

DISASTER TO DANCING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
FRED LUTER JR.'S STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AT
FRANKLIN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
ABSTRACT	xv
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem and Its Setting	1
Research Problem	6
Research Question	7
Significance of the Study	8
Limitations	11
Delimitations	11
Assumptions	12
Definitions of Terms	13
2. THE STATE OF RESEARCH	17
Christian Leadership	17
Biblical Perspectives of Christian Leadership	
Contemporary Perspectives of Christian Leadership	
Christian Leadership and Conversion	
Christian Leadership and the Call of God	
Christian Leadership and Servanthood	
Christian Leadership and Strategy	

Strategic Leadership	28
Biblical Perspectives on Strategic Leadership	
History of Strategic Leadership	
Military Strategy	
Business Strategy	
Nature of Strategic Leadership	
3. METHODOLOGY	47
Subject of Analysis	48
Data Collection	48
Interviews	
Sermons	
Articles	
Data Analysis	55
The Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie Research Instrument	56
A Brief Biography	
The Instrument Explained	
Strategic Thinking	
Strategic Acting	
Strategic Influencing	
4. FINDINGS	67
Initial Response	70
Summary Analysis	
Narrative of Events	

Satellite Campuses	80
Summary Analysis	
Narrative of Events	
Home Base	97
Summary Analysis	
Narrative of Events	
Operation Back Home	111
Summary Analysis	
Narrative of Events	
Providential Homecoming	125
Summary Analysis	
Narrative of Events	
5. CONCLUSION	137
Summary of Findings	138
Strategic Thinking	
Strategic Acting	
Strategic Influencing	
Implications	158
Strategic Leadership through Inclusive Leadership	
Strategic Leadership through Emotional Intelligence	
Strategic Leadership through Pastoral Care	
Strategic Leadership through Preaching	
Further Research	165

Appendix

A. FRED LUTER JR. BIOGRAPHY	169
B. FRANKLIN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH	175
C. FRED LUTER JR. INTERVIEW SUMMARIES	179
D. DAVID CROSBY INTERVIEW SUMMARY	187
E. GARY MACK SR. INTERVIEW SUMMARY	189
F. FRANKLIN AVENUE PUBLICATIONS	191
G. FRED LUTER JR. SERMONS	199
H. HUGHES, BEATTY, AND DINWOODIE INSTRUMENT	273
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	279
VITA	

TABLES

Table

1. Strategic Thinking for Initial Response	70
2. Strategic Acting for Initial Response	71
3. Strategic Influencing for Initial Response	72
4. Strategic Thinking for Satellite Campuses	80
5. Strategic Acting for Satellite Campuses	81
6. Strategic Influencing for Satellite Campuses	82
7. Strategic Thinking for Home Base	98
8. Strategic Acting for Home	99
9. Strategic Influencing for Home Base	100
10. Strategic Thinking for Operation Back Home	111
11. Strategic Acting for Operation Back Home	112
12. Strategic Influencing for Operation Back Home	113
13. Strategic Thinking for Providential Homecoming	126
14. Strategic Acting for Providential Homecoming	126
15. Strategic Influencing for Providential Homecoming	127
16. Strategic Thinking Summary	139
17. Strategic Acting Summary	143
18. Strategic Influencing Summary	147

ABSTRACT

DISASTER TO DANCING: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FRED LUTER JR.'S STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AT FRANKLIN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH

Christopher Brandon Phillips, PhD
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2025
Faculty Supervisor: Reggie Ogea, Professor of Leadership and Pastoral Ministry

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically analyze the strategic leadership of Fred Luter Jr. at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, from 2005 to 2008, during the tumultuous period following Hurricane Katrina. Utilizing Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie's Strategic Leadership Model, the study examines Luter's strategic thinking, strategic acting, and strategic influencing as he navigated the church through crisis and displacement.

The introduction contextualizes the need for effective leadership in contemporary church settings, particularly in light of the challenges posed by crises. A literature review provides a biblical and historical framework for understanding Christian leadership and strategic leadership, tracing their roots from biblical figures to modern applications.

The qualitative methodology employs observational research to examine five key areas in Fred Luter's leadership: the initial response, the development of satellite campuses, the establishment of a home base, the implementation of Operation Back Home, and the providential

homecoming. Findings indicate that Luter's strategic leadership was marked by high levels of engagement in strategic thinking, acting, and influencing, significantly contributing to the church's growth and sustainability. The results emphasize the importance of involving others and building trust to execute strategic leadership for Christian leaders.

The conclusion underscores the significance of Luter's leadership in addressing modern church challenges, particularly the deficiency of effective leadership. It highlights an inclusive leadership model, emotional intelligence, pastoral care, and preaching to enhance strategic leadership practices. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research in strategic leadership and Christian ministry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting

The earliest written historical documents suggest the human desire to understand leadership practice. Bernard M. Bass and Ruth R. Bass support this assessment by asserting, “From its infancy, much of the study of history has been the study of leaders—what they do and why they do it. These studies go back nearly as far as the emergence of civilization, which shaped its leaders as much as it was shaped by them.”¹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, developments in the field of psychology revolutionized the study of leadership. In 1948, these psychological advancements led Ralph Stogdill to challenge the status quo by shifting the leadership focus from traits to the leadership context.²

By 1978, the influx of leadership theories and publications prompted James MacGregor Burns to assert that “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. One of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership.”³ Burns emphasized the urgent need to understand leadership as a phenomenon that

¹ Ruth R. Bass and Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 4.

² Ralph M. Stogdill, “Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature,” *Journal of Psychology*, 25 (1948): 36–71, doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1948.9917362.

³ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 2.

shapes all areas of civilization. He lamented, “There is no school of leadership, intellectual or practical.”⁴

Since Burns’s plea, leadership schools, centers, and programs have proliferated within and beyond the university. The analysis of leadership has only intensified over the last fifty years. Richard Morrill noted that leadership has become “a self-conscious interdisciplinary field of study with a range of theoretical and practical achievements.”⁵ Despite this increased attention, a consensus on effective leadership remains elusive. Warren Bennis, a pioneer in contemporary leadership studies, remarked, “Leadership is the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences. Never have so many labored so long to say so little.”⁶

An agreement on what constitutes effective leadership still does not exist. However, leadership remains a popular topic because no person, organization, or culture has existed without being affected by leadership.⁷ In *The Conviction to Lead*, Albert Mohler warned of a shortage of effective leaders who can navigate transformational change: “The hunger for

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Richard L Morrill, *Strategic Leadership: Integrating Strategy and Leadership in Colleges and Universities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), xi.

⁶ Warren G. Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 26.

⁷ Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in the Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 1.

leadership has reached every sector of our society, including business, government, education, cultural institutions, and, of course, the church.”⁸

Secular and religious organizations share similarities in that neither is immune to experiencing a “*crisis of leadership*.”⁹ According to Lifeway Research, churches are closing at an alarming rate.¹⁰ In 2019, evidence suggested that more churches closed than were planted.¹¹ The closures were attributed to economic hardships. However, they were accelerated following the global pandemic known as COVID-19.

Recently, Lifeway Research analyzed Annual Church Profile reports submitted by Southern Baptist Congregations from 2020 to 2022 to determine whether the 2019 results were isolated or the beginning of a trend. The results were staggering, indicating the Southern Baptist

⁸ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2023), 18.

⁹ James MacGregor Burns, “The Crisis of Leadership,” in *The Leader’s Companion: Insights of Leadership through the Ages*, ed. J. Thomas Wren (New York: Free Press, 1995), 9. The *crisis of leadership* is considered the mediocrity, incompetence, irresponsibility, or shortage of men and women in positions of power.

¹⁰ Lisa Green, “New Churches Draw Those Who Previously Didn’t Attend,” Lifeway Research, accessed January 17, 2025, <https://research.lifeway.com/2015/12/08/new-churches-draw-those-who-previously-didnt-attend/>. The study analyzed congregational information from thirty-four denominations and groups representing sixty percent of US Protestant churches. According to estimates from Lifeway Research, approximately 3,000 Protestant churches were started in the US in 2019, but 4,500 closed.

¹¹ Aaron Earls, “Protestant Church Closures Outpace Openings in US,” Lifeway Research, accessed January 17, 2025, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/05/25/protestant-church-closures-outpace-openings-in-u-s/>.

Convention lost more than a thousand churches a year from 2020 to 2022.¹² Executive Director of Lifeway Research, Scott McConnell, commented on the data, “Many expected the number of church closures to spike because of the pandemic, but data suggest otherwise.”¹³

Alongside the rise in church closures is the increasing dropout rate of ministerial leaders. In 2022, the Barna Group published findings indicating that pastoral burnout has increased. Most of the pastors surveyed reported feeling called to ministry but admitted they “could not lead effectively due to various internal or external factors.”¹⁴ A notable similarity emerged between the studies conducted by Lifeway Research and the Barna Group: both studies were conducted

¹² Aaron Earls, “Southern Baptists Lost More Than 1,200 Congregations in 2022,” *Lifeway Research*, accessed January 21, 2025, <https://research.lifeway.com/2024/04/02/southern-baptists-lost-more-than-1200-congregations-in-2022/>. For Full Report: <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2022-ACP-postmortem-of-2021-congregations-lost-For-Release.pdf>.

¹³ Earls, “Southern Baptists Lost More.”; Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 171. In 2013, Aubrey Malphurs signaled a decline in church attendance that long exceeded recent pandemics: “Now, in the twenty-first century, that figure [rapid decline of church] has not changed appreciably despite a valiant surge in church planting. The number of unchurched people across America continues to be high, possibly as high as 70 to 80 percent,” 171.

¹⁴ Barna Group, “Pastors Share Top Reasons They’ve Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year,” *Barna Group*, accessed January 21, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/-pastors-quitting-ministry/>. Barna Group conducted this online survey among 510 Protestant senior pastors from March 10 to 16, 2022. Participants were all members of Barna Group’s Church Panel. The data revealed 42 percent of pastors considered quitting in 2022, up 13 percentage points from 2021.

during times of conflict and crisis. This similarity does not surprise Otto Lerbinger, who earlier wrote, “We are living in an era of crises; crises have become an unavoidable part of our lives.”¹⁵

In *Catastrophic Crisis*, Steve Echols and Allen England presented case studies of various crises to provide applicable leadership insights and lessons for everyday challenges. Their rationale stems from the “increasing complexity of decisions leaders face,” prompting them to suggest that an “effective approach for finding helpful leadership practices is to study leadership in times of crisis because crises accentuate the dynamics of leadership and reveal a leader’s strengths and weaknesses in a way that ordinary challenges do not.”¹⁶ Echols and England’s work is innovative and underscores the value of studying leaders during crises. However, the current rise in leadership burnout indicates that a new leadership approach may be necessary for longevity and organizational success.¹⁷

In *Effective Strategic Leadership*, John Adair proposed that the type of leadership needed to address the current leadership crisis is strategic leadership.¹⁸ Richard L. Hughes, Katherine C. Beatty, and David L. Dinwoodie reinforced Adair’s position, asserting, “All of the forces and changes in the current organizational environment calls for more people, not fewer, to be

¹⁵ Otto Lerbinger, *The Crisis Manager: Facing Disasters, Conflicts, and Failures* (New York: Routledge, 2012), xi.

¹⁶ Steve Echols and Allen England, *Catastrophic Crisis: Ministry Leadership in the Midst of Trial and Tragedy* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 2–4.

¹⁷ Aaron K. Olson, and Byron K. Simerson. *Leading with Strategic Thinking: Four Ways Effective Leaders Gain Insight, Drive Change and Get Results* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), xi.

¹⁸ John Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership: An Essential Path to Success Guided by the World’s Great Leaders* (London: Pan Books, 2002), 1.

engaged in strategic leadership because strategic leaders make decisions and take action not just to boost organizational progression, but enhance longevity.”¹⁹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie defined *strategic leadership* as “the ability to create direction, alignment, and commitment for organizational progression.”²⁰ Strategic leadership, with its focus on direction, alignment, and commitment, offers a promising solution to the current leadership crisis.

Research Problem

Leaders have utilized strategy for centuries in military operations.²¹ However, due to the growing demand for capable upper-level leaders to manage organizations, the study of strategic leadership has gained attention from practitioners and researchers in recent decades.²² Over the past forty years, strategic leadership has appeared frequently in literature related to management, military operations, and education.²³ Despite these efforts, a noticeable gap in research on strategic leadership exists in the religious sector, particularly in Christian leadership.

¹⁹ Richard L. Hughes, Katherine Colarelli Beatty, and David L. Dinwoodie. *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

²¹ Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership*, 7.

²² Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 682.

²³ Morrill, *Strategic Leadership*, xi.

The purpose of the current study is to demonstrate strategic leadership as a viable form of leadership among Christian leaders.²⁴ Since case studies are invaluable for revealing leadership practices, the objective of this study was to utilize a single case study of Fred Luter Jr. at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, following Hurricane Katrina, to analyze the role that strategic leadership played in guiding the church through times of crisis.²⁵

Research Question

How did Fred Luter Jr. use strategic leadership at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, Louisiana, to navigate conflict, crisis, and displacement following Hurricane Katrina from 2005 to 2008? This study evaluated Fred Luter Jr.'s strategic leadership at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church from 2005 to 2008.²⁶ To assess Luter's strategic leadership, an examination of his pastoral leadership and selected sermons was utilized from that period to identify the presence of strategic leadership. To achieve these goals, an analytical tool was developed to evaluate strategic leadership by synthesizing the work of Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie in *Becoming a Strategic Leader*.

²⁴ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 682–88. Strategic leadership can be practiced at any level. However, strategic leadership has been viewed traditionally as a function of upper-level leadership, such as CEOs or senior executives. The church has viewed the senior pastor as the upper-level or first-chair leader. The current study examined strategic leadership by focusing on the senior pastor as a Christian leader.

²⁵ Echols and England, *Catastrophic Crisis*, 4.

²⁶ Fred Luter recommended the scope of study, which extends from August 24, 2005, to April 6, 2008.

Significance of the Study

In September 1986, Fred Luter became the pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church (FABC) in New Orleans, Louisiana.²⁷ When Luter started his pastorate, Franklin Avenue's membership had dwindled to approximately sixty-five members, and closure seemed imminent.²⁸ Luter strategically led FABC to grow its membership to nearly seven thousand by 2005. During this time, his outstanding leadership garnered both local and national recognition.²⁹

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the coastal regions of the Gulf Coast, including New Orleans, Louisiana, and FABC. During this dark time, the floodwaters destroyed Franklin Avenue's campus and the homes of most of its members. FABC experienced a dramatic decline in membership due to the nationwide displacement of its congregation, which resulted in an 80 percent decrease in contributions.

Amid this catastrophic crisis, Luter guided the church to embrace the challenges of post-Katrina, leading the congregation to rebuild and expand their membership by meeting in various

²⁷ From this point forward, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church will be referred to as FABC or Franklin Avenue. The Southern Baptist Convention will be referred to as SBC.

²⁸ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Black Pastor Reaches across the Southern Baptist Divide," *Los Angeles Times*, June 01, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2012-jun-01-la-na-southern-baptist-20120601-story.html>."

²⁹ Karen L. Willoughby, "*Historic: Fred Luter Elected SBC President*," Baptist Press. June 2, 2012, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/historic-fred-luter-elected-sbc-president/>. In 2001, Fred Luter became the first African American to preach the convention sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention.

locations nationwide until they could gather again in New Orleans.³⁰ During the years of mass displacement, Luter strategically boosted morale by reminding the church of its vision: “To spiritually impact our families, neighborhoods, city, and state by Exalting the Savior, Equipping the Saints, and Evangelizing the Sinner.”³¹ Despite all odds, FABC experienced substantial growth post-Katrina and currently has a membership of just under six thousand.³² Due to this ongoing growth after Hurricane Katrina, FABC relocated to a new facility in New Orleans East in 2018.

Throughout Luter’s tenure, FABC has encountered numerous challenges. Nevertheless, his strategic leadership consistently enabled the church to maintain a missional focus during crises and reverse the church’s decline, not just once but twice. David Crosby, a contemporary of Luter, remarked, “[Luter] is the only mega-church pastor I know of who has had to do it twice, and he did it against the trends and against the odds.”³³

³⁰ “Church History: History of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church,” Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, accessed January 24, 2025, <https://www.franklinabc.com/about/our-history>.

³¹ “Mission & Vision Statements,” Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, accessed January 24, 2025, <https://www.franklinabc.com/about/mission-vision>.

³² “Church Snapshot Report 2024,” SBC Workspace, September 1, 2024, <https://la.sbc-workspace.com/reports/view/380?orgid=190020333>. These statistics are based on FABC’s Annual Church Profile submitted to the SBC in 2024.

³³ Tobin Perry, “Luter Named NAMB National African-American Ambassador,” Baptist Convention of Iowa, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://bciowa.org/luter-named-namb-national-african-american-ambassador/>.

Fred Luter's pastoral leadership during turbulent times at FABC frequently garnered public attention.³⁴ Crosby stated in an interview, "[Luter] would likely be a candidate for sainthood one day if he were a Catholic." Crosby later described Luter as "the fire-breathing, miracle-working pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church."³⁵ In the spring of 2022, the trustees at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary voted to rename the campus student center in honor of Fred Luter Jr.

On Sunday, April 17, 2022, Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, surprised Luter during a morning worship service at FABC with the trustees' decision. During his presentation, Dew stated, "Proverbs 3:27 says, 'Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do so.' Pastor Luter, you are clearly a man to whom honor is due, and it is within our power to do so."³⁶ Crosby and Dew's commendations suggest that Luter's pastoral leadership at Franklin Avenue is worthy of recognition. The researcher

³⁴ In 2012, when David Crosby nominated Fred Luter for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention, Luter's exemplary leadership received praise from leaders across the convention. Russell Moore stated, "Fred Luter is a hero for the way he shepherded his flock after Katrina." Danny Akin remarked, "Fred Luter is one of the most loved and respected pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention." For more information, see Joe Carter, "From Street Preacher to SBC Leader: An Interview with Fred Luter," The Gospel Coalition, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.thegospel-coalition.org/article/from-street-preacher-to-sbc-leader-an-interview-with-fred-luter/>.

³⁵ Karen L Willough, "Historic: Fred Luter Elected SBC President," *Baptist Press*, last modified June 19, 2012, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/historic-fred-luter-elected-sbc-president/>.

³⁶ G. D. Myers, "NOBTS Trustees Approve \$12 Million Campus Renovation Plan, Rename Student Center in Honor of Fred Luter," NOBTS, April 18, 2022, <https://www.nobts.edu/news/articles/2022/Trustees-renovations-2022.html>.

affirms these declarations and intends to offer one of the first of hopefully many future academic papers highlighting specific nuances of Luter's leadership.³⁷

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the collection of primary sources. The interviews were limited to Fred Luter, FABC staff members, and various Baptist leaders. Given the time that has passed since the specific research timeline, the possibility that interviewees might have limited recollections of Luter's leadership style was acknowledged. Similarly, most relevant church documents were destroyed during Katrina or are unavailable due to technological and facility updates.

Delimitations

The study included several delimitations. First, an analytical instrument was created to evaluate only the three strategic leadership competencies outlined in Richard L. Hughes, Katherine C. Beatty, and David L. Dinwoodie's *Becoming a Strategic Leader*: thinking, acting, and influencing.

³⁷ As of 2025, only one academic paper has been published on Fred Luter Jr. In May 2024, Michael B. Linton completed a DMin project report that focused on the expository preaching of Fred Luter in times of tragedy from 2005 to 2008. Linton evaluated Luter's preaching style and pastoral care through preaching. For more information, see Michael Boyd Linton, "Preaching from Tragedy: The Preaching of Fred Luter after Hurricane Katrina as a Model for Preachers" (DMin proj. rpt., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024).

The second delimitation concerns biographical, historical, and meteorological information. The purpose of the study was not to provide a comprehensive biography of Fred Luter Jr., an exhaustive history of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, or an in-depth analysis of Hurricane Katrina. The biographical, historical, and meteorological details were confined to what was essential to meeting the research objectives.

The third delimitation pertains to the ministry of Fred Luter Jr. A brief overview was solely provided regarding Fred Luter's pastoral and preaching ministry from 2005 to 2008, along with any pertinent information that supports the research.

The fourth delimitation relates to the profile of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. There is no discussion about the ethnic composition, church size, or city dynamics as key elements of Luter's strategic leadership.

The fifth delimitation pertains to the selected sermons. The sermons were limited to a pool of ten to twelve that were either selected or endorsed by Luter from 2005 to 2008, with the objective of strategically engaging the congregation.

Assumptions

Several assumptions exist regarding this study. First, Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie's *Becoming a Strategic Leader* provided a suitable basis for analyzing how—not whether—Fred Luter Jr. used strategic competencies in his ministry and preaching.

Second, due to the specific timeline for this study, it was assumed that interviewees would participate and accurately depict Fred Luter's strategic leadership after Hurricane Katrina. Fourth, the relevant church documents, staff correspondence, and various sources

would be available for review. Fifth, the selected sermons preached from 2005 to 2008 would include strategic components that enabled the progression of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church.

Definitions of Terms

Leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group to achieve a common goal.”³⁸ According to Robert Clinton, *Christian leadership* is “a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God’s people toward His purposes for the group.”³⁹

This study used Aubrey Malphurs’s definition of *strategy*. Malphurs defined strategy as “the process that determines how your ministry will accomplish its mission.” This definition relates to the mission, the process, and the answer to the question “How?”⁴⁰

Pastoral leadership is the process of “seeing visions of ministry, communicating dreams clearly, gaining consensus, demonstrating commitment to common objectives, taking the initiative by setting the pace in ministry actions, and multiplying influence by transforming followers into new leaders.”⁴¹ Robert D. Dale further differentiated pastoral leadership from

³⁸ Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 8th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2019), 3.

³⁹ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 10.

⁴⁰ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 171.

⁴¹ Robert D. Dale, *Pastoral Leadership: A Handbook of Resources for Effective Congregational Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 14.

church management. Dale stated, “Church managers conserve and concentrate on doing things right; pastoral leadership creates and focuses on doing right things.”⁴²

Strategic leadership occurs when individuals or groups “create the direction, alignment, and commitment needed to achieve the enduring performance potential of an organization.”⁴³

Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie’s definition of strategic leadership entails the exercise of three core competencies: *strategic thinking, strategic action, and strategic influence*.

Strategic preaching is the “kind of Christian proclamation that is designed to guide a congregation in the fulfillment of its mission. One primary purpose of a sermon is to lead its hearers from Point A to Point B, that is, from where they are now to where the imperative of the gospel calls them to be.”⁴⁴

Strategic thinking involves the “cognitive and social processes that lead to a shared understanding of the complex relationship between the organization and its environment. It also involves using that understanding to set the direction for the organization’s future.”⁴⁵ Five categories are involved in strategic thinking: scanning, visioning, reframing, making common sense, and systems thinking. These categories include twenty-one skill sets.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 11.

⁴⁴ William E. Hull, *Strategic Preaching: The Role of the Pulpit in Pastoral Leadership* (St. Louis, MO: Cha, 2006), 2.

⁴⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 69.

Strategic acting is “taking decisive action consistent with the strategic direction despite the inherent ambiguity, chaos, and complexity inherent in organizational life. At its core, it involves translating thinking into priorities for collective action.”⁴⁷ Three categories are present in strategic acting: decision making, fostering agility, and creating alignment.⁴⁸ The three categories include fourteen skill sets.

Strategic influence is “engendering commitment to the organization’s strategic direction by inviting others into the strategic process, forging relationships inside and outside the organization, and using organizational culture and systems influence.”⁴⁹ Six categories are associated with strategic influence: building trust, managing the political landscape, boundary spanning, involving others, connecting emotionally, and building and sustaining momentum.⁵⁰ The six categories include thirty-four skill sets.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 162.

CHAPTER 2

THE STATE OF RESEARCH

To analyze how Christian leaders apply strategic leadership requires understanding two key concepts: Christian leadership and strategic leadership. The following section synthesizes pertinent literature and research about each thematic area.

Christian Leadership

Biblical Perspectives of Christian Leadership

The complexities of organizational management necessitate adept and stable leadership. In their work *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry advised that effective leadership requires more than “focusing on management techniques.”¹ Instead, leaders need a healthy leadership foundation.

The Bible, while not functioning primarily as a leadership manual, does provide essential principles for Christian leaders.² In *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Chambers emphasized the Bible’s foundational importance by claiming that “the principles of leadership in both the temporal and spiritual realms are presented and illustrated from both Scripture and the

¹ Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus Revisited: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), xi.

² Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 3–4.

biographies of the eminent men of God.”³ A comprehensive word study of the Hebrew Bible indicates no precise equivalent for the word *leader* in the Old Testament. Still, Bernice M. Ledbetter, Robert J. Banks, and David C. Greenhalgh observed, “The idea is certainly present.”⁴

The pages of the Bible are filled with examples of leadership. Bernard Bass and Ruth Bass supported this idea, arguing that religious texts, including the Bible, hold significant importance as they “offer many accounts of leaders [in the roles] of prophets, priests, chiefs, and kings.”⁵ In Genesis, the Lord called Abram to “go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you,” emphasizing the dependence of a Christian leader on God’s guidance for missional clarity.⁶

Joseph demonstrated the strategic nature of Christian leadership by storing up grain “before the year of famine” in Egypt.⁷ The transference of leadership from Eli to Samuel revealed the importance of a Christian leader’s ethos when God declared, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.”⁸

³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 11.

⁴ Bernice M. Ledbetter, Robert J. Banks, and David C. Greenhalgh, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 21.

⁵ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 4.

⁶ Gen. 12:1. All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Gen. 41:50.

⁸ 1 Sam. 2:35.

Bass and Bass presented a rich tapestry of Old Testament leadership, from Moses guiding the Hebrew people out of Egypt and Joshua leading the Israelites into Canaan to King David ruling over Israel and King Solomon reigning with wisdom.⁹ In *Leadership Roles of the Old Testament*, Marty E. Stevens recognized the numerous examples of leadership in the Old Testament stating, “Despite the differences between the societies of ancient Israel and modern America, lessons can be learned from our ancestors [leaders] in the faith of whom we are as servant leaders.”¹⁰ The diverse examples of leadership in the Old Testament serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement for Christian leaders today.

The New Testament similarly offers insight into the nature of Christian leadership. Bass and Bass noted, “The Gospels of the New Testament are filled with stories about how Jesus led his small group of disciples as well as the large audiences.”¹¹ The Gospel of Mark recounts an occasion when the disciples traveled to Jerusalem and a conflict arose between James and John, the sons of Zebedee. In response, Jesus seized the opportunity to teach his disciples about the importance of servant leadership:

⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

⁹ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 4.

¹⁰ Marty E. Stevens, *Leadership Roles of the Old Testament: King, Prophet, Priest, and Sage* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), xi.

¹¹ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 4.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹²

The apostles Peter and Paul are regarded as exemplary models of Christian leadership. In *Peter and Paul in Acts*, David Spell observed, “Peter and Paul provided significant leadership to the early church in their respective arenas.”¹³ Spell further indicated that, although their leadership roles were markedly different, both were equally essential to the early church’s missional success. The Bible may not function primarily as a manual for leadership, but it contains numerous narratives that illustrate Christian leadership. Moreover, the biblical accounts imply that Christian leadership encompasses a variety of leadership practices.

Contemporary Perspectives on Christian Leadership

Christian leadership is regarded as the process of influencing others.¹⁴ In *The Making of a Leader*, Robert Clinton’s definition of Christian leadership emphasized the role of influence, focusing on the root of that influence being “a God-given capacity.”¹⁵ According to Clinton, the key characteristic of Christian leadership is the nature of that influence. He described Christian

¹² Mark 10:42–45.

¹³ David Spell, *Peter and Paul in Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 71.

¹⁴ To evaluate various Christian leader’s views on influence, see J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago; Moody, 1994), 27; Deana L. Porterfield, “Orchestrating a Life of Influence,” in *Thriving in Leadership: Strategies for Making a Difference in Christian Higher Education*, ed. Karen Longman (Abilene, NM: ACU Press, 2014), <http://qut.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.a-spx?p=3110291>, 139.

¹⁵ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 10.

leadership as divinely inspired, indicating that a Christian's influence arises from a relationship with and a call from God.¹⁶

Christian Leadership and Conversion

In *Being Leaders*, Aubrey Malphurs discussed the nature of authentic Christian leadership. Malphurs outlined eight core distinctions of Christian leadership by differentiating between general and Christian leadership. He asserted that the defining trait of a Christian leader is being “a Christian from core to crust.” He added, “At the very core of the Christian leader's life is his or her personal conversion. This serves as the foundation for all Christian leaders and leadership.”¹⁷

In *Organizational Leadership*, John S. Burns, John R. Shoup, and Donald C. Simmons Jr. supported Malphurs's conclusion. They stated, “A model of Christian leadership first requires at least one participant in the group to be a Christian to render fully the resources available from

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 14–15. Malphurs identified a Christian as one who “has accepted Jesus Christ as personal savior. They have recognized that they are sinners (Rom. 3:23) and that their sin separates them from God (Rom. 6:23). They are also aware that their good works and lifestyle will not save them (Eph. 2:8–9). Consequently, they have placed their trust in Christ, the God-man who died, to pay for their sins (2 Cor. 5:21). This means they are authentic Christians. They have been born again in the sense that they have experienced a spiritual birth in addition to their natural birth (John 3:1–21),” 15.

special revelation.”¹⁸ According to Burns, Shoup, and Simmons, only leaders who are authentic Christians can guarantee that “leadership perspectives, practices, and habits are congruent with the tenets and habits of the Christian faith.”¹⁹

Christian Leadership and the Call of God

In his book *Is God Calling Me*, Jeff Iorg argued that before assuming any role in Christian leadership, an individual should consider the question “Is God calling me?”²⁰ Iorg further emphasized the distinction between general and Christian leadership stating, “Ministry [Christian] leadership is a calling we answer, not a career we pursue.”²¹ The idea of being set apart for Christian leadership distinguishes the call to ministry from other vocational callings.

¹⁸ Jack S. Burns, John R. Shoup, and Donald C. Simmons, *Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 60. Burns, Shoup, and Simmons defined *special revelation* as the Bible, comprised of both the Old and New Testament. They contended, “It requires the Christian to walk by the Spirit and to be devoted to prayer, Bible study, and the church,” 60.

¹⁹ Burns, Shoup, and Simmons, *Organizational Leadership*, 60.

²⁰ Jeff Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?: Answering the Question Every Leader Asks* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 1.

²¹ Ibid., 2. Iorg defined a *call* as a profound impression from God that establishes parameters for one’s life and can be altered only by subsequent, superseding impressions from God (8). Iorg’s definition was influenced by John Calvin’s Two-Fold Model of calling, which includes the inward and outward call. For more information, see John Calvin, *Calvin’s Institutes* (Mac Dill, FL: Mac Donald Publishing, 2001), 562.

The high call of God does not diminish the value of other types of leadership; instead, it emphasizes the gravity of Christian leadership.²² In *On the Priesthood*, early church father John Chrysostom regarded the call of God as weighty because the leader represented God:

It [the call to Christian leadership] is not the management of corn and barley, oxen or sheep, that is now under our consideration, nor any such like matters, but the very body of Jesus. For the church of Christ, according to St. Paul, is Christ's body, and he who is entrusted with its care ought to train it up to a state of healthiness and beauty unspeakable and to look everywhere, lest any spot or wrinkle, or other like blemish should mar its vigor and comeliness.²³

Henry T. Blackaby and Henry Brandt affirmed the necessity of God's call and further suggested that this call is essential for effective Christian leadership. In *The Power of the Call*, Blackaby and Brandt stated, "Everything depends on how one views, understands, and responds to this "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). The understanding of this call determines how a person lives and functions.²⁴ In *The Call*, Os Guinness claimed that the Christian leader's calling must be "rescued from the weight of clichés, confusion, ignorance, and uncertainties that still commonly surround calling today."²⁵

²² Russell L. Huizing, "The Seasons of Ecclesial Leadership: A New Paradigm," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 1 (2011): 81–90, doi.org/10.1057/978113747808-5_1., 82–83.

²³ John Chrysostom and B. Harris Cowper, *On The Priesthood: In Six Books* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1866), 22.

²⁴ Henry T. Blackaby, Henry Brandt, and Kerry L. Skinner, *The Power of the Call* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 27.

²⁵ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling God's Purpose for Your Life*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2018), vii.

Christian Leadership and Servanthood

Few concepts have influenced the modern evolution of Christian leadership as profoundly as the servant leadership theory, which originated in the writings of Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s.²⁶ While not inherently Christian, scholars have identified recurring examples of servant leadership in the Bible.²⁷ Aubrey Malphurs supported the servant leadership theory, “Greenleaf does not profess to be a Christian nor base his approach on the Bible. However, his thoughts carry altruistic and ethical overtones.”²⁸ Malphurs found a correlation between Greenleaf’s theory and the teachings of Jesus in Matt. 20:25–28 and John 13:1–17, leading him to suggest that “Christian leadership is servant leadership, and any definition of a Christian leader must include the concept of servanthood.”²⁹

In *Pastoral Leadership*, Robert D. Dale supported the union of Christian and servant leadership but found distinguishing between leadership style and stance necessary. Dale wrote, “A leadership stance provides a foundation, a basic position, and reason for exercising

²⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 227; R. K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New Y: Paulist, 1977) 27. Robert Greenleaf defined servant leadership as “the natural feeling one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first, to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test. . . is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” 27.

²⁷ Sen Sendjaya and James C. Sarros, “Servant Leadership: Its Origin, Development, and Application in Organizations,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 9, no. 2 (2002): 58. They inferred that the teaching of Mark 10:42–43 and John 13 offers examples of Jesus practicing servant leadership.

²⁸ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

leadership. On the other hand, style is a leader's manner of expressing initiative, a distinctive fashion of leading."³⁰

Dale's view of leadership is comparable to a professional boxer's basic fighting stance; from that singular stance, the boxer can throw various punches. Dale proposed that a leadership stance helps stabilize the Christian leader's stylistic competencies on the biblical foundation of servant leadership. Depending on the context, Christian leaders may employ various leadership styles. However, regardless of the style, they always operate from a servant leadership stance.³¹ In *Catastrophic Crisis*, Echols and England expanded on Dale's work by drawing on James MacGregor Burns's transformational leadership theory. They agreed that leaders may exhibit various stylistic competencies depending on the situation, but they proposed two biblical stances for Christian leaders: "transformational leadership and servant leadership."³²

These perspectives illustrate a growing recognition among scholars of Christian leadership that, although styles may vary, the leader's posture must remain firmly anchored in servanthood. In *Leading by Being Led*, Philip L. McKinney explored the connection between servanthood and Christian leadership, suggesting that the foundation of servant leadership

³⁰ Dale, *Pastoral Leadership*, 34.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Echols and England, *Catastrophic Crisis*, 133. Echols proposed that combining transformational and servant leadership theories can create a more effective and inclusive leadership style, particularly within the context of the local church. For more information, see Steve Echols, "Transformational/Servant Leadership: A Potential Synergism for an Inclusive Leadership Style," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 88–90.

enables Christian leaders to “be a servant of the Lord. . . by demonstrating the necessary [leadership] skills to lead God’s people effectively.”³³ McKinney suggested that being a servant means adapting one’s leadership style to “meet the needs of God’s people.”³⁴

In *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry*, Jeff Iorg endorsed McKinney’s assessment stating, “Servant-leadership is more an attitude than an action, but it is an attitude demonstrated by actions.”³⁵ Iorg linked servanthood as fundamental to any effective leadership style, asserting, “If you want to have the kind of influence required to lead major change in your ministry setting, your followers must be convinced you are passionately driven to serve them.”³⁶ Therefore, Christian leaders may be grounded in servanthood or embrace servant leadership qualities; they may not always identify exclusively as servant leaders.

Christian Leadership and Strategy

For decades, Simon Wooten and Terry Horne studied strategic leadership under the tutelage of John Adair.³⁷ In 1997, they identified empathy as a vital component of strategic

³³ Phil McKinney, “Leading by Being Led,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 5, no. 1 (2013):143–44.

³⁴ Ibid., 156.

³⁵ Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Adair is regarded as a leading authority on leadership studies, specifically strategic leadership. Adair was the world’s first professor of leadership studies at the University of Surrey. He has published over forty books on leadership. For more information, see John Adair, *John Adair, Leadership & Management*, accessed February 12, 2025, <http://www.john-adair.co.uk/>.

thinking. By recognizing empathy as a core aspect of servant leadership, Wooten and Horne expanded their investigation to determine whether a correlation existed between strategic leadership and servant leadership. They began their analysis by reevaluating Leo, the servant character from Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*, which served as the inspiration for Robert Greenleaf's discovery of servant leadership. They aimed to determine whether Leo's use of empathy extended beyond servant leadership. In *Strategic Thinking*, Wooten and Horne concluded that Leo's ability to motivate and provide direction through compassion exemplified strategic leadership. They asserted, "Leo is a metaphor for the way that strategic leadership is attributed to those who know which way we are meant to be going, those who know the strategic direction."³⁸

Aubrey Malphurs supported Wooten and Horne's assessment by suggesting in his eighth distinction of Christian leadership that Christian leaders are "directional leaders. . . leaders with a clear sense of God's direction who influence followers to pursue the organization's mission and vision."³⁹ Although Malphurs highlighted the importance of servanthood as one of the distinctives of Christian leadership, he understood strategic function as the essential task of the Christian leader. In *The Making of a Christian Leader*, Ted W. Engstrom underscored the need for Christian leaders to function strategically, warning that "if the [Christian] leadership style is

³⁸ Simon Wooten and Terry Horne, *Strategic Thinking: A Nine Step Approach to Strategy and Leadership for Managers and Marketers*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2010), 3–4.

³⁹ Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 157–58.

not modified to include sharing of goals. . . and adopting strategy, the [Christian] organization will fail.”⁴⁰

Strategic Leadership

Biblical Perspectives of Strategic Leadership

The term *strategic leadership* does not appear in the Bible, but its essence is evident in the ministries of certain biblical leaders from both the Old and New Testaments.⁴¹ The first word in the Bible illustrates God’s strategic leadership. In Hebrew, the word *bereshit* is translated as “in the beginning” and comes from the root word *Rosh*, which means “head.”⁴²

Jacques B. Doukhan, the director of the Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies at St. Andrews University in Laurinburg, posited that the term *bereshit* “helps readers of Genesis understand that creation began as an act of strategic leadership by God.”⁴³ The first two chapters of Genesis provide insight into the essence of God’s strategic leadership. Divine direction was imparted through the establishment of his authority over creation. His actions and directives were aligned to reinforce his authority, manifested through speaking the world into existence. Furthermore, God instilled a sense of commitment within his creation. In particular, God

⁴⁰ Ted W. Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 12.

