Appendix F, questionnaire #4.
and the opportunities for fellowship and bonding were a really valuable side effect.\textsuperscript{144}

Love wrote at the beginning of his report that he has seen the practice dwelling in the Word catalyze congregational transformation. Transformation takes place through underscoring the importance of Scripture while also creating a certain type of community. “Dwelling in the Word is not about teaching. It is a practice of listening, and through its use it often creates vital community in ways that did not exist before.” Love reports this is exactly what he witnessed and what he heard from the participants. The participants informed Love that before joining the group “they knew each other as persons who sat in the same building on Sunday mornings. Many of them began this process as relative strangers, but now they know each other on a deeper, more meaningful level.”

The field notes captured the demeanor of the participants. The demeanor of the participants in the first week was formal, and the process seemed ceremonial. Listening their partner into free speech, participants spoke only about what they believed was the authorial intent of the selected passage. The demeanor had changed by the end of the sixth session. Participants did not have their heads bent over Scripture; instead, they were leaning in towards one another, listening attentively, in dialogue with each other. While in dialogue, the text was not distant from their lives or their experiences because the language of the text was being used to describe their experiences.

Conclusion

The problem, as stated in chapter 1, was that the NCofC had a limited meaningful engagement with Scripture. The congregation, in its established modes of engaging

\textsuperscript{144} Appendix F, questionnaire #1.
Scripture, was limited because the same lens for engaging Scripture was being employed. There was always a backwards reading of Scripture. In addition, congregants were afraid Scripture was not adequately playing the formative role in the life of the church as they perceived Scripture should have been.

The project sought to introduce an established practice of reading Scripture that would allow the participants, not to read Scripture with a backwards looking lens, but instead to read Scripture through the context of experience. Would this method of reading Scripture enhance the participants’ engagement of Scripture? Would Scripture become meaningful?

The evidence affirms that the practice dwelling in the Word enhanced, in a meaningful way, the participants’ engagement of Scripture. The participants grew in an understanding of what 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 says. The participants were formed and shaped by the words of Paul, and as a result, they were anxious to read and study more. The practice of dwelling engaged their lives in such a way that experiences were renamed with the language of the text. Consequently, experiences are seen differently. The experiences informing the dwelling sessions are seen as a mode of living and performing the story of Jesus.

The data confirms that dwelling in the Word enhanced the participants’ engagement with Scripture. In addition to enhancing the engagement of Scripture, other implications surfaced alongside questions for further research and development. It is to this we now turn.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This project, which sought to help the Newmarket Church of Christ have a meaningful engagement with Scripture, was rich, rich in the sense that experiences were in dialogue with Scripture, thus creating a space where it is possible for participants to have a meaningful engagement with Scripture. Chapter 4 probed the outcomes and effectiveness of the project. Through the method of triangulation, three perspectives were compared: field notes, a questionnaire from participants and a report written by an outside consultant. Based upon the results, this chapter highlights the impact of the project upon the participants and my personal ministry, raises questions that warrant further research, discusses implications, and finally highlights what others might wish to consider if embarking on a similar project.

Impact on Participants

The process of dwelling for six weeks revealed the depth of the participants reading Scripture through a backward-looking lens. As a result, the participants inadvertently displayed a functionality of Scripture. Scripture at the beginning of the sessions functioned distantly. This observation arose through the comments of the participants, watching their demeanor and engaging them in the process of reading. However, I learned that when Scripture is approached in a manner that does not allow a backwards reading, the functionality changes. I learned this through watching and
listening to the group engage the selected text. In their engagement with Scripture through dwelling in the Word, they learned to discern the significance of the words for them in the here and now.\footnote{Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, \textit{Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 51.} This is significant because the participants began to see the text, not as something to be applied to their lives, but rather as describing their lives, thus changing the function of Scripture. The function of Scripture changed from historical description to narrative performance.

The process of engaging Scripture through dwelling in the Word opened up the possibility for Scripture to direct experience. As the participants recognized that Scripture is a story to be performed, their experiences were re-imagined while their future experiences are directed. Participants see what they do, both individually and communally, as living out the story of Christ.

Dwelling on the Word impacted the participants by allowing the text to become understandable over time. They told Love, in discussing their experience of dwelling, was told that over time the text became clear. One participant went as far as saying the process of dwelling yielded clarity that specific study habits had not, comparing translations and consulting commentaries.\footnote{See appendix G.}

The method of engaging Scripture created a space where participants were not obligated to discover the historical meaning nor were they encouraged to do so. This space then allowed the participants to hear the text in a different way, and as a result, the participants discovered an engagement with Scripture that has not been made available to them because the method by which Scripture has historically been engaged is through a backwards-reading lens. The participants themselves grasped this notion. The
participants, as revealed through the questionnaires and field notes, continually referred to the fact that listening to what each other hears in the text opens their ears to possible new meanings in light of the different contexts. The impact on the participants, as a result, is that the method of reading Scripture freed them to not always read the text with a backwards-looking lens.

The practice dwelling in the Word enhanced a meaningful engagement with Scripture for the participants. As a result, a further implication is the ability for dwelling to be a means whereby the participants are able to reflect theologically concerning the church’s communal vocation. Dwelling provided a process whereby Scripture could be engaged so that the participants heard the story of Jesus. Hearing the story of Jesus, dwelling provided a space whereby participants could see their current vocation as performing the story of Jesus. Thus the vocation of serving and loving the neighborhood is rooted in a deep theology of who God is. This is important because unless theology guides the church’s vocation, the vocation will falter.147

Another effect upon the participants was that the text reframed their experiences. The experiences of serving MLPS, seniors in the condominiums, and children of the Longford subdivision are now seen as the church that is giving its life over to death so that the life of Jesus is able to be revealed. Also the language of the text surfaced to become the language utilized in conversations with one another.

Two final impacts upon the participants are the relationships with each other and the method of reading Scripture affecting other aspects of the participants’ lives. Dwelling in the Word created deeper relationships among participants that other methods

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of engaging Scripture have failed to create, while empowering those who normally feel uncomfortable speaking in public with a chance to speak. The practice of listening to each other affected other areas of participants’ lives by helping some participants become better listeners in their workplaces.

Impact on My Personal Ministry

The success of this project is not determined by the practice of dwelling providing an avenue for the participants to develop a meaningful engagement with Scripture. Instead, the success of the project lies with the participants who care enough about Scripture that they desire and are open to the possibility of reading Scripture through a different lens. This has a vast benefit on my ministry with the NCofC because I know there is a group that cares deeply about Scripture and wishes to embody Scripture.

The process of leading the group through dwelling in the Word has also revealed the deep—seated method of reading Scripture the participants, and by correlation, the congregation employs, namely a backwards reading of Scripture. The participants during the first session of dwelling displayed the demeanor of seeking the authorial intent. The participants came with their Bibles, one with a carefully exegetical synopsis of the selected passage, the participants describing in detail to the “friendly-looking stranger” what they perceived Paul to have meant. The participants came to seek the meaning of Paul’s words.

Throughout the process of dwelling, some participants continued to voice frustration despite what Love called their rich engagement with Scripture. A few participants were frustrated because they believed they had grasped Paul’s meaning and having once grasped what he meant, they no longer needed to read or study the selected
passage for further insight. This became evident when one participant on a weekly basis continually voiced frustration of reading the same selected Scripture week after week.

The demeanor of the participants during the first week is telling. Scripture is approached with a backward—looking lens. The demeanor, I assume, is the demeanor most members of the congregation adopt when reading Scripture. The responsibility of the teacher is to help the readers see the connection between the meaning of the Scripture and their lives. This backwards reading, intentionally or unintentionally, continues to foster the separation of Scripture from the life of the community of faith. Scripture becomes something to be applied rather than performed. Scripture becomes a piece of literature that is studied for a meaning rather than engaged for the purpose of formation.

This deeply seated method of reading Scripture impacts my ministry by raising questions of how to model faithful readings of Scripture. In addition, how do I help the congregation make a transition from solely seeking the historical meaning to reading Scripture for the purpose of formation? How do I come alongside the congregation and model the possibility that the historical meaning is not always what the people of God should seek?

These questions, arising out of leading the participants through dwelling in the Word, give way to the attention that I must give to the careful and thoughtful preparation of how the church engages Scripture. This is necessary because the method of engagement has the potential to influence the meaning. As a result, several questions regarding how I allow and foster the congregation’s engagement with Scripture need to be asked. What is the purpose of Bible study? What words are to be spoken before and
after the reading of Scripture? What is the focus and function of the sermon? How is the congregation allowed to interact with Scripture?

A third impact upon my ministry is the interrelationship between scholarship and community. The community has a voice, and it is through the community’s voice that clarity of Scripture, not necessarily achieved by critical scholarship, can be derived. The reminder that there is an interrelationship between scholarship and community in the reading of Scripture has pushed me deeper into careful and critical study. This is in addition to helping me recognize a space needs to be created whereby the community can have a voice in the interpretation of Scripture.

Questions Warranting Further Research

The project has had a significant impact on me, both as a disciple of Jesus and also as a minister for the NCofC. The impact must also be seen in conjunction with questions that have arisen out of the project but have not been answered. With this, I want to raise questions that theologians who are engaged in ministry might wish to address.

First, what type of community does dwelling in the Word form? Love captures this in his report:

I have seen this practice catalyze congregational transformation. It does this, not only by underscoring the importance of Scripture in the life of the church, but also through the development of a certain kind of community. Dwelling in the Word is not about teaching. It is a practice of listening, and through its use it often creates vital community in ways that did not exist before.\[148\]

This project inadvertently created a specific type of community, a community that developed the skill and discipline of listening while creating a connection in which the participants’ lives are connected on a deeper level than other teaching ministries have

\[148\] Appendix G.
created. The question is, why? A second question becomes what type of community is formed through the practice of dwelling, and how would the formation of this community be different from that of a congregation that strictly seeks the historical intent of the author?

A third question warranting further research is the role dwelling in the Word plays in epistemology. The participants recognize the process of dwelling brought clarity to the passage of Scripture that other methods of reading had failed to accomplish. Why does dwelling allow participants, who free each other into speaking, allow the text to become understandable and transparent in a way critical scholarship did not or does not? Answering this question by no means undermines the importance of responsible scholarship, but it does raise the question as to the role dwelling might have in understanding Scripture.

A third avenue theologians might wish to pursue is the role dwelling in the Word might play in narrative theology. Narrative theology believes we live story-formed lives. If this is true, the question becomes what stories shape us? For disciples of Jesus, the answer is the story of Jesus, expanded to include the biblical narrative, Genesis to Revelation. Joel Green writes, “Our task is to make our lodging the Genesis-to-Revelation narrative so that our modes of interpretation are conformed to the biblical narrative, so that this story decisively shapes our lives.”

Reading Scripture as narrative so that we can perform the story of Scripture calls for a specific way of reading. One must read in such a way that the stories of Scripture are not giving answers to life’s problems but rather are embodying the story. How is

\[149\] Joel B. Green, “The (Re-)Turn to Narrative” in Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching (ed. Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello III; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.
Dwelling in the Word able to enhance narrative theology so that the people of God are able to perform the story?

A final question for further research is the way in which the practice dwelling in the Word might direct experience. Will experiences of participants who live with the same text over a period of time be shaped by the text? For example, will dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 draw participants to embrace experiences whereby they will be crushed, perplexed, overthrown, and destroyed? Will the text direct participants to embrace experiences they might otherwise avoid?

Implications

The project has developed a web of impacts while raising questions needing further research. As a result, implications abound for the participants and the communal life of the church.

The participants have grown in their understanding of the nature and function of Scripture. They are learning to listen, and as a result, are creating a community of deep relationships because each person is learning that others care in ways that are not noticeable in other methods of study.

Implications are not limited to the participants. The project raises connotations for the congregation. The participants have experienced dwelling in the Word, and the consensus is that the practice brings clarity, opens new meanings, and creates a space of imagination, while forming a deep community of listening. How can the practice of dwelling be exercised with the wider body so that what was accomplished within the small group of participants can be experienced within the larger church? The participants,
having engaged in the method of dwelling in the Word, are in a position to foster and model a way of reading Scripture for the congregation that does not look backwards.

Implications for Other Ministries

The success of combining the theology and methodology of this project lends credibility to the possibility that one or both might be useful for other ministries. To enact the methodology, which is possible because the theology creates an intellectual space whereby there is room for a new lens of reading Scripture, allows individuals or organizations to implement this method of reading Scripture in various contexts. To do so though requires participants to believe Scripture forms community and is not limited to an individual reading. This is in addition to believing clarity is not necessarily achieved with one method of study, but believing clarity might be achieved by listening to what others hear in the reading. Overarching is the assumption that Scripture does not necessarily contain nuggets of truth we can apply to our lives, but rather, in the reading of Scripture we are formed to embody the words and stories of Scripture.

By no means will I argue this method of reading Scripture, on its own, will create sustainable and healthy communities centered upon Jesus Christ. This method of reading Scripture must be alongside responsible scholarship. Thus groups of individuals who are committed to responsible scholarship, desire to enact the story of Scripture, and believe Scripture involves communal discernment, the practice can lend itself to being a useful method of reading Scripture for the formation of the people of God. Three areas in which dwelling can become a valuable method of reading Scripture are church leadership meetings, communal worship, and evangelism.
Church Leadership Meetings

An obvious place for dwelling to be practiced is church leadership meetings. Leadership meetings often revolve around problematic issues, planning or maintaining. Enacting the method of dwelling at the beginning of each meeting would not only create the possibility of deep community; the process of dwelling would form the leadership to listen in ways the leadership has not learned or modeled.

Church leadership, enacting the method of dwelling within the same passage for a period of time, will potentially embody the words and phrases of the text so that the meetings begin to be reframed in the language of the text. As a result, the possibility is created whereby the problematic issues, planning, and maintenance discussed by the church leadership would be reframed by Scripture.

Communal Worship

A second place where dwelling in the Word could be practiced is within communal worship. Enacting the method of dwelling within worship will disrupt the nineteenth and twentieth century’s lenses of reading Scripture. The disruption would not be dire because, as the method of reading changes, the potential for the community to develop a richer and fuller understanding of the nature and function of Scripture becomes possible.

Evangelism

Evangelism is often equated with church growth. Though not identical, they are connected. The danger in believing evangelism and church growth are identical is that those advocating for numerical growth potentially could seek a magic wand that would increase the size of churches while failing to disciple people.
Not wanting to equate evangelism and church growth, one should view evangelism as a “set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.”150 Understanding evangelism in this way means one cannot be initiated into the kingdom and remain an isolated nomad. Initiation into the kingdom is initiation into God’s community. Initiation has a communal dimension.151

Dwelling in the Word is able to assist the church in initiating people into the community. Inviting non-disciples to hear Scripture within the context of community, for the purpose of discerning together what God is up to, is communal in nature. The method also becomes non-threatening. The text is allowed to be heard within the outsider’s own experiences. Thus instead of telling the outsiders what Scripture says, the outsider is invited to discern with others what God is up to and is free to respond on terms of the text, not the terms of the teacher.

Consideration for Future Interventions

The project’s purpose was to create a space whereby a meaningful engagement with Scripture could become possible. This was done by allowing Scripture to be in dialogue with experience through the practice dwelling in the Word in several sessions. Sessions 3 through 5 allowed focused experiences of the congregation to be in dialogue with the selected text. However, not all members were participants in each experience and thus were limited. Arriving at this realization, two possibilities emerge for consideration of future interventions using dwelling in the Word.

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151 Ibid., 102.
For individuals desiring to allow Scripture to be in dialogue with experience, I wonder what would occur if the group participated in an activity and then used time afterwards for dwelling in the Word. Would the results be different, or would the text become meaningful in diverse ways than what was experienced in this project? Would the participants be able to connect the story of Scripture to the experience previously engaged? It is on one level to ask participants to connect the story of Scripture to their experiences rhetorically, while I surmise it might be more meaningful to have the experience and then invite the participants into the process of dwelling.

In relation to the above, as one keen participant observed, at times the focused dwelling seemed forced. Would it be beneficial to have participants begin the dwelling process and, out of the process, measure if the experiences of the congregation are named by the text? As it was, the experiences were named and became the guiding principle by which the text was reflected upon. Would it be more “Spirit-led” if the text was read and, out of the reading, measured whether the group was able to make the shift into renaming the communal experiences? This consideration would essentially allow a new project to arise. The project would then seek to measure, not whether the participants have a meaningful engagement with Scripture, but whether the communal experiences of the participants can be seen in light of the story of Scripture.