⁴¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 31.

⁴² Stanley E. Patterson, “Biblical Foundations of Christian Leadership, Part I,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (2016): 78–89.

⁴³ Jacques B. Doukhan, “Leadership in the Creation Narrative,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 12, no. 1 (2018): 31.

allocated tasks and leadership roles to humanity while ensuring that they operated within the framework of his authority, referred to as “bereshit.”⁴⁴

Several leaders in the Old Testament demonstrated strategic leadership. Barbara Dodson noted, “From Abraham to Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, David, and others have all understood the value and practice of strategic leadership emphasizing missional, transformational, and spiritual imperatives.”⁴⁵ Their strategic effectiveness, as seen in their alignment with God’s direction for his people, serves as an inspiring model for leaders today.

Pharaoh promoted Joseph to an upper-level administrative role in Egypt during a time of crisis.⁴⁶ Enstrom remarked, “Is there in all history a more magnificent example of leadership skill than his [Joseph]?”⁴⁷ Joseph’s ability to think, plan, and act strategically, as demonstrated in his establishment of an operation to distribute resources, proved invaluable for Egypt’s survival of a seven-year famine.

The prophet Haggai exemplified strategic leadership. His ministry was brief, spanning just four months during the Second Temple period. In 538 BC, the first wave of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. Initial excitement among the people promoted

⁴⁴ Gen. 1–2.

⁴⁵ Barbara Angela Dodson, “Transformational and Strategic Leadership: Its Impact on the Capacity for Organizational Effectiveness” (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014), 23.

⁴⁶ Gen. 40–45.

⁴⁷ Enstrom, *Making of Christian Leader*, 26.

temple construction; however, after two years, all work stopped. In 520 BC, following eighteen years of delays in temple construction, Haggai began his ministry in Jerusalem.⁴⁸

The presence of strategic leadership was evident in Haggai's work in Jerusalem. In just four months, Haggai provided direction by offering a clear strategy: "Go up to the hills, bring wood, and build the house."⁴⁹ He strategically aligned his verbal directives with the overall goal of building the temple.⁵⁰ This alignment of his directives with his goals is a key aspect of strategic leadership. Next, Haggai strategically rallied commitment around the mission of constructing the temple by challenging the people's attitudes and priorities.⁵¹ Through Haggai's strategic leadership, the children of Israel achieved their goal of building the temple.⁵²

The New Testament also highlights the significance and influence of strategic leadership. In the Gospels, Jesus conveyed the church's mission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁵³ Then,

⁴⁸ Hag. 1–2.

⁴⁹ Hag. 1:7.

⁵⁰ F. Duane Lindsey, "Haggai," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Script*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:1539.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1543.

⁵² Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 10:119.

⁵³ Matt. 28:19.

in Acts, Jesus gave the church its geographical strategy and direction, instructing them to fulfill the Great Commission, starting in Jerusalem and extending throughout the rest of the world.⁵⁴

In 2000, Lt. Col. Gregg F. Martin from the US Army War College conducted an unconventional study of Jesus to identify seven effective behavioral patterns for strategic military leaders to achieve their missions. Martin concluded that Jesus, a servant leader, was likely the “greatest strategic leader ever to live.” He further stated, “Jesus practiced at strategic, organizational, and direct levels while selflessly serving and loving others.”⁵⁵

The apostle Peter demonstrated the traits of strategic leadership in the early church. He supervised the election of a new apostle after Judas’s death, showcasing his strategic leadership.⁵⁶ Peter often led the way in proclaiming the gospel by preaching at the Jerusalem church.⁵⁷ As a miracle worker, he displayed his authority as an apostle over sickness and death.⁵⁸ As a visionary, Peter received powerful visions from God, changing the course of the early

⁵⁴ Acts 1:8.

⁵⁵ Gregg F. Martin, “Jesus the Strategic Leader,” Defense Technical Information Center-DTIC, April 5, 2000, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA378218>, 1–2.

⁵⁶ Acts 1:15–26.

⁵⁷ Acts 2:14–36; 3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:34–43.

⁵⁸ Acts 3:1–10; 5:1–15; 9:32–42.

church and the gospel.⁵⁹ He served as the spokesman for the Jerusalem community.⁶⁰ Peter did not hold a defined pastoral role, but his administrative and governmental contributions were vital to the early church's strategic formulation, direction, and success.⁶¹ His strategic role in the early church is a testament to the importance of strategic leadership in the context of Christian leadership studies.

The apostle Paul is regarded as one of the most strategic leaders in the early church in furthering Jesus's Great Commission. As David Spell noted in *Peter and Paul in Acts*, "Paul occupied a very important leadership role in the early church. He was the one who, more than anyone else, brought the first organization and church government to those early Christian communities that he founded. He took that which Peter and the twelve started and translated it into the Greek world."⁶²

The apostle Paul demonstrated strategic leadership in the early church by emphasizing the need to combat false teachings through discipleship in Crete, as mentioned in Titus 2.⁶³ He established a discipleship pipeline to ensure that sound doctrine was taught across future generations within the church. Paul's pipeline offered the congregation a unified direction for

⁵⁹ Acts 5:17–21; 10:9–48; 12:6–11.

⁶⁰ Karl P. Donfried, "Peter (Person)," *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 253. Acts 8:14–25; 11:1–18; 15:7–11.

⁶¹ Spell, *Peter and Paul*, 71.

⁶² Ibid., 88.

⁶³ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 1992), 305.

maintaining sound doctrine. Paul reinforced this direction by aligning leadership with the older generation. Ultimately, he encouraged commitment by challenging believers to align their lifestyles with their teachings.⁶⁴

History of Strategic Leadership

Military Strategy

In 1989, Donald Hambrick stated that the term *strategic leadership* “did not become widespread in literature until he [Hambrick] formally proposed both the term and the definition.”⁶⁵ Hambrick’s assertion may suggest that strategic leadership is a recent concept. However, its origins can be traced back to military institutions whose success has depended on the formulation and execution of effective strategies for centuries.

Sun Tzu, the esteemed Chinese military general and strategist, is recognized for the first publication on strategy, *The Art of War*, which emerged circa 475 BC. This treatise is regarded as the oldest military text globally and is relevant today.⁶⁶ Tzu’s work revolutionized warfare by shifting the focus from mere physical strength to the prioritization of cognitive skills and the art of war. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu wrote, “All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but

⁶⁴ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Ne: T&T Clark International, 2004), 230.

⁶⁵ Donald C. Hambrick, “Guest Editor’s Introduction: Putting Top Managers Back in the Strategy Picture,” *Strategic Management Journal* 10 (1989): 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250100703>.

⁶⁶ April Graham et al., eds., *The Art of War and Other Classic of Eastern Philosophy* (San Diego, CA: Printers Row, 2016), xx.

what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.”⁶⁷ Tzu’s work presented principles for obtaining an advantage over an opponent and remains widely taught. Ken Mondschein noted, “*The Art of War* is still studied by generals, business leaders, sports coaches, and politicians as a general guide on strategy.”⁶⁸

The term *strategy* originates from two ancient Greek words: *stratos*, meaning “army,” and *agein*, meaning “to lead.” These words merged to form *strategus*, which translates to “military commander.”⁶⁹ In *Strategic Leadership*, John Adair explained how the Romans later developed the word *strategia* for the territories under a *strategus*’s command.⁷⁰ After the Roman Empire, Athens employed *strategia* in military operations. Adair explained, “The Athenian army adopted the term *strategos*, which is equivalent to the modern military term ‘general.’”⁷¹

By the eighteenth century, the *strategos* gained widespread acceptance when the French military introduced *stratégique* to describe the strategic thinking employed by Frederick the Great during his successful military campaigns. This innovation by the French army sparked a significant advancement in the concepts of strategic leadership over the following century, as

⁶⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, in *The Art of War and Other Classics of Eastern Philosophy* (San Diego, CA: Printers Row, 2016), 15.

⁶⁸ Ken Mondschein, *Introduction*, in *The Art of War and Other Classics of Eastern Philosophy* (San Diego, CA: Printers Row, 2016), xx.

⁶⁹ Shand Stringham, *Strategic Leadership and Strategic Management: Leading and Managing Change on the Edge of Chaos* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2012), 32.

⁷⁰ John Adair, *Strategic Leadership: How to Think and Plan Strategically and Provide Direction* (Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2010), 8–10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Prussian general and theorist Carl von Clausewitz provided a new perspective on modern warfare. In his work *Strategic Leadership and Strategic Management*, Stringham noted Clausewitz's weighty contributions, identifying him as the father of strategic studies.⁷²

Two works published during the nineteenth century further developed the framework of modern military strategy. In 1832, Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* was published posthumously. While serving as the director of the *Kriegsakademie*, Clausewitz proposed that war “was not merely a political act, but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means.”⁷³

Clausewitz argued that war could be more than just an exercise of physical dominance; it could be used to achieve strategic political advancement for a nation. He frequently stated that war “is an extension of politics by other means and that strategy involves using engagement to fulfill its purposes.” Clausewitz believed that for a strategy to be effective, it must articulate the

⁷² Stringham, *Strategic Leadership Management*, 32. Other scholars hold that Carl von Clausewitz is the father of strategic studies or modern Western warfare. David Kaiser, “Clausewitz and the First World War,” *Military Strategy Magazine*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/clausewitz-and-the-first-world-war/>. For more information, see Čajić, Jasmin. “The Relevance of Clausewitz’s Theory of War to Contemporary Conflict Resolution,” *Connections: Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016): 72–78.

⁷³ *Kriegsakademie* was regarded as “the top War Academy, or Kriegs Akademie, at Berlin, founded in 1810 and offering the highest advanced education for commissioned officers,” 280. For more information, see Chelsey Parrott-Sheffer, “War Academy,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, n.d., accessed February 8, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/War-Academy>; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 280.

central political purpose or aim of the war, “so war planners and generals could execute operational campaigns that would support those objectives.”⁷⁴

Six years later, in 1838, Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini published *The Art of War*. Jomini’s perspective differed from Clausewitz’s because, rather than taking a philosophical approach, he took a practical approach to warfare. Jomini was a systems-oriented thinker who sought to identify prescriptive principles for warfare. Specifically, he distinguished between strategic thinking and strategic tactics.⁷⁵ He stated, “Strategy is the order of the procedure of a general who commences the plan. However, tactics, on the contrary, are the details necessary for success.”⁷⁶ Jomini’s writings were eventually translated into English and used by American officers during the Civil War in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁷ The contributions of both Clausewitz and Jomini continue to be essential within the curricula of American military academies and war colleges.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter P (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 280.

⁷⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 105. Strategic tactics are referred to as *strategic actions* in business strategy.

⁷⁶ Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1992), 47.

⁷⁷ Stringham, *Strategic Leadership and Management*, 33.

⁷⁸ Christopher Bassfield, “Jomini and Clausewitz: Their Interaction,” 2nd ed. (paper presented at the 23rd Meeting of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, February 26, 1993), <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford-/Jomini/JOMINIX.htm>.

By the mid-twentieth century, the term *strategy* became common in military operations and started to move into the business world, propelled by the Industrial Revolution and World War II. However, the shift from perceiving strategy as a military construct to acknowledging it as a business or organizational framework is a subject of speculation.

In 1997, Keith Hoskin, Richard Macve, and John Stone presented a paper titled “The Historical Genesis of Modern Business and Military Strategy: 1850–1950” at the Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting Conference in Manchester, UK. In their presentation, the authors argued that the two disciplines merged through Herman Haupt, who applied his military background to his work as superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Hoskins, Macve, and Stone claimed that Haupt introduced “a strategic reorganization, grounded in the collection and analysis of operating statistics and costs, and laid the foundation for the development of the USA’s largest railroad.”⁷⁹ They further argued that Haupt’s adaptation of military strategy into business shifted the contemporary understanding of strategy away from a purely military perspective.

In a conversation between John Adair and Peter Drucker, Drucker discussed the difficulties of publishing business books about strategy in the 1960s due to military connotations. Drucker stated, “I submitted a book to my American publisher called *Management Strategy*. They insisted that I should change the title, as ‘strategy’ was a military term, and business executive readers would either not understand or perceive it as irrelevant. So, it appeared as

⁷⁹ Keith Hoskins, Richard Macve, and John Stone, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting Conference” (paper presented at Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting Conference, Manchester, UK, July, 1997), accessed February 8, 2025, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=b7badf66eb716f43269ce93e07ddeb00b8a23460>.

Management for Results.”⁸⁰ Adair inquired about the shift in mindset concerning business and strategy. Drucker eventually credited Robert McNamara with the conceptual merger.

Robert McNamara joined the Ford Motor Company in 1946 as a planning and financial analysis manager. By 1960, he had become the company’s president. McNamara’s strategic thinking and vision helped expand the Ford Motor Company and led to the creation of the first compact car. President Kennedy recognized McNamara’s effective leadership during the post-war era, and five weeks after his inauguration, he invited McNamara to join his cabinet.

McNamara went on to serve under both Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.⁸¹

McNamara set a precedent as the first businessman to leave a Fortune 500 company to oversee the military. In his early days as Secretary of Defense, colleagues noted, “Although [McNamara] was not knowledgeable about defense matters, he immersed himself in the subject, learned quickly, and soon began to apply an ‘active role’ management philosophy. In his own words, he provided aggressive leadership by questioning, suggesting alternatives, proposing objectives, and stimulating progress.”⁸² Therefore, scholars regard McNamara as the one who ushered in corporate acceptance of integrating strategy in leadership.⁸³

⁸⁰ Adair, *Strategic Leadership*, 8.

⁸¹ US Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office, *Robert S. McNamara: John F. Kennedy/Lyndon Johnson Administration, January 21, 1961–February 29, 1968*, accessed February 8, 2025, <https://history.defense.gov/Multimedia/Biographies/Article-View/Article/571271/robert-s-mcnamara/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Adair, *Strategic Leadership*, 8.

Business Strategy

In 1912, Harvard University in Cambridge became the first higher education institution to offer a business course aimed at helping business executives manage companies.⁸⁴ Frederick W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* served as the primary textbook for this course. In his work, Taylor proposed that achieving organizational efficiency involved identifying the “one best way” to accomplish corporate objectives. His one-size-fits-all strategic management approach prevailed until World War II ended.

During the post-war era, consumerism surged as industries shifted from wartime to peacetime production. After years of Americans living under national rationing policies, the overwhelming demand for products from Americans quickly exceeded market capacity, forcing corporations to find new strategies to meet their objectives.⁸⁵ The sudden flux in the market caused executives to face complex problems, which could no longer be solved with a single solution.

In 1959, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation for the Advancement of Education released a report on business schools' failure to train top executives to think critically. They proposed that business schools offer a “capstone” course that integrates knowledge of “marketing, finance, and accounting to help students devise better ideas for addressing complex

⁸⁴ Dave Ketchen et al., “The History of Strategic Management,” *Mastering Strategic Management*, September 2014, <https://opentextbc.ca/strategic-management/chapter/the-history-of-strategic-management/>.

⁸⁵ Sarah Pruitt, “The Post World War II Boom: How America Got into Gear,” *History.Com*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/post-world-war-ii-boom-economy>.

business problems.”⁸⁶ Integrating critical thinking into business schools sparked a wealth of new literature on strategic management.

In the 1960s, leadership experts concentrated on corporate planning and new methodologies pertaining to management objectives.⁸⁷ A pivotal advancement in these initiatives occurred in 1963 when Robert Franklin Steward established a strategic planning framework known as the SOFT approach.⁸⁸ Steward proposed through his groundbreaking framework that long-range organizational planning would achieve greater success by critically assessing four fundamental factors related to organizational structure: strengths, opportunities, faults, and threats.⁸⁹ In 1965, Steward renamed the SOFT approach as the SWOT analysis tool, which evaluates four organizational components: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

By the 1970s, strategists began integrating Ralph Stogdill’s behavioral approach into research, focusing primarily on “diversification through portfolio planning.”⁹⁰ In “The State of the Art of Strategic Leadership,” Anjali Singh analyzed 6,024 strategic leadership articles published between 1980 and 2020 through a bibliometric approach to identify influential works

⁸⁶ Ketchen et al., “History of Strategic Management.”

⁸⁷ David Faulkner and Andrew Campbell, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Strategy. A Strategy Overview and Competitive Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford Books, 2009), 10.

⁸⁸ Richard W. Puyt, Finn Birger Lie, and Celeste P. M. Wilderom, “The Origins of SWOT Analysis,” *Long Range Planning* 56, no. 3 (June 2023): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2023.-102304>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Faulkner and Campbell, *Oxford Handbook of Strategy*, 10.

based on their citation frequency.⁹¹ Singh et al. found that one of the most significant contributions to modern strategic leadership theory came from John Child's 1972 article, "Strategic Choice."⁹² In "Strategic Choice," Child suggested that "powerful individuals make strategic decisions based on the strategic choices available to them at the particular time, and that such decisions can impact myriad aspects of the organization."

Although strategists embraced Child's notion of strategic choice, his inability to describe the "powerful individuals" making organizational decisions initially limited the widespread acceptance of his work. In 1984, twelve years after Child's publication, Donald C. Hambrick and Phyllis A. Mason built upon this idea by introducing the Upper Echelon Theory. This theory posited that an organization reflects its top management, thus clarifying Child's ambiguous term "powerful individuals." Hambrick and Mason proposed that strategic decisions and outcomes depended on senior executives or upper-level management.⁹³

By the close of the twentieth century, the works of strategists such as Alfred D. Chandler Jr., H. Igor Ansoff, Peter Drucker, John Kotter, and Donald Hambrick contributed to the establishment of strategic leadership as a field of study and the development of the *Strategic*

⁹¹ Anjali Singh et al., "The State of the Art of Strategic Leadership," *Journal of Business Research* 158 (March 2023): 113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113676>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Donald C. Hambrick and Phyllis A. Mason, "Upper Echelons: The Organization as a Reflection of Its Top Managers, *Academy of Management Review* 9, no. 2 (April 1984): 193, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258434>, 193.

Management Journal.⁹⁴ Throughout the 2000s, Richard Hughes conducted work for The Center for Creative Leadership by researching organizational challenges such as “change, strategic thinking, business issues, and achieving focus, consensus, and vision.”⁹⁵

By the end of the 2000s, the volume of research and publications on strategic leadership attracted the attention of leadership experts. In 2009, Sydney Finkelstein, Donald C. Hambrick, and Albert A. Cannella Jr. wrote in *Strategic Leadership* about the state of this emerging field, “The floodgates are open. Hundreds of academic and applied articles, books, and monographs have now been written on top executives.”⁹⁶

Over the past two decades, the field of strategic leadership has evolved significantly, particularly with the establishment of strategic leadership studies at post-secondary institutions. In 2009, James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, distinguished itself as a pioneering higher education institution, establishing a School of Strategic Leadership Studies and offering a PhD in strategic leadership.⁹⁷ Since instituting this department, numerous secular and

⁹⁴ Ketchen et al., “History of Strategic Management.”

⁹⁵ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 604. The Center for Creative Leadership was established in 1970 and has been at the forefront of leadership research over the past fifty years, including strategic leadership. The resources and history can be found at <https://www.ccl.org/>.

⁹⁶ Sydney Finkelstein, Donald C. Hambrick, and Albert A. Cannella Jr., *Strategic Leadership: Theory and Research on Executives, Top Management Teams, and Boards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 8.

⁹⁷ James Madison University, “Strategic Leadership Studies,” JMU, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.jmu.edu/leadership/about/index.shtml>.

religious post-secondary academic institutions have adopted similar programs.⁹⁸ The advancement of these academic programs has helped to clarify the nature of strategic leadership.

Nature of Strategic Leadership

Katherine Beatty and Laura Quinn asserted that organizations can attain a competitive advantage most effectively through strategic leadership. According to Beatty and Quinn, “If you were to ask a group of executives to define strategic leadership, you would likely get as many different answers as there were people in the room.”⁹⁹ As discussed in their work “Strategic Command: Taking the Long View on Organizational Success,” the primary concern is the definition of strategic leadership.

A review of related literature demonstrates the difficulty of reaching a consensus on strategic leadership. Professors Silas Martinez and Tom Galvin, affiliated with the US Army War College, provided a two-dimensional definition of strategic leadership. In their work “Leadership at the Strategic Level,” they delineated a strategic leader as one who engages in the “process of aligning people, systems, and resources to achieve a vision for the enterprise while enabling an

⁹⁸ A list of some of the post-secondary schools that offer degrees in strategic leadership are the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN: MBA in strategic leadership; Columbia Southern University, Orange Beach, AL: BS in strategic leadership; University of Charleston, Charleston, SC: MS in strategic leadership; University of Memphis, Memphis, TN: Certificate in strategic leadership; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA: DMin in strategic leadership; and Liberty University, Lynchburg, TN: DSL in strategic leadership.

⁹⁹ Katherine Beatty and Laura Quinn, “Strategic Command: Taking the Long View for Organizational Success,” in *Leadership in Action Series on Strategic Leadership*, ed. Stephen Rush (Greensboro, NC: CCL Press, 2011), 1.

adaptive and innovative culture necessary to gain an advantage in the competitive environment.”¹⁰⁰

Martinez and Galvin’s definition includes two dimensions: historical and futuristic. They asserted that the way forward involves aligning the current climate with past activities. The second dimension focuses on the future, suggesting that a strategic leader must “be concerned with achieving a vision for the future.”¹⁰¹ They also emphasized that understanding the complexity of the environment is essential for reaching these historical and futuristic levels.

In *The Art of Strategic Leadership*, Steven Stowell and Stephanie Mead argued that strategic leadership is better described than defined. They claimed that it encompasses two primary functions. First, it entails “fulfilling your regular leadership responsibilities in a proactive and forward-thinking manner.” The second function directly pertains to the leader. Stowell and Mead proposed that leaders must “incorporate a specific collection of qualities and characteristics into [their] leadership style as [they] lead [their] team[s] and execute strategic objectives and plans.”¹⁰²

John Adair, the world’s first Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Surrey in England, also found describing easier than defining strategic leadership. Adair characterized a

¹⁰⁰ Silas Martinez and Tom Galvin, “Leadership at the Strategic Level in *Strategic Leadership Primer for Senior Leaders*, 4th ed. (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, School of Strategic Landpower, US Army War College, 2019), 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Steven J. Stowell, and Stephanie S. Mead, *The Art of Strategic Leadership: How Leaders at All Levels Prepare Themselves, Their Teams, and Organizations for the Future* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 4.

strategic leader according to seven essential functions: “giving direction, strategic thinking and planning, making it happen, relating the parts to the whole, building partnerships, releasing the corporate spirit, and developing today’s and tomorrow’s leaders.”¹⁰³

In 2010, the absence of a universally accepted definition led Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella to characterize strategic leadership based on its roots in executive leadership. This generalization delineates strategic leadership as the pivotal function of upper-level executives, those who are responsible for the organization.¹⁰⁴ The authors distinguished this particular approach by emphasizing strategic leaders as “the executives who. . . [lead by] what they do, how they do it, and particularly, how they influence the organization.”¹⁰⁵ Although straightforward, the multidimensional understanding of strategic leadership by Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella underscores the significance of the leaders’ actions and how they influence the organization.

In *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie acknowledged the concept of strategic leadership is broad in scope. Thus, they defined it as the process through which individuals and teams “create the direction, alignment, and commitment needed to achieve the enduring performance potential of an organization.”¹⁰⁶ Unlike other interpretations of

¹⁰³ Adair, *Strategic Leadership*, 43.

¹⁰⁴ While strategic leadership primarily focuses on the top executives of an organization, they still acknowledged strategies can “bubble up and accrete from below.” Therefore, strategic leadership is possible at other levels.

¹⁰⁵ Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella, *Strategic Leadership*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 11.

strategic leadership, Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie did not define or list its functions. Instead, they concentrated on addressing the question “How?”

Specifically, how do leaders create the direction, alignment, and commitment needed to make the strategy come alive in the organization through their behaviors and interactions?¹⁰⁷

While Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella raised a similar question, Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie suggested three competencies of strategic leadership: strategic thinking, strategic acting, and strategic influencing.¹⁰⁸ The current study utilized Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie’s conceptual framework to analyze Fred Luter’s strategic leadership at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church post-Katrina.

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Canne, *Strategic Leadership*, 4.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research project consisted of a qualitative, single-case study of Fred Luter Jr. at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church from 2005 to 2008.¹ The purpose of the study was to analyze Fred Luter Jr.'s pastoral leadership to determine how he used strategic leadership to navigate times of conflict, crisis, and displacement following Hurricane Katrina.²

¹ To conduct the single case study, the study utilized phenomenological research methods to assist in the single case study by considering the lived experiences of individuals connected to Fred Luter Jr. during the research period. Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdall suggested that phenomenology “underlies [to some degree] all qualitative research, and one can conduct various qualitative studies using the particular tools of phenomenology,” 25–26. *Phenomenology* is used to explore the lived experiences of individuals or groups, often employing interviews as the primary data collection method. For more information, see Sharan B Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdall, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 26–27. While phenomenological research typically focuses on emotions or affective states, the current study examined the lived experiences of selected parties to assess their evaluation and response to Fred Luter Jr.'s strategic leadership.

² For this research, preaching is considered an extension of strategic pastoral leadership rather than an autonomous function. As a result, the preaching and pastoral ministry of Fred Luter Jr. will be evaluated as equal components of strategic leadership. The researcher embraces William E. Hull and William H. Willimon's perspective on strategic preaching. Hull argued, “Strategic preaching is the kind of Christian proclamation that is designed to guide a congregation in the fulfillment of its mission. One primary purpose of a sermon is to lead its hearers from Point A to Point B, that is, from where they are now to where the imperative of the gospel calls them to be” (Hull, *Strategic Preaching*, 2). In *Leading with the Sermon*, Willimon asserted, “Preaching is a practice of leadership. Preaching aids and shapes our leadership and our leadership provides the context, purposes, and test of our preaching.” William H. Willimon, *Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2020), xi. For additional information on the relationship between the pastoral office and the pulpit, refer to John Currie, *The Pastor as Leader: Principles and Practices for Connecting Preaching and Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024); Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Planning Your*

Subject of Analysis

The research examined Fred Luter Jr., a distinguished pastor and influential leader within the SBC.³ Since September 1986, Luter has served as the senior pastor at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.⁴ Under his leadership, Franklin Avenue expanded from 65 to nearly seven thousand members.⁵

Data Collection

Interviews

Primary sources were used to address the research question, with supplementary information obtained from secondary sources.⁶ The first primary source consisted of semi-structured interviews with various participants associated with Fred Luter's leadership from 2005 to 2008.

Preaching: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing A One-Year Preaching Calendar (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002); Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016); Michael J. Quicke, *360-Degree Leadership: Preaching to Transform Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).

³ See appendix A: "Fred Luter Jr. Biography," 169–73.

⁴ See appendix B: "Franklin Avenue Baptist Church," 175–78.

⁵ For a Chronological Timeline of Franklin Avenue, see appendix B, 177–78.

⁶ Linda Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019), 148. Primary source documents contain firsthand information. Examples include scholarly research articles, books, diaries, speeches, manuscripts, interviews, records, and audio and video sources. Secondary sources describe, summarize, or discuss information or details originally presented from another source. Examples include reviews, encyclopedias, magazine articles, popular journal articles, and textbooks.

The first participant interviewed was Fred Luter Jr. The interviews consisted of three, ninety-minute video interviews with Luter on June 20, 2023, August 16, 2023, and February 24, 2025.⁷ The interviews with Luter led to other relevant figures involved in his leadership during the research period.⁸

The second participant interviewed was David Crosby, Pastor Emeritus of the First Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.⁹ Luter stated that Crosby played a pivotal role in rebuilding Franklin Avenue Baptist Church by providing support, staff, and long-term access to their facilities. The interview entailed a sixty-minute phone conversation with Crosby on January 31, 2025.¹⁰ In addition to a phone interview, communication with Crosby occurred through phone calls, emails, and text messages.

The third participant interviewed was Gary Mack Sr., the former associate pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. Mack joined the staff at FABC in January 2004 and played a key role on the leadership team from 2005 to 2008. He was the first staff member rehired

⁷ The interviews with Fred Luter Jr. were structured according to the interviewing guidelines established by Irving Seidman in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. Seidman suggested, “A three-interview structure works best” (27), and the interview time should be limited to ninety minutes. This time frame allows for effective information transfer without putting pressure on the participants” (26). Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 5th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019). The current study followed Robert Yin’s interview structure by conducting single, sixty-minute interviews with other participants. Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 112–14.

⁸ See appendix C: “Fred Luter Jr. Interview Summaries,” 179–85.

⁹ From this point forward, First Baptist Church of New Orleans will be referred to as FBC New Orleans.

¹⁰ See appendix D: “David Crosby Interview Summary,” 187–88.

after Hurricane Katrina and was essential to the Operation Back Home program. In his sermon “Don’t Let Sin Discredit You,” Luter called Gary Mack his right hand throughout the rebuilding process. The interview with Gary Mack Sr. consisted of an hour phone conversation on February 4, 2025.¹¹ In addition to a phone interview, communication with Mack occurred through phone calls, emails, and text messages. Gary Mack kept detailed records on flash drives, including photos, a newsletter, and one of Luter’s preaching schedules from 2005.¹²

Sermons

The second primary source consisted of ten sermons preached by Luter from 2005 to 2008. Luter provided manuscripts, videos, or audio recordings of the sermons he used to navigate the church strategically. Luter submitted eight handwritten sermon outlines, while the last two sermons were obtained from YouTube and Lifeway Resources with Luter’s approval.¹³

Due to the displacement of FABC’s members, the sermons were delivered at various locations across the country, including churches, universities, seminaries, and civic events. These sermons directly or indirectly addressed the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact caused by Hurricane Katrina. Each sermon was presented multiple times and tailored to fit the audience’s context, often including displaced FABC members. The only sermon

¹¹ See appendix E: “Gary Mack Sr. Interview Summary,” 189–90.

¹² See appendix F: “Franklin Avenue Publications,” 191–97.

¹³ See appendix G: “Fred Luter Jr. Sermons,” 199–271.

delivered on the campus of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church was “From Disaster to Dancing” on April 6, 2008.

“The Other Side of Ministry” was delivered on August 24, 2005, just five days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall. The sermon was delivered during a New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary chapel service and was his final sermon before the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Luter told the seminary students that they would face tests in life and ministry. He repeated throughout the sermon that when a person least expects it, “The storm will come!” The message was based on Ps. 34:19 and included three key points focused on the afflicted: first, “The Plight of the Afflicted;” second, “The Problem of the Afflicted;” and third, “The Promise to the Afflicted.”

“What to Do When the Storm Comes” was first preached by Luter on September 6, 2005, during the chapel service at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This sermon was the first Luter delivered after Hurricane Katrina. The message focused on Mark 4:35–41, in which Jesus delivered the disciples through the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Luter encouraged the audience to remember three truths: first, remember “The Promises of Jesus;” second, remember “The Presence of Jesus;” and third, remember “The Power of Jesus.” He concluded the sermon by urging the audience to “never forget: When your storms show up, so will your Savior!”

“Why?” was delivered on September 25, 2005, at First Baptist Church in Houston.¹⁴ Luter began preparing for it during a helicopter ride over New Orleans two weeks prior, when

¹⁴ From this point forward, First Baptist Church in Houston will be referred to as FBC Houston.

he witnessed the devastation and realized that the church would not recover quickly. He sought to address the immense destruction in his beloved city. This message was the first sermon Luther specifically prepared for his congregation after Hurricane Katrina. The central text was drawn from Deut. 8:1–6. During his sermon, he aimed to help the congregation understand the reasons behind the hurricane. He provided four key reasons: first, “To Humble Us”; second, “To Test Us”; third, “To Chasten Us”; and fourth, “To Conform Us.” Luther concluded his message by reminding the congregation, “Your best days are not behind you; they are ahead of you. You are going to make it!”

The sermon entitled “What to Do after the Storm” was preached numerous times, though the first instance remains unknown. Based on Luther’s handwritten outline, it followed his sermon “What to Do When the Storm Comes.” This sermon is filled with grief while maintaining an encouraging tone. The primary sermon text was Lam. 3:22–26. Luther urged the audience to “never forget three things after going through the storms of life”: first, “Remember the Mercy of God” (v. 22a); second, “Remember the Compassion of God” (v. 22b); and third, “Remember the Faithfulness of God” (v. 23).

The sermon entitled “The Test Called Katrina” was first preached by Luther on August 29, 2006, at FBC New Orleans. The occasion marked a special service for the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The primary text for the sermon was Job 23:8–12, but Luther utilized the entire book of Job for context. The sermon featured three main points: first, “God Preapproves Us for Every Test”; second, “God Prepares Us for Every Test”; and third, “God Preserves Us for Every Test.” Luther frequently reiterated throughout the sermon, “even if the test is called Katrina.”

The sermon entitled “It May Be over Our Heads, But It’s under God’s Feet” was preached by Luter in April 2007 at an undisclosed location. The sermon was based on Hab. 3:17–19 and emphasized the importance of enduring the trials of life. Luter presented three ways to face these challenges: first, by understanding that “Life Is Full of Fears”; second, by acknowledging that “Life Is Full of Frustrations”; and third, by embracing that “Life Must Be Full of Faith.” The sermon concluded with the powerful declaration, “If God brings you to it, then God will bring you through it!”

The sermon entitled “When God Says No” was preached on an undisclosed date and at an undisclosed location.¹⁵ The primary text came from 2 Cor. 12:7–10. Luter began by explaining that prayer is a privilege for all believers. However, he challenged the audience to consider, “What will we do as believers when God says, No.” Using the example of the apostle Paul, Luter offered three ways to handle unfulfilled prayer requests: first, notice Paul’s “Restraint”; second, observe Paul’s “Request”; and third, recognize Paul’s “Response.” Luter concluded with the assertion, “Now you know what to do when God tells you No.”

The sermon entitled “Don’t Let Sin Discredit You” was preached on September 6, 2007, during the chapel service at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In this sermon, Luter addressed the question, “How do you deal with someone near and dear to you who has fallen into sin or into a trap set by the enemy?” Luter shared that in the month leading up to this message, he felt the pain of witnessing a friend fall into sin. The primary text came from 1 Pet. 5:8–11. The sermon outlined three steps to standing firm against the enemy’s attacks:

¹⁵ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025. The original delivery date is estimated between the summer and fall of 2007.

first, “You Must Recognize the Enemy”; second, “You Must Resist the Enemy”; and third, “You Must Remind the Enemy.” He concluded by encouraging his FABC members, church staff, and seminary students not to succumb to the enemy when feeling tired or discouraged.

The sermon entitled “The Church That Christ Builds” was preached on March 30, 2008, at FBC New Orleans. It marked Luter’s final sermon before returning to FABC’s campus on April 6, 2008. The sermon text was based on Matt. 16:13–20. Luter began by reading the children’s book *The Three Little Pigs*. He then compared Satan to the big bad wolf that sought to destroy their church. The sermon consisted of three parts: “The Adversary,” “Christ the Foundation,” and “Upon This Rock.” At the conclusion of the sermon, Luter expressed his love and appreciation for David Crosby and FBC New Orleans for welcoming FABC.

The sermon entitled “From Disaster to Dancing” was preached on April 6, 2008, at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. This sermon marked the first sermon delivered on the newly renovated campus of FABC. The scriptural text was drawn from Hab. 1:2–4 and 3:17–19, the same text used in the previous sermon: “It May Be over Our Heads, but It’s under God’s Feet.” However, unlike the earlier sermon, this one did not concentrate on overcoming trials but instead celebrated the end of a trial. The sermon presented three main points focused on ways to transition from disaster to dancing: first, realize “Life Is Full of Foes” (1:1–4); second, acknowledge that “Life Is Full of Failure” (3:17); and third, embrace that “Life is Full of Favor” (3:18–19). Luter concluded the sermon by inviting the congregation to “Stand, clap your hands, lift up your voice, give thanks to God, and dance!”

Articles

The third primary source included news articles and journals published during the time of the event, which featured Joe McKeever's daily blog posts.¹⁶ From 2004 to 2009, McKeever served as the Director of Missions for the Baptist Association for Greater New Orleans.¹⁷ He collaborated with pastors during the disaster relief efforts and documented several encounters with Fred Luter from 2005 to 2008. The secondary sources referenced included newspaper and journal articles written after the events.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection, an analysis and interpretation was conducted on the findings. The interviews were recorded in audio format and sent to a third-party transcription service to ensure accuracy and proper organization of the extensive data.¹⁸ The eight handwritten sermon manuscripts that Luter supplied were transcribed.¹⁹

¹⁶ Joe McKeever has blogged daily since 2003. His blogs can be viewed at <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/>.

¹⁷ The Baptist Association for Greater New Orleans is now known as the New Orleans Baptist Association. This association serves 140 Southern Baptist churches in the Greater New Orleans area, including Franklin Avenue Baptist Church.

¹⁸ Clipto Transcription Services were used to transcribe interviews into a manuscript and provide a one-page detailed summary of the conversation. The transcription service can be found at <https://www.clipto.com/>.

¹⁹ While priority was given to the handwritten sermon outlines to enhance the authenticity of the delivered sermon, any of the ten sermons available in digital format were utilized instead. The digital files were transcribed using Clipto Transcription Services.

Any misspellings, grammatical errors, or colloquial expressions were included in the transcripts to ensure an accurate reflection of the original content. However, the sermon outlines were reformatted into manuscript form for better readability. The sermon evaluated from YouTube was submitted to Clipto Transcription Services to create a digital manuscript, and the sermon evaluated from Lifeway Resources was copied directly. Since preaching is viewed as an extension of leadership, the ten sermons were examined as a whole rather than separately.

To evaluate Luter's use of strategic leadership, the primary sources were examined first to identify areas of his strategic leadership that warranted analysis. The primary sources revealed five key areas of Luter's strategic leadership that warranted examination: his initial response, the development of satellite campuses, the establishment of a home base, the implementation of Operation Back Home, and the providential homecoming.