Conclusion

The essential claim of this thesis is that the reading of Scripture must be done alongside our experiences. Without experiences in dialogue with Scripture, our lives will remain distant from the story of Scripture, thus failing to create an environment where readers will find a meaningful engagement of Scripture. Space, as a result, has been
created in which a method of reading Scripture takes context and experience into factor. Allowing context and experiences to be read alongside Scripture provides an opportunity for experiences to be reframed in light of the story of Scripture.

My hope for this project is that it will help Scripture retain its rightful place within the church and that the people of God will be formed and shaped by the words and stories for the purpose of reflecting the God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

As you are well aware I am continuing to work on furthering my education. Over the course of the past few years, several members of the congregation have been invited to participate in various projects associated with my course work.

I am currently developing a project in which a group gathers together to read Scripture through the established practice, *Dwelling in the Word.* *Dwelling in the Word* is practiced when a group of people listen to the Word of God together. There is a double listening process: first, listening to the Scripture being read and second, to listen to “a reasonably friendly-looking stranger into free speech.” In listening to a “friendly-looking stranger” participants are invited to find a partner and pay attention to what the other person has heard from the reading. Following this, participants assert to the large group what one heard from the “friendly-looking stranger.” The passage of Scripture we will dwell in will be 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

Seven Sunday’s have been selected for the group to meet (Sept. 12 – Oct. 24). The time in which we meet will be either afternoons or evenings for a period of no more than one hour each Sunday. Attendance each week is expected. Our first gathering will be September 12 @ 2:00pm at the church building.

I would very much appreciate if you would be able to join this group and learn the practice of *Dwelling in the Word.* As there is a specific timeline I would like to ask that you consider this opportunity and respond to me within one week, either in person, by phone or email: pickardnathan@hotmail.com.

God’s Blessings Upon Your Life & Ministry,

Nathan Pickard
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Engaging Scripture through *Dwelling in the Word* at the Newmarket Church of Christ

**Principle Investigator:** Nathan Pickard  
Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

**Advisors:** Stephen Johnson  
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University  
Trevor Thompson  
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

**Introduction:** I understand that I have been asked to participate in a small group that will participate in a practice of reading Scripture through the method *Dwelling in the Word.*

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to read Scripture with a group of people from the Newmarket Church of Christ. While reading Scripture, the group will invite each other into “free speech.” Each participant will share with a single member of the group what they have heard in the reading of Scripture. In addition, each group member will share with the larger group what they heard from their partner.

**Procedures:** This project will enlist 14 individuals from the Newmarket Church of Christ. The project will entail 7 sessions, each running no longer than one hour. The sessions will run congruently starting September 12 and running through October 24. The purpose of this project is to help the group have a meaningful engagement with Scripture.

**Potential Risks:** There are no identifiable risks to participants in this research study. All published participant quotations will remain anonymous.

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation may benefit you by: 1) Having a meaningful engagement with Scripture 2) Discernment as to how God’s living word may form you in your experiences and 3) Forming the groundwork for the entire congregation to continue the journey of having a meaningful engagement with Scripture.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for your participation in this research.
Rights of Research Participants: I have read the above. Mr. Pickard has explained the nature of the group and has answered my questions. He has informed me of the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research.

I understand that I do not have to participate in this research and can withdraw from this research project at any time.

I understand that all of the information I provide will remain confidential.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Pickard by telephone at (905) 895-6502 or by email, pickardnathan@hotmail.com.

Signature of Participant______________________________. Date ____________

Signature of Principle Investigator ________________________________.
APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

Rational
Field notes are essential for having raw data that can be analyzed for the purpose of evaluation. This protocol has been designed to specifically help me capture what is taking place during the practice *Dwelling in the Word*.

1. Observe
   a. Attendance and seating of the group
      i. How was the seating arranged? Did the arrangement inhibit or assist the group in the practice *Dwelling in the Word*?
      ii. Who showed up?
   b. Participation and non-participation in pairs and in the larger group
      i. While in pairs are both listening and talking?
      ii. While in pairs is one partner doing more talking than listening?
      iii. While in pairs are both partners engaged in the process?
      iv. Within the larger group are people listening to each other?
      v. Within the larger group are people telling what they heard their partner speak or telling the group what they themselves heard?
      vi. Within the larger group is their participation by everyone or a select few?
   c. Content and manner of conversations
      i. Are the conversations revolving around the text?
      ii. Do the content of the answers grow out of the text?
      iii. Are people listening to each other?
      iv. Are people reacting negatively or positively to what others are saying?
   d. Silences and non-verbal behavior of participants
      i. How are people responding to each other through their mannerisms?
   e. Casual conversation within 10 minutes of the session ending
      i. What am I hearing from the participants after the session has ended?
      ii. What are people telling me at the end of the session?
      iii. What side conversations do I hear taking place after the session has ended?
2. Listening for specific themes
   a. Themes centering around the reading of the selected passage of Scripture
      (2 Corinthians 4:7-12).
         i. “Treasures in jars of clay”
         ii. “Carrying around in our bodies the death of Jesus “
         iii. “So that the life of Jesus will be revealed”
         iv. “Being given over to death”
         v. “Death is at work in us but life is at work in you”
   b. Themes centering around the church’s ministry in the neighborhood
      i. Community gardens
      ii. MLPS and the sandwich program
      iii. MLPS and the reading program
      iv. Summer Camp for children of the neighborhood
   c. Various phrases
      i. “My experience . . .”
      ii. “This is what Paul meant . . .”
      iii. “This is what the passage means . . .”
      iv. “This is shaping my . . .”
      v. “This is shaping our . . .”
   d. Using various words or phrases in conjunction with speaking about their places of work, home, hobbies, church ministries
   e. Are participants using restoration language?
      i. This is what Paul meant
      ii. This is what it means to be a first century church
   f. Are participants using present or future language?
      i. This is how the passage is shaping my . . .
      ii. I think I am being challenged to . . .
      iii. I am rethinking . . .
   g. Are people connecting 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 with the story of Jesus?
      i. Is Jesus being mentioned?
      ii. Is the story of Jesus being told in some way?
      iii. Are participants rooting Paul’s words back into the story of Jesus?
3. Noting Silences and Slippages
   a. Slippages
      i. Are people contradicting the themes I am anticipating to hear?
      ii. Are people saying
         1. I don’t think Paul has anything to say in this passage about my experience
         2. I don’t think Paul has in mind . . .
         3. My experiences do not allow me to carry the death of Jesus around in my body
         4. This passage has no formative . . .
         5. This passage is speaking to my . . .
b. Silences
   i. What is left unsaid? What is being omitted?
   ii. Are people speaking about the church’s ministries or are they left unspoken?
   iii. Is the story of Jesus unspoken?
   iv. Are people speaking about their own experiences or are they silent?
   v. Are Paul’s words being left unspoken?
   vi. Is the tradition of Churches of Christ being spoken or is this a silence?
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honesty and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain?

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR CODING

Protocol for Coding Audio Files

1. Listen to each audio file and record reflections on a sheet of paper.
   a. Type up the field notes (reflections) by date in a Microsoft Word document
2. Read through all data at the time, recording reflections and questions in a separate Microsoft Word document.
   a. Construct a record of emerging themes and words being used by the participants.
   b. Archive repeating terminology and words
   c. Archive themes, topics and reflections of the participants.
      i. Themes centering around the reading of Scripture
      ii. Themes centering around the churches ministries
      iii. Various phrases being used as noted in protocol for taking field notes
      iv. Are people using past, present or future terminology
      v. Is the story of Jesus being spoken?
   d. Note slippages and silences
      i. Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?
      ii. Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
      iii. What is being left unspoken?
3. Prepare the data for an interpretation of the project’s effectiveness.
   a. Through the raw material of the audio files am I sensing the project is being effective or not? For what reasons? What are the audio files revealing?

Protocol for Coding Field Notes

1. Read through field notes and record reflections on a sheet of paper.
   a. Type up the field notes (reflections) by date in a Microsoft Word document.
2. Read through all data at the time, recording reflections and questions in a separate Microsoft Word document.
   a. Construct a record of emerging themes and words being used by the participants.
   b. Archive repeating terminology and words
   c. Archive themes, topics and reflections of the participants.
1. Themes centering around the reading of Scripture
2. Themes centering around the churches ministries
3. Various phrases being used as noted in protocol for taking field notes
4. Are people using past, present or future terminology
5. Is the story of Jesus being spoken?

**d. Note slippages and silences**
6. Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?
7. Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
8. What is being left unspoken?

3. Prepare the data for an interpretation of the project’s effectiveness.
   a. Through the raw material of field notes am I sensing the project is being effective or not? For what reasons? What are the field notes revealing?

**Protocol for Coding Questionnaires**
1. Read through all questionnaires recording reflections and questions on a sheet of paper.
   a. Type up reflections in a Microsoft Word document.
2. Read through reflections and record emerging themes and words based upon the experiences of the participants.
   a. Recordings will be typed up in a Microsoft Word document.
3. Construct a record of explanations as to whether or not the practice of *Dwelling in the Word* has allowed Scripture to be engaged in meaningful ways.
   a. To be typed up in a Microsoft Word document.
4. Categorize themes, topics and explanations, preparing the data for an interpretation of the project’s effectiveness.
   a. To be typed up in a Microsoft Word document.
5. Prepare the data for an interpretation of the project’s effectiveness.
   a. Through the questionnaires and the responses from the participants, is the project effective in helping the group have a meaningful engagement with Scripture?
   b. What is being said by the participants that would allow the researcher to believe the participants have had a meaningful engagement with Scripture?
   c. What is being said by the participants that would allow the researcher to believe the participants have not had a meaningful engagement with Scripture?
APPENDIX E

Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

September 12, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Death of Jesus
- Persecutions, hardships
- Related to Paul’s life
- Death of spouses

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Paul’s language was referenced on numerous occasions.
- Future language was obsolete. Some participants did use present language but the majority of the participants were employing past language. Participants were reflecting upon their past experiences.

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- Very much so. The respondents heard and applied these words to the death of Jesus.

Topics

- Paul’s life
- The life of Jesus
- Jesus and Paul become our examples of how to persevere

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?

- No.

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- The resurrection of Jesus. I heard a lot about the death of Jesus and what the death accomplished but nothing about the resurrection.
- The church’s ministries

What is being left unspoken?

- The resurrection of Jesus
- How we are conquerors. I heard a lot of persecution, hardships but there was silence about how we overcome these difficulties.
How we persevere

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness
What strikes me as I reflect over the field notes is how there was always a backward projection, whether it was a backward reading to the story of Jesus or Paul or even a backward focus on the participants individual experiences. I heard only one present-day experience being considered.

Reflecting over the field notes I was struck by my recording of how one participant commented, “Did you have to choose such a hard passage to apply to our lives.” The comment reveals that Scripture is not describing the participant’s situation but rather is to be applied to their situation. It seems through this comment, Scripture is a nugget of truth that is deciphered and applied.

This is the first week of Dwellings in the Word. Am I surprise then, given the historical interaction with Scripture by the Newmarket Church of Christ that there seemed to be a formal interaction with the Scriptures? It is not surprising that when the participants were invited to find a “friendly looking stranger” the majority of the groups spent their time with a focal attention on the Scriptures and not in conversation with each other.

Is the project effective? It is too early to tell. Clearly this first week the participants’ present experiences were not in dialogue with the selected passage. Participants were very quick to read the lives of Paul and Jesus into the selected passage but were unable to read or see their own lives with the words of 2 Corinthians 4.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

September 12, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Personal struggles
- Life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- Lord’s Supper (Eucharist)

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Hardships, struggles, persecutions – all related to the apostle Paul.
- Story of Jesus
- Story of Paul
- Participants own experiences

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- One set of partners interpreted how death is at work in us as pertaining to the death of Christ.
- Sacrifice of Jesus was mentioned in two groups.
- Jesus has set the example through his suffering; we can now look to Jesus when we suffer.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?
- Participants did not say, “I think this is reading my experience in such a way . . .”

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
- Ministries of the church
- Communal experiences of the church
- Present and future language. The past experiences were highlighted.
- How death is at work in us so others can have life.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

As I consider our first meeting to dwell in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 I couldn’t help but notice the language being used by the participants. The first set of participants to report to the larger group began with a historical reading. One participant did exegesis on the passage prior to our dwelling time. This participant took these words to be referring to the apostle Paul. After listening to the recording of the first group reporting what they heard in the reading of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, I discerned the participant saw the words as not describing us, they were describing Paul.

Reflecting on the conversations through the audio files the participants were not seeing the passage of Scripture as describing them in the sense that this is our life. However, participants did describe past individual experiences yet the text remained distant from
their lives. The participants allowed the text to only speak about the experiences of Paul and Jesus.

If I could summarize what I am hearing from the participants I would say that there is a backwards reading. The experiences of the participants are being read back into the words of Paul instead of the words being read in such a way to read the experiences of the participants.
Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

September 19, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants
- Negative experiences – hardships and struggles.
- Health problems of the participants
- Death of individuals

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture
- “Perplexed,”
- “But not crushed.”
- “But not destroyed”
- “Hardships”

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?
- One of the respondents at the very end summarized after hearing the other participants speak of their experiences, that the life of Jesus was no different than our lives. As Jesus suffered so we are suffering.

Topics
- God is at work to redeem us from our hardships.
- Whatever happens God will remain in control.
- God seems to always have a way to work in our lives.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
- Paul’s experiences.
- The church’s ministries
- Some were silent about their present experiences.
- Restoration language

What is being left unspoken?
- Paul’s experiences and the experiences of the early church.
- “Persecuted” and “struck down.”
- “Jars of clay.”

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

As I watched the participants speak with a “friendly-looking stranger” about their experiences, again I noticed that each of the groups had their Bibles opened to 2 Corinthians 4. However, as the Bibles remained opened the participants were not bent over the words in a studious position. The groups were in dialogue about their own experiences.
The participants, being part of the larger group, never once mentioned Paul’s experiences of trials and hardships. In fact Paul was never mentioned. The story of Jesus was mentioned but Paul never was. So what happened to allow the group to forget to mention Paul’s experiences? Last week Paul was the center of the conversation but this week Paul isn’t even mentioned.

Overwhelmingly, the group reflected upon their experiences in light of the text. There was no backward reading of the text. Experiences of the participants dominated the focus of the responses. What is interesting is how the participants utilized the language of the selected passage for the purpose of applying the descriptive words Paul uses to describe his situation, to describe the participants unique experiences.

As a result of the participants overwhelmingly reflecting upon their current experiences and using the language of the text to describe their experiences, I have to say *Dwelling in the Word*, this particular week, is a providing a meaningful engagement with Scripture. Participants spoke of their experiences, reflected upon their experiences and have now seemed to allow their experiences to be in dialogue and read by 2 Corinthians 4.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

September 19, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- “perplexed”
- “But not crushed or destroyed.”

Past experiences. Three respondents talked about their present experiences. The rest of the group mentioned historical experiences (whether it was a week ago or five years ago). What was interesting to note is that two of the respondents who mentioned their present day experiences were partners in the dwelling time.

- God is present in the midst of our struggles and hardships.

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- “perplexed”
- God is always present in our struggles

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- Yes. While reflecting together about what we are hearing and learning from Scripture today, one respondent referenced the group’s experiences of hardships and struggles just as Jesus lived a life of hardships and struggles. The respondent said that through our present experiences is related to the life of Jesus.

Topics

- The presence of God in the midst of suffering.
- God receives glorification even in the midst of our sufferings.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?

- No.

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- The experiences of Paul. Not a single mention or reference to Paul’s trials and hardships.

What is being left unspoken?

- The church’s ministries
- Paul’s experiences
- The story of Jesus was unspoken by many of the respondents but some were reflecting how the story of Jesus is similar to our stories of life – hardships and struggles.
- The tradition of Churches of Christ is unspoken.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness
What is fascinating is to notice the silence pertaining to Paul’s experiences. The conversations of the participants completely revolved around their own past and present experiences. Terminology from 2 Cor. 4 was evident, especially the words or phrases “perplexed,” “but not crushed,” “not in despair.”