Next, to analyze the application of strategic leadership, an analytical instrument was developed by synthesizing the work of Richard L. Hughes, Katherine Colarelli Beatty, and David L. Dinwoodie in their book *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success*.²⁰

The Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie Instrument

A Brief Biography

Richard L. Hughes holds a PhD from the University of Wyoming and has served on the faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership, the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and Denver Seminary. He headed the Behavioral Science and Leadership

²⁰ See appendix H: "Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie Instrument" 273–77.

Department at the US Air Force Academy and wrote the widely used textbook *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*.

Katherine Calarelli Beatty holds a PhD in organizational psychology from Saint Louis University. She was the former Director of Global Portfolio Management at the Center for Creative Leadership and is currently the CEO of Inspirati Leadership Solutions, a consulting firm for business executives. Beatty has authored several notable works on leadership.²¹

David L. Dinwoodie holds a doctorate from Aston University in England. He has held senior management positions in international relations for several Fortune 500 companies worldwide. Currently, he serves as the Director of Leadership Products in the Latin American Division of the Center for Creative Leadership.

The Instrument Explained

In *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie explained how strategic leaders create the direction, alignment, and commitment necessary to lead change, span boundaries, and influence organizational culture.²² Strategic leadership navigates challenges by exercising the three foundational competencies: strategic thinking, acting, and

²¹ Beatty has written extensively on leadership. Some of her publications include *Handbook of Leadership Development*, *On Strategic Leadership*, and *Developing and Enhancing Teamwork in Organizations*.

²² Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 20.

influencing.²³ These three competencies include various categories and subsets of skills that describe the process and nature of strategic leadership.

Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking involves the “cognitive and social processes that lead to a shared understanding of the complex relationship between the organization and its environment. It also involves using that understanding to set the direction for the organization’s future.”²⁴ Five categories are involved in strategic thinking: scanning, visioning, reframing, making common sense, and systems thinking.

Scanning refers to assessing the organization’s current strategic situation and evaluating it for potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.²⁵ Judi Mellon and Michael Kroth conducted a qualitative study among ministers to identify the most essential characteristics of effective strategic thinkers. They concluded that spiritual discernment is crucial for ministers who exhibit strategic thinking. According to their findings, spiritual discernment involves analyzing situations.²⁶ Therefore, scanning or discernment is a critical component of strategic thinking.

²³ Ibid., 48–49.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 72.

²⁶ J. Mellon, and M. Kroth, “Experiences That Enable One to Become an Expert Strategic Thinker,” *Journal of Adult Education* 42 (2013): 74.

The ability to conceptualize the future trajectory of an organization is referred to as visioning. A leader's vision encompasses the articulation of ideals and values, the acknowledgment of the human element, the facilitation of connections among members to a shared identity, the clarification of expectations, and the delineation of factors driving change.²⁷ Thomas Bandy posited that numerous churches remain ambiguous or inactive due to a vision deficiency. Bandy advised that Christian leaders cultivate a visionary mindset to elucidate the congregation's identity; vision is revealed rather than created.²⁸

Reframing is the ability to view situations from opposing perspectives and discover new insights into an organization's challenges and capabilities.²⁹ A strategic leader's approach to reframing will vary based on the situation and context.³⁰ Lee Bolman argued that reframing, or seeing things from various angles, "is the distinguishing difference in leaders that succeed or fail."³¹ Sloan supported Bolman's view, "The ability to reframe an issue is an outcome of successful strategic thinking."³²

²⁷ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 75.

²⁸ Thomas G. Bandy, *Strategic Thinking: How to Sustain Effective Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2017), 15. *Strategic Thinking* resulted from Bandy consulting with churches along the Gulf Coast post-Katrina.

²⁹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 79.

³⁰ Ibid., 83

³¹ Lee G. Bolman, and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2017), 17.

³² Julia Sloan, *Learning to Think Strategically*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 106.

Making common sense allows individuals within an organization to understand external and internal challenges. It fosters a shared understanding of the issues at hand.³³ In *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry*, Jeff Iorg draws on his personal experience of relocating a seminary to provide insights into managing significant ministry changes effectively. He highlighted the importance of clarity and communication throughout the organization by stating, “Wise leaders allocate significant time and resources to ensure people share a common understanding.”³⁴

Systems thinking is the ability to recognize the interrelationships among various variables in a complex situation.³⁵ In *Healthy Congregations*, Peter Steinke claimed, “Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all one piece. . . It claims that any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it.”³⁶ Systems thinking comprises five skill sets necessary for understanding organizational interconnectedness: seeking patterns over time, considering the big picture, identifying complex interactions, hypothesizing key causal relationships, and confirming one’s understanding of cause and effect.³⁷

³³ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 84.

³⁴ Iorg, *Leading Major Change*, 121.

³⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 92.

³⁶ Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 3–5.

³⁷ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 94.

Strategic Acting

The concepts of strategic thinking and strategic acting are interdependent. A leader translates the insights gained from strategic thinking into deliberate actions. Strategic acting is “taking decisive action consistent with the strategic direction despite the inherent ambiguity, chaos, and complexity inherent in organizational life. At its core, it involves translating thinking into priorities for collective action.”³⁸ Three key categories are vital in strategic acting: decision-making, fostering agility, and aligning goals.

Decision making is the ability to act decisively in the face of uncertainty.³⁹ Weitzman et al. supported the interconnectedness of problem solving and decision making but advocated the necessity of making precise decisions amid organizational uncertainty.⁴⁰ Decision making includes four skills: consulting with other experts for advice, accounting for variable change, making strategically consistent decisions, and acting in a timely manner to mitigate further damage.

Fostering agility involves sensing and responding quickly and effectively to turbulence in a competitive environment.⁴¹ Due to uncertainty and rapid change, agility enables leaders to

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Uncertainty* refers to a future event that may be unsure but still one of finite and specific probability.

⁴⁰ Eben A. Weitzman, et al., “The PSDM Model: Integrating Problem Solving and Decision Making in Conflict Resolution,” in *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, ed. Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 197.

⁴¹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 105.

operate situationally. One of the most significant challenges in leadership is the failure to adapt personal skills or organizational structure. Fostering agility encompasses four skills: recognizing changes in the environment, taking prompt and effective action, addressing and removing obstacles that hinder progress, and viewing specific situations as opportunities for learning.

Creating alignment involves setting clear strategic priorities and aligning organizational resources and capabilities. According to Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, “Nothing is more powerful than creating alignment.”⁴² The key to creating alignment is establishing clear priorities that can be understood throughout the organization. A leader should employ six critical skills to enhance alignment: strategic thinking, ensuring a common understanding of goals, presenting a vision for the future, offering strategic drivers, maintaining personal integrity, and ensuring transparency.

Strategic Influencing

Leaders cannot achieve organizational success alone; they need the commitment of others within the organization. Barbara Dodson asserted, “The effectiveness of a leader’s ability to engage in strategic thinking and acting depends on the capacity to influence others.”⁴³ Belinda Davies, the director of Leadership Solutions, considers influence a nonnegotiable element of strategic leadership.⁴⁴ She advocates,

⁴² Ibid., 135.

⁴³ Dodson, “Transformational and Strategic Leadership,” 96.

⁴⁴ Belinda Davies has been a leadership consultant for nearly forty years. She specializes in strategic leadership and has provided leadership training internationally for the hotel industry.

The strategic leader understands that without the ability to influence in all directions throughout the organization, her long-term success in effecting strategic action will be limited. Real strategic leaders understand this long before they reach the top of the organization. If you examine the career history of the most successful strategic leaders, you will find that they have cultivated rich, healthy networks in all parts of the organization, as well as outside the organization, with key players. They understand that the key to real success is relationships—both professionally and personally.⁴⁵

Strategic influencing involves “engendering commitment to the organization’s strategic direction by inviting others into the strategic process, forging relationships inside and outside the organization, and using organizational culture and systems influence.”⁴⁶ Six categories are associated with strategic influencing: building trust, managing the political landscape, boundary spanning, involving others, connecting emotionally, and building and sustaining momentum.

Building trust is essential for influential strategic relationships. Three dimensions contribute to the development of trust. The first is contractual trust, which refers to trust in character—the mutual understanding that individuals will honor their promises. A level of personal consistency exists to meet both obligations and expectations. The second is competence trust, which relates to trust in capability. This sort of trust occurs when individuals respect each other’s skills and abilities, seek input, involve others, and allow people to make their own decisions. Competence trust also includes supporting individuals in learning new skills. The third

⁴⁵ Belinda Davies, “Strategic Influencing,” *Leadership Solutions: Executive Coaching and Leadership Development Specializing in Strategy Development and Implementation*, accessed February 21, 2025, <http://www.leadershipsolutions.co.za/strategic-influencing.html>.

⁴⁶ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 105.

dimension is communication trust, which pertains to trust of disclosure. This type of trust involves a willingness to share relevant information promptly and honestly.⁴⁷

Managing the political landscape helps maintain credibility and authenticity while addressing the diversity of dissenting opinions within and outside the organization. To manage effectively, a leader should examine personal motives, communicate agendas, shift expectations, focus on the end goal, demonstrate success in the mission, and model appropriate behavior.⁴⁸ In *Leading with Strategic Thinking*, Aaron Olson and Keith Simerson referred to this form of influence as “valuing and leveraging diversity.” They claimed that “leaders are less effective when they discount or fail to understand the views that do not align with their own.”⁴⁹

Boundary spanning refers to the ability to expand organizational boundaries. Boundary spanning encompasses six skills. The first is buffering, which fosters safety and cohesiveness while providing clarity. The second is reflecting, which promotes respect by sharing assumptions and perceptions. The third is connecting, which builds trust between groups. The fourth is mobilizing, which explores the group’s shared goals. The fifth is weaving, a method that creates interdependence by integrating the group’s differences. The sixth is transforming, or the organization’s capacity to reinvent methods to achieve its mission.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 163–68.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 169–73.

⁴⁹ Olson and Simerson, *Leading with Strategic Thinking*, 231.

⁵⁰ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 173–77.

Involving others is a process that helps generate commitment. A strategic leader fosters the representation of diverse perspectives in the overall strategy in three ways: first, it helps create a common understanding of the holistic picture; second, it develops consensus around the organization's direction; and third, it ensures that the input and perspectives of others are valued.⁵¹ In *Strategic Leadership and Systems Thinking*, Peter S. Delisi wrote that leaders build a wealth of influence when “they make people feel that they are being listened to and that their opinions matter.”⁵²

Connecting emotionally involves understanding what matters to others to inspire passionate commitment. Strategic leaders who consider their stakeholders' perspectives are better equipped “to frame their conversations in ways that let the people know they are valued. . . and in a better state to discuss the future.”⁵³ To engage emotionally, leaders should align with the organization's aspirations and enhance communication through captivating stories, metaphors, and imagery. The objective of using enlivened language is to connect the audience's logos and pathos, thereby enhancing a leader's ability to influence.

The final category is building and maintaining momentum. This process begins with a solid understanding of oneself and developing relationships with others, and it continues with sustaining momentum during strategic changes.⁵⁴ John Maxwell claimed, “If you have

⁵¹ Ibid, 163–68.

⁵² Peter S. Delisi, *Strategic Leadership and Systems Thinking* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 130.

⁵³ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 186–87.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 190.

momentum, it will solve 80 percent of your problems without you even knowing it.”⁵⁵ Building and sustaining momentum encompasses five skills: setting appropriate expectations, celebrating achievements, delivering consistent messages, organizational adaptability, and minimizing distractions.

⁵⁵ Chris Goede, “Momentum: 6 Ways to Leverage the Next Big Trend in Team Development,” Maxwell Leadership, accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.maxwell-leadership.com/blog/csg-momentum-team-development/>.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In 2005, Franklin Avenue was the largest congregation in Louisiana, boasting a membership of seven thousand.¹ Due to this growth, in June 2005, FABC recognized the need for expansion and purchased ninety acres of land off Michoud Boulevard adjacent to Six Flags in New Orleans East. Fred Luter and his team collaborated with Lifeway Architects to design plans for a six thousand-seat sanctuary and a multi-purpose building with educational and office spaces.²

On August 14, 2005, Luter eagerly presented the expansion plans to the congregation. The congregation could not contain their excitement for the future of their church, so they stood in unison and applauded the architectural plans.³ FABC was poised for growth. However, on August 29, 2005, as Luter noted, “A woman named [Hurricane] Katrina came and messed everything up.”⁴

¹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

² Shannon Baker, “Fred Luter Aims for Resurrection of Congregation in New Orleans,” *Baptist Press*, September 6, 20, <https://www.baptistpress.com/-resource-library/news/fred-luter-aims-for-resurrection-of-congregation-in-new-orleans/>.

³ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

⁴ H. B. Charles, “Fred J. Luter Jr. | Conversations with H. B. Charles,” Cutting It Straight, video of interview, October 14, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSHncv_MJmw.

The impact from Hurricane Katrina's on the Gulf Coast was costly and long-lasting, still considered the most expensive natural disaster to strike the United States.⁵ Steve Lemke and other Baptist leaders commemorated the events of Katrina in the Spring 2007 edition of the *Baptist Theology and Ministry Journal* by composing a series of articles about their firsthand experiences with the disaster. Lemke described the effects of Katrina on the residents of New Orleans thoroughly:

[Hurricane Katrina] wiped out houses and businesses anywhere near the Gulf Coast, and hurricane-force winds crashed tree limbs into power lines and houses, causing even greater devastation. New Orleans, which is 80 miles inland, suffered only modest damage from the Hurricane Katrina winds. . . And then the levees broke. In many ways, Katrina was more the greatest engineering disaster in American history than the greatest natural disaster. Water poured through the broken levees like a mud tsunami, demolishing hundreds of houses in its wake. The flood waters flowed into many residential areas in New Orleans, submerging many houses five to eight feet deep. . . This was not the kind of flood that receded in a day or two, but the waters continued to flood the houses and businesses for week. . . Each family went through a nightmare.⁶

As Lemke noted, the numerous levee failures flooded more than 80 percent of New Orleans, resulting in 1,392 deaths and \$201.3 billion in damages.⁷ In the days and months that followed, New Orleans's population decreased by 50 percent as residents evacuated to cities

⁵ Aaron Kassraie, "10 Worst Natural Disasters to Strike the US," *AARP*, January 17, 20, <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/history/info2021/-costliest-natural-disasters.html#list-TitleOne>.

⁶ Steve Lemke, "Editorial Introduction: Baptists Ministering in the Midst of Disaster," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 4 (April 2007): 4, https://nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/-journals/journals/JBTM_4-1_Spring_2007.pdf.

⁷ CNN Editorial Research, "Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts," *CNN*, August 14, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/weather/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts>; Kassraie, "10 Worst Natural Disasters."

across the country, including Fred Luter and members of Franklin Avenue.⁸ The combination of the damage and the population reduction caused many businesses and churches to close permanently.⁹

Nearly half of the churches in the Greater New Orleans Area became inoperative because of the storm. Yet, Luter's leadership ensured that Franklin Avenue continued functioning, albeit in different capacities.¹⁰ Five areas of Luter's strategic leadership were identified that enabled Franklin Avenue Baptist Church to thrive in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The five areas include Luter's initial response, the development of satellite campuses, the establishment of a home base, the implementation of Operation Back Home, and the providential homecoming. The strategic leadership areas were analyzed using the Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie Instrument to determine how Luter implemented strategic leadership. This chapter presents the findings related

⁸ CNN Editorial Research, "Hurricane Katrina Statistics Facts."

⁹ On August 29, 2006, Bill Day, former Associate Professor of Evangelism and Church Health at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, presented his preliminary findings regarding the impact of Hurricane Katrina on church closures in New Orleans. In "The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Viability of Churches in the Greater New Orleans Area," Day attempted to determine which churches would close and which would survive. Day's research focused on the five parishes that represent the New Orleans metro area—Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany parishes. Not limited to Baptist churches, Day studied all area churches. Day found that only 905 of the 1,508 churches that existed before Katrina were functioning one year after the storm. Day wanted to use what he learned about churches that survived Katrina to help with future disasters. He reported that 40 percent of churches were not functional, and over 50 had closed permanently. The results left Day wondering, "Why did some churches survive and others did not?" For more information, see Gary D Meyers, "Study Finds Just 60 Percent of Churches 'Functioning' in New Orleans Area," *Vision Magazine*, Holiday 2006 ed., 17, https://www.nobts.edu/_resources/pdf-/Publications-/VisionHoliday06.pdf, 2006.

¹⁰ Meyers, "Study Finds 60 Percent."

to each of the five areas of strategic leadership within Luter's pastoral ministry from 2005 to 2008. The subsequent portion of the chapter provides a comprehensive analysis and narrative summary of the five areas of leadership, arranged in a chronological order of events.

Initial Response

Summary Analysis

This section outlines Luter's initial response to Hurricane Katrina. The timeline spans the week before and the two weeks after the displacement. During his initial response to Hurricane Katrina, Luter employed all three strategic leadership competencies. Due to the rapid nature of the event, the most prominent competency Luter demonstrated was *strategic acting*. The second most utilized competency was *strategic influencing*. However, because Luter could not conduct an accurate situational analysis until the second week after Katrina, *strategic thinking* was the least utilized competency. Tables 1 to 3 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the three competencies.

Table 1. Strategic Thinking for Initial Response

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential strength	Expressed ideals	Adjusted core beliefs	Advocating	Looked at the big picture
Potential weakness	Affirmed human dimension	Altered lifestyle	Illustrating	Looked for complex interactions
Potential threats	Clarified expectations		Inquiring	

Luter utilized all five categories of strategic thinking along with the thirteen associated skills. He implemented scanning by recognizing the early value of strengthening his people through personal contact. He employed visioning to express his ideals, affirm the human dimension, and clarify his expectations for revitalizing FABC through various communication channels. Lastly, Luter helped make common sense among his people by advocating for their needs as well as systemically connecting them to the big picture.

Table 2. Strategic Acting for Initial Response

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Consulted experts	Recognized environmental changes	Strategic thinking
Accounted for change	Fast and effective action	Ensured common understanding
Acted to establish order	Dealt and removed barriers	Presented vision of future
	Recognized opportunity for learning	Offered strategic drivers
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Luter utilized all three strategic acting categories. The most prominent was creating alignment, as Luter leveraged his influence to present a vision for the future and ensure that all

members and staff were aligned with it. Next, he fostered agility by responding to the volatile environment with quick decisions, eliminating barriers, and recognizing organizational changes. Finally, he engaged in decision making by consulting with his leadership team to account for variable change and establish a plan.

Table 3. Strategic Influencing for Initial Response

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Examined motives	Connected	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder's shoes	Set appropriate expectations
Requested input	Communicated personal agenda	Mobilized	Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Organizational adaptability
Involved others	Shifted expectation	Weaved	Valued input	Enlivened language	
Allowed others to make decisions	Maintained end goal				
Told the truth	Modeled appropriate behavior				

During the initial response, Luter relied on his influence by leveraging all six strategic influencing categories. His decisions regarding Franklin Avenue were embraced due to the trust he built with his members and staff. His ability to connect emotionally, having experienced

firsthand the conditions faced by his people, further solidified his role as the organization's leader and a beacon of hope.

Narrative of Events

On August 24, 2005, a tropical depression strengthened into Tropical Storm Katrina as it passed over the central Bahamas.¹¹ Meanwhile, approximately 950 miles northwest, New Orleans continued its routine activities. That same day, Fred Luter delivered a message during the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary chapel service. Little did he know that his message titled “The Other Side of Ministry,” based on God’s protection over King David in Ps. 34:19, would soon take on a profound and unexpected relevance.¹²

Throughout his sermon, he frequently reminded the attendees that “the storm will come, and [will come] when you least expect it.” Luter passionately articulated that no one is immune to the various “storms that will inevitably come our way.” Despite the challenging words, his message was rich in encouragement as he proclaimed the sovereign providence of God. Luter concluded with a heartfelt encouragement, “It is in the script! Hang in there, pastors, wives, brothers, and sisters. I have a feeling that everything will be alright because it is in the script.”¹³

¹¹ US Department of Commerce, “Hurricane Katrina—August 2005,” National Weather Service, September 7, 2022, <https://www.weather.gov/mob/katrina>.

¹² See appendix G: “Sermon 1: The Other Side of Christianity,” 201.

¹³ Ibid. Charles S. Kelly Jr., the former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisiana, shared during an informal meeting on August 4, 2024, that this sermon by Luter was a great source of encouragement for him and his fellow faculty members in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

On Saturday, August 27, daily routines were disrupted when New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin announced a state of emergency and ordered a voluntary evacuation as Hurricane Katrina intensified into a Category 3 storm.¹⁴ Despite the fear and uncertainty, the residents of New Orleans, including Fred Luter and his family, were no strangers to the challenges of hurricane season, which often included temporary evacuations. Fred and his wife Elizabeth's evacuation plan typically involved rotating between their two children, Chip and Kimberly. After evacuating to their son Chip's apartment in Texas earlier in the year, they traveled to their daughter Kimberly's apartment in Birmingham, Alabama. Their original plan was to stay for two days before returning home.¹⁵

However, on Monday, August 29, Luter's plan came to a halt as Hurricane Katrina unleashed eight to ten inches of rain on New Orleans, ultimately resulting in the failure of the levee systems by August 30.¹⁶ As Luter watched the scenes unfold on national news from his daughter's apartment, he felt trapped in a nightmare. Luter recounted, "I was sipping tea, staring angrily at the TV. I was mad at the mayor, the governor, and the president. I was even angry and upset with God."¹⁷

¹⁴ David Johnson, "Hurricane Katrina August 23–31, 2005," *Department of Commerce*, June 2006, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.weather.gov/media/publications/assessments/Katrina.pdf>.

¹⁵ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

¹⁶ Johnson, "Hurricane Katrina August 23–31."

¹⁷ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

Luter was angry because 80 percent of the city he loved had flooded, yet Bourbon Street remained unaffected. Luter lamented, “Here’s a place with satanic churches, where people worshipped voodoo and all that, and yet it was never touched by the flood of the hurricanes. I said to God, ‘time out!’ It didn’t make sense, and for the first time in my life, my faith was literally shaken.” This moment of doubt and questioning marked a significant turning point in Luter’s faith journey. Luter added, “This is America. We can go to the moon, yet we cannot protect a city like New Orleans from a hurricane.”¹⁸

To exacerbate the situation, the storm caused widespread outages in the mobile network, making contact impossible for displaced family members, parishioners, and staff. By the first week of September, the culmination of these factors led Luter to a low point in his faith. He admitted that he stopped praying for nearly a week until his wife, Elizabeth, encouraged him to listen to his own sermons and trust in God.¹⁹ Elizabeth reminded Fred of his recent sermon from August 24, when he declared, “Storms are tough; trials and tribulations are part of life. But in the midst of the storm, we must hold on to what we believe.”²⁰ Luter identified this self-reflection as the moment he committed wholeheartedly to returning to rebuild. Over the next few days, he began preparing a sermon to remind people, “When the storms show up, so will the Savior.”²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Karen L. Willoughby, “Franklin Avenue: Pre- and Post-Katrina,” *Baptist Press*, April 7, 2008, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/-franklin-avenue-pre-and-post-katrina/>.

²⁰ See appendix G: “Sermon 1: The Other Side of Christianity,” 201.

²¹ The sermon Luter prepared was “What to Do When the Storm Comes.” See appendix G: “Sermon 2: What to Do When the Storm Comes,” 209.

These heart-wrenching, intimate moments in Luter's life revealed his personal disappointments and frustrations; they did more than test his faith. They enabled him to experience the emotions of his people, thereby enhancing his ability to influence his congregation by connecting with them on an emotional level. Luter realized that if he could not trust God to help them return to New Orleans, neither could his congregation. From that point on, he understood the necessity to press forward and be a voice of encouragement for his people.²²

On September 6, just nine days after Luter witnessed the horrifying scenes unfold from his daughter's Birmingham apartment, he honored a prior commitment to speak at the chapel service for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. During the service, Luter broke down in tears upon seeing his extended family and many parishioners for the first time since evacuating New Orleans. He took this opportunity to express his concerns for his missing members and conveyed gratitude for God's provisions.

Luter's message was titled "What to Do When the Storm Comes." He focused on Mark 4:35–41, where Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee and delivered the disciples. Luter emotionally connected with the audience by reflecting on his personal struggles and encouraging them, including many of his members, to release their fears and trust in God. His emotional connection with the audience was palpable, as he shared his plans to travel to cities across the country to locate and minister to them. Throughout his sermon, Luter aimed to connect the people's physical challenges with divine comfort. He urged them, as Christians, to have faith in

²² Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

the promise, presence, and power of Jesus, even when facing life's most challenging storms.

Luter concluded his address with the lesson he learned from his recent struggles: "Never forget, when your storms show up, so will your Savior!"²³

Before returning to Birmingham, Luter built trust by keeping his promise and visiting the convention center and Reunion Arena in Dallas to find some of his displaced members. While there, he reminded them that they were loved. During the visit, he reinforced his words of affirmation by distributing monetary donations he had received the previous week from First Baptist Church in Lavaca, AR.²⁴ Upon scanning the situation and noticing that the displaced members were overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty, he offered them hope by sharing his vision of returning to and rebuilding Franklin Avenue.

In the coming days, Luter worked diligently and managed to contact around one hundred of his members.²⁵ However, he recognized that such a large-scale endeavor and plans for a successful return would require teamwork, so he promptly formed a leadership team to assist

²³ See appendix G: "Sermon 2: What to Do When the Storm Comes," 209.

²⁴ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025. On August 31, 2005, Luter spoke during a mid-week service at First Baptist Church in Lavaca, Arkansas. He did not recall the content of his message. He admitted to crying profusely while people ministered to him. The church generously bought Luter a suit and collected a benevolence offering on his behalf.

²⁵ Lauri Arnold, "Embrace Faith, Turn from fear, New Orleans Pastor Exhorts," *Baptist Press*, September 7, 2005, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/embrace-faith-turn-from-fear-new-orleans-pastor-exhorts/>.

with the planning. His initial leadership team included his office manager, Georgia Jimerson, and church administrator, Vincent Enzinga.²⁶ Luter and his team arranged weekly phone meetings.

On September 10, the leadership team identified the most critical issue threatening FABC: the inability to communicate with evacuated members.²⁷ Luter and his team concluded that, given the cell network outages, the best way to establish communication was to use their website as the primary information channel. The only challenge was that Luter could not locate Gary Mack, who had assisted with their communications.²⁸

Unfortunately, on September 12, Luter and his team's plans were disrupted when he assessed the damage in person for the first time. Bobby Welch, who was then president of the SBC, arranged for a National Guard helicopter to pick them up at Williams Boulevard Baptist Church in Kenner, Louisiana, so that they could survey the damage.²⁹ Luter remarked, "I looked down and recognized the church because it had a big red metal roof. I saw all the water surrounding it, and I just lost it. I couldn't believe something like that could happen."³⁰ Upon

²⁶ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

²⁷ In an interview with *The Ledger* during this time, Luter lamented, "That's one of the toughest things. . . . having no idea where our members are located." Adelle M. Banks and Suleman Din, "Churches, Flocks Gone," *The Ledger*, September 10, 2005, 2025. <https://www.theledger.com/story/news/2005/09/10/churches-flocks-gone/26172915007/>.

²⁸ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

²⁹ Ibid. Bobby Welch arranged the helicopter for Fred Luter and David Hankins, who was then the Executive Director of the Louisiana State Convention. Luter built a relationship with Welch while they served together at the SBC, where Luter held the position of Second Vice President.

³⁰ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

seeing the place where he had served for nineteen years, submerged under nine feet of water, Fred Luter wiped his eyes and resolved to return to New Orleans to rebuild Franklin Avenue. He declared emphatically from the helicopter, “We’re gonna rebuild. We’re gonna rebuild.”³¹

Luter understood that any chance of rebuilding would require more than words; it would take hope and vision. After concluding his helicopter tour to assess the damage, he aimed to provide a symbol of hope for the city. Consequently, Luter planted a Christian flag on Poydras Street near the Mercedes Superdome in downtown New Orleans to demonstrate his commitment to the city and Franklin Avenue. Once again, Luter proclaimed, “We’re coming back.”³²

Motivated to restore his church, Luter traveled back to Birmingham, fully aware that his original plan required adjustments due to the extensive flood damage. This damage necessitated that his team develop a more comprehensive restoration strategy. Luter told his team, “Franklin Avenue has been a beacon of light and hope. If there is any chance the neighborhood would come back, Franklin Avenue would have to come back.”³³ In the initial response, Luter’s

³¹ Norm Miller, “LifeWay Trustee Affected by Katrina,” *Facts & Trends*, November 2005, https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2005_11.pdf.

³² David Hankins, “Katrina: A Life Changing Storm,” *Baptist Message: News Journal for Louisiana Baptists*, August 27, 2015, 130th ed., sec. 18, <https://baptistmessage.com/wpcontent/uploads/2015/03/August-27-issue.pdf>.

³³ Fred Luter Jr., “After Katrina: What God Brought out of Chaos,” *Baptist Message: News Journal for Louisiana Baptists*, August 27, 2015, 130 ed., sec. 18, <https://baptistmessage.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/August-27-issue.pdf>.

commitment to return, his decisive action, and his ability to reframe his mindset, adapt situationally, and seek input from others established the foundation for the rebuilding process.

Satellite Campuses

Summary Analysis

This section outlines Luter's establishment of three satellite campuses in response to the national displacement of FABC's members following evacuations caused by Hurricane Katrina. The campuses included FBC Houston, Texas; Istrouma Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and FBC New Orleans, Louisiana. Luter applied all three strategic leadership competencies while establishing these satellite campuses. From his initial response, he demonstrated an increased use of each strategic competency, with the most significant increase noted in strategic thinking. The most prominent competency he exhibited was strategic acting. Tables 4 through 6 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the three competencies.

Table 4. Strategic Thinking for Satellite Campuses

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential weakness	Expressed ideals and Values	Adjusted core beliefs	Framing	Looked for patterns
Potential opportunity	Affirmed human dimension	Transcended barriers	Advocating	Looked at big picture
	Contextualized story	Altered lifestyle	Illustrating	Looked at complex interactions

Table 4. Continued

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
	Clarified expectations		Inquiring	Hypothesized key relationships
	Described change drivers			Validated understanding

Luter employed strategic thinking, with visioning being the most commonly used category to align the satellite campuses toward a shared goal. He utilized systemic thinking to identify factors that could evolve into significant barriers for Franklin Avenue. The third most prominent category of strategic thinking that Luter applied was making common sense, as he helped members understand their challenges and opportunities.

Table 5. Strategic Acting for Satellite Campuses

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Consulted experts	Recognized environment changes	Strategic thinking
Accounted for change	Fast and effective action	Ensured common understanding
Consistent decisions	Dealt and removed barriers	Presented vision of future

Table 5. Continued

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Acted quickly to limit damage	Recognized opportunity for learning	Offered strategic drivers
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Luter utilized all categories of strategic acting. The most prominent was creating alignment, as he established clear strategic priorities to foster cohesion among his dispersed members. The second most applied category was decision making, since Luter acted decisively to minimize damage in the face of uncertainty. Lastly, he fostered agility by recognizing that the prolonged nature of the crisis called for a temporary change in meeting location for dispersed members.

Table 6. Strategic Influencing for Satellite Campuses

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Examined personal motives	Buffered	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder's shoes	Set appropriate expectations

Table 6. Continued

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Respected others skills	Shifted expectation	Connected	Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Sent consistent messages
Request input	Maintained end goal	Mobilized	Valued input	Enlivened language	Organizational adaptability
Involved others	Modeled appropriate behavior	Transformed			Prevented distractions
Allowed others to make decisions					
Supported others decisions					
Told truth					
Gave Feedback					

While establishing satellite campuses, Luter utilized strategic influencing. Once he recognized the severity of the crisis facing Franklin Avenue, he managed the political landscape by reinforcing his personal commitment to rebuilding and involving others in the decision making process. Next, Luter spanned the boundaries of his organization by leveraging his influence to forge partnerships with other churches. Finally, he outlined a clear course of action and set appropriate boundaries to ensure sustained momentum.

Narrative of Events

After assessing the storm damage, Luter and the leadership team began revising their strategy and brainstorming new ways to engage their displaced members, acknowledging that a swift return was unlikely. In the third week of September 2005, cellular networks were restored, enabling Luter to contact Gary Mack Sr., who had evacuated to Houston, Texas.

Luter and Mack began communicating frequently through phone and email regarding the significant damage and the need to establish contact with members nationwide. Gary Mack, a former IT specialist, developed a website that featured vital information, including an online registry for members, Luter's preaching schedule, and updates on the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans.³⁴

Once the website was functional, Mack provided Luter with a weekly updated list of their members' locations, enabling him to schedule his preaching engagements based on their new residences.³⁵ Mack noted that the online registry was "the most significant way Luter established and maintained connections with FABC members nationwide."³⁶ This digital platform became a lifeline, enabling Luter to travel across the country, connecting with his people in small towns and large cities.³⁷

³⁴ Gary Mack Sr., interview by researcher, Birmingham, February 4, 2025. The name of the website was www.nawlinsconnect.com. The website is decommissioned.

³⁵ To view an original copy of Luter's preaching schedule from the fall of 2005, See appendix F: "Franklin Avenue Publications," 197.

³⁶ Mack, interview.

³⁷ Ibid.

By the middle of the third week of September 2005, Luter and the leadership team recognized that the displacement of their members and the decline in financial support threatened FABC's sustainability. They decided to lay off all staff members except for the three on the leadership team. However, even the three on the leadership team received a substantial pay cut.

Regarding the difficult decision to lay off his staff, Luter lamented, "We were just trying to keep our heads above water, so we had to let go of all the staff, which was one of the most challenging letters I've ever written. I informed them that we had no other option because we didn't know when we would be able to return." He concluded the letter with the encouragement, "I trust and pray you'll find a job in whichever city you're located. Hopefully, when things get back on track, we can rehire some of you at Franklin."³⁸

During the same week that FABC's staff were devastated by the layoffs, an opportunity emerged for Luter and FABC. In discussions between Luter and Gary Mack, Mack informed Luter about the many evacuees from Franklin Avenue who had been displaced to Houston.³⁹ Mack asked for Luter's permission to organize the evacuees. Luter responded, "Yes, if you can find the people there, you have my permission to organize them. Let me know, and we will meet the needs of the people in Houston."⁴⁰

After discovering that many of their members were in Houston, Luter revised his plan and contacted Beth Moore, a longtime friend and member of FBC Houston, Texas, to inquire

³⁸ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

about using their facilities as a temporary place of worship.⁴¹ Through Moore, Luter arranged a meeting with FBC Houston and Gary Mack. During this meeting, FBC Houston not only offered their facilities but also provided additional support. Mack commented on their meeting, “Fred worked it out for me. FBC Houston brought me on staff, provided two offices, allowed me to hire a secretary, and gave me a \$50,000 budget. They also told me that if I could find other displaced staff members, I could hire them.”⁴²

On September 25, 2005, Franklin Avenue held its first service in the six hundred-seat chapel of FBC Houston. Much to Luter’s delight, the service was well attended and featured guests such as Beth Moore. During the service, Luter made several announcements, each met with a sense of hope and determination. First, he announced his appointment of Gary Mack as the campus pastor for their Houston satellite campus. Second, he announced his intention to travel to Houston to preach twice a month, specifically on the second and fourth Sundays. Third, he shared his plans to establish two additional satellite campuses in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, unless the data from the online membership registry indicated a need for more campuses.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid. Luter had established a relationship with Beth Moore seven years earlier when she requested to use Franklin Avenue to film a six-week series for her book *Breaking Free*.

⁴² Mack, interview.

⁴³ Ibid.

Luter's sermon to his congregation that morning was titled "Why?" The inspiration for the sermon came to him while he was flying over the floodwaters in New Orleans.⁴⁴ Recognizing that the past few weeks had caused immense pain and led some to question God, he aimed to help them make sense of their situation by answering the question he knew they had been asking: "Why?" Luter admitted to questioning "why?" almost daily for nearly a month.

He openly shared that he not only questioned why God would allow the city he loved to be flooded, but he also connected with them emotionally by admitting his disdain for the fact that God seemingly did not eliminate the sinful areas, such as "Bourbon Street, the strip clubs, the houses of prostitution, the Voodoo worshippers, or the satanic churches."⁴⁵ This admission of shared emotions helped Luter establish a deeper emotional connection with his congregation. He added, "I know I am not the only person who has questioned God since August 29, 2005."⁴⁶

Luter encouraged his congregation that while asking why is acceptable, he asserted that the answers to all their questions can be found in Deut. 8:1–6. Using the children of Israel as an example, Luter presented four reasons why God allows struggles: to humble, to test, to chasten, and to conform his people. He concluded by emphatically stating, "Oh, Franklin Avenue, I know you have been through a lot. It hasn't been easy. You've asked why! But your best days are not behind you; they are ahead of you."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁴⁵ See appendix G: "Sermon 3: Why?," 216.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 221.

Along with traveling to Houston, Luter's schedule remained busy for the rest of 2005 as he journeyed across the country to preach and connect with dispersed members of his congregation. During his travels, Luter sensed the discouragement among his people and prayed for an opportunity to reassure them about returning to New Orleans. His opportunity arose on September 30, when New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin invited him to serve on his seventeen-member panel known as the Bring Back New Orleans Commission.⁴⁸

Luter's appointment to the mayoral commission inspired him to demonstrate his commitment to return and rebuild. While he felt a civic duty to serve at the mayor's request, he expressed that his motivations were twofold. First, he wanted to help "bring back the city of New Orleans." However, according to Luter, the primary motivation was "to communicate to our members that we were certainly planning on coming back and building. So, it wasn't just the Bring Back New Orleans Commission. To me, it was the Bring Back Franklin Avenue Commission."⁴⁹

On October 23, 2005, Johnny Hunt invited Luter to preach at First Baptist Church in Woodstock, GA. As Luter scanned the room, he noticed that many attendees were his dispersed members, so he asked them to "stand up."⁵⁰ Luter praised Hunt's hospitality for organizing a

⁴⁸ Gary Rivlin, "New Orleans Forms a Panel on Renewal," *New York Times*, October 1, 2005, sec. A, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/01/us/nationalspecial/new-orleans-forms-a-panel-on-renewal.html>. The commission served as an advisory panel for the mayor. The commission played a central role in helping the mayor address obstacles such as spending federal grants, addressing the economy, rebuilding neighborhoods, and education. Luter's specific role revolved around addressing education needs in the city.