In addition to the participants reflecting upon their own experiences, overwhelmingly the group referenced God’s hand at work in the midst of their lives. Despite their hardships and struggles, God was at work, not to take away their hardships and struggles but to see that they live(d) through the hardships and struggles.

It became clear the participants experiences were being reframed by the text of 2 Cor. 4:7-12. The participants were seeing their lives being spoken about in the text.
Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

September 26, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Used By Participants

- Sacrifice
- Life
- Death
- Poverty
- Giving ourselves away

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Hard pressed
- Perplexed
- Treasures in jars of clay

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- “We are carrying Jesus as we give our lives away to the children and they have life.”
- One participant observed that as a church we are embodying the story of Christ through our communal experience of a summer camp.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?

- One participant was questioning how as a group we can continue “dwelling” for three additional weeks.

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- Participants remained silent concerning the ministries of the church other than summer camp

What is being left unspoken?

- Restoration language
- The story of Paul
- Experiences outside of the summer camp

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

If I could choose a metaphor to describe what I saw and witnessed during the exercise, the metaphor I would employ would be “living in the grayness.” It was challenging for the participants to let the text of 2 Corinthians 4 read the communal experience of the church’s ministry in the form of a Summer Camp. As one participant said, “I think it might be impossible for me to apply this text to our experience.”
What stood out was how the group read the story of Jesus into their experiences. Through the church giving its life away in the form of a summer camp the participants clearly saw life being brought to the participants of the camp and not just the participants but their families and even the church itself.

Interesting to note the varying definitions of “treasures in clay jars” from the participants. The definitions of treasure ranged from children, glory of God, gifts, to the camp itself. Not one person mentioned how we ourselves might be the clay jars that are holding inside of us a treasure.

This is the third week of the participants formally Dwelling in the Word. This week the communal experience of a Summer Camp was read through the lens of 2 Corinthians 4. The language of 2 Corinthians 4 was employed to describe the communal experience.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

September 26, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- God’s glory
- Camp is a treasure. The world looks at the camp and they see a clay jar but what they don’t see is the treasure inside of the jar.
- Language of “hard pressed,” “perplexed,” “struck down.”
- Sacrifice

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- As Christ gives his life away so we are giving our lives away.
- Life is found when we die for the sake of the neighborhood

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- Very much so. As one participant said, “An absence of sacrifice results in a lack of death to self.” If there is no death, as Jesus died, then there is no chance for the children to have life.

Topics

- The ways we are dieing for the children
- Sacrifice and how we are sacrificing ourselves for the children
- Giving God the glory.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?

- No.

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- Where is Paul?
- Experiences outside of camp. The participants stayed firmly planted in the experience of summer camp.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

The metaphors and images of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 were beginning to dance with the imaginations of the participants. The language of the text was being used to describe the experiences of the participants hosting the summer camp. The group seemed to be discerning that life is given to the children as the church gives their lives over to death. The Summer Camp is our means of embracing death so that life can be given to the children and the families in the neighborhood.

The descriptive words Paul is using to describe his situation are the words that are now being used to describe the church’s life. As Paul is hard pressed, perplexed and struck
down so the church embraces this life for the sake of the children. The words of Paul are not just describing what happened to an individual two thousand years ago; the words are describing the life we are embodying.

The practice *Dwelling in the Word* seems to be allowing the participants to have a meaningful engagement with Scripture. Scripture is not distant from the experiences of the participants, instead Scripture is being read in such a way that the experiences are being reframed through the rhetoric of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.
Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

October 3, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Used By Participants
- Evangelism
- Relationships
- Community
- Death

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture
- Life
- Death
- Treasure
- Hard pressed
- Perplexed

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?
- Death of Christ

Topics
- Community garden
- Neighborhood
- Serving

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?
- One participant expressed difficulty seeing why we have to live in the same text week after week.

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
- Personal experiences
- The apostle Paul’s experiences
- Restoration language

What is being left unspoken?
- Personal experiences of the participants outside of the community garden
- The experiences of the apostle Paul

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

In conversations with the group around the question, “What are we learning and hearing from listening to each other” it became evident the group saw the gardens as the seed of the gospel. For three years we have provided a space for our neighbors to grow their own vegetables. “We do this without any expectation,” said one participant. Within the last year we are now starting to see the fruit from the gardens.
While discerning together what we are hearing the group discerned together that life is now being seen, both in the gardeners and in the church as a result of the church giving itself away. The gardens have been our way of giving ourselves over to death so that life can be found. One participant observed the gardens are like a rock thrown into a pond. One never knows where the ripples are going to end up. The gardens are the stones we have thrown in the neighborhood and now we are discovering the rippling affect it is having, not only on us as a church but also within the community.

The communal experience of providing a space for the neighborhood to have a community garden and allowing this experience to be in dialogue with 2 Corinthians 4 the congregation continues to have a meaningful engagement with Scripture. The group’s reading of 2 Corinthians 4 is not focused on the apostle Paul and what he said or meant. Instead the group is exploring together whereby we provide a space for a community garden is living out the story of 2 Corinthians 4.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

October 3, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants
- Evangelism
- Loving the neighborhood

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture
- Life through death

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?
- Only one person mentioned the story of Jesus and it was mentioned in the sense that the motif for building the garden grew out of the motif of Jesus giving his life.

Noting Slippages and Silences
Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?
- The story of Jesus is silent but all except one participant.
- The story of Paul is silent.
- The experiences of the people in everyday life. Conversation was limited to the communal experience of the community garden.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness
As I reflect upon the audio files I am recalling how in other times of dwelling the clay jar has been defined as something else. It seems the clay jar is being defined in light of the communal experiences.

Very interesting how three of the four groups were explicit in revealing to the larger group how they discerned the gardens as an opportunity of evangelism. The participants used the language of 2 Corinthians 4 in such a way that the seeds brought forth life. The language of the text was heard, not as describing the life of the church or the people, but rather as the gardens. The words of 2 Corinthians 4 described the gardens themselves and not the experiences or the life of the people.

At the end of our dwelling session where the questioned was posed, What are we learning or hearing from Scripture today the group discerned together how the community garden is the church’s way of giving life to the neighborhood. The participants used the language of 2 Corinthians 4 to describe what we were doing. The language of death to life was explicit in the participant’s summaries. As one participant noted, the gardens is a way for us to be a pebble thrown into a pond. The pebble is thrown into the water and the ripples caused by the pebble hitting the water scatters across the pond. No one knows the effects the ripples might have. The participant summarized her thoughts by saying that our community garden is having effects in the community that we are only beginning to realize.
Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

October 10, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Treasures
- Children
- Feeding
- History of the congregation with the congregations roots beginning at MLPS

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Treasures
- Life

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- No. The participants have not mentioned the story of Jesus. Conversation has revolved specifically around the communal experience of working with Maple Leaf Public School.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- Restoration language
- The apostle Paul

What is being left unspoken?

- The language of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12
- The story of Jesus

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

As the group dwelt in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 it became obvious from the beginning that there was a struggle to hear and read the text in light of the church’s ministry with MLPS. Participants, as they reported to the larger group what they heard their partner speak, voiced that there was difficulty in “applying” this passage to the church’s ministry at MLPS.

I gathered from the group the text of 2 Corinthians 4 continued to be able to describe the life of the church as the church continued in its ministries. Participants were using the language of “carrying around the death of Jesus” and also being verbal about how our ministries were giving life to the children.

As the group finished reporting what they heard their partners speak and we spent some time in communal reflection around the question, “What are we learning or hearing from the text today?” I was surprised. One participant said that she is now seeing this passage as her life and that this passage is never fulfilled but always being lived out. A second
participant reported to the group that she hears the other participants describe “treasures” as something different and that by hearing what others have to say opens up her imagination to new possibilities. A third individual reported that while listening to the other participants report what they heard their partners speak the idea that death is not at work in us but rather the children could be a possibility. As a result, this individual said that because death is apparent in the children’s lives, life is apparent in the church’s life as the church engages in various ministries on behalf of the children.