⁴⁹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁵⁰ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

meal in one of their fellowship halls, which allowed everyone to “hug, cry, catch up, and find out where more people were located.”⁵¹

Luter noted that these post-service gatherings took place wherever he traveled and were vital for helping people feel connected. During his sermons, he encouraged his congregation from Franklin Avenue to “hang around for another five or ten minutes after the service.”⁵² At these meetings, Luter intentionally shared his vision for rebuilding and assessed people’s interest in returning. He remarked that these intentional visits were “very pivotal to our long-term progress.”⁵³

In the fall of 2005, Luter’s commitment to rebuilding Franklin Avenue faced a challenge when one of the churches where he preached offered him their vacant senior pastor position. This role was appealing because it was located near his daughter, away from the threat of hurricanes, and would reduce vocational stress for Fred and Elizabeth. Luter’s wife, Elizabeth, deeply distressed by their loss, expressed her desire for him to accept the position so they could start anew. However, Luter made her a promise. He said, “Just give me three years. Let’s go back for three years and see how it goes.” He assured her he would be willing to “move anywhere in America she wanted to go.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

Luter decided he could not take the easy way out because of his love for Franklin Avenue. In his words,

This church provided me with an opportunity. I was a street preacher preaching on street corners in New Orleans and had never pastored before this congregation. They gave me a chance to be their pastor. They didn't know that their church would grow and boom. They gave me an opportunity, and I loved them; they loved me. Even with other offers, I could not leave them. I was committed to returning to rebuild.⁵⁵

By the end of 2005, the online membership registry confirmed that most FABC members resided in Houston, Texas; Baton Rouge, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Based on this registration data, Luter and his leadership team decided to establish only three satellite campuses in these cities. Luter's decision faced disapproval as some urged him to plant churches in other locations, such as Memphis or Atlanta. While Luter understood their disappointment, he explained the challenges of planting churches in every city where members had evacuated.

Luter encouraged members to join local churches in their area, who were outside commuting distance from a satellite campus. Once they became members of a local church, he requested the new pastor's contact information in hopes of "establishing a relationship with the pastor and, if he [the new pastor] permitted, coming to preach in those areas."⁵⁶ Luter was pragmatic and recognized that appropriate boundaries were essential to rebuild FABC in New Orleans. Luter remarked, "We just could not spread ourselves too thin and start churches in all

⁵⁵ Fred Luter Jr., "Implementing Biblical Principles for Effective Church Life in New Orleans from an African American Context," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 18, no. 2 (2021): 209–18, <https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/journals/journals/jbtlm-18b-fall-2021.pdf>. Luter reflected on the impact of his sacrificial commitment to remain at FABC and suggested that his early commitment was vital to solidifying his leadership role and influence among the people.

⁵⁶ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

those cities. I couldn't do it."⁵⁷ After the leadership team decided on the locations for the satellite campuses, Luter began reaching out to pastors in those areas.

Luter contacted David Crosby, then senior pastor of FBC New Orleans. Luter and Crosby already had a strong relationship through their collaborative efforts on various community boards, and ministries within the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans. Since floodwaters did not directly impact FBC New Orleans, Luter formally requested to use it as their primary satellite campus.⁵⁸ Despite facing substantial challenges with his congregation, Crosby generously welcomed Pastor Luter and Franklin Avenue to utilize their facilities, including office space, once they reopened in January 2006. Upon reopening, the plan was for Franklin Avenue to meet on the first and third Sundays at 7:30 a.m.

After the arrangements were finalized in New Orleans, Luter leveraged a connection with Istrouma Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to secure their facilities for a third satellite campus. He planned to travel to Baton Rouge on the first and third Sundays after the service in New Orleans and conduct a service with members in Baton Rouge at 1:00 p.m.

In January 2006, Luter took on his responsibilities as a circuit rider, traveling from Birmingham while pastoring one church that spanned three cities. By February, he reported

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ David Crosby, interview by researcher, January 31, 2025. While FBC New Orleans did not have flood damage, they did suffer \$3 million in damages from the Hurricane, including their roof, walls, carpet, and pews. Crosby noted they had to replace the entire building exterior, except for the brick. Due to the widespread power outages, FBC New Orleans did not have the power restored at their facilities until January 2006. Their phone lines and internet were not restored until the summer of 2006.

having traveled over nine thousand miles in his Jeep Cherokee.⁵⁹ This distance included trips to the satellite campuses and weekly visits to New Orleans to oversee the disaster relief teams' efforts to gut and clean Franklin Avenue's facilities.⁶⁰ Luter's extensive travel and busy schedule affected his physical and emotional health. Nevertheless, he noted that his tireless efforts "caused his relationship with his members to triple when they saw the sacrifices I was willing to make to meet with them and care for their needs."⁶¹

Luter was not alone in grappling with his well-being. In February 2006, during a church service at the FBC New Orleans campus, Luter observed the harmful effects of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath on his congregation. Concerned for their welfare, he took a moment at the start of his message to inquire, "How are you dealing with post-Katrina syndrome? How has it affected your relationship with your spouse? How has this thing affected your relationship with your children?"⁶²

⁵⁹ Shannon Baker, "Katrina Calls Fred Luter to 'One Church in 3 Cities,'" *Baptist Press*, February 21, 2006, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/katrina-calls--fred-luter-to-one-church-in-3-cities/>.

⁶⁰ "Gutting" and "muck out" are terms used in disaster relief to remove mud, silt, debris, and damaged materials left by a storm. It also involves sanitizing mildew and mold damage to enable safe entry into the facility. For more information see <https://www.allhandsandhearts.org/program-work/mucking-and-gutting/>.

⁶¹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

⁶² *Post-Katrina Syndrome* refers to the "long-term mental health effects of Hurricane Katrina, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety." In 2011, McLaughlin et al. published results from studying post-Katrina survivors who suffered displacement, difficulty obtaining housing and employment, lack of access to basic needs, community disruption, and dissolution of support networks. The findings suggested that "the majority of adults who developed estimated PTSD after Hurricane Katrina did not recover within

Luter tried to support his congregation in dealing with post-Katrina syndrome, but the people often concealed their mental and emotional pain in public, particularly during worship services. While Luter endeavored to meet their needs during visits to the satellite campuses, he observed that most of his pastoral care took place late at night or in the early morning hours. He received letters, emails, and calls from members struggling to cope with the devastation.⁶³

In February 2006, the political climate in New Orleans was volatile. Residents quickly lost trust in their elected officials due to mismanagement of federal funds and insufficient communication.⁶⁴ Luter perceived the chaotic political landscape as a serious threat to the city and the church's rebuilding efforts. On February 2, 2006, Luter and Crosby stood on the steps of the closed Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, joined by dozens of ecumenical leaders, to hold a press conference urging city leaders to unite.⁶⁵

In their opening statement, Luter and Crosby insisted, "The New Orleans we knew and loved before Katrina will never return. We are now called to build a new New Orleans on the old

18–27 months." To view detailed statistics, see: Katie A. McLaughlin et al., "Recovery from PTSD Following Hurricane Katrina," *Depression and Anxiety* 28, no. 6 (2011): 439–46, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/da.20790>; Michele Norris, "Pastor Takes Faith on the Road for Scattered Flock," *Maine Public*, February 28, 2006, accessed March 9, 2025, <https://www.maine-public.org/2006-02-28/pastor-takes-faith-on-the-road-for-scattered-flock>.

⁶³ Norris, "Pastor Takes Faith On."

⁶⁴ Crosby, interview.

⁶⁵ Joe McKeever, "Who's under Stress? I Said, WHO'S UNDER STRESS," weblog, *Joe McKeever*, February 4, 2006, <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/whos-under-stress-i-said-whos-under-stress/>.

ruins. Distrust and suspicion must not prevent us from participating at the planning table.”⁶⁶

They urged officials to “pay close attention to the recommendations of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission.”⁶⁷

Luter and Crosby addressed the volatility by urging city officials to remove from their council individuals who engage in disrespectful and slanderous behavior. They called upon elected officials to hold themselves accountable. They requested that they “avoid divisive or self-serving words and actions,” “embrace a wholesome vision that unites us with justice and equality for all,” “eliminate political posturing,” “speak the truth,” and “seek the common good.”⁶⁸ Luter hoped this stance would redirect leaders who, in his words, “had gotten off target.”⁶⁹

While Luter traveled across the country preaching and addressing the threats to FABC’s return, the Houston Campus was the most active in meeting the daily needs of its members, thanks to having a full-time campus pastor. During the week, Gary Mack kept Luter informed about the physiological needs of the dispersed members in Houston. Mack shared that “most of the members lacked permanent shelter, and those who did have shelter slept on the floor in sleeping bags.”⁷⁰ Once Luter learned of the conditions, he instructed Mack to find ways to address these essential needs.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁷⁰ Mack, interview.

Luter assisted by contacting local stores in Houston for support and referred them to Gary Mack. Mack began receiving calls from businesses throughout the Houston area and secured truckloads of furniture.⁷¹ FBC Houston supported their humanitarian efforts and generously provided a warehouse for storing and distributing items during the week. Under Mack's daily supervision of warehouse operations, items such as furniture, clothing, and food were distributed "to help members get back on their feet quicker."⁷²

Due to the challenges posed by three campuses scattered across the country, Luter aimed to enhance communication by posting a monthly newsletter on the church's website.⁷³ The front of the newsletter featured directions to the membership registration link and the church's mission, prominently displaying the words "We're Coming Back!" Members received important news announcements on the second page, including rebuilding efforts, and death and wedding notices. The newsletter also contained a message from Pastor Luter, service times, and details on where to mail tithes and offerings. The monthly newsletter continued to be published until the campus renovations in New Orleans were completed in April 2008.

Luter attributed the monthly newsletter as a critical measure for unifying the dispersed congregation. He stated, "I updated them on certain developments in their lives, especially the

⁷¹ Ibid. Gary Mack stated that Luter's influence was essential for securing supplies. He noted, "Fred is so well known that corporations familiar with Fred and Franklin Avenue offered supplies because they knew my name and knew I was there helping people. I received calls from companies all over."

⁷² Mack, interview.

⁷³ To view a monthly newsletter template, see appendix F: "Franklin Avenue Publications," 193–94.

positives. I also provided updates on the city's progress." Furthermore, Luter noted that the monthly newsletters "provided focus and leadership to the church members."⁷⁴

In conjunction with the monthly newsletter, Luter regularly utilized national news coverage, employing the media as a communication channel to connect with audiences not located near the satellite campuses. While conducting interviews with various news sources across the country, Luter maintained a consistent message, informing his members of his intention to rebuild. The headlines frequently featured uplifting words such as "rebuild," "resurrect," and "embracing faith and turning from fear."⁷⁵

Luter's media use was intentional, as he viewed it as an "opportunity to reach the masses [with words of encouragement]."⁷⁶ He utilized the media to remind his followers of biblical truths. In the weeks after Hurricane Katrina, Luter proclaimed, "When the storms show up, so does the Savior."⁷⁷ On December 25, 2005, desiring to preach at his church on Christmas, Luter told the media, "In the midst of devastation and hopelessness, that's why Christ was born."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, August 16, 2023.

⁷⁵ To view news articles from this period, see Michael Mcleod, "Preacher Vows to Rebuild Church," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 25, 2005, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/2005/12/26/preacher-vows-to-rebuild-church/>; Norris, "Pastor Takes Faith on the Road for Scattered Flock"; "Fred Luter Aims for Resurrection of Congregation in New Orleans"; Arnold, "Embrace Faith, Turn from Fear, New Orleans Pastor Exhorts"; Banks and Din, "Churches, Flock Gone"; Baker, "Katrina Calls Fred Luter to 'One Church in 3 Cities.'"

⁷⁶ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁷⁷ Arnold, "Embrace Faith Pastor Exhorts."

⁷⁸ Mcleod, "Preacher Vows to Rebuild."

In establishing satellite campuses, Luter's willingness to seek input and involve others in the decision-making process enabled him to navigate the political landscape and expand the boundaries for FABC. By communicating consistent messages and affirming his people's needs, Luter continued to cultivate their trust in his ethos and vision.

Home Base

Summary Analysis

This section outlines Luter's establishment of a strategic home base at FBC New Orleans, prioritizing ministry and rebuilding initiatives in the New Orleans area. Luter's decision to focus on New Orleans had short-term and long-term effects on the satellite campuses in Houston, Texas, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In the short term, full-time campus pastors were assigned to each location, significantly reducing Luter's travel to these campuses. In the long term, the other satellite campuses evolved into autonomous congregations with Luter's support.

Luter employed all three strategic leadership competencies while establishing a home base for FABC at the FBC New Orleans. The most applied competency was strategic influencing. The trust people placed in Luter enabled him to garner support and persuade families to return to New Orleans. The other two competencies were also well represented during this phase. Tables 7 through 9 provide a detailed breakdown of the three competencies.

Table 7. Strategic Thinking for Home Base

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential strength	Expressed ideals and values	Adjusted core beliefs	Framing	Looked for patterns
Potential weakness	Affirmed human dimension	Altered lifestyle	Advocating	Looked at big picture
	Contextualized members to core identity		Illustrating	Looked at complex interactions
	Clarified expectations		Inquiring	Hypothesized key relationships
	Described change drivers			Validated understanding

Luter employed strategic thinking, using systems thinking and visioning as the most frequently utilized categories. He applied systemic thinking to identify patterns among displaced members who no longer intended to return to New Orleans. Visioning enabled Luter to clarify expectations and contextualize the importance of returning to New Orleans. Finally, Luter used common sense to frame the situation, helping members understand the adjustment process.

Table 8. Strategic Acting for Home Base

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Consulted experts	Recognized changes in environment	Strategic thinking
Accounted for change	Dealt and removed barriers	Ensured common understanding
Consistent decisions	Recognized opportunity for learning	Presented vision of future
Acted to establish order		Offered strategic drivers
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Luter utilized all three categories of strategic acting, with creating alignment as the most prominent. After identifying that establishing a home base would strengthen the church, he presented his vision for the future and offered strategic drivers to ensure missional success. During this strategic leadership area, Luter shifted from quick decisions to more methodical ones by planting autonomous churches. He and his team also took the opportunity at FBC New Orleans to learn new approaches to ministry.

Table 9. Strategic Influencing for Home Base

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Examined personal motives	Buffered	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder's shoes	Set appropriate expectations
Set reasonable boundaries	Communicated personal agenda	Mobilized	Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Searched out successes
Respected others skills	Shifted expectation	Transformed	Valued input	Enlivened language	Sent consistent messages
Requested input	Maintained end goal				Organizational adaptability
Involved others	Modeled appropriate behavior				Prevented distractions
Allowed others to make decisions					
Supported others progression					
Told the truth					

While establishing a home base, Luter employed all six categories of strategic influencing. The most frequently used category was building trust. Luter aided Franklin Avenue in expanding the organization's boundaries by reinventing the church's ministry capacity to plant

two autonomous churches. Next, Luter ensured sustained momentum by minimizing distractions and adapting to situational needs. Finally, amid ongoing uncertainty, Luter maintained the end goal of rebuilding.

Narrative of Events

In April 2006, Luter and his wife, Elizabeth, moved from their daughter's apartment in Birmingham, Alabama, to an apartment in Kenner, Louisiana. This relocation brought Luter great joy, allowing him to focus more on his vision to rebuild Franklin Avenue and rejuvenate the congregation in New Orleans. However, as he traveled to the satellite campus over the next few months, Luter observed a troubling trend among his displaced members that jeopardized the efforts to return to New Orleans.

During his discussions with relocated members, Luter discovered that many did not plan to return to the New Orleans region. The motivations behind their decision to relocate permanently varied, with some individuals choosing this path due to emotional exhaustion from living in a high-risk hurricane zone, which involved the constant threat of evacuation. Others who initially intended to return reevaluated their plans after experiencing life in a new city featuring a more favorable housing market, better educational institutions, and lower crime rates.⁷⁹

Luter respected the members' decisions but recognized that a different course of action was necessary to ensure their vision for rebuilding FABC would not be in vain. Luter and his leadership team, with their strategic planning and careful consideration, explored their options

⁷⁹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

and concluded that the best way forward was to dedicate more time to the people returning to the city.⁸⁰ To implement this new approach, Luter acknowledged the need for a home base for Franklin Avenue in New Orleans. At Luter's request, David Crosby graciously allowed them to transition from biweekly to weekly worship services at FBC New Orleans.⁸¹

Due to the ongoing renovations at FBC New Orleans, including the restoration of phone and internet services, weekly services were scheduled to begin on August 7, 2006.⁸² Once the location and date for FABC's home base were confirmed, Luter and his team began identifying strengths and weaknesses in their home base efforts. They chose to enhance their plan by assisting Luter in managing the daily operations in New Orleans.

Luter contacted Gary Mack Sr. and formally invited him to rejoin the staff in New Orleans. This decision came quickly for Luter, as he was impressed by Mack's work ethic and ministry at the Houston campus. Luter remarked, "Gary was committed to doing whatever he could to help our folks get back on their feet. He proved that during his time in Houston, where he was instrumental in working with FBC Houston." Luter stated, "The brother [Mack] had a work ethic that I didn't even possess, and I needed someone like that on my team."⁸³ The intention was for Mack to replicate his Houston ministry in New Orleans.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Crosby, interview.

⁸² Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Luter was not the only one impressed by Gary Mack's ministry. When Luter invited him to rejoin the staff, the team at FBC Houston proposed assigning him to one of their new church plants in the Houston area.⁸⁵ Mack expressed gratitude for the offer extended by FBC Houston. Yet, he held a strong belief in Luter's vision. Mack articulated, "Fred and I were like two peas in a pod. We encouraged and supported one another. He had a clear plan for what he wanted to achieve, and genuinely believed in it, which he demonstrated to us. He believed the people would return, and indeed, he was correct."⁸⁶

Mack's trust in Luter reinforced his desire to return to New Orleans and contribute to the rebuilding efforts. Mack stated, "I believe in him. So, when he organized a team of people who had worked with him before, I was the only minister who wanted to come back."⁸⁷ Due to the housing shortage in New Orleans, Mack and his wife, Paulanner, could not return until October 2006.

Luter's decision was neither easy nor without consequences. By shifting his focus to New Orleans, he no longer made regular trips to the satellite campuses in Baton Rouge and Houston. His irregularity led to the decision to appoint permanent pastors for those campuses and to prepare them to become autonomous churches. Despite the challenges, Luter was unwavering in his commitment to concentrate primarily on New Orleans. He stated, "I was a hundred percent

⁸⁵ Mack, interview.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

committed to the church in New Orleans because that is where we got our start. And I just had a mandate from God that we had to reveal.”⁸⁸

In July 2006, Luter officially announced Franklin Avenue’s new plan to establish a home base at FBC New Orleans during a planning meeting for a prayer rally celebrating the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. This event was scheduled for Tuesday, August 29, 2006, at FBC New Orleans.⁸⁹ During the meeting, he confirmed that Franklin Avenue’s shift to weekly services would begin on Sunday, August 7, 2006. To facilitate this transition, he expressed his intention to appoint one of his former assistant pastors as the new pastor of the Houston campus.⁹⁰

Luter appointed Sam Young, who previously served as the associate pastor for seniors and new members before Hurricane Katrina. This decision stemmed from their longstanding relationship and Luter’s trust in Young. Sam Young was Luter’s first hire at Franklin Avenue.⁹¹ Young was officially installed as the senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in Houston on August 27, 2006.⁹²

⁸⁸ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁸⁹ Joe McKeever, “Making Plans, Getting Wet,” weblog, *Joe McKeever*, July 3, 2006, accessed 2025, <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

⁹² Sam Young eventually rejoined the staff at Franklin Avenue in New Orleans. However, Houston’s Franklin Avenue Baptist Church (HFABC) continues to thrive as a congregation in Houston, Texas. Although their locations are different, the lasting impact of Fred Luter is evident as their mission remains unchanged: “to spiritually impact our families,

Once Young was appointed as the pastor in Houston, Luter stopped making biweekly trips to the church. However, Luter supported the church by guiding it through a transitional process to ensure the success of the newly established congregation. The commitment of pastors, under Luter's guidance, was a reassuring sign for the future of their churches. Luter and his team trained lay leaders, established deacons, and created orders for worship services.⁹³

According to Luter, the goal was to set up the church to function the same way the mother church did before Katrina and follow those guidelines.⁹⁴ The leadership team then had the finance manager provide financial training to each pastor to help them learn how to manage their finances.⁹⁵ Luter invested considerable resources in planting the churches to ensure they were well prepared. Once Luter and his team confirmed that the people, pastors, and deacons were adequately trained, Luter "let them go."⁹⁶ In urgent situations, the pastors had direct access to Luter via his mobile number. Occasionally, Luter would fly to the Houston campus to support the staff and uplift the congregation.⁹⁷

neighborhoods, city, and state by Exalting the Savior, Equipping the Saints, and Evangelizing the Sinners." Their current pastor is Lachlin Verrett. For more information see <https://sites.google.com/hfabc.org/site1/home>.

⁹³ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Mack, interview.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025. Luter's original plan was to guest preach in Houston at least once every two months.

Due to their proximity, Luter continued to travel to the Baton Rouge campus twice a month, ultimately facilitating its transition to autonomy. The staff followed the procedures they had implemented with the Houston campus for training and program development. Due to scheduling conflicts with Istrouma Baptist Church, Luter's team assisted in relocating the congregation to Florida Boulevard Baptist Church, which had experienced a decline in membership because of demographic changes in the community.

Once their new location was established, they identified the best candidate to lead the congregation. Luter and his team selected two candidates: Manuel Pigeo and Titus White. Although both were qualified, they determined that Pigeo was the suitable choice. He had been a devoted member of Franklin Avenue and was well known within the congregation.

Before the displacement, Pigeo was actively involved in the church's marriage and education ministries. As a skilled teacher, he served as a Sunday School teacher and provided supply preaching. After being displaced to Baton Rouge, Pigeo maintained a strong presence in the Baton Rouge congregation. Mack commented on their decision: "Pastor Luter felt that Pigeo was a good fit. The people loved him, and he [Pigeo] loved them."⁹⁸ Like Pastor Young, Pigeo had direct access to Luter once the church completed the planting process.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Mack, interview.

⁹⁹ Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in Baton Rouge continues to gather for worship under the leadership of Pastor Manuel Pigeo. The church takes pride in its connection to its mother church in New Orleans. On April 15, 2015, the congregation voted to change its name to United Believers Baptist Church. Although their name has changed, their mission remains the same: "To spiritually impact our families, neighborhood, city, and state by exalting the Savior, equipping the body, and evangelizing sinners." For more information see <https://www.unitedbelieversbc.org/>.

Although considerable time and resources were devoted to planting their campus churches, Luter and his team shifted their focus to New Orleans. When the weekly services commenced on August 7, 2006, at their home base, FBC New Orleans, FABC welcomed over 1,200 attendees at the 7:30 a.m. service.¹⁰⁰ One Sunday morning, David Crosby arrived early for a worship service. He recalled having difficulty finding a parking space, as the lot accommodating 700 vehicles, along with the adjacent curbs and grassy areas, was full.

Over the next month, Luter and his team assessed the congregation's needs and determined that creating small group ministries would strengthen the congregation and foster community. On August 27, Luter announced to his congregation that they would launch Wednesday night Bible study classes at FBC New Orleans.¹⁰¹ Luter often seized opportunities to visit various small groups to connect with his members and, as Crosby noted, "give a strategic bump on the shoulder, hug, and cheer them on in their own work."¹⁰²

On August 29, 2006, FBC New Orleans hosted an ecumenical prayer rally to commemorate the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.¹⁰³ The uplifting service began with a

¹⁰⁰ Richard Vara, "Katrina Didn't Displace Evacuees' Faith," *Houston Chronicle*, accessed 2025, <https://www.chron.com/life/houston-belief/article/Katrina-didn-t-displace-evacuees-faith-1909892.php>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Crosby, interview.

¹⁰³ Joe McKeever, "What to Do on the First Anniversary," weblog, *Joe McKeever*, August 26, 2006, <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/what-to-do-on-the-first-anniversary/>. The prayer rally was a product of the Pastors Coalition, a network of two hundred ecumenical ministers established by Dennis Watson, who collaborated to rebuild the city.

performance by George Huff, an *American Idol* contestant. Pastors from local churches led prayer sessions throughout the service. Pastor Luter delivered a message that Joe McKeever described as an “incredible sermon that left people glowing the next day.”¹⁰⁴

Fred Luter’s sermon was titled “The Test Called Katrina.”¹⁰⁵ The uplifting message, based on Job 23:8–12, opened with questions about how individuals are to cope with the difficulties of life. Luter stated that Job 23 would guide those unsure how to respond when their faith is tested. He assured the attendees that tests are a regular part of life, emphasizing that the benefit of spiritual tests is that they strengthen one’s faith. Luter claimed, “I believe sometimes God allows us to go through things to see if we trust Him as we say we do.”¹⁰⁶

Throughout the sermon, he used vivid illustrations and lively mannerisms to convey three truths about spiritual tests. First, Luter addressed the significance of remembering that “God preapproves every test.” He added, “There is nothing that a believer goes through that catches God by surprise, but that doesn’t mean you and I may not be surprised.”¹⁰⁷ Luter connected emotionally by highlighting God’s omniscience. He reminded them that God knew “Katrina was

¹⁰⁴ Joe McKeever, “Wednesday’s Cup Runneth Over,” weblog, *Joe McKeever*, August 31, 2006, <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/Wednesdays-cup-runneth-over/>.

¹⁰⁵ See appendix G: “Sermon 5: The Test Called Katrina,” 227.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

going to hit New Orleans, and the levees would break.”¹⁰⁸ Luter concluded the first point by asking, “How will His [God’s] children respond to the test called Katrina?”¹⁰⁹

The second point of Luter’s sermon focused on God’s omnipresence. He encouraged the audience by assuring them that God is always present, “preparing His children to face the tests” of life. Lastly, he affirmed God’s omnipotence by reminding the people that “God preserves us through every test.” Luter challenged the attendees to reflect on why they were attending the service. He stated they were there because “God preserved them through it all.” He concluded his message by emphasizing, “I know you have to cry sometimes, but like Job, you can pass the test.”¹¹⁰

Over the next few years, the support provided by FBC New Orleans enabled Franklin Avenue to strengthen its congregation and expand its ministries. The two congregations maintained a harmonious relationship, collaborating on various ministry initiatives. Reflecting on their interactions, Crosby stated, “We joined forces to do men’s ministry, women’s ministry, health ministries, prayer groups, summer camps, and fellowships of all kinds.”¹¹¹

During this time, Luter and Crosby developed a close friendship rooted in their mutual appreciation and respect for one another. Their strong bond extended into their professional

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 233.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 234.

¹¹¹ David Crosby, “After Katrina, We Survived by Reaching Out to Each Other: David Crosby,” *NOLA.Com*, June 14, 2015, https://www.nola.com/opinions-/after-katrina-we-survived-by-reaching-out-to-each-other-david-crosby/article_5732834c-c707-5d92-ab89-173c2d7fb330.html.

lives, as they occasionally supported one another by preaching to each other's congregations. Luter credited David Crosby and the generosity of FBC New Orleans for providing them with a home base for two and a half years, which he believed was pivotal to the survival of Franklin Avenue.¹¹²

Additionally, Luter noted that members of the FBC New Orleans "helped change the trajectory of how we [FABC] do ministry." Before Katrina, FABC did not broadcast its worship services on online platforms. Guy Williams, an audiovisual team member at FBC New Orleans, taught FABC how to live stream its worship services. The incorporation of technology enabled FABC to expand its ministry reach and connect with a broader audience. Once FABC returned to their facilities, they established a permanent live stream ministry to communicate with their "Franklin Away members."¹¹³

While establishing a home base in New Orleans, Luter keenly observed changing patterns within his congregation and redefined his operational approach. He acted decisively in the face of opposition for the greater good of the church. His willingness to involve others in the process allowed him to restore a core team in New Orleans, which proved essential to FABC's revitalization.

¹¹² Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

¹¹³ Ibid. Luter stated, "If it were not for [FBC New Orleans] teaching us how to do livestreaming, there was no way I would have been connected to all those people across the country." The long-term impact of learning new approaches to ministry paid off in 2020 during COVID-19 because they already had live stream services established.

Operation Back Home

Summary Analysis

This section outlines Luter and his team's execution of Operation Back Home in the neighborhoods surrounding Franklin Avenue Baptist Church that began in the fall of 2006. The goal of Operation Back Home was to revitalize the community and help its members return home. Under the leadership of Gary Mack, the team provided on-site resources and assistance with home renovations. The implementation of this strategic initiative accelerated FABC's restoration efforts.

While implementing Operation Back Home, Luter demonstrated a high level of all three strategic leadership competencies. His most notable competency was strategic acting, as he employed all fourteen acting skills. Tables 10 through 12 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the three competencies.

Table 10. Strategic Thinking for Operation Back Home

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential strength	Expressed ideals and values	Adjusted core beliefs	Framing	Looked for patterns
Potential weakness	Affirmed human dimension	Transcended barriers	Advocating	Looked at big picture
Potential opportunity	Clarified expectations		Illustrating	Hypothesized key relationships

Table 10. Continued

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential threat	Described change drivers		Inquiring	Validated understanding

Luter applied each category of strategic thinking during the development and implementation of Operation Back Home. By scanning his people's evolving needs, Luter and his team determined that developing a home renovation assistance program would strengthen FABC's mission to rebuild by alleviating the housing threat facing his parishioners. He employed visioning and systems thinking to remain focused on the big picture while addressing the people's immediate concerns.

Table 11. Strategic Acting for Operation Back Home

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Consulted experts	Recognized environmental changes	Strategic thinking
Accounted for change	Fast and effective action	Ensured common understanding
Consistent decisions	Dealt and removed barriers	Presented vision of future
Acted quickly to limit damage	Recognized opportunity for learning	Offered strategic drivers

Table 11. Continued

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Luter utilized all three categories of strategic acting, with creating alignment being the most prominent. By establishing an on-site center in local neighborhoods, he employed a tent ministry as a strategic driver to foster trust and ensure a shared understanding. He also applied decision making and fostering agility. By recognizing the threats related to housing and transportation, Luter acted swiftly to eliminate barriers to his people's physical well-being.

Table 12. Strategic Influencing for Operation Back Home

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Communicated personal agenda	Mobilized	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder's shoes	Set appropriate expectation
Set reasonable boundaries	Shifted expectation	Weaved	Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Sent consistent messages
Respected others skills	Maintained end goal	Transformed	Valued input	Enlivened language	Organizational adaptability

Table 12. Continued

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Requested input	Modeled appropriate behavior				Prevented distractions
Involved others					
Allowed others to make decisions					
Supported other's progression					
Told the truth					

During Operation Back Home, Luter utilized all categories of strategic influence. His willingness to involve others and seek input allowed him to continue building trust among his peers. Next, Luter navigated the political landscape by adjusting his expectations to maintain the end goal. His and his team's ability to adapt to organizational volatility and establish appropriate boundaries ensured they sustained missional momentum. Finally, Luter's capacity to connect with people through pastoral care and preaching fostered consensus among the congregation.

Narrative of Events

After permanently relocating to New Orleans in April 2006, Luter anticipated returning to their facilities by the end of the year.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, the widespread damage throughout the city led to a shortage of reliable contractors, which shattered Luter's hopes.¹¹⁵ Luter explained, "Everybody was looking for contractors, plumbers, and electricians. So, you had to wait in line, especially if you wanted someone reputable because, unfortunately, there were many crooks out there, man, ripping people off." While partial work on the facility was an option, Luter and his team chose to complete everything at once, which is why Luter noted, "It took us two and a half years to get everything done because of the large facility."¹¹⁶

By the end of August 2006, Luter expressed frustration with the prolonged efforts and emerging obstacles that hindered progress.¹¹⁷ However, he viewed these challenges as opportunities to reassess their strategy for achieving their goals. Luter declared his intent to allocate more resources to assist members in navigating the reconstruction process. He conveyed his hope that "Franklin Avenue Baptist Church would serve as a catalyst for stimulating activity in the area and helping those whose lives were devastated by the storm." Luter stated, "From all

¹¹⁴ Rich Preheim, "Storm and Stress: Ministry after Katrina," *The Christian Century*, accessed March 13, 2025, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2006-06/storm-and-stress>.

¹¹⁵ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Vara, "Katrina Didn't Displace Evacuees."

the lessons we've learned from this situation [Hurricane Katrina], we'll definitely have a better ministry.”¹¹⁸

In October, Gary Mack returned to New Orleans and promptly began collaborating with Luter to develop the most effective strategy for ensuring a successful reintegration into their campus. Luter and his team concluded they needed to invest time and resources in revitalizing their neighborhoods. Luter stated, “If I want my church, I have to rebuild their homes.”¹¹⁹ This revised strategy led Luter and his team to launch Operation Back Home, directed by Gary Mack, in the late fall of 2006.¹²⁰

Luter's primary motivation for Operation Back Home stemmed from Jesus's compassion for helpless people, as expressed in Matt. 9:36: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Luter resonated with Jesus's compassionate response: “I felt the same way, man, folks were scattered.

¹¹⁸ Baker, “One Church in 3 Cities.”

¹¹⁹ A 2006 article describes the circumstances surrounding Luter and his team's discussions. There were 112,000 owner-occupied homes affected by Katrina that were located outside the official flood zones and lacked flood insurance. Many homeowners were informed they were not at risk of high water. The outcome was financial devastation. Because they lived in the impoverished Ninth Ward community, most Franklin Avenue members could not afford to renovate their homes. For more information regarding the insurance disputes among New Orleanians, see John Tibbetts, “After the Storm,” *Sea Grant* (S.C. Sea Grant Consortium, 2006), accessed 2025, <https://www.scseagrant.org/after-the-storm/>.

¹²⁰ Mack, interview. Operation Back Home was established to help members of Franklin Avenue in gutting, cleaning, and renovating their homes. The operation included an on-site benevolence ministry, located in a tent, in the local neighborhood. The program continued after Franklin Avenue returned to its campus on April 6, 2008. Once they returned, Operation Back Home shifted its focus from members to neighborhood residents.

And I just felt in my spirit that we needed to get back on track. Part of that was getting people back into their homes. That was the motive behind it all.”¹²¹

By early 2007, Operation Back Home was in full swing, and Mack reached out to various organizations to inform them of their efforts.¹²² As news of Franklin Avenue’s initiatives spread, it garnered nationwide support.¹²³ Mack remarked, “Once word got out that we had launched a ministry for Operation Back Home and that Fred was involved, we began receiving calls from churches eager to send teams and skilled laborers.”¹²⁴

The target group for this ministry included its most vulnerable members, specifically individuals aged sixty and older, whom the staff referred to as the “Age of Grace.” After identifying members within the target demographic, comprehensive inventories of their home renovation needs were submitted to Mack. Considering the disaster relief group’s time constraints, Mack enhanced efficiency by aligning the members’ renovation lists with the group’s skill sets to ensure they matched the appropriate home.

¹²¹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025.

¹²² Ibid. Mack worked with Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams from several states, Samaritan’s Purse, Salvation Army, and the Red Cross. They also applied for grants such as the Bush-Clinton Fund, which awarded \$35,000.

¹²³ The news about Franklin Avenue’s campaign spread to Hawaii. Hawaii Kai Church in Honolulu sent seven teams to participate in Operation Back Home. For more information, see Marilyn Stewart, “Katrina 2005–15: God’s Work during, after the Storm,” *Baptist Press*, August 27, 2015, accessed March 13, 2025, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/katrina-2005-15-gods-work-during-after-the-storm/>.

¹²⁴ Mack, interview.

Mack initially met the teams assigned to gut homes at the job site at 7:00 a.m. to deliver the necessary equipment, such as shovels, rakes, and wheelbarrows. He frequently traveled to four or five houses each day, supplying tools and checking on the teams. To ensure the effective utilization of skilled workers, such as electricians, plumbers, and roofers, they assigned gutting out duties exclusively to unskilled laborers or teams with limited time constraints.

Over time, the process became more efficient as companies provided improved equipment, including two trailers and pallets of display tools. In the morning, Mack towed each trailer to its designated location. Afterward, he returned with them and inspected every tool to ensure their functionality. Although Mack expressed disappointment about their inability to extend additional housing assistance to non-members during this period, he viewed Operation Back Home as a resounding success. He stated, “We got many of them [FABC members] into their homes again.”¹²⁵

In April 2007, Luter and his team were actively engaged in their rebuilding campaign when he noticed that his congregation was exhausted by challenges such as dealing with insurance companies and corrupt contractors. To uplift them, he delivered a pointed sermon to

¹²⁵ Ibid. Pastor Luter also praised Southern Baptist and Franklin Avenue’s disaster relief efforts. Luter stated, “After the storm, one of the things I was most proud about was the response by our Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams. I brag about our disaster relief efforts. There are not a lot of organizations that have been able to do what we were able to do successfully. The *Times-Picayune* ran an editorial at a time when the rebuilding process was going slowly. The editorial said that if Southern Baptists had been responsible for rebuilding the city, it would have been rebuilt by now. That made me so proud.” For more information, see Luter, “Katrina 2005–15: Test of Faith.”

remind them of God's sovereignty. The message was titled "It May Be over Our Heads, but It's under God's Feet," based on Hab. 3:17–19.¹²⁶

Luter began his sermon by discussing that Christians are not exempt from the troubles, trials, and tribulations of life. He helped people understand they were not alone by sharing that regardless of how faithful, dedicated, or educated a person may be, everyone will face disasters, disappointments, and depression at some point. However, throughout the sermon, Luter emphatically declared, "The good news is, we're going to get through this. This stuff may be over our heads, but it's under God's feet."¹²⁷

In his message, he compared the people's uncertainties to those of the prophet Habakkuk. Luter stated, "Habakkuk presents a picture of a man who trusts God yet is perplexed. A picture of a man who trusts God yet is confused. A picture of a man who trusts God yet is bewildered. A picture of a man who trusts God yet is troubled."¹²⁸ Luter shared that Habakkuk's frustration in not understanding mirrored his own frustration after Katrina. His vulnerability aimed to normalize feelings of frustration and help those who were frustrated realize, "This frustration may be over your head, but it's under God's feet."¹²⁹

During the sermon, Luter shared three lessons from the prophet Habakkuk. He declared, "Life is full of fears, frustrations, and faith." He urged the people to stand firm in their faith and

¹²⁶ See appendix G: "Sermon 6: It May Be over Our Head, but It's under God's Feet," 236.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 237.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 238.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

to “keep trusting that what is over our heads is under God’s feet.” He concluded by acknowledging the challenges faced by the people. He proclaimed, “I know it’s hard, but you can make it by faith. I know it has been a long time, but you can make it. It’s a process. Everything is not like you want it, but the reason we can make it is because the just shall live by faith, not luck.”¹³⁰

As Luter and his team worked to help their congregation navigate uncertainties, they observed that many members had lost their homes and vehicles due to the flood. This unfortunate situation made traveling across town to FBC New Orleans for Sunday morning worship impossible, as the city buses did not operate on Sundays. Unwilling to abandon the individuals in his local neighborhoods, Luter addressed the transportation issue by taking an Old Testament approach: setting up a tent for gatherings reminiscent of a tabernacle.¹³¹

The leadership team acquired a large tent from the local parish prison previously used for rodeos. They set it up in an empty parking lot rented from the city, across the street from their church facilities on Florida Boulevard.¹³² Throughout the week, the tent allowed Franklin Avenue to run an on-site benevolence ministry for the local neighborhoods.