The group’s experience of Dwelling in the Word continues to become a meaningful engagement. Paul’s rhetoric to describe his situation is being used to describe the congregation’s life. Furthermore, the participants are not reading 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 through a restoration lens but rather allowing the text to inform and describe the life of the church.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

October 10, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Nurturing the children because they are our future.
- Treasures in jars of clay
  - One participant said it becomes obvious to us the treasure is the children
  - One participant said treasure in jars of clay is the service and ministry we are performing
  - One participant said the treasure is the message we have and the life of Jesus we live.
- Reading with the children of MLPS
- Spiritually feeding the children through the reading program
- Physically feeding the children through the sandwich program
- Oppression of children and their families
- Summer camp

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Possibly the children are the treasure
- One participant said vv. 8-9 are applied to our ministry. We are carrying around the death of Jesus in our body.
- What the church is doing is giving life to the children
- Treasures in jars of clay

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- No. Vv. 8-9 were referenced. Participants however did not mention Jesus by name or root the experience of ministering to MLPS into the larger narrative of Jesus.

Noting Slippages and Silences

A slippage took place. One group voiced this is a difficult week to “apply” this passage to our ministry with MLPS? Participant said, “Does this text apply to what we are doing?”

What is being left unspoken?

- The story of Jesus
- Personal experiences outside of the church’s communal experience
- The apostle Paul’s life. Paul was not mentioned once during this session.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

The group clearly reflected on the church’s communal experience of serving the neighborhood and Maple Leaf Public School. The group saw a connection between the church’s ministries and how these ministries bring life to the children. One participant said that through our sandwich program we are feeding the children physically. Yet, as the participant said, we are also feeding the children spiritually when we sit beside them in a chair and help them learn how to read.
Interesting to see how various participants are beginning to read this particular passage. One participant voiced how the passage can be applied to any facet of our lives while another participant voiced how the passage is not applied, but lived.

Through active listening to each other the participants are beginning to come to the realization that through experience various interpretations are possible. One participant, after listening to the group speak about what they heard the other participants reveal, told the group that he is starting to see the children as a place in which death is at work. Instead of seeing death at work in our lives the participant is hearing how death is at work in the children’s lives. As a result, life is at work in our church. Through the experiences of the group serving MLPS and the telling of the stories, experience is being allowed to shape the reading and hearing of the text.
Analyzing the Data from Field Notes

October 17, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Steadfastness
- Who we are as a people
- Glory given to God
- Evangelism

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- Treasures

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- Participants experiences were related to the story of Jesus

Topics

- The suffering of the Corinthian church

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people contradicting some of the themes I am expecting to hear?

- One person referenced their skepticism for this particular passage to have formative power.

What is being left unspoken?

- Restorative language
- Communal experiences of the congregation

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness

Spending some time at the end of our dwelling session around the question “What are we learning or hearing from the text today” brought forth the realization this project is having a positive effect on the group’s engagement with Scripture.

The following are bulleted points of what the group reported.

- “I’ve never thought about the treasure being the Holy Spirit.
- I think the reason why we are hearing something different in the passage each week is because of our varying experiences.
- I am learning to see the difference between applying the passage of Scripture to my life and living the Scripture.
- I am surprised at the many different levels by which we can draw on.
- I am learning to be comfortable with the idea that differing interpretations can be okay. Over the weeks I have heard us define “the treasure” in various ways: children, Holy Spirit, MLPS, Summer Camp.
The method of *Dwelling in the Word* has opened up a new way of reading Scripture. I used to believe that there was only one correct interpretation of Scripture. Through this process I am being open to the possibility of new meanings.

I am beginning to question whether or not the way I have read Scripture is the only way. I have read Scripture in such a way that “this is the Word and this is what it means.” Is this the only way?

The process of *Dwelling in the Word* is proving to provide an avenue for the group to allow their experiences to be in dialogue with the text. In addition, the process is allowing the group to reflect upon how the text can be lived out and not necessarily be applied to their lives.

As the group is involved in the deep listening of the text, to each other and for God it seems (at least during this session) the group is hearing a new word being spoken that is arising out of their experiences. Through their varying experiences the text is being heard to speak a different word to each of them. In addition, I sense the group is making a transition from reading the words with a backwards orientation and instead beginning to see the text as describing the life they are called to embody.
Analyzing the Data from Audio Recordings

October 17, 2010

Themes, Topics and Reflections of the Participants

Emerging Themes and Words Use By Participants

- Heard the passage telling us “not to loose heart, but to persevere.”
- “World’s view is to ‘eat, drink and be merry.’ Our view of the world is to live the story of Christ.”
- Spreading the word of God; spreading the good news.
- Ministries of the church in the neighborhood
- Being oppressed as people. “We will not stay crushed forever” said one participant.
- Treasures of jars of clay
- “We learn from each other when we engage in this process of reading Scripture”
- One individual reflected at the end that upon hearing the group speak what they heard their partner saying, he became curious when one person revealed they thought the treasure was the Holy Spirit.
- One participant revealed that through this method of reading Scripture, they have come to believe experiences change what we hear in the text.

Themes Centering Around The Reading of Scripture

- “Sometimes when we feel beaten by the world, God shows his faithfulness.”
- One participant said sometimes we are struck down and persecuted so that God can be glorified.
- Persecution
- Hard pressed
- Sometimes we feel oppressed
- One participant reported their partner saying treasure is the Holy Spirit, while jars of clay is our body
- Another participant reflected upon how she thinks treasure is the body while jars of clay are the holy scriptures.

Is the Story of Jesus Being Spoken?

- Two groups explicitly mentioned the story of Jesus. However, the story of Jesus was not the forefront of the conversation but rather a piece of the conversation.

Noting Slippages and Silences

Are people remaining silent about certain subjects?

- Participants remained silent about Paul’s life.
- Participants remained silent about linking the story of Jesus to their lives.
  Participants referenced the story of Jesus but were silent in linking their lives into the story of Jesus.

Preparing the Data for an Interpretation of the Project’s Effectiveness
It came at the end while the group responded to the question, “what are we learning or hearing from Scripture today?” The participants spoke about how they are seeing the text in light of their various experiences and that by reading the text in conjunction with their experiences, new meanings are springing from the text.

Two of the participants talked about the way in which they have been taught and told how to read Scripture: single meaning. By participating in Dwelling in the Word they are being opened up to the possibility experience can play a major factor in the meaning of Scripture. One participant told the story of a math problem with two different but correct answers. Explaining both answers to the professor, the professor said that without both solutions to the problem the whole truth is indiscernible. After telling this story the participant than said, “Maybe this is what Scripture is; we need to see it from different views to get the complete picture.”

One participant made the stunning comment that she has been trying to apply this passage to her life. Through Dwelling in the Word the participant is beginning to see that Scripture is not something we apply to our lives but rather is performed.

The participants were clear in mentioning how experience plays a pivotal role in how we hear the text. One participant made the remark that this week, through her experiences she is hearing the passage speak in one way. “But,” the participant said, “I might read Scripture two weeks from now and develop a different view because my experiences are changing.”
APPENDIX F
QUESTIONNAIRES OF PARTICIPANTS

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I thought the sessions were meaningful and generally I enjoyed getting together with church family in a different atmosphere. The process itself and the opportunities for fellowship and bonding were a really valuable side effect. Things like Dwelling in the Word and Soup n’ Scripture offer something unique and powerful over and above our normal get-togethers. Dwelling in the Word itself was useful, but at times it was difficult, at times frustrating, at times repetitive in its process. I found that the times when we were suppose to apply Dwelling in the Word to specific circumstances (community gardens, Maple Leaf Public School, church life, etc.) to be particularly difficult with this particular passage. I sometimes found myself wishing that we could have either used a different passage (that fit better), or simply just used the passage to describe our personal lives, spiritual lives, communal church life, etc. and then we could see if the gardens, Maple Leaf, etc. came into the conversation more organically. As it was, at times it felt too “forced,” which seems a little at odds with being “Spirit-led.”

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
I think it has become somewhat more meaningful because I understand it better. It is a confusing and deep passage, so reading and re-reading it helps with understanding. And as we seek to see how it applies to and describes our lives, it becomes more meaningful as it becomes more personal.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
I think that Dwelling in the Word helps with interpreting Scripture more deeply in our lives and it allows us to live scripture as it lives with us. It also opens us up to different interpretations and knowledge that we otherwise would not be exposed too.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
I’m not sure about the wider church since they have not been exposed to this scripture as much. For me, this scripture has served as a call to perseverance and faithfulness. I think it will help the church to realize that God’s glory is continually being revealed through our lives and in the world.
QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

**Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.**
I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience to the point where I have looked forward each week as a new session unfolded. It amazed me to hear the different “takes” or expressions of each participant and realized how much there was to learn weekly.

**As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.**
Yes, now I see more clearly that God has made his light shine in my heart and so gives me the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He has also given me his Holy Spirit – his treasure in jars of clay – to guide, guard and enlighten me.

**How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?**
Perhaps we should routinely set aside a time each week (i.e., apart from Sunday and Wednesday) to meet and continue what we have been doing over the last while, to discuss a portion of Scripture to enable us to fully grasp it.

**How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?**
Dwelling in this section of Scripture (2 Cor. 4:7-12) has definitely motivated me to read and digest what I read so as to fully understand the scriptures (God’s Holy Word). This passage highlights and confirms what the church at Newmarket is doing as we reach out to the neighborhood.
QUESTIONNAIRE 3

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I thoroughly enjoyed each session. Sitting each week with a different person gave me greater insight into the few verses – greater than I could imagine.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
Definitely! It has allowed me to look at the same words with a more open mind. Listening to others interpretations has caused me to think deeper. This is always a good thing.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
I would not feel I have had a (response not legible) thoroughly if I do not go through and dissect the words. I am not content to read words and say we are done. It is good to evaluate and understand, help each other to understand perhaps more than one meaning of the same group of words.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
Life is hard. Each member (church) will have a different experience. I know this has opened my eyes to different opportunities and a need to be opened to those times to perhaps, step out, take a (response not legible) and not always be sure where we are going but to have faith our God will direct us and not leave us. In shaping future experiences it can only be positive, I feel.
QUESTIONNAIRE 4

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honesty and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
Being a participant was an enjoyable one. I’ve always like going over scripture and applying it to different everyday scenarios (camp, the reading program . . .). This changed the meaning in some ways and not in others. It was interesting and I was never bored.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
I think we have gone over almost every application and yet there are still more ways we could read the scripture and get something different from it.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
By taking a particular scripture and applying it to different aspects of our lives – it will make reading the scripture more meaningful each time it is done.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
As future experiences unfold, the meaning in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will change to reflect the experiences. Through Dwelling in the Word the experiences of the church and my experiences have become closer.
QUESTIONNAIRE 5

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I think I’ve grown in my thinking as to always thinking there is only one meaning to a scripture. I realize there can be multiple ways of seeing scripture and how we are connected to the story. I have enjoyed hearing other peoples comments because it made me see this passage in a different “light” then I am used to.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
Yes, I have realized that in order for me to fully understand and apply scripture, I need to see myself in the story. This particular passage has been a reminder to me that I need to love as a light in a dark world wherever I am.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
By constantly going over the same passage I believe we can remember it better and therefore apply it better. By reading in this manner as a church it will help us shape our lives, by making the text form us.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
I think we have learned to “put” ourselves in the story rather then just reading the text. This has helped me see myself in the story and how we are continuously going through trials and temptations, but God is faith. God has bigger plans for me and the church. This passage will help shape our future experiences by realizing God is faithful and even though it may appear that nothing is being accomplished, we need to realize God is at work in this world and also this church (i.e., garden and Maple Leaf Public School.
QUESTIONNAIRE 6

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
   ❖ Opened my view of interpreting the Scriptures.
   ❖ Made me aware of the different views and interpretations of the scriptures.

As you engaged in the practice of *Dwelling in the Word*, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
   ❖ It became more meaningful because of the different views that I’ve heard and I could live it out as a better Christian

How would *Dwelling in the Word* provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
   ❖ It will give the congregation opportunities to be open to new ideas in regards to worship and spreading the gospel.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
   ❖ By dwelling in 2 Cor. 4:7-12
   ❖ It will shape my future experience in being more involved with church activities
QUESTIONNAIRE 7

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I have found myself thinking more and more about how to incorporate what I am learning into my daily life. I have spent time reflecting on the different discussions that everyone has had at each session and how that fits in my life.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
I have found that Dwelling in the Word very meaningful for me. This was the first time that I have studied the bible and I found it extremely helpful in getting a better understanding of the passage we studied. Each session my understanding of the passage grew.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
Since I have just started my studying of the bible I found that Dwelling in the Word extremely helpful in building my understanding of the scripture. The group discussion also helped as I was able to get an understanding of how others understood the scripture and it helped me get a better understanding. I would enjoy the opportunity to study other scripture in the same way.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
One of the main things that I have taken away from Dwelling in the Word it that God is the power in our lives as well as the church. I feel that this experience has started my relationship with the church and I am looking forward to learn and expanding my experience with the church.
Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honesty and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I had a chance to see these verses from the other person's point of view.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
I was able to see myself as an object that needed to be molded so as to show Christ in me.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
By reading the scripture over and over then applying it in our day to day life.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
In the past I would try to read the Bible from cover to cover and see how long it will take me to do so, now I read the passage over and over and see what I get from it, and apply it to my life.
QUESTIONNAIRE 9

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honesty and be as specific as possible.

**Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.**
I have seen a gradual change in the way we have read and applied the scripture each week. Week 1 was very methodical and literal. We read it “as is,” tried to decipher its meaning, took notes, etc. As we moved on, week after week, our views and interpretations became more personal – more relevant.

**As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.**
I think so. Listening to others describe the passage and how it pertains to their lives was quite interesting. Getting away from just “reading” scripture and moving towards “applying” scripture has been interesting and meaningful.

**How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?**
Taking a historical document, written long ago, and applying it to our lives and current events is always interesting. Given the ancient context of many passages, it can sometimes be difficult to apply to modern times. Listening to other peoples interpretations helps.

**How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?**
If nothing else, I would hope this experience would help us all to be more open to different points, interpretations, and ways of thinking about scripture. Hopefully we all learned to listen a bit more to others and to express ourselves and our lives through scripture.
QUESTIONNAIRE 10

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
I personally did not fell it was anything new to me. It is doing that is most important in my life, applying what are aspects of Christ like qualities to my living in this world, doing good to all men (everybody) and especially to the household of faith.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
Yes it is very meaningful! To go through life in just reading the word doesn’t do much for me unless I am trying to apply the principles in my living for Christ. Hospitality, helping people, consideration of my fellow man, serving rather than trying to become the top of the heap.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
Reading with emotion and trying to read in the context of the hearers is meaningful. How does it affect people back then and how should it affect us today?

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
My experiences are very much ongoing. I don’t think I have arrived until the very last day of my life. With age comes many, many, more experiences that others are just starting to experience. Never too old to learn. We learn from all ages that is why we must be more considerate of others. Future considerations will depend on how much the brethren put into living for Christ. If Christ comes will he find faith on earth? A very scary passage and one that makes me feel inadequate. Can I be lost? Think about it.
QUESTIONNAIRE 11

Thank you for your participation in this project. This questionnaire will help me determine the strengths and weaknesses of our sessions together. Please respond with complete honest and be as specific as possible.

Describe your experience as a participant in these sessions.
In the beginning I was apprehensive and doubtful that I had anything to contribute. As we progressed I realized that I wasn’t alone. Many seemed puzzled as to how to apply this passage or apply our works to it.

As you engaged in the practice of Dwelling in the Word, has the particular passage of Scripture we have dwelt in become more meaningful? Explain.
Yes, in that I see we can apply it to many different circumstances and could do so throughout scripture studies.

How would Dwelling in the Word provide you and the congregation opportunities in the future to read Scripture in a meaningful manner?
It should give us a deeper understanding and appreciation for God’s word.

How do you perceive dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 to have shaped your experiences and the church’s experiences? In addition, how do you think dwelling in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 will shape future experiences?
I find this too difficult to answer. However, it many give me more confidence in my own understanding of scripture.
APPENDIX G

CONSULTANT’S REPORT

My experience with Dwelling in the Word has been rich and varied over the past six years. I have seen this practice catalyze congregational transformation. It does this, not only by underscoring the importance of Scripture in the life of the church, but also through the development of a certain kind of community. Dwelling in the Word is not about teaching. It is a practice of listening, and through its use it often creates vital community in ways that did not exist before.