Gary Mack, who led the assistance program, stated, “We would be there all day. On Saturday mornings, we fed people not only with the Word of God but also with food for their

¹³⁰ Ibid., 239.

¹³¹ A *tabernacle* refers to a portable sanctuary or tent used by Israel during the exodus until the conquest of Canaan. For more information about tabernacles, see Timothy Hyun, “Tabernacle,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹³² Mack, interview.

stomachs.” Once news spread about Luter and his team’s efforts, companies across Louisiana sponsored the program by sending semitrucks loaded with food items. After the morning services at FBC New Orleans, Luter and his staff would return to their neighborhood to hold services under the tent on Sunday afternoons.¹³³

On May 10, 2007, during a chapel service at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Luter joyfully announced that reconstruction begun that week at 2515 Franklin Ave. He anticipated being back in their facilities by fall 2007.¹³⁴ However, by August 29, 2007, the return date was postponed once more to the end of the year. Throughout the remainder of 2007, Luter and his team learned to navigate disappointments and setbacks.

To prevent his team and congregation from succumbing to discouragement, Luter delivered a timely message on coping with disappointment. His message was titled “When God Says No” and was based on 2 Cor. 12:2–10.¹³⁵ It focused on how Paul handled God’s denial of his request to remove his source of frustration.

Luter began by asserting that “the greatest decision in the world is to become a Christian.”¹³⁶ He supported his argument by referencing salvific hymns, such as “Amazing Grace,” to illustrate the blessing of God’s saving grace. He then transitioned to prayer, stating

¹³³ Ibid. The benevolence ministry and worship services took place at the tent on Florida Boulevard until their return to campus on April 6, 2008.

¹³⁴ Fred Luter Jr., “Taking Tests,” video of sermon, May 10, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf0Ip4K0jjM>.

¹³⁵ See appendix G: “Sermon 7: When God Says No,” 241.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

that “one of the primary privileges granted to believers is the privilege of prayer.”¹³⁷ Luter encouraged the audience to embrace prayer as their primary channel of communication with God while challenging them to consider their response “when God says no!”¹³⁸

Luter admitted to the attendees that learning how to respond when God says no was a lesson he learned firsthand, especially since Katrina. Based on 2 Cor. 12:2–10, Luter offered four biblical responses to disappointment gleaned from the apostle Paul. First, he discussed Paul’s restraint. Luter’s intention in highlighting the presence of restraint was to normalize obstacles among believers. He noted, “From the pulpit to the balcony, every last one of us deals with something and can relate.”¹³⁹

Second, Luter disclosed Paul’s request. The apostle implored God three times to remove his “thorn.”¹⁴⁰ At this point, Luter engaged the audience by calling out the names of selected attendees and referencing categories of everyday struggles. In a spirit of complete transparency, he connected with the audience by admitting his own struggles with God’s rejection of his requests after Hurricane Katrina.

Luter stated, “To be honest with you, I started having issues with God. I have such a relationship with God that I can talk to him about things that don’t happen, things that don’t make sense. Cynthia, I couldn’t understand how 80 percent of the city flooded after Hurricane

¹³⁷ Ibid., 244.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 245.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 12:8.

Katrina, yet Bourbon Street remained high and dry.”¹⁴¹ He admitted that he thought God’s denial of Paul’s request was unfair, suggesting, “God, he wasn’t asking to win the lottery or for a golden chariot with spinning wheels on the side. He just wanted his thorn removed.”¹⁴² Addressing the audience directly, Luter called out an attendee, saying, “Don’t tell me I am the only one who has struggled to hear no from God.”¹⁴³

Third, Luter referenced Paul’s response, which, according to 2 Cor. 12:9, stated, “God’s grace is sufficient, and His strength is perfected in weakness.” When God says no, Luter reassured the people that God is not denying but rather delaying his grace. Fourth, Luter explained God’s reason for allowing Paul to experience a thorn in the flesh. He discussed the passages, suggesting, “The reason God says ‘no’ is to prevent believers from becoming prideful and to teach them to depend on God’s strength rather than their own.”¹⁴⁴ He concludes by encouraging the church to “keep praying,” “keep singing,” “keep serving,” “keep teaching,” and “keep doing what God has called you to do.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to ongoing delays and assisting his church in overcoming discouragement, Luter endured the heartache of having a friend who succumbed to temptation under the immense

¹⁴¹ See appendix G: “Sermon 7: When God Says No,” 248.

¹⁴² Ibid., 249.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 251.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 252.

pressures of life. On September 6, he shared his grief during a chapel service at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with a poignant sermon titled “Don’t Let Sin Discredit You.”¹⁴⁶

Luter began his message by engaging the audience and addressing them by name. He posed a series of questions about dealing with disappointment, openly admitting his own struggles with it in recent months. He shared, “In the past month or so, it has happened to me with someone near and dear to me, who messed up in a very serious way, and it affected me unlike anything that has affected me as far as someone who’s messed up.”¹⁴⁷ Luter emphasized that the best way to cope with disappointments is to follow the guidelines outlined in 1 Pet. 5:8–11.

During the address, he urged his parishioners and staff to avoid jeopardizing their lives, families, or ministry. He warned them that believers face an active and formidable enemy known as the devil. He asserted that this enemy is malicious and will stop at nothing to destroy them. Nevertheless, Luter offered hope by revealing God’s threefold response to confronting the enemy. The three strategies for winning spiritual warfare are recognizing, resisting, and reminding the enemy.

The message concluded with a boxing ring analogy. Luter declared, “Remind the devil that this is a twelve-round bout. I know you got me in the first round. You got me in the second. But it ain’t over until God says it’s over. It’s a twelve-round bout. Yes, I fell in round one, but God was just using that to teach me about His grace and about his mercy.” In his final

¹⁴⁶ See appendix G: “Sermon 8: Don’t Let Sin Discredit You,” 253.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 254.

statements, Luter encouraged, “Somebody in this sanctuary, somebody in this chapel, needs to know they can get back up. Resist the devil because the bout isn’t finished.”¹⁴⁸

During the implementation of Operation Back Home, Luter and his team expanded the church’s boundaries by engaging external organizations in renovating the homes of their parishioners. By establishing an on-site ministry center in the local neighborhood, members of FABC strengthened their trust in Luter’s leadership. Once people witnessed Luter’s commitment to the local neighborhoods, more individuals returned due to their trust in him.

Providential Homecoming

Summary Analysis

This section describes FABC’s return to its campus on April 6, 2008, along with the weeks leading up to the inaugural service. In the weeks leading up to their return to the renovated campus, Luter and his team utilized various communication channels to promote the occasion. During this time, Luter encouraged his congregation to reflect on God’s faithfulness and the hospitality of FBC New Orleans. The celebratory homecoming service on April 6, 2008, included moments of intentional reflection and joyful expectation.

Luter utilized all three strategic leadership competencies during the providential homecoming. The most prominent competency he applied was strategic influencing, while he demonstrated less strategic thinking and acting skills compared to the first four leadership areas. Tables 13 through 15 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the three competencies.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Table 13. Strategic Thinking for Providential Homecoming

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
Potential strength	Expressed ideals and values		Framing	Looked at big picture
Potential opportunity	Affirmed human dimension		Advocating	Hypothesized key relationships
	Contextualized story		Illustrating	Validated understanding
	Clarified expectations			

Luter employed all three categories of strategic thinking, with visioning being the most frequently utilized category to align the satellite campuses toward a shared goal. He applied systemic thinking to identify factors that could evolve into significant barriers for Franklin Avenue. The third most prominent category of strategic thinking that Luter used was making common sense, as he helped members understand the challenges and opportunities they faced.

Table 14. Strategic Acting for Providential Homecoming

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
Consistent decisions	Recognized opportunity for learning	Strategic thinking
		Ensured common understanding

Table 14. Continued

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
		Presented vision of future
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Luter applied all three categories of strategic acting. The most prominent category was creating alignment. He leveraged his ethos by openly sharing his emotions during the homecoming service. Luter's willingness to dance in triumph before his congregation set a tone for FABC's ongoing missional progression. The other categories were decision making and fostering agility. Luter recognized that challenges presented opportunities for learning and declared his intention to continue Operation Back Home.

Table 15. Strategic Influencing for Providential Homecoming

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Examined personal motives	Reflected	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder's shoes	Set appropriate expectations
Respected others skills	Communicated personal agenda	Mobilized	Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Celebrated successes

Table 15. Continued

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Involved others	Shifted expectation	Transformed	Valued input	Enlivened language	Sent consistent messages
Allowed others to make decisions	Maintained end goal				Organizational adaptability
Supported others progression	Demonstrated missional success				Slowed down
Told the truth	Modeled appropriate behavior				

During Franklin Avenue's providential homecoming, Luter employed high levels of strategic influencing. For the first time during the rebuilding process, he encouraged the congregation to slow down and celebrate their success. He used enlivened language in his sermons to connect emotionally with the people. Moreover, Luter continued to foster trust by inviting others to share in decision making and ensuring that various groups felt included in the service.

Narrative of Events

After months of postponements, in March 2008, Luter received an official return date of April 6, 2008. His team quickly began promoting the homecoming service through their website, newsletter, and media outlets. On March 30, FABC held its final service at the FBC New

Orleans before returning to its facilities. Luther preached “The Church That Christ Builds.”¹⁴⁹ The sermon text was drawn from Matt. 16:13–20. His message provided an opportunity to proclaim that the enemy attempted to destroy their church but could not succeed because it was “the church that Christ builds.”¹⁵⁰

Throughout the sermon, Luther connected the text to the children’s story *The Three Little Pigs*. He pointed out that the big bad wolf succeeded in destroying the first two weaker homes but failed to demolish the third home, which was built on a solid foundation. He identified the adversary as Satan, who “did his best to blow down God’s houses, to blow down God’s congregation.”¹⁵¹

Amid the adversarial attacks, Luther assured the church that God had been faithful to them through the FBC New Orleans hospitality. He proclaimed, “The devil doesn’t like [FBC New Orleans] opening up their doors to a predominantly black congregation. He doesn’t like [FBC New Orleans] doing what they’ve done for us. . . the devil has done his best to blow down their church, to blow down their ministry, but this is the church that Christ built.”¹⁵²

For the church to remain steadfast amid chaos, it must build its foundation on Christ. Luther emphasized that Christ is the only true foundation for a thriving church. He concluded his message by praising Crosby’s efforts, exclaiming, “I love David Crosby. I love him like a

¹⁴⁹ See appendix G: “Sermon 9: The Church That Christ Builds,” 263.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 263.

brother. I appreciate all he has meant to me these past two years.”¹⁵³ Nonetheless, Luter declared that, like Franklin Avenue, FBC New Orleans would continue to succeed because it was built on Christ rather than on its leader. He stated, “If the church is going to stand, Jesus must be its foundation.”¹⁵⁴

On Sunday, April 6, 2008, FABC joyfully celebrated its inaugural worship service in the newly renovated facilities, having overcome the significant challenges posed by Hurricane Katrina. By 6:15 a.m., eager attendees had formed a line outside the worship center, extending along the sidewalks and around the building.¹⁵⁵ The 7:30 and 10:30 a.m. services were at full capacity, with over four thousand people in attendance.

The standing-room-only crowd filled the overflow rooms and sanctuary foyer, spilling onto the sidewalks. Attendees included past and current parishioners, denominational leaders, government officials, and visitors from across the country. To the crowd’s delight, Luter joyfully exclaimed from behind his oak pulpit, “So many people are here! I’m thankful the fire marshal didn’t show up.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ibid., 265.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ John L. Yeats, “The Feet of a Rejoicing Pastor,” *Baptist Press*, April 7, 2008, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/the-feet-of-a-rejoicing-pastor/>.

¹⁵⁶ Karen L. Willoughby, “In New Orleans, Joy Abounds as Congregation Returns Home,” *Baptist Press*, April 7, 2008, <https://www.baptistpress.com-/resource-library/news/in-new-orleans-joy-abounds-as-congregation-returns-home/>.

The services began with Pastor Luter exuberantly proclaiming, “Franklin Avenue! We’re back! We’re back, y’all! Welcome home!”¹⁵⁷ After Luter welcomed the congregation, Elizabeth Luter took the microphone and extended her welcome from the floor. She praised her husband for his resilience and commitment during her greeting, commending him for “staying the course in troubled times.”¹⁵⁸

Throughout both services, the congregation participated in the Lord’s Supper and enjoyed a performance by a one-hundred-member choir made up of displaced members, directed by Beverly Criddle and accompanied by a high-energy band. Bridget Bazile, a professional opera singer and former member, delivered a special musical performance. To highlight the importance of a Christian’s commitment to the church, a deacon publicly read the church covenant, a solemn agreement outlining the responsibilities and privileges of church membership—which was included in the bulletin.¹⁵⁹

Both services included intentional moments to celebrate, honor, and memorialize significant events in Franklin Avenue’s life from 2005 to 2008. During the first service, Crosby was introduced and invited to join Pastor Luter on stage. As Crosby approached, the attendees stood, applauding and expressing their appreciation for his hospitality in hosting their church for

¹⁵⁷ Joe McKeever, “We’re Back, Ya’ll,” weblog, *Joe McKeever*, April 6, 2008, <https://joemckeeper.com/wp/were-back-yall/>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ To view a copy of the classical Baptist Church Covenant originally published in 1833, see Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1973), 25–26.

over two years. Once on stage, Luter and Crosby embraced and shared a private conversation, which left them both in tears.¹⁶⁰

Crosby addressed the congregation, noting how the aftermath of Katrina helped both congregations expand beyond their boundaries. He stated, “God let everything get turned upside down so we could get some things straightened out in this city.” He added that in his thirty-six years of ministry, hosting Franklin Avenue “had been his church’s greatest privilege.”¹⁶¹ After he finished, he briefly exited through the side door to conduct services at FBC New Orleans.

The second service featured various speakers, including US Sen. Mary Landrieu and author Beth Moore. Landrieu praised Luter, stating, “I wanted to be here today to pay tribute to this pastor and his wonderful first lady. We thank this pastor for his faith in this city.”¹⁶² The congregation rejoiced when Moore announced that FABC would host her updated Bible study “Breaking Free.”

The service order also included various presentations. Several individuals presented the church with checks symbolizing significant monetary donations to celebrate their homecoming.¹⁶³ A tribute was given to honor the thirty members who passed away during the

¹⁶⁰ Willoughby, “Joy as Congregation Returns.”

¹⁶¹ McKeever, “We’re Back, Ya’ll.”

¹⁶² Willoughby, “Joy as Congregation Returns.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.

displacement period.¹⁶⁴ Following the tribute, a celebration ensued for approximately thirty new church members who joined that morning.¹⁶⁵

Luter's sermon was titled "From Disaster to Dancing," a reflection of the church's journey from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina to the joy of their homecoming.¹⁶⁶ The Scripture for the sermon was drawn from Hab. 1:2–4 and 3:17–19, which Luter referenced in his earlier sermon, "It May Be over Our Heads, but It's under God's Feet." However, unlike the previous sermon, this one did not focus on overcoming trials; instead, it celebrated the conclusion of a trial.

At the beginning of his sermon, Luter claimed, "This woman named Katrina has affected us all."¹⁶⁷ He engaged the audience by posing questions: "How many of you are living in another state? How many are living in another city and waiting for their recovery money? How many are still living in a FEMA trailer?"¹⁶⁸ Luter identified with the people's suffering, emphatically stating, "Oh yes, we've been affected!"

Despite enduring "damage, dysfunction, disappointment, disbelief, disgust, disconnect, disorder, and displacement for two and a half years," he encouraged the congregation to repeat

¹⁶⁴ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025. The members who died between August 29, 2005, and April 6, 2006, were not directly connected to Hurricane Katrina.

¹⁶⁵ Willoughby, "Joy as Congregation Returns."

¹⁶⁶ See appendix G: "Sermon 10: Disaster to Dancing," 267.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. A FEMA trailer is a temporary housing unit provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

joyfully, “Oh, but now! Oh, but now! We are back in our sanctuary.”¹⁶⁹ Luther proclaimed that everything was once again in its rightful place. He stated, “The preacher is back in the pulpit, musicians in the music pit, deacons in their seats, ushers at their posts, and Franklinites in their pews.”¹⁷⁰ He transitioned his introduction by comparing their experiences to those faced by the prophet Habakkuk.

According to Luther, the question of the hour was, “How does Habakkuk go from disaster to dancing?” He offered three answers based on Habakkuk’s example. First, he had to recognize that life is full of foes. He described it as having a “bull’s-eye on your chest.”¹⁷¹ “But,” Luther exclaimed, “your presence today tells us that giants can be defeated. The fact that we are in this sanctuary today assures me that God is for us, not against us!”¹⁷²

Second, Habakkuk had to recognize that life is full of failures to move from disaster to dancing. After listing the failures experienced by Habakkuk, Luther connected with the audience, stating, “My brothers and sisters, this sounds like us. If anyone knows failure, it is those of us from New Orleans.”¹⁷³ Luther continued, “FEMA failed us, the federal government failed us, the State of Louisiana failed us, the City of New Orleans failed us, the Corps of Engineers failed us,

¹⁶⁹ See appendix G: “Sermon 10: Disaster to Dancing,” 267.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 268.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 269.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

the levees failed us.” “But,” Luter emphasized, “in the midst of failure, you must place your faith in God, not in your circumstances.”¹⁷⁴

Third, Habakkuk had to recognize that life is full of favor for the child of God to move from disaster to dancing. To illustrate his point, Luter used the analogy of receiving tickets to an NBA Hornets game from a benefactor. He described being upgraded from upper-level to courtside tickets and noted that in his excitement over the upgrade, “my disaster was turned to dancing.”¹⁷⁵

To conclude his message, Luter reflected on God’s favor during the years they faced displacement and were forced to worship in other facilities. He invited everyone to celebrate with him, declaring, “You can sit down if you want to, but it’s been two and a half years, so dance, clap your hands and dance, lift up your voice and dance, give thanks to God, and dance.” Many participants from the congregation joined Luter in turning their disaster into dancing.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 269.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 270.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Currently, the secular and religious sectors are experiencing a leadership crisis.¹ In 2024, 33 percent of pastors reported that they considered quitting the ministry.² While this recent report offers some optimism regarding the ongoing destabilization of pastoral leaders, it also indicates the ongoing need to address high levels of burnout. John Adair has advocated for the enhancement of strategic leadership competencies as a solution to this ongoing crisis.³ Despite efforts to address strategic leadership over the past four decades, little research has explored the relationship between strategic leadership and the religious sector, particularly in Christian leadership.

The purpose of this research was to utilize Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie's conceptual framework to analyze Fred Luter Jr.'s strategic leadership at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church post-Katrina. The study examined five areas of Luter's strategic leadership: his initial response,

¹ Lerbinger, *The Crisis Manger*, xi.

² Barna Group, "New Data Shows Hopeful Increases in Pastors' Confidence & Satisfaction," Barna Group, accessed April 8, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/hopeful-increases-pastors/>. The destabilizing of pastoral leaders became a major concern between 2021 and 2022, when dramatic surges arose among pastors contemplating quitting vocation ministry. During this period, numbers rose from 29 to 42 percent. However, in 2024 that number declined to 33 percent.

³ Adair, *Effective Strategic Leadership*, 1.

the development of satellite campuses, the establishment of a home base, the implementation of Operation Back Home, and the providential homecoming. This chapter summarizes and interprets the results of the previous chapter.

Summary of Findings

Strategic leadership includes three competencies: thinking, acting, and influencing. Strategic thinking includes five categories: scanning, visioning, reframing, making common sense, and systems thinking. These five thinking categories are comprised of a possible twenty-one skill sets (table 16). Strategic acting includes three categories: decision making, fostering agility, and creating alignment. These three acting categories include a possible fourteen skill sets (table 17). Strategic influencing includes six categories: building trust, managing political landscape, boundary spanning, involving others, connecting emotionally, and building and sustaining momentum. These influencing categories are comprised of a possible thirty-four skillsets (table 18).

Fred Luter employed all three strategic competencies proposed by Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie across five areas of study from 2005 to 2008. However, throughout these events, Luter's application of each strategic competency varied, often adapting to situational needs. In fact, he consistently applied only two strategic categories across all five strategic leadership areas. Both categories derived from strategic influencing: involving others and connecting emotionally.

Strategic thinking ranked as the second most frequently employed competency, exhibiting significant fluctuations, particularly during the initial response and providential

homecoming. The competency with the highest percentage was strategic acting. Finally, Luter exhibited a plurality of strategic influencing skills across the five areas of study.

Strategic Thinking

Luter utilized all twenty-one strategic thinking skills situationally across the five leadership areas. However, as illustrated in table 16, only three thinking categories and six skills appeared in all five accounts: visioning, making common sense, and systems thinking.

Table 16. Strategic Thinking Summary

Scanning	Visioning	Reframing	Making common sense	Systems thinking
	Expressed ideals		Advocating	Looked at the big picture
	Affirmed human dimension		Illustrating	
	Clarified expectations			

Visioning

Among the three categories, visioning emerged as the predominant thinking category in each focus area. Visioning is the ability to see what the organization can and should become.⁴ From the initial response to the providential homecoming, Luter emphasized the importance of

⁴ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 75.

connecting with his members as a key method for fostering commitment and aligning people with the vision.

During the initial response, Luter and his FABC team identified the most pressing needs to achieve the long-term objective of rebuilding: to reestablish communication and reconnect with members. Luter traveled nationwide, visiting churches, community centers, and college campuses to facilitate these connections. His dedication to fostering these relationships led to the creation of a website as a communication medium; the establishment of three satellite campuses and the implementation of Operation Back Home, a program designed to provide support and resources to members who were displaced by the hurricane and were looking to return to their homes and communities.

Once FABC established its home base and began live streaming worship services at FBC New Orleans, Luter continued to engage with people nationwide by mentioning their names and locations during his sermons to foster a sense of connection with his dispersed members. Luter's efforts to connect with members were deliberate. For Luter, affirming the human dimension allowed him to express ideals and values while clarifying expectations.

Making Common Sense

Making common sense helps individuals within the organization better understand external and internal challenges.⁵ Luter recognized that achieving their goals required a shared understanding and vision for overcoming those challenges. To foster this shared understanding,

⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 85.

Luter employed all four skills: framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring. However, only advocating and illustrating were consistently present across the five areas of study.

Luter frequently employed both skills during his preaching. On September 6, 2005, he delivered a sermon titled “What to Do When the Storm Comes.”⁶ During this inaugural address following Katrina, Luter aimed to calm his congregation’s widespread fears and assure them that God would “show up to help.”⁷ On September 25, 2005, he delivered his sermon “Why.” The sermon was to assist the church in understanding their challenges by providing a biblical response to the question they had all been grappling with since Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on their lives: “Why?”⁸

Luter also employed his preferred course of action: pastoral care after worship services. These were intentional gatherings for the purpose of engaging in conversations with members to express his desire to rebuild. In addition to these gatherings, he viewed the distribution of a monthly newsletter as a key unifying tool for the dispersed congregation, as it provided consistent information and direction.⁹

⁶ See appendix G: “Sermon 2: What to Do When the Storm Comes,” 209.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See appendix G: “Sermon 3: Why?,” 2169.

⁹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, February 24, 2025

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking occurs when a leader recognizes the interrelationships among variables in complex situations.¹⁰ In other words, it involves connecting the dots within the organization. Systems thinking consists of five skills: observing patterns over time, considering the big picture, examining complex interactions, hypothesizing key causal relationships, and validating one's understanding of cause and effect.¹¹ Throughout the five leadership areas, Luter applied all five skills at various times. However, looking at the big picture was the primary skill, represented in each account.

From 2005 to 2008, a multitude of variables emerged that posed challenges to FABC's missional progression. However, Luter maintained momentum by viewing each situation through the lens of the overarching goal: the post-Katrina rebuilding of FABC. By considering the bigger picture, Luter was able to break down every factor into manageable components and leverage them for their return to New Orleans.

Along with other examples, Luter employed systems thinking to carry out Operation Back Home. Once he identified that his members lacked the resources to renovate their homes, Luter recognized this issue as a potential barrier to their mission. Therefore, he systematically linked the renovation of his members' homes to the future success of their church's goals.

¹⁰ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 92.

¹¹ Ibid.

Strategic Acting

The data showed that strategic acting was the most prominent competency among the five leadership areas based on percentage. Luter utilized all three strategic acting categories across the five areas at various times. However, as shown in table 17, only two categories and six skills consistently appeared in all five areas of Luter's strategic leadership: fostering agility and creating alignment. Luter applied the relevant skills within these two categories based on the specific circumstances.

Table 17. Strategic Acting Summary

Decision making	Fostering agility	Creating alignment
	Recognized opportunity for learning	Strategic thinking
		Ensured common understanding
		Presented vision of future
		Leadership ethos
		Offered openness

Fostering Agility

Fostering agility, which involves responding promptly and effectively to volatility through situational leadership, was a key aspect of Luter's leadership.¹² He demonstrated situational leadership by employing each agility skill across the five focus areas. During the initial response, Luter recognized environmental changes after assessing the disaster on a helicopter tour. Once he determined that the damage was worse than expected and would delay their return to New Orleans, Luter and his team adjusted their course of action to concentrate on developing satellite campuses.

While establishing the satellite campuses, Luter took prompt action to create effective communication tools by developing a website and an online registry to locate displaced parishioners. Once he learned about a large cluster of FABC members in Houston, Luter quickly leveraged his connections to establish a satellite campus at FBC Houston within a week. While setting up a home base, Luter recognized that the satellite campuses could hinder their rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. To address this issue, Luter assigned staff to each campus and guided them through the process of becoming autonomous congregations.

The one agility skill consistently evident in each area was the ability to recognize situations as learning opportunities. Luter and his team identified their national displacement as an opportunity to learn how to operate from satellite campuses. After a year, they adapted and learned to establish autonomous churches.

¹² Ibid., 105.

During their time at FBC New Orleans, FABC discovered methods to broaden the reach of their worship services by live streaming them online. Luter and his team also learned to collaborate with external agencies to encourage families to return through Operation Back Home. Despite the circumstances, Luter showed a commitment to developing his skill set through intellectual humility.

Creating Alignment

Creating alignment involves setting clear strategic priorities and aligning organizational resources and capabilities. A leader's ability to cultivate alignment is a key competency for executing strategic acting.¹³ During the five strategic areas, Luter exemplified the importance of goal alignment by discharging five of the six categorical skills.

Three of the five alignment skills directly integrate strategic thinking with acting to achieve alignment. By intertwining these elements, Luter cultivated a shared understanding of the challenges while outlining a clear vision for the future that prioritized returning to New Orleans. Employing these skills in tandem, Luter utilized visioning and making common sense to foster buy-in. He viewed his pastoral care, preaching, community outreach, and political engagements as means to promote missional consensus.

Luter's primary approach to creating alignment stemmed from the confidence people placed in his leadership ethos. During FABC's home base phase, Gary Mack willingly returned to New Orleans after establishing himself and gaining financial stability in Houston, Texas. His

¹³ Ibid., 135.

sole justification for this decision was his trust in Luter. Mack stated, “Luter had a clear plan for what he wanted to achieve, and I believed in it. I believed in him.”¹⁴

The character and values of Luter profoundly influenced Mack’s transformative decision to support FABC in pursuing its vision. Luter’s primary means of exemplifying good works and maintaining his integrity was his commitment to transparency about his internal challenges, which is evident throughout his sermons. He strategically used transparent language in his sermons to connect with his audience and encourage them to press on.

In his first sermon following Hurricane Katrina, Luter acknowledged his struggle to manage his emotions and grief regarding the devastation in New Orleans.¹⁵ He expressed to the congregation at the Houston campus that he felt anger toward God for allowing the destruction of their homes and churches instead of the godless places like Bourbon Street.¹⁶ In April 2007, he publicly declared the painful lesson learned from his own spiritual journey that no one is exempt from enduring “disasters, disappointments, and depression.”¹⁷

In his sermon “When God Says No,” Luter reassured the people about his struggles; saying, “I know it is difficult, but hang in there, don’t give up.” He urged them to “keep praying,” “remain obedient,” “keep serving,” and “keep teaching because God’s grace is

¹⁴ Mack, interview.

¹⁵ See appendix G: “Sermon 2: What to Do When the Storm Comes,” 209.

¹⁶ See appendix G: “Sermon 3: Why?,” 216.

¹⁷ See appendix G: “Sermon 6: It May Be over Our Head, but It’s under God’s Feet,” 236.

sufficient.”¹⁸ Luter’s strategic transparency enabled him to connect with his congregation and bolstered his parishioners’ confidence in him as their leader. Furthermore, their confidence in him cultivated a fertile atmosphere for creating alignment.

Strategic Influencing

Strategic influencing exhibited the highest median rate across the five strategic areas, underscoring the importance of influence in Luter’s leadership. Among the three strategic competencies, influencing is the only one that encompassed every associated leadership category in all five areas. Luter’s most frequently employed strategic leadership categories across all five areas stemmed from strategic influencing: involving others and connecting emotionally. Throughout the five study areas, Luter utilized every relevant skill set related to these two aspects of strategic influencing, as shown in table 18.

Table 18. Strategic Influencing Summary

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Discussed expectations	Maintained end goal	Mobilized	Created common understanding	Put self in stakeholder’s shoes	Set appropriate expectations
Involved others	Modeled appropriate behavior		Developed consensus	Connected to organizational aspirations	Organizational adaptability

¹⁸ See appendix G: “Sermon 7: When God Say No,” 241.

Table 18. Continued

Building trust	Managing political landscape	Boundary spanning	Involving others	Connecting emotionally	Building and sustaining momentum
Allowed others to make decisions			Valued input	Enlivened language	
Told the truth					

Building Trust

Luter's leadership strengthened as a result of the trust he cultivated with his congregation. Building trust depends on three types: contractual, competence, and communication. Throughout the five areas of study, Luter demonstrated each type of trust at various times. His most frequently used form was competence trust, which was shown through his willingness to involve and encourage others to make decisions.

Competence trust exists when a leader respects the skills and abilities of others in the organization.¹⁹ During the initial phase, Luter's first major decision was to form a leadership team to assist in the decision-making process. Throughout each strategic area, Luter relied on his team and valued their input, demonstrating that leadership is not conducted in isolation. Luter allowed Gary Mack to utilize his skill set and relied on Mack to aid in the development and execution of Operation Back Home.

¹⁹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 163.

Contractual trust occurs when people have confidence that a leader will “do what they say they will do.”²⁰ Through his actions, Luter earned his people’s trust by validating his idealistic expectations for FABC’s return. His willingness to sacrifice and connect with members through extensive travel and personal hardship solidified their faith in him and his vision. Luter asserted that his people’s confidence in him “tripled” when his actions validated his message.²¹

Communication trust, or trust of disclosure, develops when individuals feel confident that the leader is forthcoming about the organization’s condition.²² Luter earned people’s trust by being honest, even at the risk of delivering unwelcome news. While establishing satellite campuses, Luter faced criticism regarding their placement because it made some beyond the travel distance to those campuses feel neglected. Rather than backing down from the backlash, Luter took responsibility for his team’s decision and spoke openly about it being in the best interest of the church’s long-term health.

Managing the Political Landscape

Luter’s ability to maintain credibility was essential for navigating the internal and external landscape surrounding FABC.²³ During the five areas of study, Luter employed two of

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

²² Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 164.

²³ Ibid., 169.

the six related skills across all areas: maintaining the end goal and modeling appropriate behavior.

From the initial phase to the providential homecoming, Luter encountered persistent challenges that required him to adjust to different circumstances. Yet, a constant aspect of Luter's leadership was his unwavering focus on the end goal. This objective was initially presented during his helicopter tour over the floodwaters: to rebuild their church in New Orleans. Luter kept this goal in mind when he participated in the Bring Back New Orleans Commission, set up a home base in New Orleans, and led Operation Back Home. Furthermore, he conveyed his commitment to aiding the community during their providential homecoming service by pledging support for rebuilding homes in the neighboring areas.

In all aspects of leadership, Luter demonstrated behaviors consistent with his ultimate objectives. Even when faced with significant challenges, he maintained a non-anxious presence by responding based on FABC's future direction rather than reacting to its current position.²⁴ In his sermon titled "Why?," Luter revealed his non-anxious presence by helping the people respond to their losses rather than react to them.

He stated, "Your best days are not behind you. They are ahead of you. Forget about what you had, forget about what you lost. Forget about what was destroyed in the flood. Your best

²⁴ A *non-anxious presence* is the ability to respond rather than react to a given situation. It includes the capacity to manage one's natural reactions, use knowledge to control impulses, keep calm, remain observant, tolerate pain and frustration, while maintaining a clear sense of direction. For more information, see, Peter L. Steinke, *Uproar: Calm Leadership in Anxious Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Litt, 2019), 49–50.

days are ahead of you.”²⁵ Luther concluded his message by assuring the audience that God had new opportunities and ministries ahead for their church. By modeling appropriate behavior and maintaining a non-anxious presence, Luther effectively navigated the political landscape.

Boundary Spanning

Boundary spanning refers to a leader’s ability to expand the organization’s boundaries.²⁶ It occurs when a leader guides people beyond their perceived limitations. While Luther applied all six boundary-spanning skills across the five leadership areas, mobilization was the sole skill present in every sequence. Throughout the rebuilding process, Luther mobilized FABC by leveraging three key skill sets: fostering community among groups, establishing a common purpose, and inspiring members to unite toward the vision.²⁷

Luther understood that achieving their mission required prioritizing the building of cohesiveness among their dispersed membership: fostering community among groups. His motivation derived from his biblical understanding that “no house divided against itself will stand.”²⁸ In addition to his travels, Luther and his team fostered a sense of community among their scattered members through monthly newsletters, which highlighted everyday events in members’ lives, such as weddings, funerals, and achievements, to promote a sense of connectedness.

²⁵ See appendix G: “Sermon 3: Why?,” 216.

²⁶ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 179.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Fred Luther Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023. Scriptural reference comes from Matt. 12:25.

Preaching served as Luter's primary method for unifying and inspiring his congregation around a shared purpose. One of the notable strengths of Luter's preaching during this period was his use of repetitive delivery. He frequently presented the same sermon in multiple locations. Luter mentioned that he often preached his sermon "What to Do after the Storm" whenever he had the opportunity because he wanted as many of his followers as possible to "hear the information in the sermon to encourage them."²⁹ He was convinced that sharing the same message with everyone would "unify them in the same direction."³⁰ Therefore, implementing these three mobilization skills—fostering community, establishing a common purpose, and inspiring members—allowed Luter to expand FABC's boundaries.

Involving Others

Luter demonstrated an exceptional ability to generate commitment by involving others in the overarching strategy. Involving others was one of Luter's two foremost traits of strategic leadership. He applied all three related influencing skills across the fields of study: creating a common understanding of the entire picture, developing consensus around the chosen direction, and ensuring that the input and perspectives of others were valued.³¹

To establish a common understanding of the entire picture, Luter formed a core leadership team early on to aid in situation analysis and strategic planning. He established this

²⁹ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, August 16, 2023.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 181.

team during his initial response after recognizing his own limitations given the severity of the crisis. Following its formation, the team met weekly throughout the rebuilding process.

The team eased the burden of daily operations so Luter could focus on the congregation's immediate needs, which involved extensive nationwide travel. During his travels, Luter provided weekly updates to the team on the congregation's status to ensure their plans remained relevant. By implementing a team-based approach to leadership, Luter and his team benefited from a confluence of information and decision making.³²

In setting up satellite campuses, Luter drew on his team's insights to create a common understanding and build consensus. Although he aimed to connect with his members, his team assisted in developing a strategy for an online registry to identify the locations of FABC's members. Likewise, his team helped formulate the plan to determine the locations of the satellite campuses.

Luter emerged as the unquestioned leader of FABC, yet his willingness to involve others in leadership suggests that he views leadership as a collaborative effort. He exhibited a humble tendency to acknowledge his own weaknesses by hiring capable individuals to address gaps in his leadership.³³ Luter welcomed and valued contributions from others, both within and outside his organization, throughout the rebuilding process.

³² A confluence of information occurs when people come together and bring multiple perspectives, different sets of data and information, and different experiences to make decisions that cannot come from any one individual. For more information, see Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 198–99.

³³ Crosby, interview. In evaluating Luter's leadership strengths, David Crosby highlighted Luter's hiring practices. Crosby remarked, "I've met numerous members over the

Connecting Emotionally

The lynchpin of Luter's leadership hinged on his ability to connect emotionally with a diverse range of people.³⁴ Connecting emotionally was the second of Luter's two foremost strategic leadership traits. He applied all three related influencing skills across the fields of study: putting himself in stakeholder's shoes, connecting to the organization's aspirations, and using enlivening language through the power of stories, metaphors, and images.³⁵

Luter's ability to connect stemmed from his capacity to empathize with his congregation. He faced the inconvenience of displacement and understood the pain of losing a home to floodwaters. He endured the emotional roller coaster of losing his personal possessions and wrestled with the spiritual struggle of feeling angry with God. His firsthand experience of his people's struggles forged stronger connections between them. Luter noted, "We were all hurting

years, and they're impressive, right down to the people who clean the building. He must be continually considering and thinking about whom he might talk to about leading the administration, education, and programs of the church. He surrounds himself with really good people." Crosby concluded that one of Luter's most impressive leadership skills is his aptitude for "recognizing talent, ability, and giftedness in people." Mack, interview. Gary Mack supported Crosby's conclusion regarding Luter's aptitude for hiring stating, "Fred's idea is that working for Franklin Avenue is not a job. If you came for a nine to five job, then you came to the wrong place. He engrains in his people that we are not governed by time, but do whatever it takes. He values character because he will train you and teach you to do the rest."

³⁴ Crosby, interview. Crosby witnessed Luter's leadership firsthand and affirms that Luter has the ability to connect with a diverse range of people. Crosby commented, "Fred can connect with anyone: rich, poor, young, old, prominent or not." Crosby suggested that Luter's ability to connect derives from his firm grasp of his own identity. He asserted, "He is comfortable in his own skin. He can navigate the world of Southern Baptists because he has enough confidence in who he is in Christ. He is not self-conscious about being in a meeting. He is at ease with himself."

³⁵ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 184–88.

and enduring difficult times. We cried and laughed together, but through it all, God brought us closer together as a church.”³⁶

Luter’s emotional connection also emerged from his willingness to connect to the organization’s aspirations. He initially connected with the church’s goal through his commitment to staying at FABC. After relocating to Birmingham, Alabama, Luter was approached by a pastor search committee from a large church regarding their vacant senior pastor position. While honored, Luter declined the offer and expressed his desire to fulfill his “calling and commitment to the congregation that took a chance on electing a street preacher from the lower 9th ward of the city to be their pastor. While there were other options, I had made up my mind to be faithful to the church where I served.”³⁷ However, Luter understood that his commitment came with responsibilities: to love, lead, and listen to them.³⁸

Luter’s unwavering commitment to rebuilding FABC inspired Gary Mack to leave the security of FBC Houston and return to New Orleans to support Operation Back Home. Mack remarked, “Fred was always involved with anything going on at the church, and he truly believed, which he showed us, that he could rebuild the church. Through his leadership, it was evident that people were going to come back because Fred really cared and was committed to the people.”³⁹

³⁶ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Luter, “Implementing Biblical Principles for Effective Church Life in New Orleans from an African American Context.”

³⁹ Mack, interview.

Finally, using enlivened language in preaching was vital for Luter's emotional connection with his congregation. During his sermons, Luter employed various homiletical tools to engage the audience. One tool Luter deemed effective was calling out members' names to engage the people intentionally.⁴⁰ His use of practical analogies and personal illustrations allowed members the freedom to address their weaknesses. Luter's use of repetition, pointed questions, and personal illustrations is elevated by his passionate delivery.⁴¹ Through his preaching ministry, Luter embraced the marriage of pathos and logos to inspire his people appropriately.⁴²

Building and Sustaining Momentum

Strategic influencing is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. It begins with self-awareness and cultivating strong relationships within the organization to build and maintain momentum.⁴³ While Luter utilized all five skills essential for building and maintaining momentum at various times, he consistently employed two skills across all five leadership areas: setting appropriate expectations and organizational adaptability.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, August 16, 2023.

⁴¹ Willoughby, "Historic: Fred Luter Elected SBC President." During his nomination of Luter for president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2012, David Crosby described Luter as a "fire-breathing, and miracle-working" preacher.

⁴² *Pathos* in preaching means embodying the spirit of the text while seeking to help the audience do the same. For more information, see Jerry Vines and Adam B Dooley, *Passion in the Pulpit: How to Exegete the Emotion of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 27.

⁴³ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 190.

⁴⁴ The five skills for building and sustaining momentum include, setting appropriate expectations, search out and celebrate successes, sending consistent messages, organizational adaptability, and slowing down or preventing distractions.

Luter's procedure for employing momentum stemmed from his ability to set appropriate expectations throughout the process. He recognized early on that achieving missional success would not be easy and would require him to maintain his pastoral presence to help his people build and sustain a hopeful outlook. To preserve his pastoral presence, Luter traveled extensively, sacrificing his health, time, and comfort to ensure his people did not become crushed by their overwhelming obstacles.

During his visits, he took the opportunity to provide candid yet hopeful updates regarding the rebuilding efforts. To uplift the dispersed members longing for home, Luter frequently shared his own struggles and frustrations in his sermons to connect with the audience and inspire perseverance. An example is in his sermon titled "Why?," in which Luter articulated his grief while acknowledging the sorrow experienced by those in attendance. He stated, "I know it hasn't been easy. I know you miss home." Nevertheless, by reminding his congregation of Christ's sufferings, he presented them with an alternative perspective and a renewed expectation by conveying, "Your best days are not behind you; they are ahead of you. You are going to make it."⁴⁵

In addition to his pastoral presence, Luter's ability to adapt to diverse situations contributed to sustaining FABC's organizational momentum despite setbacks. An example of his adaptive leadership style emerged when he decided to establish a home base at FBC New Orleans. By 2006, Luter and his team experienced success through their satellite campuses;

⁴⁵ See appendix G: "Sermon 3: Why?," 221.

however, they recognized that their success could impede their goal of rebuilding their original location.

Although many leaders might resist halting perceived progress, Luter concluded that their satellite campus approach no longer optimized the rebuilding plan. Luter and his team shifted gears by guiding their satellite campuses to become autonomous churches. To rally support and maintain momentum, Luter leveraged the trust he had established through his pastoral presence to mobilize resources exclusively toward New Orleans. The essence of Luter's adaptability was evident in how he filtered his decisions through the primary goal of rebuilding to ensure they remained on target. Thus, Luter's adaptation to evolving situations was grounded in servitude and strategic decisions that consistently aligned with the overarching objective.

Implications

This study evaluated Fred Luter's pastoral ministry to determine the role that strategic leadership played in guiding FABC through times of crisis. The analysis yielded four implications for Christian leaders, particularly pastors who aim to employ strategic leadership practices.

Strategic Leadership through Inclusive Leadership

The efficacy of strategic Christian leadership is enhanced through the implementation of an inclusive leadership model. A recurring theme throughout Luter's leadership following Hurricane Katrina was his reliance on his leadership team. His team served as a sounding board, and their input was welcomed and valued. His inclusive leadership style cultivated a culture that embraced and empowered others to maximize their skill sets for missional alignment.

Luter's leadership supports and elaborates on Steve Echols's proposition that an inclusive leadership style, rooted in the synergism of transformational and servant leadership, can maximize organizational outcomes—or, in this context, enhance strategic leadership. Echols outlined five characteristics of inclusive leadership, which Luter exemplified across the five areas of strategic leadership:

First, inclusive leadership brings the maximum number of individuals into participation. . . Second, inclusive leadership empowers individuals to reach their full potential while pursuing the common good of the particular populace. . . Third, those who practice inclusive leadership develop a culture that perpetuates the morality of the individual's worth as a preventive resistance against the ever-present possibility of despotism . . . Fourth, inclusive leadership intentionally replicates today's leaders who model the above characteristics with a commitment to allow future leadership to emerge. . . Fifth, inclusive leadership manifests in establishing appropriate boundaries that preserve the integrity of the nature of the collective without marginalizing any of the populace.⁴⁶

Aubrey Malphurs endorsed the idea that inclusive leadership enhances strategic leadership. Malphurs asserted, "Gone are the days when everyone expected the pastor to come up with all the good ideas and then pass them on to the congregation for implementation. Excellent leaders understand that they can accomplish far more through the wisdom of a gifted and committed strategic team of staff and lay leaders."⁴⁷ Malphurs's assertion reflects Robert Dale's insights from his work *Pastoral Leadership*. Dale noted, "Because people support what they help create, pastoral leaders build consensus, commitment, and momentum for

⁴⁶ Echols, "Transformational/Servant Leadership," 88–90.

⁴⁷ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 29.

implementing projects by involving the members of the congregation early and often in dreaming and planning.”⁴⁸

While Scripture may not explicitly command leaders to adopt an inclusive leadership model, this approach is evident among selected biblical leaders throughout the Old and New Testaments. In Exodus 18, Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, advised him to appoint a group of qualified individuals to whom he could delegate responsibilities and who could assist him in leading Israel effectively. Furthermore, in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul frequently traveled with a team to support his missionary endeavors.⁴⁹ In 1 Cor. 12:12–31, Paul likened the church to a body to underscore the significance of teamwork within the church.

Strategic Leadership through Emotional Intelligence

Strategic leadership is augmented when leaders demonstrate emotional intelligence.⁵⁰ Besides involving others in the leadership process, Luter’s strength resided in his ability to connect emotionally while effectively managing his emotions. His skillful use of emotional intelligence allowed him to maintain a non-anxious presence, which was crucial to his strategic influence. Luter demonstrated a keen ability to empathize with his people’s concerns while

⁴⁸ Dale, *Pastoral Leadership*, 15.

⁴⁹ Throughout the apostle Paul’s missionary journey, he served with Barnabas (Acts 11:25–26; 13:2–3), Mark (Acts 13:5), Silas (Acts 15:40), Timothy (Acts 16:1–3), and countless others.

⁵⁰ *Emotional intelligence* refers to “the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one’s own emotions, as well as to recognize and influence the emotions of others. This involves self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.” Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 10th ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 2020), xxii.

motivating them simultaneously to remain focused on the overall objective. His ability to self-differentiate came from two key sources: a continual commitment to spiritual disciplines and missional clarity.

Bass and Bass asserted that emotional intelligence is fundamental to any formula for effective leadership. They stated, “Emotional intelligence correlates with effective leadership and the development of collective goals and encouraging flexibility.”⁵¹ In his dissertation, “Exploring the Relationship between a Lead Pastor’s Emotional Intelligence and Church Revitalization in Select SBC Churches,” Benjamin McRoy inferred that emotional intelligence is a non-negotiable skill for pastoral leaders who desire to implement change on any significant scale within the church. McRoy claimed, “Pastors may not only need to be trained in biblical, theological, and ministerial expertise, but also in the skills connected to emotional intelligence.”⁵²

While emotional intelligence is a modern construct, its foundational principles are supported in Scripture. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament provides insights into regulating emotions and interacting in an emotionally charged climate. King Solomon wrote in Prov. 25:28, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” In offering qualifications for church leaders, the apostle Paul stated that an overseer must “be above reproach,” “sober-minded,” and “self-controlled” (1 Tim. 3:1–7). His point was for leaders to be models of emotional regulation and self-discipline.

⁵¹ Bass and Bass, *Bass Handbook of Leadership*, 124.

⁵² Benjamin Andrew McRoy, “Exploring the Relationship between a Lead Pastor’s Emotional Intelligence and Church Revitalization in Select SBC Churches” (EdD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024).

Strategic Leadership through Pastoral Care

Pastoral care substantially enhances a leader's capacity to implement a strategic plan.⁵³

While strategic leadership has historical origins in military operations and hierarchy, Luther reinforced his strategic goals through servitude rather than imperatives.⁵⁴ His initial response to the crisis prioritized the immediate welfare of the people over the church's goals. In essence, Luther regarded the health of his congregation as a pathway to long-term missional success. Luther's dedication to pastoral tenure, spending quality time with his people, actively listening and addressing their needs, strengthened their trust in him as their strategic leader.

In response to a Barna Research report suggesting a decline in numerical church growth, Carey Nieuwhof advocated that a lack of pastoral care contributed to this decline. While many factors lead to decreased church attendance, Nieuwhof generalized, "One factor that kills almost every church and pastor is pastoral care."⁵⁵ Nieuwhof's claim supports Dale's assertion that pastoral care is important and opens the door for other forms of leadership, as seen in Luther's exemplary pastoral care. Dale stated, "The caring skills of pastoral counseling, clinical chaplaincy in the hospital setting, grief intervention, and ministry to family systems expanded

⁵³ *Pastoral care* refers to "the practice by which a pastor cares for the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of their congregation. It has a long and storied history within the church, rooted in the idea that a pastor is the 'shepherd' of their congregation." For more information, see Carey Nieuwhof, "Pastoral Care for Healthy Churches (and Pastors)," CareyNieuwhof.Com, accessed April 22, 2025, <https://careynieuwhof.com/how-pastoral-care-stunts-the-growth-of-most-churches/>.

⁵⁴ Adair, *Strategic Leadership*, 9.

⁵⁵ Nieuwhof, "Pastoral Care for Churches."

the congregational leader's array of tools. . . Pastoral leadership is built on the motivation and communication skills of proclaiming and human relation skills."⁵⁶

The significance of pastoral care is underscored in the apostle Paul's address to the Ephesian elders, where he urged leaders to pay careful attention to and provide care for the members of the church, emphasizing that the church is valuable to the Lord (Acts 20:28). Similarly, the apostle Peter highlighted the necessity of pastoral care to church leaders, focusing on instilling the underlying motivation for such care. In 1 Pet. 5:2–3, Peter taught, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Strategic Leadership through Preaching

Preaching represents a legitimate form of strategic leadership that fosters alignment and commitment to the organization's mission. Luther's pastoral philosophy illustrates that preaching and leadership are inseparable functions. While his leadership is multidimensional, his ministry primarily centers on preaching—which acts as a primary expression of his leadership and strategic influence.⁵⁷ His passionate delivery style, pointed practical application, and audience engagement were vital in helping to build and sustain momentum.

⁵⁶ Dale, *Pastoral Leadership*, 21.

⁵⁷ Regarding the centrality of preaching in Luther's ministry, David Crosby observed, "His preaching serves as the church's flagship; he frequently preaches all over the country and is a magnificent presenter of God's Word." Crosby, interview. Gary Mack supported this assessment:

Contemporary literature supports Luter's use of preaching as a primary means of communicating his missional objectives. In *The Pastor as Leader*, John Currie wrote,

Preaching is, along with prayer, the primary task entrusted to a man of God. Men of God who have been used of God to lead his church on mission throughout history have prioritized preaching in their stewardship of pastoral ministry. . . Leading through preaching means expounding not only the doctrines deposited in the Scriptures but also the direction they set for the people who believe and follow the Christ revealed to them. It is through preaching that a man of God communicates the vision and defines the strategy God has prescribed in this word for his people to fulfill his mission.⁵⁸

In *Leading with the Sermon*, William Willimon supported Currie's assessment, arguing that preaching serves as a powerful strategic leadership tool due to its public aspect. He stated, "Preaching is at the center of pastoral work. . . because in preaching a pastor is with more members of the congregation, in a more intentional and focused way, than in any other activity."⁵⁹ Therefore, preaching should be recognized as a key method of strategic leadership.

The term *strategic preaching* is not mentioned in the Bible, but evidence of it appears in the proclamations of certain biblical leaders in the Old and New Testaments. During his brief four-month ministry, Haggai delivered four sermons aimed at motivating the Israelites to transition from a state of procrastination that impeded temple construction through repentance to

"Fred's preaching was crucial in keeping the congregation united and motivated during rebuilding." Mack, interview.

⁵⁸ John Currie, *The Pastor as Leader: Principles and Practices for Connecting Preaching and Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 127, 143.

⁵⁹ Willimon, *Leading with the Sermon*, 2.

fulfill their divinely appointed mission to rebuild the temple.⁶⁰ Similarly, in Acts 2, the apostle Peter delivered a timely and intentional sermon on the day of Pentecost to a bewildered crowd. He adeptly seized the opportunity to clarify their confusion, explain the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and direct them toward alignment with God's church.⁶¹

Further Research

The purpose of this study was to research the use of strategic leadership in Fred Luter Jr.'s ministry from 2005 to 2008, post-Hurricane Katrina. The first suggestion for future research involved exploring different periods of Luter's leadership. The same methodology could be applied to study other periods, particularly following his installation as pastor, when he led FABC through revitalization in the midst of shifting demographics in the church's surrounding neighborhoods between 1986 and 2005.

The second suggestion is to apply the same methodology to study other notable pastors who embody the characteristics of a strategic leader, particularly David Crosby. During his tenure at FBC New Orleans, Louisiana, Crosby successfully navigated the church through a natural disaster, a relocation, and a revitalization while addressing social justice issues within the church and the community. Similarly, a qualitative comparative analysis of senior pastors in the

⁶⁰ Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, New American Commentary, 21A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 54. F. Duane Lindsey, "Haggai," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:1539.

⁶¹ John B. Polhill, New American Commentary, 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 95. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 76.

greater New Orleans area post-Katrina could provide better generalizations regarding strategic crisis leadership. This study could include a comparison of the pastors of churches that closed with those that remained open.

The third suggestion involves applying the same methodology with an alternate instrument for assessing strategic leadership effectiveness. Additionally, broadening the research from a single case study to a phenomenological approach could prove advantageous. Rather than solely examining first-chair leaders, a study could investigate the phenomenological experiences of second-chair leaders, as explored by Jennifer Blair Foster, to understand how the practice of strategic leadership by second-chair leaders supports first-chair leaders.⁶²

The fourth suggestion is to explore the relationship between strategic leadership and other styles, such as servant or situational leadership. A study could determine the relationship between an inclusive leadership style and strategic leadership. Conducting a skills study may offer a greater understanding of how emotional intelligence, pastoral care, and preaching influence strategic leadership.

The fifth suggestion is a more detailed study focusing on the strategic dimensions of Luther's ten sermons from 2005 to 2008. To gauge the nature of his strategic preaching, a study could utilize the methodology employed by T. Brett Golson in his dissertation, "Strategic

⁶² Jennifer Blair Foster, "Leading in Between: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Second Chair Ministry Leaders in Alabama Baptist Churches" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024).

Preaching, Accomplishing a Unique Purpose: Effectively Communicating Strategy through the Sermon.”⁶³

In his research, Golson employed three instruments to assess strategic preaching: the Malphurs Analysis Instrument, the Baumann Analysis Instrument, and the Broadus Analysis Instrument. The Malphurs Analysis Instrument features nine questions that evaluate how sermons address strategic issues in the local church.⁶⁴ The Baumann Analysis Instrument consists of five questions pertaining to the style, target audience, and purpose of the sermon.⁶⁵ Lastly, the Broadus Analysis Instrument includes three questions focused on the structure of a sermon.⁶⁶

⁶³ T. Brett Golson, “Strategic Preaching, Accomplishing a Unique Purpose: Effectively Communicating Strategy through the Sermon” (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 168.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170.

APPENDIX A

FRED LUTER JR. BIOGRAPHY

Early Life

On November 11, 1956, Fred Luter Jr. was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is a native of the impoverished neighborhood known as the Lower Ninth Ward.¹ Luter was the third of five children raised by his divorced mother, Viola Brooks, who worked as a seamstress and surgical scrub assistant.² He accompanied his mother to worship services at a predominantly Black National Baptist Church. However, Luter considered himself, above all, a “street kid.”³ As he grew, he became more focused on the world, and his commitment to the church and the Lord diminished.

Family

In 1980, he married his wife, Elizabeth. To understand Fred Luter is to know his wife, whom he affectionately calls his “Prime Rib.” The couple proudly parents two children: Kimberly Luter-Terrell and Fred “Chip” Luter III. They also have two grandchildren: Fred Luter IV, and Zoe Grace Luter.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the information in appendix A came from Fred Luter Jr., interview by researcher, New Orleans, June 20, 2023.

² Ashley Hayes, “New Southern Baptist Leader: Former Street Preacher, Katrina Survivor,” CNN: Cable News Network, June 20, 2012, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/20/new-southern-baptist-leader-former-street-preacher-katrina-survivor/>.

³ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, “Black Pastor Reaches across the Southern Baptist Divide,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2012-jun-01-la-na-southern-baptist-20120601-story.html>;

Education

Luter attended the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1980s; however, the demands of co-vocational ministry compelled him to withdraw from classes. During his two terms as SBC president, he was awarded honorary doctoral degrees from five institutions: Oklahoma Baptist University, Criswell College in Dallas, Dallas Baptist University, Carver College in Atlanta, and Liberty University in Lynchburg.

Salvation and Call to Ministry

Despite having been raised in a Christian household, Luter did not acknowledge Jesus as his Lord and Savior until the age of twenty-one. In 1977, Luter characterized his journey to salvation as akin to his Damascus Road experience. During this profound journey, Luter recounted a near-fatal incident in which he was struck by a vehicle while riding his motorcycle without a helmet. This tragic accident resulted in a compound fracture of his left leg and a significant head injury. While hospitalized at Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Luter became acutely aware of the fragility of life. He recounted that a deacon from his mother's church visited him, positioning his finger mere inches from his face, and stated without equivocation, "Boy, obedience is better than sacrifice. If you had been obedient to your mom, you would not be sacrificing your life here in this hospital!" In a state of fear for his life, Luter vowed to God, "If you save my life, I will serve you for the rest of my life."

As a result of the accident, Luter devoted his life entirely to God. While working as a commodities clerk, he began preaching every Saturday on the street at the corner of Galvez and Caffin Avenue in the Lower Ninth Ward. To convey his message, Luter used a megaphone

called his “half-mile hailer.” His time street preaching is pivotal for many pastoral leadership skills, including passionate and practical communication, interpersonal relationships, perseverance, and influencing abilities.

Call to Franklin Avenue Baptist Church

In 1983, Luter delivered his first official sermon at Law Street Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana. By 1986, he was preaching regularly at several churches around New Orleans, including National Baptist Church, when he discovered an opening for the pastor position at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church.⁴ Initially, Luter believed Franklin Avenue was a predominantly white church within the SBC. He did not fully understand the demographic shift that occurred due to white flight in the area during the late 1970s. Luter’s comment about Franklin Avenue illustrates this perspective: “That’s that white church over on Franklin Avenue. Blacks don’t go there.”⁵

Despite Luter’s initial hesitance, Franklin Avenue members searched for a fervent leader with a shepherd’s heart. Noah Lewis, a pastor’s search committee member, stated, “The members at that time were dissatisfied with the seminary graduates they met. But then, they saw Luter preaching at a revival, and he appeared to have the touch they needed.”⁶ After multiple meetings with the pulpit committee, arrangements were made for him to teach a church-wide

⁴ Hayes, “New Southern Baptist Leader.”

⁵ Hennessy-Fiske, “Black Pastor Reaches Divide.”

⁶ Erik Eckholm, “Southern Baptists Set to Elect Their First Black Leader,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/18/us/-southern-baptists-set-to-elect-their-first-black-leader.html>.

Sunday school class and preach at the morning worship service. Following the morning service, Luter participated in a ninety-minute Q&A session.⁷ In September 1986, Franklin Avenue officially called and ordained Fred Luter as the pastor of their small, struggling church, which had an average attendance of just sixty-five members.

Denominational Service

Fred Luter is a dedicated ambassador for Franklin Avenue and the SBC. In his early years at Franklin Avenue, Luter recognized the value of cooperation. He met biweekly with leaders from local associations and the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Luter relied on the local association to train Sunday school teachers and ministry leaders, while the seminary generously provided space for Franklin Avenue's evangelistic events.⁸

Luter held various positions at the local association, state, and national convention levels. Fred Luter became a trailblazer for African Americans in the SBC. In 1995, Luter helped draft a resolution at the 150th SBC Annual Meeting that committed congregations to eradicating racism and repudiating slavery. Then, in 1999, he participated in the committee that proposed revising the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message*.⁹

In 2001, he made history as the first African American to deliver the convention sermon at the annual meeting. In 2005, he served as a trustee for Lifeway Christian Resources. In 2011,

⁷ Luter, "Don't Ditch Your Denomination."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Willoughby, "Historic: Fred Luter Elected SBC President."

he was elected as the first African American vice president of the SBC. In 2012, Luter was unanimously elected as the first black president of the SBC at the Annual Meeting held in New Orleans. The following year, in 2013, he was reelected unanimously for a second term. Luter continues to serve as an active leader in the Louisiana Baptist Convention (LBC) and the SBC.

APPENDIX B
FRANKLIN AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH

History

In the face of racial discrimination in the mid-twentieth century, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, demonstrated remarkable resilience. Initially established as an all-white Southern Baptist church, the church's community was weakened by the phenomenon of white flight in the late 1970s.¹ Despite the mass exodus, the remaining congregants, committed to their mission, donated the FABC sanctuary and educational building to the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans, a testament to their unwavering spirit.²

As FABC began to engage with the community, the dynamics of the church transitioned from a historically white congregation to a predominantly black one. This shift was not just about demographics but about a deep commitment to community. In 1980, FABC was established as a mission of Gentilly Baptist Church under the leadership of Daniel O'Reagan.³ From 1980 to 1986, the Franklin Avenue Baptist Mission was overseen by three pastors—Bill Weathers, John Henry Thomas, and Robert Loggins. Following the departure of Robert Loggins,

¹ *White flight* is a term used to describe the migration of white Americans from urban neighborhoods to the suburbs. *White flight* was often due to the immigration of people of color because of desegregation. For more information see <https://www.governing.com/topics/urban/gov-white-flight-suburbs.html>

² "Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, LA: HOME." Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans LA HOME Web, September 24, 2013. <http://www.acswebnetworks.com/franklinavenuebaptist/aboutus/article320005.htm>

³ Ibid.

FABC faced significant conflict, but the church's commitment to its community remained steadfast.

In September 1986, Fred Luter became the pastor of FABC. He was ordained and installed as pastor on the same day.⁴ The church's membership had dwindled to around sixty-five and seemed to be heading toward closure. At the beginning of his ministry, Luter did not advertise the church's affiliation with the SBC. Luter said, "Often members did not discover its affiliation until they joined." By then, he said, "it did not bother them because the church was a part of their lives."⁵

In 1986, FABC embodied the characteristics of a declining church needing immediate revitalization. By 2005, Luter strategically guided the church to continual growth, reaching over seven thousand members before the next major crisis struck Franklin Avenue. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and Franklin Avenue.

In the post-Katrina era of FABC, Luter addressed the need to reestablish the church's membership, as many never returned to New Orleans. The church grew again and currently holds a membership of just over six thousand. This newfound growth led the church to transition to a newly built facility that they occupied in late 2018.⁶ Franklin Avenue approached the various transitions and obstacles with a consistent mission and vision.

⁴ Hennessy-Fiske, "Black Pastor Reaches Across Divide."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Diana Chandler, "Cross & Steeple of Luter's New Church Grace Skyline," *Baptist Press*, <http://www.bpnews.net/52635/cross-and-steeple-of-luters-new-church-grace-skyline>

Chronological History

- In 1988, Franklin Avenue Became an autonomous church.
- In 1989, FABC had grown from 65 to 300, and a second Sunday morning service was started.
- In 1993, a third Sunday morning service was added.
- By 1994, due to the church's numerical growth, Luter began to promote building a larger sanctuary.
- In March 1997, the congregation moved to their new two thousand-seat sanctuary.
- In 2002, the congregation started a satellite campus in New Orleans East.
- In 2003, Franklin Avenue built a Family Life Center next to the sanctuary.
- In 2005, the congregation grew to over seven thousand members.
- In 2005, the church purchased 90 acres of land in New Orleans East.
- On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina flooded Franklin Avenue with nine feet of water. This horrific natural disaster caused members to be displaced all over the nation.
- Until April 2008, FBC New Orleans partnered with Franklin Avenue and shared their facilities until Franklin Avenue could be rebuilt.
- In April 2008, Franklin Avenue moved back into a newly renovated sanctuary, where over four thousand members and guests attended two services.
- Due to the church's displacement from Hurricane Katrina, Franklin Avenue became one church in three cities (Houston, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans).

- In December 2018, FABC moved to New Orleans East, a brand new thirty-five-hundred-seat sanctuary with separate areas for children's and youth worship services.⁷

⁷ Chronological list provided by "Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, LA: HOME." Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans LA HOME Web, September 24, 2023. <http://www.acswebnetworks.com/franklinavenuebaptist/aboutus/article320005>.

APPENDIX C

FRED LUTER JR. INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Detailed Summaries

Here is a detailed summary of the key points from the transcripts.¹

Interview 1

Overview

- This was the first interview with Fred Luter Jr. of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, conducted on June 20, 2023.
- The interview is focused on how Luter dealt with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina from 2005 to 2008.

Key Topics

1. Luter's Background and Early Life
 - Luter was born and raised in New Orleans by a hardworking single mother and an absent but supportive father.
 - Luter's upbringing instilled a strong work ethic that shaped his leadership approach.
2. The Impact of Hurricane Katrina
 - Luter and his family evacuated to Birmingham, Alabama, before Katrina hit.
 - When they returned, Luter was devastated by the destruction of his home, church, and city.
 - The levees breaking and the widespread flooding were a shocking and traumatic experience for Luter.
3. Scattering and Regathering the Congregation
 - Luter used the church website to locate and communicate with scattered members nationwide.
 - He established temporary worship locations in Baton Rouge, Houston, and FBC in New Orleans.
 - Luter and his team had to make difficult decisions, like laying off all the church staff due to the 80 percent contribution reduction.
4. Rebuilding and Returning to the Church
 - It took 2.5 years for Luter and the congregation to rebuild and return to their church building on Franklin Avenue.
 - Luter received support and assistance from other churches, the state convention, and the broader Southern Baptist community.

¹ Fred Luter provided express written consent, including explicit permission for using and publishing the data from his interviews in this dissertation.

- Luter continued preaching and ministering to his scattered flock through extensive travel and live streaming technology.
5. Leadership and Perseverance
 - Luter's deep love for his congregation and city motivated him to persevere through the challenges.
 - Luter's preaching and pastoral presence were vital in helping the church and community heal and rebuild.

Overall, the transcript highlights Luter's strategic leadership, resilience, and unwavering commitment to his church and community amidst an unprecedented disaster. The interview offers valuable insights into Luter's personal and ministerial journey during this transformative period.

Interview 2

Overview

- The second interview was conducted on August 16, 2023.
- The discussion covers the period from May 2006, when Luter moved back to Kenner, until the church's first service in their building in April 2008.

Key Topics

1. Luter's Honorary Doctorates
 - Luter has received honorary doctorates from several colleges and universities, primarily as president of the Southern Baptist Convention.
 - These include degrees from Criswell College, Liberty University, Dallas Baptist University, Oklahoma Baptist University, and Carver College.
2. Luter's Roles in the Louisiana Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention
 - Luter was the first African American to serve as 2nd Vice President and on the Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.
 - Nationally, he served as second vice president under Tom Eliff and first vice president under Brian Wright, and then he was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention.
3. Relationships with New Orleans Seminary
 - Luter had a close relationship with the seminary, including using their Landrum Chapel for Easter services when Franklin Avenue's sanctuary was too small.
 - He also co-taught classes with professors and was invited to speak on the history of the African American church.
4. Rebuilding the Church after Katrina
 - Luter and a leadership team, including the church administrator and finance person, met weekly to find contractors and coordinate the rebuilding efforts.
 - Rebuilding was challenging as contractors were in high demand across the city.

- Houston's First Baptist Church, which sent mission teams and supplies, helped rebuild Luter's home.
5. Returning to the Rebuilt Church
 - The rebuilt Franklin Avenue Baptist Church's first service was on April 6, 2008, and it was a joyful, standing-room-only event.
 - Luter and the church heavily promoted the return date through the internet and word of mouth.
 - The local newspaper published an article titled "Resurrection" about the church's return.
 6. Providing Direction, Alignment, and Commitment
 - Luter credits the monthly letters he wrote and posted online as a key way to provide strategic leadership and keep the scattered congregation informed and aligned.
 - No formal business meetings were held during the transition period, as the members were dispersed.

Overall, the transcript highlights Luter's strategic leadership in guiding his congregation through the crisis of Hurricane Katrina, maintaining unity and momentum, and ultimately rebuilding the church to return stronger than before.

Interview 3

Overview

- The third interview was conducted on February 24, 2025.
- The discussion covers Pastor Luter's strategic leadership during the crisis and displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans from 2005 to 2008.
- It details the various aspects of his leadership and decision making as the church navigated this challenging period.

Key Topics

1. Strategic Initial Response
 - Quickly set up operations in Houston and Baton Rouge to locate and minister to displaced members
 - Utilized website and technology to communicate with and track down members
 - Conducted flyovers to assess the damage to the church building and surrounding areas
2. Strategic Staff Engagement and Team Building
 - Rehired and reorganized the church staff to navigate the crisis
 - Held weekly meetings with the leadership team to make critical decisions

- Relied heavily on key staff members like Gary Mack to coordinate relief efforts
- 3. Strategic Political Engagement
 - Served on the Bring Back New Orleans Commission to help rebuild the city
 - Engaged with the mayor, president, and other officials to advocate for the church and community
 - Navigated the political tensions and infighting within the commission
- 4. Strategic Communication
 - Utilized the church website, monthly newsletters, and media to communicate with members and the public
 - Reinforced consistent messages of hope, unity, and the church's commitment to returning
- 5. Strategic Satellite Campuses
 - Established satellite campuses in Houston and Baton Rouge to minister to displaced members
 - Appointed pastors to lead these campuses and help members settle in those cities
- 6. Strategic Home Base
 - Transitioned to weekly services at FBC New Orleans
 - Launched the "Build Back" campaign to help members return and rebuild their homes
 - Utilized a tent on Florida Boulevard to serve members without transportation
- 7. Strategic Preaching
 - Used preaching to engage, unify, and encourage the congregation
 - Delivered sermons focused on enduring trials, overcoming challenges, and the church's resilience
- 8. Preparing the satellite campuses for autonomy
 - Trained leaders and set up deacon ministry and worship service orders to ensure the campuses would be successful
 - Provided ongoing support and availability through direct communication channels like phone, Zoom, and in-person visits
- 9. Leveraging new communication technologies
 - Adopted live streaming and text messaging to stay connected with the campuses, a significant shift from the pre-Katrina era
 - Katrina forced the church to learn and utilize these new communication methods
- 10. Emphasis on preaching
 - Preaching the Word of God is the church's core priority and DNA
 - Preaching was crucial in encouraging and increasing people's faith during post-Katrina
- 11. Utilizing media and outreach
 - Intentionally used media interviews and the internet to reach beyond the local congregation and share the message of the church's return
 - Viewed media and technology as a blessing to spread the Word of God
- 12. Maintaining a sense of normalcy

- Continued hosting the annual marriage retreat to keep the church's ministry and community life intact
 - Saw investing in marriages and families as crucial for keeping the church strong
13. Staff development and hiring process
- Highly intentional about hiring exceptional people for every position, from the janitor to the top leadership
 - They preferred to hire from within the church community, as they were more committed and willing to go the extra mile

Overview: Throughout the discussion, Pastor Luter's strategic leadership and adaptability were crucial in navigating the crisis and maintaining the church's unity and momentum during this challenging period. His commitment to his congregation and New Orleans is demonstrated through his actions and decisions.

APPENDIX D

DAVID CROSBY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Here is a detailed summary of the key points from the transcript.¹

Overview

- The transcript is an interview with David Crosby, the former pastor of FBC New Orleans.
- The interview was conducted on January 31, 2025.

Key Topics

1. Relationship between Crosby and Luter before Katrina
 - They knew each other and had worked together on various boards and associations before the hurricane.
 - Their relationship deepened and became broader after Katrina as they navigated the challenges together.
2. Impact of Katrina on First Baptist Church
 - The church suffered \$3 million in damage, though it did not take on rising floodwaters.
 - They could return to the building in October 2005 but had no electricity, phone service, or internet for months.
 - The church lost about half its staff and half its congregation due to displacement.
3. Hosting Franklin Avenue Baptist Church
 - In early 2006, Luter approached Crosby about Franklin Avenue using FBC New Orleans's facilities for worship services.
 - Crosby readily agreed, seeing it as the right thing to do to help another needy church.
 - Franklin Avenue initially met at FBC New Orleans every first and third Sunday, then transitioned to weekly services by July 2006.
 - The two churches collaborated on various ministries and events during this time.
4. Crosby's observations on Luter's strategic leadership
 - Luter prioritized regular worship for his congregation, even as they were displaced.
 - Luter had a vast influence and brought together diverse leaders, including politicians, to work for the city's common good.
 - Using intentional personal interactions, Luter was skilled at connecting with

¹ David Crosby provided express written consent, including explicit permission for using and publishing the data from his interview in this dissertation.

and inspiring people.

- Luter surrounded himself with capable staff and volunteer leaders who could help carry out the church's mission.

Overall, the transcript highlights Fred Luter's strategic leadership during a time of great upheaval and the collaborative spirit between the two pastors and their churches in serving the broader community.

APPENDIX E

GARY MACK SR. INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Here is a detailed summary of the key points from the transcript.¹

Overview

- This is an interview with Gary Mack, a former Franklin Avenue Baptist Church associate pastor.
- The interview was conducted on February 4, 2025.

Key Topics

1. Mack's Relationship with Luter
 - Mack and his wife spoke at Franklin Avenue's marriage retreats for about twelve years before Luter hired him in 2005.
 - Luter became Mack's mentor and supervisor when he joined the staff.
2. The Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina
 - Katrina hit in August 2005, displacing the entire church staff and congregation.
 - Mack fled to Houston, where Luter established a satellite church for displaced members.
 - Mack helped organize and minister to the Houston congregation, while Luter traveled to preach at various locations.
 - The church in New Orleans could not afford to pay staff, but FBC Houston hired Mack to continue supporting the displaced members.
3. Rebuilding the Church in New Orleans
 - After about a year, Luter decided to return and rebuild the Franklin Avenue church.
 - Mack returned with Luter, and they worked to restore the church building with help from volunteer teams.
 - They held services in a tent on the church property while the building was being repaired.
 - Mack led an "Operation Back Home" ministry to help members gut and rebuild their homes.
 - The church officially reopened in 2008, with the congregation returning in full force.
4. Luter's Strategic Leadership
 - Mack emphasized Luter's influence, character, and commitment to the people of the church and community.
 - Luter's preaching was crucial in keeping the congregation united and motivated during rebuilding.

¹ Gary Mack Sr. provided express written consent, including explicit permission for using and publishing the data from his interview in this dissertation.

- Luter empowered his staff, including Mack, to take on significant responsibilities and make decisions.
- Luter's willingness to engage with political and civic leaders helped secure resources for the church and community.

Overall, the transcript highlights Luter's strategic, people-focused leadership, which guided Franklin Avenue Baptist Church through the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and subsequent rebuilding efforts.

APPENDIX F

FRANKLIN AVENUE PUBLICATIONS

Monthly Newsletter¹

Membership Registration

All Franklinites go to
nawlingsconnect.com
to register or update your family's location
information. Tell other FABC members!