This second observation related to the impact of Dwelling in the Word is especially pertinent in relation to the practice of the Newmarket Church of Christ. Nathan Pickard invited me to experience Dwelling with a dozen members of the congregation where he serves as minister. They had been using 2 Cor 4:7-12 as their dwelling text for a six week period. I was invited to lead a dwelling session with them from another text and to evaluate whether or not the group had facility at allowing the text to read their lives. In other words, had they developed capacity in bringing the biblical text and the text of their lives into meaningful dialogue?

I chose a text just across the page, 2 Cor 5:11-21. This choice gave them something new, but within a consistent frame of reference. Moreover, it is a text rich with allusions and pictures, several places where their imagination might get hooked. I anticipated a rich time of sharing.

We began by introducing ourselves. I learned through these introductions what a diverse group this was. Some had been with the congregation since its inception. A few were not only brand new members of the congregation, but freshly minted Christians. And we had everything in between. We had persons who spoke English with different accents, Canada not being their country of birth. Some spoke in familiar Church-of-Christ-ease, others were clearly not as fluent in the tradition. Some were clearly well-educated, others clearly not. Even as we introduced ourselves, however, there was a warmth within the group. Good-natured teasing went with every introduction, or some little inside joke might be shared. My first impression was that whether or not they could allow the text to read them as a group, this group had formed a bond through this process. This was confirmed at several turns during our time together, especially in the time we spent debriefing our dwelling time.

After introductions, I read our text for the day aloud. We practiced a time of silence. We shared in pairs around the prompt, “what caught your imagination?” And then we shared in the big group, each person being responsible to share what their partner
had shared. They eagerly went about their task. Conversations were animated. They leaned in to hear each other. There was laughter, affirming nods, expressive hands. This was not a practice they were enduring, but one they had come to eagerly welcome.

The sharing was rich. The group was disciplined about sharing only what their partner had said. Themes quickly emerged through various reports. There were many comments about what it might mean to be ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through them. And the sharing here was very personal. Sarah\textsuperscript{152} told how Rachael related this text to her baptism. Peter shared Amy’s experience of feeling a sense of failure at living up to this standard. Tina shared about Michael’s profound sense of forgiveness and the subsequent possibilities for transparency in his life. Brandon related a story from Tammy related to the phrase “we are well known to God.” In her work as a customer representative, it was often important for her to remember this basis of her identity. In fact, she had part of our text written as a prayer that she kept with her at work.

These stories could be multiplied. These are offered simply to demonstrate that the group was indeed allowing this text to read their lives in some fairly significant ways.

After our dwelling time, I asked them to help me understand what had just happened. I asked two questions to get at the meaning of their experience of Dwelling in the Word. First I asked, “What has surprised you about Dwelling in the Word?” Tina responded immediately. She was surprised that each time they were together the text remained fresh. She anticipated that they might tire of being in the same text, but the opposite happened. Each reading deepened the significance. Many in the group chimed in at this point. They expressed surprise that they had a new text for our time together and remembered the feeling of being a little overwhelmed the first few times they used 2 Cor 4. It was over time that the text became clearer. It yielded its depth, became more opaque to meaning, through its use in this way. Brandon even shared that the sharing in a group over time yielded a clarity that many of his study habits before had not, e.g. comparing translations, consulting commentaries. For him, reading the same text over time in community brought clarity.

This was a bit surprising to me. I had expected them to report that sharing with a different person each time kept the text fresh. And they did report this. I also expected them to report that the text took on added significance because their life changed from day-to-day and week-to-week. And they did indeed report this as well. But they were more impressed with how time brought clarity. I asked them to give me some phrases from the 2 Cor 4 text that stood out for them from memory. As a group, they gave me the entire text. Their familiarity with the text had brought a level of understanding through the use that perhaps a series of lessons from this text would not have. Dwelling in the Word for them was not a pooling of ignorance, but a practice that produced sharper understanding.

During this discussion, they spoke of how well they had come to know each other through this practice. Before, they knew each other as persons who sat in the same

\textsuperscript{152} All names in this report, except Nathan, are pseudonyms.
building on Sunday mornings. Many of them began this process as relative strangers but now they know each other on a deeper, more meaningful level.

The second question I asked was, “Did this require you to develop new skills?” Heidi nodded immediately. When I asked her to share, she reported that she had to learn to express herself in front of others. Before this, she seldom spoke up in a group. I was a bit stunned at Heidi’s admission. She had shared easily and often during our dwelling time. In fact, I wondered if she might have experienced dwelling as a frustrating experience given the need for so many voices to share. Just the opposite. She had grown in her confidence related to sharing her opinions, which in turn had deepened her sense of belonging to both the group and to God. Others shared how meaningful it was for them to hear someone else report what they had shared. It was very affirming to be heard and for their experience to be shared with the rest of the group.

Several talked about the fact that dwelling had taught them to be better listeners. They found at the beginning that they were not good listeners. They had a hard time remembering what their partner had shared. One person noted that they had to get out of the habit of thinking about what they might say in response and just listen. Others talked about the need to write comments down at first so that they could remember. As a group, they were confident that they had become better listeners. Tammy even reported that dwelling had made her a better listener at work, an important aspect of her job.

I had intended to ask them what skills they already possessed that made them good at Dwelling in the Word, but the conversation around the first two questions had been so rich that we ran out of time. As we concluded, I prayed for them and spoke a blessing over them. We lingered together in the church building, however, for another twenty minutes or so. This group clearly had come to enjoy each other’s company.

**Concluding Observations**

Nathan’s interest in this project concerned their ability to allow the text to read the lives of the participants. Did Dwelling in the Word constitute a thick of enough engagement with the text so that participants began to think with and through the text, not just about the text? Clearly, this was the case. Dwelling, by the virtue of its every member sharing, every member listening, around the same text over time had developed an expectation in the group that their lives would be rendered more clearly through this practice.

So much more than this, however, occurred. The thick web of meaning related to their own lives and the words of 2 Cor 4 also had implications for the development of a particular kind of community. They had formed meaningful relationships around sacred words. The web of significance reached further than just the connection between an individual and a text. It also spread from life to life. This practice brought a level of spiritual sharing, of koinonia, that other practices, including worship and Sunday school, had not, at least to this point. The group definitely wanted this type of engagement with each other to extend beyond Nathan’s D.Min. project. Their affirmation about the need to continue was unanimous.
Dwelling in the Word cannot be the only practice related to Scripture with the economy of the church. Preaching and teaching clearly are important practices that accomplish things not accomplished by Dwelling in the Word. Having said that, however, the experience of this group calls to the fore questions of epistemology, or even perhaps an ontology related to Christian understanding. We did not test the sophistication of understanding of group members related to 2 Cor 4 in a kind of before and after snapshot or related to any standards of responsible interpretation. But the group’s own sense was that they understood this text, a familiar Christian text, far more completely than they had before the Dwelling project. I was impressed in their first encounter with 2 Cor 5 with the kinds of comments being made, especially from the newer Christians in the group. Again, Dwelling cannot be the only item on the menu related to the use of Scripture in congregations. However, it might represent a kind of reasoning, practical reasoning (phronesis?) that produces reliable understanding in ways not often valued. We often think that “real understanding,” by which we typically mean understanding that overcomes subjective readings, comes through a scientific reasoning related to a certain kind of rationality. Nathan’s project raises some interesting possibilities related to a reasoning through use over time that overcomes idiosyncratic or subjective readings.
BRIEF VITA

Nathan Pickard was born in Meaford, Ontario Canada in 1977. He attended public schools in Meaford and then attended Great Lakes Christian College in Beamsville, ON during grades ten through thirteen. After a year of working in the construction industry, he enrolled at Harding University and pursued a Bachelor of Arts and a minor in business. Immediately following Harding he pursued a Masters of Divinity from Abilene Christian University. Pickard married Kathryn Babcock of Portland, OR in May 2004. Together they have one son, Caleb Pickard. Pickard has worked with the Newmarket Church of Christ since graduating from Abilene Christian University in 2004. Pickard entered the Doctor of Ministry program at Abilene Christian in June 2008.