2515 Franklin Avenue
New Orleans, LA 77017



2515 Franklin Avenue
New Orleans, LA 77017

We're Coming Back!

Fred Luter, Jr. Sr. Pastor

**"Spiritually impacting our families, neighborhood, city and state by Exalting the Savior,
Equipping the Saints, and Evangelizing the Sinners."**

¹ Fred Luter provided express written consent, including explicit permission for using and publishing FABC's articles in this dissertation.

FABC Newsletter**February 2006****Words from the Pastor****Pastor's Preaching Schedule****1st and 3rd Sundays of each month**

First Baptist Church of New Orleans at 7:30 AM
5290 Canal Blvd. 504-482-5572.

Istrouma Baptist Church in Baton Rouge at 1:00 PM
10500 Sam Rushing Dr. 225-295-0775

2nd and 4th Sundays of each month

Houston's First Baptist Church at 1:00 PM
7401 Katy Freeway 713-335-6490

Church Rebuilding News**Tithes & Donations**

Please mail your tithes and donations to:
P.O. Box 11407 Birmingham, Alabama 35246-1296

Contact for Other Pastors

Pastor Sam Young, Jr.
Memphis, TN

Pastor Johnell Thomas
1801 East Palm Valley Blvd. Apt. 1513
Rounrock, TX 78664

Pastor Averri LeMelle
5706 Darby Square Trail
Houston, TX 77084

Pastor William Marshall
New Orleans, LA

Pastor Elbert Williams, III
Dallas, TX

Pastor Gary Mack
Houston, TX

Death Notices**Wedding Notices**

Service Bulletin

Page 1

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FABC Contacts in Houston

Pastor Gary J. Mack, Sr. can be reached at 713-335-6490. If you have not already done so, register your family information online at **nawlinsconnect.com**.

Pastor Luter's Preaching Schedule

1st and 3rd Sundays of each month

First Baptist Church of New Orleans at 7:30 a.m.
5290 Canal Blvd. 504-482-5772

Istrouma Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, LA at 1:00 p.m.
105000 Sam Rushing Dr. 225-295-0775

2nd and 4th Sundays of each month

Houston's First Baptist Church at 1:00 p.m.

Ministry Volunteers Needed

We are asking members who are associate ministers and those who serve in the music, ushers, greeters, deacons, deaconess and children's ministries to please sign up today. We need your help!

FABC Married Couples Retreat

FABC Married Couples Retreat will be August 18-20, 2006
San Destin Beach Hilton, Destin Florida. For more information contact
Eric & Adrian Page at 713-436-8375 or Darrin & Cassandra Brown at 281-870-1161
or email request for information to **fabcmarriageretreat@yahoo.com**

**If you have joined FABC-West in the past 3 months
please call the office at 713-335-6493**

Sick and Shut-In Call 713-335-6490

Gregory Painia (Houston) VA Hospital

Bereaved FABC Family Members

Carolyn Boutte & Napoleon Williams
(father & grandfather: *James Zacharie, Jr.*)



located at
Houston's First Baptist Church
7401 Katy Freeway
Houston, Texas

Fred Luter, Jr., Senior Pastor

SERMON NOTES

Sermon Title & Scripture	
Notes	

WORSHIP SERVICE

January 22, 2006
1:00 p.m.

Organ Prelude.....	Musicians
Call to Worship.....	Minister
Celebration of Praise.....	Choir & Congregation
Scripture Reading & Prayer.....	Deacons
Choral Prayer Response.....	Choir & Congregation
Late Worshipers May Enter	
Welcome of Guests.....	Minister
Inspirational Singing.....	Choir
Tithes & Offerings.....	Deacons & Ushers
Hymn of Preparation.....	Choir

The Gospel Message

Pastor Fred Luter, Jr.

Invitation to Discipleship	
Intercessory Prayer.....	Minister
Benediction	

God Loves You and So Do We!!!

Fall 2005 Preaching Schedule²

This is my preaching schedule for the next two months:

10/23	First Baptist Church	Woodstock, AL
10/30	The Church at Brook Hills	Birmingham, AL
11/04	The Church at Brrok Hills	Birmingham, AL
11/13	First Baptist Church	Conyers, GA
11/20	First Baptist Church	West Monroe, LA
11/23	Cornerstone Baptist Church	Arlington, TX
11/27	Cornerstone Baptist Church	Arlington, TX
12/04	Mississippi Blvd. Christian Church	Memphis, TN
12/11	Mount Zion Fifth African BC	*Virginia
12/18	Tabernacle Baptist Church	Atlanta, GA

² Luter emailed this preaching schedule to Gary Mack Sr. to publish on the church's website in the fall of 2005. The font, grammar, and spelling is in the original format.

APPENDIX G

FRED LUTER JR. SERMONS

Sermon 1¹

Title: "The Other Side of Christianity"

Text: Psalm 34

Originally preached on August 24, 2005

Well, good morning. How's everybody doing today? Amen. Giving obedience to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Savior of my life, to my friend and my brother, my mentor, and the man that I love and appreciate, Dr. Chuck Kelly, I thank you so much for all that you've done for me and my family and the ministry there at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church.

It is such an honor to always come and share at this wonderful, wonderful seminary. God has blessed me to preach all over the country and all-over different places, but there's no place like coming home to New Orleans Seminary. I appreciate you so very much, Dr. Kelly, more than you would ever know, for the opportunity that you have given to me in these years that we've known one another.

To the faculty and the staff, and especially the students here at New Orleans Seminary, I am indeed delighted and excited because I have been invited back with you one more time. Thank you so much.

Praise the Lord for you. Will you turn your Bibles with me this morning to the Old Testament, the 34th division of Psalms? I also want to thank Dr. Platt, the new dean of the chapel, for his hospitality this morning. I appreciate him so very, very, very much.

Psalm 34 is where we will be preaching from this morning. This is an exciting time for those of you who are in school, who are in seminary. It's an opportunity to come and develop your skills, develop the dreams and the vision that God has for you in the future as music leaders, as pastors, as missionaries, as individuals that God's going to use in the body of Christ to just develop and to save those who are lost, to impact neighborhoods and change people's lives, Mel, like you're doing, and across the city, state, and nation. It's an exciting time to come and sit at this place, learn at this school, and be a part of what God is doing in your life. And I know it's exciting.

It's a great joy to be in a place like this campus, to be in a place like this city, and there's an excitement, anticipation, and joy. But, ladies and gentlemen, there's also the other part of your seminary experience. There's the test, there's the exam, there's the financial hardship. There are a lot of things that will cause you, if you're not careful, not only to not enjoy your seminary experience as much, but also your experience in life. All of us need to understand that there are

¹ Fred Luter provided express written consent, including explicit permission for using and publishing his sermons in this dissertation. To maintain the integrity of Luter's sermons, any misspellings, grammatical errors or colloquial expressions used in the preaching settings were included in the sermon transcripts.

always some valleys and mountains in our lives as believers. I will never forget when God sent the children of Israel to the promised land. He said, ‘Go forth.’ It’s a land full of milk and honey. It’s a land that I’m giving you. You don’t have to buy it. Nothing that you have to pay for. However, it’s a land of hills and valleys. And such is the Christian life. Such is the life of every child of God. And so today, I want to share with you a passage of Scripture that I trust and pray will help you and encourage you when you meet those valley experiences, when you deal with those dry times, and when you face those tough times, when you deal with those dry times, when you face those times during this semester and during the time in your life that hopefully you can refer back to this sermon and realize that I’ll make it through the storm and through the rain. In Psalm 34:19, David is the writer of the Psalms. You’ll find these similar words. The Bible says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

Father, we thank You and praise You for this privilege and opportunity that You’ve given us to be in the Lord’s house on this, the Lord’s Day. We thank You, Lord, for the invitation from Dr. Kelly and Dr. Platt. We thank you for all that has been said and done through music, God. We praise You for the faculty, the staff, and the students at this wonderful seminary. Now, God, we pray that You’ll bless this time of preaching. As always, Master, let me decrease as You increase. Father, let them not see prayer, but God, let them see Christ. So then, Master, that you may be glorified in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.

I want to preach this morning on the subject “The Other Side of Christianity.” Dr. Kelly, one of the greatest feelings in the world is when a person becomes a believer; Amy, when a person becomes born again; when a person becomes a Christian. I’ve never won an NBA championship; I’ve never Dr. Ken, won a World Series; I’ve never won the Super Bowl, and I don’t think we’re gonna see it here in New Orleans for a very long time. I was telling Dr. Kelly and Dr. Platt that my wife and I went to the Saints and Seattle game a few weeks ago and left at halftime with about four thousand other people; it was just a bad situation. For that matter, I’ve never won an Academy Award. I’ve never won an Olympic medal. I’ve never won a Grammy. I’ve never won a Stella or Dove Award.

I can only imagine, ladies and gentlemen, how those athletes feel, how those actors feel, how those gospel artists feel when their name is called and when they come to a podium and people are applauding for them and clapping for them because of their accomplishments in sports because of the accomplishments in the arts because of their accomplishment in gospel music. I can only imagine what it may feel like to win any of those honors. However, my brothers and my sisters, I’m sure you know that very few awards could give you the feeling that you have when you surrender your heart and your mind to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There’s nothing that you can compare to a life that’s committed and surrendered to a Savior named Jesus Christ.

Think about it. Once you acknowledge Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are part of the family of God. God is your Father; he created you; he loves you. Jesus Christ is your Savior; he suffered for you; he bled for you; he died for you on the cross. The Holy Spirit is now your comforter and your keeper. He gives you power to walk right, to talk right, and to live right. You are now part

of the family of God. Think about it. From every continent, from every nation, from every country, from every nationality, from every tribe, from every village, you have brothers and sisters all over this world. And then you are part of a local church where you come to worship God, where you come to praise God, where you come to learn of the things of God.

You come into the fellowship of believers. You can come here to this seminary, and you can come from the north, from the south, from the east, and from the west, and you'll find believers here with the love of God that you have. You're part of the family of God. On top of that, as a believer, God gives you blessings in your life. You're given assurance. You're given blessings. You're promised contentment. You're promised deliverance. What a feeling it is to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life. You're promised eternal life. You're promised fullness. You're promised grace and holiness and justification and sanctification. You're promised the kingdom of God. What a feeling it is to be a part of the family of God.

You have love and mercy, and newness and peace, and revelation of the Scripture. What a blessing it is to be a part of the family of God. You have sanctification, testimony, and unity. You have victory in your walk with God. You have worship. You have zeal. And it's all because you're part of the family of God. Everything is going well.

The blessings of God are flowing in your life like Niagara Falls. You're too blessed to be stressed. You believe that when praises go up, blessings certainly come down. But then one day, when you least expect, one day that you have never anticipated, one day that you will never, ever forget, you experience the other side of Christianity. That day when the blessings come down.

That's when the blessings, for whatever reason, stop flowing. As a matter of fact, the blessings have turned into bitterness. The happiness has turned into hopelessness. The fullness has turned into frustration. The friends have turned into foes. Holiness has turned into hypocrisy. And your testimony has turned into trials and tribulations. Maybe there's too much stress in your life. Maybe you're trying to do it all by yourself. Maybe you're tired of the church mess. And church cliques and devilish deacons and tricky trustees and cranky choir members and ugly acting ushers and messy members. You find yourself not enjoying your Christianity as much as you did when you first got saved. Ladies and gentlemen, don't look now. But what you are experiencing is the other side of Christianity.

That's what's happening, ladies and gentlemen, in our text this morning in Psalms 34. David, Dr. Lee, is experiencing. He's experiencing the other side of Christianity. He's experiencing that time that every believer, that every child of God, goes through at one time or another in their lives. That time in your life, that side where we don't want to go through, that side that we never look forward to, that side of Christianity that we don't want to talk about, we don't want to deal with, we don't want to live through. However, my brothers and my sisters, it's a time that every believer, that all of us, Dr. Kelly, go through at one time or another in our Christian life. Ladies and gentlemen, trouble, trials, and tribulations are part of the Christian experience.

It's a part of the believer's life. Frustration, fear, and foes will happen to every child of God somewhere along their Christian journey. And no one is exempt. Think about it. David was a man after God's own heart, yet he experienced the other side of Christianity. David was the apple of God's eye, yet he experienced the other side of Christianity. David was chosen by God, yet he experienced the other side of Christianity. David was anointed and appointed by God as a pastor, but he experienced the other side of Christianity. Listen to David in verses 1–10 of Psalm 34, when things were going so well. Look what he says, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make a boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear the heavenly glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."

Look at the joy that David had. Listen to the excitement that David had. Listen to the anticipation that He's encouraging people. Rejoice with me. Exalt the Lord with me. But just a few verses later, David is singing, ladies and gentlemen, a different tune. Just a few verses later, now David is singing a different song. In verses 1 through 3, he's excited. He's pumped. He's overjoyed. But now listen to verse 19. Listen to his cry. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." In just a few short verses, in just a few short Scriptures, in just a matter of minutes, David has gone from divine preservation to human persecution.

In a few short verses and a few short moments, he's gone from divine preservation to human persecution. Many of the afflictions of the righteous. And such is the case with my brothers and my sisters, with many of us here today. Whether we want to admit it or not, whether we want to accept it or not, every believer will face the other side of Christianity. So, how do we handle it? How do we cope with it? How do we deal as believers, as you start off this semester, when those tough times come? When joy is not there? When happiness is not there? When the smile is not there? When the finances are not there?

How do you deal with the other side of your seminary experience? Well, three things that you must understand according to this text that everyone of us must have to deal with as you're dealing with the other side of Christianity. First of all, I want you to see the plight of the afflicted. Notice the plight of the afflicted. Look at the first part of verse 19. David says, Notice the plight of the afflicted. Now, David said, Dr. Kevin, my struggle, my dilemma, my difficulty, my plight, it's not that I'm afflicted. I understand that. I realize that as a child of God, I've got to go through that, that I'm not exempt. David said, "I don't have a problem." I don't have a difficulty.

It's not that I'm afflicted, but the problem that I have with the text is how often I'm afflicted. The Bible didn't say every now and then. The Bible didn't say that sometimes. The Bible didn't say every other year. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Back in old school, there was a blues song out that identified this plight. It said that when something like that happens, they call it Stormy Monday, but Tuesday is just as bad. Wednesday is first, and Thursday is also sad. Come on, some of y'all know that, don't they? You haven't been saved all your life. David said, God, I can handle this every once in a while. I can deal with it every now and then, but why many?

Dr. Taylor, why many? I can see every now and then. I can see every now and then, every year, every, but God, why many? Why so often? Why are there so numerous? Can anybody besides me relate? Can anyone say to David, I understand? David, I feel you. I know Job can understand it, and one day, Job lost his health, his wealth, and his family, my brothers and my sisters. The fact of the matter is, all of us will face the other side of Christianity. Just because you're born again, you're not exempt from affliction. Just because you're saved, you're not exempt from trials. Just because you are spirit-filled, you are not exempt from the troubles in life. The Bible says many, numerous, plenty, various, and countless afflictions of the righteous.

In other words, if it ain't one thing, it's another. If it's not piling with you and your spouse, it's piling with you and the kids. If it's not piling with you and your spouse, and you and your kids, it's piling with a coworker, piling with a classmate, piling with a job, piling with the church members, piling with finances. Your money is funny, and your change is strange. Your promise piles up with your classmate. If it's not one thing, it's another. As soon as you get things right between you and your wife, the dogs start barking, the cats start meowing. Everything seems to go wrong. David said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Every believer will face numerous afflictions as a child of God.

The Scripture says, the Bible says, "many are the afflictions." Think about it, ladies and gentlemen, in your walk with God, in your travels with the Master, we're afflicted in things sometimes every day of our lives. We're afflicted by temptations. We're afflicted by bitterness. We're afflicted by struggles with our flesh. Many are the afflictions. We're afflicted by doubt. Lord, I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I can be successful in this class. I don't know if I can pull this off. I don't know if I can be successful in ministry. We're afflicted by the death of a loved one. We're afflicted. We're afflicted with marital problems. Many are the afflictions. We're afflicted with single issues. We're afflicted with discouragement. We're afflicted with loneliness. Many are the afflictions. We're afflicted with guilt. We're afflicted with worry. Can I pass Hebrew? Can I pass Greek? Lord, we're afflicted with worry. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. We're afflicted with anger. We're afflicted with jealousy. We're afflicted with financial issues. We're afflicted with everything. We're afflicted with lifestyle choices. We're afflicted with lying. We're afflicted with backbiting. We're afflicted with pride. We're afflicted with disease, sickness, and health problems. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, don't look now, but many are the afflictions of the righteous. And because many are the afflictions of the righteous, it forces us to face the other side of Christianity.

But then there's a second thing I want you to see in the text, not only the plight of the afflicted, but second, I want you to notice the problems for the afflicted. The problem for the afflicted. Look at the second part of verse 19. David says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Start right there. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Not only the plight of the afflicted, but secondly, I noticed my brothers and my sisters, the problem since the Olympics, for the afflicted. The problem that I have, Dr. Kelly, honestly, with this text, the issue that I have with this text, the struggle that I have with this text: when I was preparing, I said, "God, you gotta explain this." God, I don't understand this.

The struggle that I have with the text is that the words “afflictions” and “righteous” are in the same verse. There’s no comma. There’s no comma. There’s no period. There’s no pause. There’s no distance. Afflictions and righteousness are in the same. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Now, Dr. Kelly, honestly, professors, ladies and gentlemen, I could have handled the text better if the Word of God had said, if the academic had said, afflictions and adulterous. I could have dealt with that better. I could have dealt with it better if it would have said afflictions and whoremongers. Afflictions and rapists. I could have dealt with it better if it had said afflictions and child abusers. Afflictions and racists. I could have dealt with it better if it had said afflictions and alcoholics.

Afflictions and murderers. Afflictions and criminals. I could have dealt with this better if the text had said “Afflictions and a lost sinner.” Because they’re just reaping what they sowed. What goes around comes around. If you do it to somebody else, it’s going to happen to you. However, my brothers and sisters, the Bible doesn’t say that. The Bible doesn’t say the afflictions of adulterers, afflictions and rapists. The Bible said, “many are the afflictions of the righteous,” and to be honest with you, ladies and gentlemen, that bothered me. God, I didn’t understand why many are the afflictions of the righteous. Which says to me that afflictions come our way not because of who you are but because of whose you are.

That’s why I have problems with these prosperity preachers on TV and prosperity preachers on the radio. If you listen to these guys, they’ll make you think you should never have any struggles. You should never have any problems. You should never have any hurts. You should never have any pain. Nothing should ever go wrong in your life. Everything should always be well because after all, you are a child of God, and you are blessed, and money is coming to you now. Now, what Jesus says is that in this world, you will suffer trials and tribulations. Jesus says if they hated me, they’re going to hate you. Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus himself said in this world, children of God will suffer trials and tribulations. Listen, my brothers and my sisters.

Satan’s main objective is to steal, kill, and destroy every child of God. He wants to steal your joy. He wants to kill your dreams. He wants to destroy your life and your ministry. In other words, ladies and gentlemen, the other side of Christianity is the fact that you can do everything right and still face affliction. You can die every hour. You can cross every T. You can even spell the word right, Dr. Bozeman, and still face affliction. Husbands, you can love your wives as Christ loved the church and still face affliction. Wives, you can respect and honor your husband as unto the Lord and still face affliction. Singles, you can live committed lives every day that you live and still face affliction.

Teenagers and young people, you can honor your husband, your parents and the Lord, for this is right. And Dr. Price still faces affliction. You can be a devoted deacon, a trusted trustee, a committed choir member, a useful usher, a marvelous member, and a praying preacher, and still face affliction. The fact of the matter, ladies and gentlemen, is that in this life, you and I will face trials and tribulations. In this life, we will face affliction. But remember, brothers and sisters, not because of who you are, but because of whose you are. With this, my third and final point.

Because of the other side of Christianity we face, first of all, the plight of the afflicted. Because of the other side of Christianity we face, secondly, the problem of the afflicted. But I'm so glad that the text doesn't stop there. Because you'll find, at the end of the text, you'll find not only the plight of the afflicted, the problem for the afflicted, but you'll also find the promise to the afflicted. The promise to the afflicted. Look at the last part of verse 19. You notice there's a period after righteousness. Then after righteousness, there's that sanctified conjunction. But that is, it kind of wipes out everything that was before. It kind of says, I know this happened, but the Lord delivers them out of them all. That was your amen, Conan. That was your shout. That amen should have gone right there somewhere. There are many afflictions of the righteous, but all is right. But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Yes, there's a plight of the afflicted. Yes, there is a problem for the afflicted. But thank God, there's a promise to the afflicted. But the Lord, not the pastor. But the Lord, not the president. But the Lord, not the professors. But the Lord, not the mayor. But the Lord, not the governor. But the mayor. But the Lord, not the president. But the Lord shall deliver him out of all them. Oh, child of God, I understand the plight of your affliction. I can relate to the problem of being afflicted. But together, we ought to rejoice in God's promises to the afflicted. But the Lord delivers him out of all of them. Yes. The last time I checked, all means all.

All, no matter how many, no matter the stronghold, no matter the struggle, no matter the addiction, no matter the issue, no matter how long you've been handling that thing, the Lord, but the Lord shall deliver him out of them all. In other words, ladies and gentlemen, your affliction is temporary. Your affliction is just for a specific time. Your affliction is just for a season. Your affliction is just for a reason. Your affliction is only a test. You cannot have a testimony without a test. And God gives all of us tests in life so we can have a testimony. Your affliction is only for a little while. It's the other side of Christianity. But always remember, ladies and gentlemen, as I come to a close, that this too will pass.

Whatever you're struggling with, whatever you're dealing with, whatever your affliction, whether it's in your marriage, whether it's in your finances, whether it's in your personal life, whether it's in your studies, whether it's in your church, whether it's in your ministry, this too will pass. Why? Because he promised to deliver you. All throughout the Bible, God promises us that he will deliver us. Isaiah 54:17 says, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." That's a promise. Psalms 37:25, David said, "I have been younger, but now I'm old. But I've never seen the righteous forsaken or his son begging for bread." That's a promise. Psalms 27:1 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" That's a promise. Psalms 35 says, "Weeping, crying, may endure for a night, but the Lord will bring joy in the morning." That's a promise. Isaiah 43:2 says, "When your path is through the water, I'll be with you." That's a promise. Isaiah 43:2 says, "When you walk through the fire, I'll be with you." That's a promise. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear not, I am with you. I will uphold you with my right hand." That's a promise. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good. To them that love God, and are called according to his purpose." That's a promise.

Second Corinthians 4:17 says, “For a light affliction, our light affliction is just for a moment.” That’s a promise. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says, “My grace, my grace, my grace is sufficient.” That’s a promise. And finally, Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing. Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which will deal with all of your afflictions, shall keep your heart and keep your mind through Jesus Christ.” And then finally, the text this morning, in Psalms 34:19 says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them.”

Oh. Oh. There will be the other side of Christianity. But never forget that the Lord shall deliver you. You’re going to have some good days here, and there are going to be some bad days. But remember that the Lord delivers them out of them all. There’s going to be some hills. There are going to be some valleys. But remember, the Lord delivers him out of them all. Many of the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord, the songwriter says it best as I go to my seat, I’ve seen the lightning flash. I’ve heard the thunder roar. I felt sin breakers dashing, trying to conquer my soul. But I heard the voice of Jesus telling me, Fred, fight on. Why? Because he promised. Why? Because he promised. Why? Because he promised. Why? Because he promised never to leave you. Never to leave you alone. No! Never alone. No! He promised never to leave you. Never to leave you alone. And that’s the other side of Christianity.

Sermon 2

Title: "What to Do When the Storm Comes"

Text: Mark 4:35–41

Originally preached on September 6, 2005

Wow, thank you, Southwestern Sound. Wasn't that great? Amen, amen, amen. I'm going to try to do this without crying. I've been crying every time I have an opportunity to stand up and share and preach, but it's been very difficult, but I'm going to try to get through this without crying. First, I will give obedience to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Savior of my life, to your president, my friend, and my brother, and one of my mentors in the faith. Dr. Paige Patterson has done more for me in my life. He has literally put me on the map of the Southern Baptist Convention. I was just a street preacher from New Orleans, Louisiana, pastoring a little struggling mission church in New Orleans.

When he heard about me and visited our church, and he said, "He has given so many people my name, all the great things that I've been able to accomplish from preaching in state conventions, preaching at Evangelical Conference, the first African American preacher to ever preach for the Southern Baptist Convention, and on and on and on. I owe that to him and for his trust and confidence in me, and I just want to thank you, brother, for what you've done for me. Appreciate it. To Sister Patterson, thank you so much. Y'all have been such a support to me. To think that you can pastor a large church and have a wonderful family, a wonderful home, a wonderful congregation, and in a matter of one day, it could all be gone. It's just unbelievable."

You know, we have no place to worship, no place to come and see our folk, and no home to go to. It's just tough. It's really difficult. And when I saw some of our members here this morning, it brought tears to my eyes because, first of all, I didn't know where they were. And I went to a reunion, you know, yesterday in the convention center, and every time I saw one, I just broke down and cried because we don't know when we'll ever be back. Our city will never again be the same. One of my elderly members right now, if they were to die, they can't come to the church to have their funeral.

Who's going to eulogize them? Who's going to talk about the great things they did for the Kingdom of God while they were there in New Orleans? And, frankly, I'm with the church. And it's just tough, so we really, really need your prayers. And my sister, my niece, and my nephew, I have not seen them since the flood. And they're here in Dallas, and they showed up this morning. My son, Chip, is a student at Dallas Baptist University. And I just praise the Lord for allowing Him to be here today, as well as Aaron and all of you. And I just want to thank you so very much, Southwestern, for your prayers and financial gift. I saw a brother here this morning from First Baptist, Lavaca. Where are you, my brother? There he is over there.

I preached last Wednesday night at First Baptist, Lavaca. When we left New Orleans, as we've always done, we just brought two or three days of clothing at the most. Because we've evacuated for hurricanes before. We always have, but we've gone back two days. We did it last year for Hurricane George. For Hurricane Ivan, a year before. And two or three days later, we were back. So, all we brought were two- or three-day's worth of clothes, all of us. And I didn't have anything. And I told Pastor Grant Ethridge, man, I say, I got a golf shirt. I'm wearing some pants. If you allow me to preach in that, I'd be fine. And he said, Oh, Brother Luter, come on. That'd be fine. And as soon as I got off the plane, this pastor and his wife, the church, brought me to a clothing store.

This outfit I have on today is from First Baptist, Lavaca. They brought me suits and shirts and ties and things like that. And so, I appreciate that, man. And raised a tremendous offering for me and my family. And I'm able now to bless other church members and family members as I see them. And it's just been a great, great opportunity to see what the Lord has done. Pray with us and pray for us. We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we do know who holds tomorrow. Amen. So, pray with us about that. There's so much more I can say, but I know you have to get to class. Turn to Mark four.

I want you to look at it really quickly with me. I'm going to just try to get this. I'm going to go through this as much as I can. Sister Kelly, good to see you, my sister. God bless you also. It's a pleasure to see you also. Mark: 4:35–41. I can only give you the bones. I can try to put the meat on it later, Milton, but I'll give you the best that I have. "On the same day, when the evening had come, Jesus said unto them, let us pass over unto the other side. Now, when they had left the multitudes, they took him along in the boat as he was, and as other little boats were also with him. And there was a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was already filling. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke him and said unto him, Teacher, Master, do you not care that we are perishing? Then he arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. But he said unto them, Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? And they feared exceedingly and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Our Father and our God, Master, we come this morning. We thank you and praise you for this privilege and the opportunity that you've given us to be here today at the Southwestern Seminary Campus. Thank you for Dr. Patterson and his confidence and trust in me. Thank you for him giving me this opportunity, God, to stand up and say, "Stand before the faculty, the staff, and the students of this great seminary and to share just a word from the Lord." Master, I thank You for seeing my family members, God, not only my biological family members, but family members from the church at Franklin Avenue. God, thank You for watching over them, protecting them, God, from the storm. And God, I don't know where thousands of them are, but God, I just pray that Your grace will be sufficient in their lives.

God bless this time of preaching, as always, so that You may be glorified. Let me decrease as you increase. Let them not see Fred, but God, let them see Christ. And that you may be glorified. The saints of God may be edified. Satan may be horrified. And lost sinners will come to repentance. In Jesus' name we pray. And for us, say, "Let the people of God say, Amen." And Jesus said unto them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" In the brief time that I have remaining, I want to preach this morning from the subject, "What to do when the storm comes?" What to do? What to do when the storm comes? When the storm comes. Dr. Patterson, it happens to every believer at one time or another. It happens to every child of God, sooner or later.

Milton, it doesn't matter how long you've been saved. Dan, it doesn't matter how long you've been born again. Tim, it doesn't matter what age you may be. You can be an adoring child, a tender teenager. In your tempting twenties, your tantalizing thirties, your firm forties, your fading fifties, your soaring sixties, your serene seventies, your aching eighties, or your blessed nineties, it doesn't matter what age you are. Still, sooner or later, it will happen to you. It doesn't matter what your profession or your vocation is. You can be a seminary professor, a seminary president, a teacher, an attorney, a pharmacist, a business owner, a housemaker, a preacher, an evangelist, a carpenter, or an electrician. And for the younger folks in the house, a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker. It doesn't matter, but sooner or later, it will happen to you.

Doesn't matter your denomination. You can be Southern Baptist, National Baptist, American Baptist, or a lot of the folks I pastored in New Orleans for years, bedside Baptists. But sooner or later, it will happen to you. It doesn't matter your race. You can be Anglo, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, African American, but I promise you, brothers and sisters, sooner or later, it will happen to you. And what will happen, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, is that somewhere along the Christian journey, somewhere along the line from the time you're born until the time that God takes us home, somewhere along the line, the life that you are in, in this world, until the time that you're out of this world, somewhere along the time of your life, storms will come your way.

Somewhere between earth and glory, trouble, heartaches, and pain will knock at your door. And it's happening to us right now in the city of New Orleans. But who knows what door storms are gonna knock on next week, or next month, or maybe on tomorrow. And to be honest with you, Southwestern, my brothers and my sisters, my concern is not that, Dr. Patterson, we have storms. My concern is not that we have trials and tribulations. But my concern is, what do you do when the storm comes? I've discovered that in spite of all the Scriptures that we know by memory, in spite of all the things that God has already done in our lives, in spite of all the blessings of God in our lives, in spite that God has been for us yesterday, today, and forevermore, in spite of all the testimonies that we can testify about the goodness of God in our life, ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that many of us as believers still don't know what to do when the storms of life are raging.

Brothers and sisters, therefore, the question of the hour is, how do you handle storms in your life? Those on the balcony, how do you handle the tough times? How do you handle the trials and tribulations in your life? How do you handle the troubled times? How do you handle a divorce? How do you handle an unfaithful spouse? How do you handle an unexpected death? How do you handle sickness? How do you handle jealousy, envy, hardships, and cliques in the ministry?

How do you handle things when your money is funny and when your change is strange? How do you handle trouble when it comes into your life? Not somebody else's family, your family. Not somebody else's church, your church. Not somebody else's ministry, your ministry. Not somebody else's son, your son. Not somebody else's daughter, your daughter. How do you handle it when storms come and knock on your door? Well, my brothers and my sisters, you know what I've discovered in this last week since we've gone through Hurricane Katrina? I've discovered that when trouble comes your way, when the storms of life are raging, faith is the first area that the enemy works on. Patterson, I must admit, watching CNN and watching Fox News and watching my city and my town and my home and my church and my brothers and my sisters' home and family church just under the water, I must admit that my faith said, Now what you gonna do now? That there's nothing, that there's nothing you can go back to. There's no job, there's no worship, there's nothing. Well, what are you gonna do now? And for a moment, the enemy took over my mind. And I began to lose faith in all the things that God has done in my life.

A reminder of the story of a hundred years ago of this gentleman who fell into this seemingly bottomless pit. And Dr. Patterson, all he was able to do was hold on to this branch. He looked down, and there was nothing but darkness. He looked up, he really couldn't climb out of that thing, so he began to cry out, "Hey, is anybody up there?" Chip didn't hear anybody for a while. He began to cry out again, "Hey, is anybody up there?" After a while, Tony, a verse came back, and the verse said, "Yes, I'm here." The guy said, "Who is it?" And the verse said, "This is God." He said, "Oh, God, I knew you would save me." God said, "You believe I can save you? Yes." He said, "Oh, God, I knew you would rescue me." God said, "You believe I can rescue you?" He said, "Yes, God." God said, "You trust me?" Yes, God, I trust you. God said, "You have faith?" Yes, God, I have faith. God said, let go of the branch." There was a long period of silence there. After a while, a verse came back, "Hey, is anybody else up there? Oh, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, faculty, I've discovered that when storms come your way, when tough times come your way, faith is the first area that the enemy works on. And you know what I've discovered? Fear is the opposite of faith. If the enemy can get you to fear, he can get you to doubt."

If he can get you to doubt the promises of God, he can shake your faith. Well, that's exactly what's happening in our text. These disciples didn't know what to do when the storms of life were raging. These disciples didn't know what to do when trouble melted and came their way. Keep in mind, they had been with Jesus now for several years. They've seen his miracles. They've heard his great sermons. Yet in spite of all that their eyes have seen, in spite of all that

their ears have heard, these disciples didn't know what to do when the storm came their way. My brothers and my sisters, in the brief time I have left, I want to share with you, really quickly, three things that you must never ever forget when trouble comes your way, when storms of life are raging.

Three things that I must admit that I forgot this week, as I was sitting there having a pity party. I forgot about my life, about our ministry, about my home, about my family. Three things you must never ever forget when the storms of life are raging. First of all, number one, remember the promises of Jesus. Remember the promises of Jesus. Look at verse 35 in the text. The Bible says, "On the same day when the evening had come, Jesus said unto them, Let us cross over to the other side." Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, Jesus didn't come to drown. He said, Let's go to the other side. As a matter of fact, He couldn't drown yet because He came to fulfill a mission. He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

He couldn't drown yet. Peter had not yet denied Him. He couldn't drown. Thomas had not yet betrayed Him. He couldn't drown yet. He had not yet been brought before an unjust court and an unjust court and an unjust court. He couldn't drown yet. He had not yet been crucified on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world. He couldn't drown. He had not yet put nails in His hands and nails in His feet. He couldn't drown. He had not yet cried those seven cries from the cross. The following is "Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani. Why, my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" He couldn't drown. He had not yet cried that seventh cry from the cross. Father, Daddy, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

He couldn't drown. He had not yet died on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world. He couldn't drown. He had not yet risen on resurrection Sunday morning with all power in His hand. Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory? He couldn't drown. That's why I said, boys, let's go to the other side. Oh, when trouble comes, when a storm comes, remember the promises of Jesus. Oh, New Orleans residents, my family, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters of Southwestern Seminary, listen! Storms are going to come your way. Tough times are going to come your way. You're going to have to cry sometime, but I promise you, if you remember the promises of Jesus, everything will be all right, and God's Word is full of promises for His children.

Psalms 37:25, David said, "I have been young, but now I'm old. But I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his son begging for bread." That's a promise. Psalms 34:19 said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord, the Lord is with them. He delivers them out of them all." That's a promise. Isaiah 26:3 said, "I will keep thee in perfect peace, whose mind is steadfast on thee, because they trust in the Lord." That's a promise. Isaiah 40:31 said, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Can I jump up in here? That your mind is stuck with words is easy. "That you run and do not get weary. That you walk in thy faith."

Isaiah 43:2, this one is personal. "When you pass through the waters, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the rivers, they shall not overtake you. When you go through the fire,

you shall not be burned. For I am the Lord, and I am with you.” Romans 8:28 said, “For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, are called according to His purpose.” That’s a promise. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God. And the peace of God, and the peace of God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.” That’s a promise.

Romans 8:38-39 said, “For I am persuaded, Dr. Patterson, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor height, nor depth, nor hurricane Katrina shall separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord.” That’s a promise. Oh, when thinking about God’s promises, the songwriter said it best, I’ve seen the lightning flash. I’ve heard Sister Kelly, the thunder roar. I felt sin breakers dashing, trying to conquer my soul. But Southwestern, I heard the voice of Jesus telling me, “Fight on, fight on.” Why? Because He promised Franklin Avenue. Why? Because He promised Yolanda. He promised never to leave us, never to leave us alone. Oh, when the storm comes, don’t forget the promises of Jesus.

He said, “Boys, let’s go to the other side.” Secondly, really quickly, remember not only the promises of Jesus, but also the presence of Jesus. Look at verse 36 really quickly. “Now, when they had left the multitudes, they took Him along in the boat as He was, and other little boats were also with Him.” Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus was right there in the boat. He was right in the boat. He didn’t say, “Guys, listen, we had a good crusade. Y’all pack up your things. I’m gonna walk on water, and I’ll meet y’all on the other side.” He didn’t do that. He could have, but He didn’t. The Bible said He was in the ship, brother Danny, with Him.

And ladies and gentlemen, when storms come, when tough times come, remember, if you’ve accepted Him into your life, He’s right there with you. He’s living with you. He’s walking with you. He’s consoling you. He’s comforting you. The songwriter said He was there all the time. He was there all the time, waiting patiently in line. He was there all the time. When storms come into your life, remember not only the promises of Jesus but also the presence of Jesus. Third and finally, remember the power of Jesus. Remember the power of Jesus. Look at verses 37 through 41. “And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. And he was in the stern asleep on a pillar. And they awakened Him and said unto Him, ‘Master, don’t you care that we are perishing?’ Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and said unto them, ‘Peace, be still.’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” Verse 41, “And Jesus said unto them, ‘What’s up with y’all? Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?’”

I’ve got to go to my seat, but remember the promises of Jesus. Let’s go to the other side. Remember the presence of Jesus. If you accept Him into your life, He’s living in you.’ And third, remember the power of Jesus. Can you imagine the scene? Use your sanctified imagination. Jesus is there in the boat, asleep. He’s already told them, “Let’s go to the other side.” But Dr. Patterson, a storm began to rage. It doesn’t say it was Hurricane Trina or whatever, but a storm began to rage. The boat begins rocking from side to side, and water is everywhere. Faith comes

into the boat, and these disciples begin to panic. How can He sleep? Why doesn't He do something? Doesn't He care that we are perishing? Why doesn't He? Doesn't He care if we're going to drown? Can you see John telling Peter, "Peter, come on, man, you're the bold one. Wake him up. We're going to drown." Peter said, Man, I got rebuked yesterday. I ain't getting rebuked. Can you see Peter telling John, John, you wake him up. You're his favorite. He likes you, John. John said, "Ah, my name is Wes. I ain't in that mess."

John looked at it, and in spite of all of this bickering and arguing, Jesus woke up. And Jesus asks the question, guys, are we there yet? Uh, uh, well, see, God, Master, you don't, um, you see the, wait, you mean to tell me we're not there yet? Well, see, sir, you don't understand. Wait a minute. What did I tell you before we, what did I tell you before we, did not I tell you? Let's go to the other side. Did I ever promise you something, and it didn't come to pass? I'm right here in the boat with you. And my presence is here with you. I'm right here in the boat with you. I'm right here with you. And he looked at the winds and the seas. He said, Peace, be still.

The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And Jesus looked at those disciples, as he looked at me this week as I was boohooing and crying, watching what was happening on CNN and Fox News, and looking at my home, and looking at our church. And he looked at me and said, "Fred, why are you so fearful?" How is it that you have no faith? And I said, "You've been preaching faith all these years, been teaching faith all these years, and been telling other people to have faith. Now it's time for you, son, to let go of the branch." And ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, as I take my seat, remember when the storms of life are raging. Remember the promises of Jesus. Let's go to the other side. Remember the presence of Jesus. Remember the power of Jesus. Always remember that when the storms show up, so does the Savior. God bless you.

Sermon 3

Title: "Why?"

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1–6

Originally preached on September 30, 2005

It's a word we've used since the time we were able to speak. It's a word we've used from the time we've been able to think for ourselves. It's a word we've used when we're trying to understand certain things. It's a word we've used when we're trying to figure out life. It's a small yet big word. It's a simple yet profound word. It's a question that often times we don't have the answer to, and that word, my brothers and my sisters, that word, ladies and gentlemen, is all but three letters: w-h-y, why. Small yet a big word, simple yet a profound word, the definition of why is for what reason, why for what cause, and why you for what purpose.

Children use this word to question their parents why can't I touch that why can't I eat that for breakfast why can't I have that why can't I play with that why teenagers use this word to aggravate their parents why can't I stay out until 2 a.m. everybody else does why can't I have company when you're not home why do I have to be off the phone by 11 p.m. Why can't I lock the door to my room? Why can't I get a tattoo? It's my body. Why can't I get a nose ring? It's my nose. Why can't I watch certain movies? Why can't I do what I want? Why can't you stop treating me like a child? Why do husbands use this word to understand their wives?

Why do you need another pair of black shoes? Why do you have to be in the bathroom for so long? Why does it take so long to get dressed? Why are you always so moody? Why do I have to sleep on the sofa tonight? The brother is just trying to understand why wives use this word to figure out their husbands. Why do you keep leaving the toilet seat up? Why are you coming to bed without taking a bath? Why do you always show off in front of the company? Why can't you and my mama get along? Why do you keep leaving your clothes on the floor? Why can't you clean up? Why can't you clean up? Why can't you clean up? Why can't you clean up? It is a serious question.

I have been asking God since Monday, August 29, 2005. I've asked that question every day since August 29th. I've asked that question every week since August 29th. I've asked that question every month since August 29th. And the question has simply been God, why? Would you allow the destruction of an entire city? God, why would you allow a flood, the flooding of an entire city? Why would you allow the devastation of an entire city? Why would you allow the displacement of an entire city? Now, brothers and sisters, don't get me wrong. I was born in New Orleans at Charity Hospital. I was raised in New Orleans in the Lower Ninth Ward. All of my schooling was in New Orleans, and I am blessed by God to pastor one of the greatest churches in America in New Orleans.

Therefore, I, more than anyone, understand that there were some things in New Orleans that God was not pleased with. I understand that there were some lifestyles in New Orleans that God was not pleased with. I understand that there were some things in New Orleans that grieved God, but my question to God has been, “God, why not just take out those things that grieved you?” Why not just take out Bourbon Street, the strip clubs? Why not just take out the houses of prostitution, the houses of voodoo worshipers? Why not just take out the satanic churches why not just take out the murderers the rapist and the criminal element

God, why not just take out the things you dislike? Why not just take out the things that displease you? Why not just take out the places that grieved you? But God, why the entire city? Why the schools? Why New Orleans Seminary? Why Xavier? Why Dillard? Why SUNO? Why Tulane? Why Loyola? Why UNO? Why Delgado? Why the churches? Why Franklin Avenue? Why New Home? Why First Emmanuel? Why Beacon Light? Why New Hope? Why Life Center? Why Great Libert? Why Christian Unity? Why, God? Why the Plantation Coffee House? Why McKenzie’s fried chicken? Why the Bakery? Why Willie Mae’s chicken? Why Commander’s Palace? Why Manchu’s Chicken Wings? Why Camelia Grill?

Oh, my brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen, the question on the floor is why? And you know what, my brothers and sisters, I really believe in my heart that I am not the only person who has questioned God since August 29th, 2005, and I know I am not the first believer to question Him. Moses questioned God. Job questioned God. Jesus questioned God when He cried out from the cross. Some of you here have questioned God. Think about it—when you’ve lost your job, when you’ve lost your home, when you’ve lost your car, truck, or SUV; when you’ve lost precious photos; when you’ve lost memories that money can’t buy and that FEMA, Red Cross, Walmart, and Visa can’t replace. And it may not be every day, and it may not be every week, and it may not be every month.

But I assure you that at some time since Hurricane Katrina hit our city, you’ve asked God, ‘Why?’ Well, my brothers and sisters, the answer to all our ‘why’ questions is found right here in our text. The children of Israel were on their way to the land that God had promised them. It was a good land, a land of brooks and water, a land of milk and honey. It was a land that should have taken them two weeks to get to. However, because of rebellion and sin, it took them forty years. It should have taken two weeks, but because of rebellion and sin, it took forty years. And here they are, forty years in the wilderness, and they began asking the question, “why?”

And not only the children of Israel, but for every believer who asked God why, we get our answer in Deuteronomy 8. Brothers and sisters, I believe that there are at least four reasons why God allows certain things—setbacks, trials, and storms—in our lives, and these are revealed right here in the text. First, to humble us. Oh, my friends, for the first time in a long while, God used Hurricane Katrina to humble many of us. Never in your wildest dreams did you see yourself standing in a Red Cross line for vouchers, waiting for food stamps, standing in the FEMA line for rental assistance, or in line to receive Walmart gift cards to buy underwear, toiletries, or other basic necessities.

Never in your wildest dreams did you ever see yourself going through piles of donated clothes for something to wear, going through piles of shoes to put on your feet, sleeping on cots in a public shelter, sharing an apartment or hotel with 10, 15, or maybe 20 other people, sleeping on the floor, air mattress, sofa, or futons, and not complaining because at least you had somewhere to lay your head. No, not you. You used to talk about people who depended on government assistance. Oh, yes, my brothers and sisters, God used Hurricane Katrina to humble us. Some of us were getting too proud. Some of us were boasting too much. Some of us were getting a big head. Some of us had forgotten where God was. Some of us were thinking that we were not where God brought us from.

Don't you know that what you have, God gave you? What do you know God taught you? Where did God bring you from? Some of us were thinking that because of the neighborhood we lived in, because of the kind of car we drove, because of the kind of bling-bling on our bodies, that we were better than everyone else. Oh, my brothers and sisters, God used Hurricane Katrina to put us all on the same level. God used Hurricane Katrina to remind us that He allows the rain to fall on us, just as well as on the unjust. He allows the rain to fall on the just, as well as the unjust. Oh, why did God allow this storm? To humble us, but second, to test us. Like a loss of a job, like a divorce, a sickness, or baby mama drama.

Oh, my friend, God uses things like Hurricane Katrina to test us, to prove us, and to try us, to see whether we would keep His commandments. In other words, to reveal the real you, the genuine you, to see what is really in thine heart. Oh, anybody can praise God when things are going well. Oh, anybody can praise God when there's a roof over your head. Oh, anybody can praise God when there's money in the bank. Anybody can praise God when there's a refrigerator full. Oh, anybody can praise God when there's job security. Oh, anybody can praise God when you're getting a paycheck every week. Oh, but you can still praise God when you're having a good time, when you're having a bad day.

Can you still praise God when you're having a tough or rough day? Can you still praise God when you're having a hell of a day? Oh, my friend, I'm convinced that God allows certain things to happen in our lives to test us, try us, and reveal the real us. That's why verse 2 says God wants to know what is in our hearts. Like Job, God wants to see what's in your heart. He lost his health, his wealth, and his family. The car is gone. But do you still trust me? God says the house is gone. But do you still trust me? The job is gone, but do you still trust me? The church building is gone. But do you still trust me? The wardrobe is gone. Do you still trust me?

What is in your heart? Can you stand the heat? Can you stand the fire? Can you stand the storm? Can you deal with the fact that everything is gone? What has it done to your heart? Are you still reading your Bible? Are you still praying? Are you still meditating on the Word? Are you still praying? Are you still fasting? Are you still learning? Are you still depending and trusting? Are you still going to church and worshipping? Or was your relationship with God based on the stuff you had? Oh, my brothers and sisters, God allows things to test us, just like He tested Moses and

the children of Israel. Just like He tested David, Elijah, and Daniel. Just like He tested Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Just like He tested Job.

And the question of the hour is, how did you do on your test? Oh, I don't know about you, but I want to pass the test. I want to pass the test. Therefore, my answer is, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Oh, my brothers and sisters, you must still trust God. You must have faith to still believe that. Romans 8:28 is still true. "All things work together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purpose." Psalm 35 is still true. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Psalm 37:25 is still true. I have been young, but God gives me strength. Psalm 34:19 is still true. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Psalm 40:31 is still true. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Matthew 11:28 is still true. "Come unto me, all you who are weak and weary, and I will give you rest." Psalm 4:6-7 is still true. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything be in prayer and supplication for the Lord. And finally, you have the faith to believe that." Romans 8:38-39 is still true. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor hurricane, shall separate me from the love of God." You must proclaim like Job, "though he slay me, yet I will trust him. I will pass this test."

Oh brothers and sisters, all of us have asked God since Hurricane Katrina, why? And the answers are: first, to humble us; second, to test us; but third, to chasten us. And from time to time, children will act like children. We pout when we don't get our way. We throw temper tantrums when we don't get our way. We cry to get attention. We rebel when we don't get our way. And that's when mom and dad chastise us to get us to behave. In like manner, my brothers and sisters, sometimes God has to chasten us as his spiritual children. We don't study like we should. We backslide. We fall. We're disobedient. We don't listen. We pout when we can't lead a song in the choir.

We throw temper tantrums when our side doesn't win in a business meeting. We cry to get attention when it's time to submit to our ministry budget. Rebel against God's way, will, or Word. We're jealous of one another. We envy one another. We're bitter against one another. We have divisions against one another. And as parents do to a child, God chastens us. He withholds his blessings. He withholds his protection. He withholds his mercy. He withholds his promises. And like my brothers and sisters, we pout when we don't get our way. Like the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, we may plead for the thorn to be removed. We may pray for the thorn to be removed. We may ask for the thorn to be removed.

But God says, "No, I will not remove the thorn. I will not remove the wind. I will not remove the rain. God says, I will not remove the storm." God says, "I will not remove the flood, the pain, the tears, the trials. But because you were still my child, this is what I'll do for you. My grace is sufficient for you. My grace is sufficient for you. Oh, I know it's hard, brothers, but his grace is sufficient. I know it's hard, sisters, but his grace is sufficient. I know it's hard, couples and singles, but his grace is sufficient. I know it's tough, teenagers, but his grace is sufficient. I know

it's rough, seniors, but his grace is sufficient. But always remember, we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.

We are perplexed, but not in despair. We are persecuted, but not forsaken. We are cast down but not destroyed. Oh, he chastens us, but he loves us. Which leads to the fourth and final point, when we ask the question, why? Why my marriage? Why my children? Why my church? Why my money? Why my house? Why this hurricane? Why my life? Why this storm? Why the oil spill? First to humble us, second to test us, third to chasten us, and finally to conform us. Brothers and sisters, this is where the rubber meets the road. This is the real deal. What else? Whatever you are dealing with, whatever you are going through, no matter how difficult, no matter how tough, through it all, God's ultimate purpose is that we may be like Him.

When Chip was a little baby, my heart's desire was that he would one day grow up and be like me. Except I didn't have no father figure in the house. Therefore, I poured my life into his life. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, I poured my life into his. Of all the things I taught him, the most important thing is how crucial it was to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. To know the God, I knew from the very first moment that I was able to worship the God that I worshipped, to love the God that I loved, and serve the God that I serve.

Through the years, it has not been easy for him, especially as a preacher's kids. There have been some setbacks, mishaps, mistakes, tears, and chastisement. However, I here today with God as my witness. That if you look at my son, talk to my son, hang around my son, listen to my son preach, then you would have no doubt in your mind that Fred Luter III is certainly a "chip" off the old block, just like his father.

And that's all that God desires for us. In spite of all that we've been through, in spite of all that we're going through, in spite of the setbacks, in spite of the mishaps, in spite of the tears, in spite of the chastisement, in spite of the hurricane, in spite of the flood, God's purpose through it all is to conform us. God's purpose through it all is to make us like Him so that when people look at us, when people talk to us, when people hang around us, when people listen to us, that they would know without a doubt that we are sons and daughters of God, that they would know without a doubt that we are sons and daughters of God.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, can't you tell? He's conforming us. Oh, my brothers and sisters, don't look now, but he's conforming us. I know it hasn't been easy, but he's conforming us. I know you've been displaced, but he's conforming us. I know you miss home, but he's conforming us. I know you miss Franklin Avenue, but he's conforming us. He's conforming us to be just like Him. And don't you remember what happened to Jesus after he endured the cross, endured the beatings, endured the sufferings, and endured the shame? Don't you remember that God highly exalted him and gave him a name that's above every name, a name to which every knee shall bow and tongue shall confess? Well, my brothers and sisters, we have been called refugees. We have been called evacuees. We have been called all kinds of E's.

Give us a new name. But one of these days, God will call us his own, because if stuff does not appear, what we shall be, but this we know we shall be like him. First Baptist Church, Franklin Avenue, how you have been through a lot. Oh, Franklin Avenue, it hasn't been easy. It's not what you've asked, but you have asked why. But your best days are not behind you. They are ahead of you. Your best days are not behind you. They are ahead of you. Forget about what you had. Forget about what you lost. Forget about what was destroyed in the flood. Your best days are ahead of you. Get ready for new blessings. Get ready for new miracles. Get ready for new anointings. Get ready for new ministries. God is going to give you double for your trouble. God is going to give you double for your trouble. You're going to make it. You're going to make it. As a matter of fact, you did make it. And you're here. I don't know about you, but I thank God for my mountains.

Sermon 4

Sermon Title: "What to Do after the Storm"

Text: Lamentations 3:22–26

Date of Original Sermon Unknown

What are we to do after the storm? How do you handle the storms of life? Perhaps you've heard the story of the chicken who was hatching out his egg, looked ahead and saw nothing but trouble, looked behind and saw nothing but trials, looked to his left and saw nothing but tribulations, and looked to the right and saw nothing but tragedy. Well, after looking at all his options, the chicken decided to go back into his eggshell, thinking that life was not worth living. My brothers and sisters, the sad story is close to the reality for many of us, if not most of us. The fact of the matter, my friends, is that life on this earth is full of trouble; life on this earth is full of trials. Life on this earth is full of tragedy.

Can I sum it up by saying that life on this earth is full of storms? As a matter of fact, someone who has experienced the hills and valleys of life described life by saying that all of us are in three potential stages of life: the first stage is that we are in a storm; the second stage is that we are coming out of a storm; and the third stage is that we are heading into a storm. Do I have at least two hundred witnesses to say, "I know you're right"? Oh, my brothers and sisters! If I had time to ask for witnesses, I assure you that there are three types of people in this sanctuary. There are three types of people in this congregation. If we are honest with ourselves, if we would take off the mask, if we would stop pretending, I assure you that there are three types of people sitting now in this sanctuary. They are sitting in the same section, upper tier, middle tier, and lower tier.

Someone may be sitting right next to you in one of these three stages in life. There are people in this congregation right now at this moment even as I preach there are people on your own row there are people in your in section there is someone sitting right next to you who are in a storm maybe you're in a marriage maybe you're single life maybe in your family, but you're in a storm, maybe in your finances, maybe in your workplace, maybe in your physical body, maybe in your spiritual life, maybe in your ministry or whatever the trouble or whatever the trial or whatever the tribulation or whatever the tragedy. You are smack in the eye of a storm, you are smack in the midst of a storm, you are smack in the middle of a storm.

And the question that keeps popping up in your mind is Why God? Why my marriage? God, why my life? God, why my family? God, why my finances? God, why did I get sick? God, why am I always depressed? God, why another hurricane? God, why another evacuation? God, why another shelter? God, why? Whatever you do, don't look at them. Whatever you do, don't look at them because they may not want you to know. They can only pretend for so long but the fact of the matter is they are in a storm however all of us are not sitting next to someone in the midst of a storm there are others of you even as I preach there are people on your row in your section is someone sitting right next to you who are in the second stage of life And they are the brothers

and sisters who are coming out of a storm, coming out of a storm in their marriage, coming out of a storm in their single life, coming out of a storm in their family, coming out of a storm in their finances, coming out of a storm in their workplace, coming out of a storm in their physical body, coming out of a storm in their spiritual lives, coming out of a storm in their ministry or whatever the trouble was, or whatever the trial was, or whatever the tribulation was, or whatever the tragedy was; they are coming out of a storm in their life and they are sitting next to you, going through their storm. They see the light at the end of the tunnel. Their head is finally above water. They can finally breathe again. They can finally rejoice again. They can finally smile again. And unlike the first group that asked why I am in this storm, the second group keeps asking how.

How did I come out of this storm? How did I make it through last week? How did I survive the attack on my marriage? Finances? How did I survive the attack on my physical body? How did I survive the attack on my single life? How did I survive another hurricane? How did I survive another setback? How did I survive another betrayal? Well, my brothers and sisters, to be honest with you, sometimes I just sit back and wonder how I got over. Oh yes, my soul looks back and wonders. And unless you have some time, don't ask them how they made it over. Don't ask them how they made it through. Don't ask them how they made it around. Because they just can't wait to tell someone, if it had not been for the Lord on my side, he kept my enemies away.

He let the sun shine through on a cloudy day. And because I'm coming out of a storm, my testimony is that I am stronger. I am wiser. I am better. I am much better. Looking back over my life, looking back over last week, I remember I was in a storm. I realize I made it because of you. Can anybody testify like Warren Sapp? And it's all because you are coming out of a storm. But there's a third group sitting in the sanctuary among this congregation. Yes, there are some of you in a storm. There are some of you coming out of a storm. However, the third group doesn't realize it, but you are heading into a storm.

You are heading in. Like Hurricane Barry, it will come out of nowhere. No, you don't realize it, but you're heading into a storm. Like Hurricane Katrina, you had no warning signs, but you're heading into a storm. You don't see it coming, but you're heading into a storm. From all the indications, you were going well, but you were heading into a storm. Don't look now, but trouble is on its way. Don't look now, but some trial is on its way. Don't look now, but some tribulation is on its way. Don't look now, but some tragedy is on its way. And unlike the first group that asked, Why am I in this storm? Unlike the second group that asked, How did I get into this storm or get out of this storm?

The third group asked, When will I head into this storm? In other words, not if, but when. When will the enemy attack my marriage? When will the enemy attack my single life? When will the enemy attack my family? When will the enemy attack my finances? When will the enemy attack my workplace? When will the enemy attack my physical body? When will the enemy attack my ministry? When will the enemy attack my spiritual life? Brothers and sisters, it's not a question of if the storm will come. The question on the floor is, when will the storm come? Oh, my

friends in this third group. It's a question of when the storm will come. It's not a question of if, but when will the storm come?

Loved ones have moved to Houston, League City, and Missouri City to escape the storm in New Orleans, a storm named Katrina. Because the fact of the matter my brothers and sisters are that storms have no respect for a person; trouble has no respect for a person; trials have no respect for a person; tribulations have no respect for a person; tragedy has no respect for a person; death, disasters, and disappointment have no respect for a person. They are not prejudiced; they are not biased; they do not choose their victims at random. And if you keep living, your number is bound to come up. You may have been born with a silver spoon in your mouth; you may have been born with a thumb in your mouth; you may have been raised by knowing both parents, or even without knowing your mom and dad.

You may stay in a penthouse suite, or you may stay in the projects. You may drive a Hummer, or you may drive a Hooptie. You may have graduated magna cum laude, or you may have finished thank you, Lottie. You may have a PhD, or may have a GED. The fact of the matter is, death, disaster, and disappointment have no respect for persons. The fact of the matter is, trouble, trials, tribulations, and tragedy have no respect for persons. Black or white, rich or poor, Democrat or Republican, look at the people who are running. Oh yes, my brothers and sisters, all of us will face the storms in this life. So, the question on the floor is, what do you do after the storm? Well, that's where Jeremiah helps us out, listen to my friend! If there is anyone who understands storms, it is Jeremiah. If there is anyone who understands trouble, trials, tribulation, and tragedy, it is Jeremiah.

Listen, he didn't get the name "the Weeping Prophet" for nothing; he's been through some stuff. He didn't write a book called Lamentations, meaning to express deep sorrow to mourn the loss of something for nothing. He's been through some stuff. But not only has Jeremiah been through some stuff because of his love for God's people, he helps us get through the storms of life and after dealing with grief, the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 1 after dealing with the pain of some personal sufferings in chapter 2 Jeremiah offers us some hope in chapter 3, so what do we do after the storm? How do we get up after being knocked down? How do we rebound after a loss? Well, Jeremiah would want us to remember three things:

First, remember the mercy of God, Verse 22, that word "mercy" means not giving us what we deserved. Oh, remember getting into trouble as a kid, didn't listen, disobedient, rebellious; daddy say, "Boy, go get my belt and meet me in your mom's room," and all the time praying "Oh Lord, have mercy, make him tired, make Him fall asleep, Oh Lord, have mercy! And my daddy finally came into the room and asked me," "Are you already crying?" And he begs for mercy. And daddy took his belt and said, "I'm not gonna whip you this time; I'm just gonna talk to you." Well, that's mercy-you deserved a whooping, but your daddy only talked to you that's mercy. And in like manner, brothers and sisters, just because of God's mercy, we have not been consumed in spite of all that we're going through.

From Hurricane Katrina, the CORPS closed all the floodgates in the city, and we're supposed to have non-stop rain. Some of your loved ones evacuated. It's because of the Lord's mercies, that was not overtaken, destroyed, or devoured. Oh, it's not because we have been good or kind, or obedient with all the stuff we have done; think about it, we could have lost our minds. But God had mercy. We could have been in the parish prison or Angola, but God had mercy. We could have been strung out on drugs, but God had mercy. We could have lost everything, but God had mercy. That sickness could have been fatal, but God had mercy. That decision has destroyed your career, but God had mercy. That mistake could have cost your ministry, but God had mercy.

That one-night stand could have resulted in kids, but God had mercy. Oh, it could have been me outdoors with no food, no clothes. Yes, it's because of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. But secondly, wherever you go through a storm, remember God's mercy. Second, remember the compassion of God—verse 22. Now, where God's mercy means not giving us what we deserve, compassion means to have pity, to have sympathy. Using the same illustration of the kid in trouble, he said, "I'm not going to give you what you deserve. I'm going to give you what you need." Compassion is when the dad whips the kid five times instead of 10, or instead of grounding him for a whole month, he only grounds you for two weeks.

In other words, he didn't get mercy, but he got compassion. Oh, my friend, every time you and I sin, God shows compassion towards us. Every time you and I sin, God shows compassion towards us. Every time you and I mess up, God shows compassion towards us. For the Bible says the wages of sin is death. But don't you remember, think about it. That lie that you told, we deserve death. That money you stole, God says we deserve death. That church member you won't forgive, we deserve death. Being disobedient to your parents, you deserve death. Having an adulterous affair, we deserve death. Having a homosexual relationship, we deserve death. Committing fornication on a regular basis, we deserve death. Oh, my brothers and sisters, we really shouldn't be alive today because of the wages of sin.

The payoff of sin is death. But I thank God for compassion. I thank God for compassion. But not only I, but everyone in this sanctuary should thank God for His compassion. Because in spite of all we've done, He still wakes us up. He still wakes us up in the morning. That's compassion. He still lets me preach in the pulpit. That's compassion. He still lets you sing in the choir. That's compassion. He still lets you serve as a deacon. That's compassion. He still lets you serve as a deaconess. That's compassion. He still lets you stand at the door as an usher. That's compassion. He still lets you breathe His air. That's compassion.

He still lets you see with His eyes. That's compassion. He still lets you hear with His ears. That's compassion. That's compassion. He still lets you walk with his legs. That's compassion. He still lets you talk with his mouth. That's compassion. Oh, my friends, in spite of ourselves, His compassion fails not. But I don't know about you, but I'm glad that God shows compassion. Finally, what do you do after the storm? First, we remember the mercy of God. Second, we remember the compassion of God. But third, we remember the faithfulness of God. Verse 23,

Jeremiah realized that in spite of the fact that his beloved city, Jerusalem, was destroyed, he suffered some personal losses, but through it all, God was still faithful.

Again, using the same illustration with the kid, the daddy with the belt, after the punishment and discipline, the daddy lovingly gave the kid a hug and said, Tomorrow you'll get another chance. To make it right. Oh, my brothers and sisters, because of God's faithfulness, we get another chance every day to get it right. Because of his faithfulness, he wakes you up every morning to give you another chance to make it right. Oh, once again, think about it. Your alarm clock didn't wake you up this morning. God was faithful. Tom Joyner didn't wake you up. Steve Harvey didn't wake you up. O.T. and the early bird didn't wake you up. Erica Campbell and the grip didn't wake you up. No radio, no DJ. No alarm clock woke you up.

And because He is faithful, his words give you another chance. So come on, brothers, you have another chance. Come on, sisters, you have another chance. Come on, teenagers, you have another chance. Come on, parents, you have another chance. Come on, teachers, you have another chance. Come on, students, you have another chance. Come on, backsliders, you have another chance. Come on, New Orleans, you have another chance. Because God's great faithfulness, because of God's great faithfulness, no matter the trouble, no matter the trial, no matter the tribulation, the tragedy, no matter the storm, all is not lost. There is a bright day coming. God is the God of another chance. This, too, shall pass. This, too, shall pass. That's why I wish I had a chance to talk to that chicken who went back into his shell.

That's why I wish I had a chance to talk to that chicken that went back into his shell. I'd tell that chicken all is not lost. All is not hopeless. All is not over. I'd tell that chicken, "I know you looked ahead and you saw trouble." I know you looked behind and you saw trials. I know you looked to the left and saw tribulation. And I know you looked to the right and saw tragedy. But chicken, before you go back into your shell, there's one more place you forgot to look. You forgot to look because if you had looked up, you would have seen the mercies of God, the compassion of God, and the faithfulness of God."

Sermon 5

Title: The Test Called Katrina

Text: Job 23:8–12

Originally preached on August 29, 2006

Good morning. How's everybody doing? Amen. Give the praise to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Savior of my life, to my friend and brother we love, a man I admire and respect dearly, and who has meant so much to me in my life and ministry. Dr. Paige Patterson, thank you, sir, for this tremendous privilege that you've given me to be here in this pulpit, where there's no lack of preaching. And I thank God out of all the preachers across this city, state, and nation, you thought of this street preacher from New Orleans, Louisiana, to come and share in this pulpit.

My respect and admiration for you are wide and deep. I thank God for the day you came across my path because you have done more for me in this Southern Baptist Convention than I could ever repay you. So, I want to thank you, sir, for your trust and confidence in me. And thank you for your leadership here at this wonderful school. Let's thank God for your presidency. He's a great man. Amen, and he probably won't know till he gets to heaven, all that he has done, not only for the Southwestern Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention, but for the kingdom of God, and I thank God for him. And he is who he is because of the lady behind him. Amen, this is Dorothy Patterson. Let's thank the Lord for Mrs. Patterson. Amen. Good to see you, my friend. I love you and thank God for you. She's been praying for me, my wife, and my family for years, always encouraging me, and I just thank God for her.

Dr. Harden and the Jazz Ensemble, thank you for that home cooking, my brother. Appreciate that, man. Maybe when I first came in, I was about to take up my handkerchief, man, with the jazz going on and things like that. I said, No, I don't want to push the button, too. I want to come back. I don't want to mess up too badly, but I want to thank God. It's such a joy to see Jim Tatum. Thank you, sir. Jim has dressed me through the years, right after Katrina. He came down personally, he and Dr. Sullivan, to give me some suits, because I lost so many. And he's just a joy to see him and not know he was on the program. Brother Anthony, God bless you. Good to meet you, my brother.

Thank God for all of you who are here this morning. It is a joy and a privilege. Let me thank you for your prayers for us in the city of New Orleans. As I've said before, we've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. And I just ask that you would just continue to be in prayer with us. And for us, we will finally be back in our church after three and a half to three years.

We had nine feet of water in our church and five feet of water in our home. These last three years have been a very difficult time for me. I've cried more these last three years than I have in any time of my ministry or any time of my life. But God has been faithful through it all. I thank God

for that. One of the reasons I thank God is my son, Chip, who's here with us, at the Southwestern Seminary, and in the Dallas area. I just praise the Lord for you.

Well, let me ask you a question as I go into the Word of God this morning. How do you deal with the setbacks that you face in life? When I look back over what's happening in the life of America, what's happening in my life, what's happening in the life of pastors and churches and church leaders all across America, how do you deal with the setbacks that you face in life?

How do you, as a believer, how do you, as a husband, you as a father, you as a pastor, you as a seminary professor, you as a church leader, how do you handle difficult times in ministry? What do you do when the ministry is more of a burden than it is a blessing? What do you do when life just doesn't make sense?

And you're trying to wonder, Lord, I need to do something, but I just don't know what to do. What do you do, my brothers and my sisters, when your faith is tested as a believer, as a child of God, as a pastor, as a church leader, as a professor, as a student, every day of your lives? I want to talk about that this morning from a very familiar passage of Scripture.

Turn with me this morning to the Old Testament, the book of Job, the Book of Job, chapter 23 of that book. The book of Job, chapter 23, as we shared this morning in the Word of God. Job, Chapter 23. The whole book is really the background of the sermon this morning, but for time's sake, we'll only look at verses 8-12. Job 23:8-12. You'll find these similar words.

"Look, I go forward, but he is not there. And backwards, but I cannot perceive him. When he works with his left hand, I cannot behold him. When he turns to the right, I cannot see him." Verse 10, "but he knows the way that I take. When he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to his steps. I have kept his way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips. I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

Our Father and our God, Master, how we thank you and how we praise you for this wonderful privilege and opportunity that you've given me to preach once again, God, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Thank you for the leadership of Dr. Patterson. Thank you for the faculty, the staff, and the students. Thank you for the music, God. Thank you for all that has been said and all that has been done. Now, God, I ask that you do as I ask every time I stand up to preach: God, hide me behind the cross. God, let them not see Fred, but God, let them see Christ. To the end, Master, that you may be glorified, that the saints of God may be edified, that Satan may be horrified, and all sinners will come to repentance. And Master, when it's all said and done, so very carefully give your name, all the praise, all of the glory, and all of the honor. In Jesus' name, we pray and for his sake, again, let people of God say amen.

When he has tested me, I shall come forth as good. I want to preach this morning on the subject of how to handle life's tests. How to handle life tests. My brothers and my sisters, all of us are

familiar with tests. All of us, Dr. Allen, have taken tests at one time or another in life, no matter your age, no matter your race, no matter your upbringing, no matter your gender, no matter how long you've been saved or how long you've been in school. At one time or another, all of us have taken tests.

Let me refresh your memory for a moment. Children take tests. Don't touch the stove test. Don't put that in your mouth test. Don't talk to a stranger test. Children take tests. Teenagers take tests. The peer pressure test. Should I drink because everybody else in school is drinking? Should I try drugs because everybody else in school is trying drugs? Should I get involved in premarital sex because everybody on the football team is getting involved in premarital sex? Should I obey my parents' test when everybody else tries to tell me something different? Children take tests, teenagers take tests, seminary and college students take tests, interest tests, the midterm tests, the final tests, the Greek tests, the Hebrew tests, the Old Testament and the New Testament tests. All of us, ladies and gentlemen, take tests in life. Even adults, ladies and gentlemen, take tests. The keeping up with the Joneses test. That's just grown folk, that's just grown folk peer pressure, amen? The only thing is, whenever you catch up with the Joneses, they move, and you've got to try something else the next time. But the commitment to my marriage test, should I stay committed to hanging on to this marriage for the long haul, even though things are not going right? The test about whether I should tell the IRS everything. Adults. Y'all act like y'all like that when adults take tests. And all believers, my brothers and my sisters, are aware of the fact that every Christian, Mr. Patterson, every believer takes tests.

The Bible reminds us of that fact over and over. Genesis 22 says, "It came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham." Psalm 66:10 says, "For thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us as silver is tried." Anthony, 1 Peter 1:7 said, "That the testing or trying of your faith be much more precious than gold, perish it, though it be tried by fire." Professors, 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, think it not strange, concerning a fiery trial, which is to try some of you, as though some strange thing happened." Now the Tatum, Romans 7:21 says, "I find in the law that when I would do good, evil is present with me." And then James 1:2 says, "My brother encountered all joy when you fall into diverse trials and tribulations, knowing that the testing is trying of your faith, work it patiently." Oh yes, my brothers and sisters, testing is a regular part of a believer's life. Tests are a regular part of a child of God's walk with God.

And all of us have faced them at one time or another. We've had health tests, we've had relationship tests, we've had racism tests, we've had gambling tests, we've had pregnancy tests, we've had church mess tests, we've had church click tests, we've had church split tests, we've had denominational tests, we've had tests all in our life. We had chemical tests, mechanical tests, structural tests, psychological tests, technical tests, IQ tests, we've had true and false tests, multiple charge tests, written tests, cancer tests, AIDS tests, cholesterol tests, and the list of tests goes on and on and on and on in life.

My brothers and my sisters, all of us, have had tests. Dr. Patterson and I should have a doctorate from all the tests we have had in life. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, I assure you, my

brothers, Brother Pige, I assure you that none of us has ever had a test like the test called the Katrina.

My brothers and sisters, none of us has really faced tests like the challenges we deal with as believers every day of our lives. None of us, maybe except brother Job. Ladies and gentlemen, if there is anyone who can identify with what you and I go through as believers—what we face in life—I have no doubt, Dr. Patterson, I have no doubt, that it is Job. If anyone here can relate to the things that you and I go through on a daily, on a weekly, on a monthly basis, I promise you, it's our brother Job.

Think about it, ladies. Think about it, brothers. Think about it, my friend. Job is well known, not because he was a great author. Job is well known not because he was a great military warrior. Job is well known not because he took a bear or lion with his bare hands or with a rifle in the African desert. Job is well known not because he built a great city. Job is well known not because he was a great missionary. Job is well known, Chip, not because he was a major prophet in the Old Testament. Job is well known not because he killed a giant with a slingshot and some rocks. No, Job is well known not because he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, nor because he was a great preacher.

Job was well known not because he was a great motivational speaker. No, ladies and gentlemen, no, my brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, Job is well known only because he passed a great test. That's it, period. End of the story, not because he was rich, not because he had fourteen thousand sheep, not because he had six thousand camels, not because he had one thousand yokes of oxen, not because he had one thousand female donkeys, not because he had houses and land, my brothers and my sister. The only reason you know Job and I know Job is that Job passed a great test.

Think about it. If Job would not have passed a great test, we would know his name as Job. But because he passed the Great Test, we know him as Job. Oh, a test, ladies and gentlemen, is an examination. A test is a trial. A test is something that tries one's qualities. A test is something that tests one's knowledge. And in the case of born-again believers, a test, Dr. Patterson, is something that tries our faith. It tests our trust. Professors, it tries our confidence. It tries our loyalty. It tries our allegiance.

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, anybody can talk about faith. Anybody can sing about faith. Jim, anybody can write about faith. Anthony, anybody can teach about faith. Anybody can preach about faith. But I've discovered just from the stuff I've gone through these last three years that every now and then, my brothers and my sisters, your faith will be tried in the fire to see if you can pass the test of faith.

Listen, ladies and gentlemen, I've discovered that every now and then, I can't prove it to you in Scripture. I can't explain it to you. But every now and then, I believe God allows some things to go on in our lives. Still, we can't depend on mama, can't depend on daddy, can't depend on the

president, can't depend on the governor, can't depend on the mayor, can't depend on the professor, can't depend on the pastor, can't then your back is against the wall, and all you have is God on your side.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe sometimes God allows us to experience things to see if we really trust him, as we say we do. Here in our text, Job is in the midst of his biggest test, Sister Dorothy. You know the story: Job, your servants are dead, while he is still speaking. Job, your sheep are dead while he was yet speaking. Job, your camels are dead, while he was yet speaking. Job, your cattle are dead, while he was yet speaking. Job, your sons and your daughters are dead. Ladies and gentlemen, you talk about a test. My brothers and my sisters, you talk about being tried in the fire.

And one day Job lost his health, he lost his wealth, and he lost his family. Even his own wife, Sister Job, looked at his situation and told him, "Man, you ought to cuss God and die." But after it was all said and done, I'm so glad to announce this morning in the Chapel Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, when it was all said and done, that Job passed the test by proclaiming in Job 1:21, "Naked I came into the world, naked I'm going out, the Lord gave, and the Lord take it away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

I'm glad to stand here in this chapel today and let everybody know that Job passed the test by proclaiming in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." I'm glad to stand here today, that even when his own friend, when his wife turned his back on him, his own three friends came to him and said, "Come on, bro, what did you do?" We admired you, man, we wanted to be like you. Look at all you've lost. You have scars all over your body. You're sick, what did you like that, Job?

What would happen to you? Even his own friends turned on him, and Job passed the test by proclaiming in Job 19:25, "Guys, I don't know why I'm going through this. I can't explain it. I don't know what's going on, but this one thing I do know is that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand on the last of the earth." So, the question up there on the hour, the question on the floor is, how did he do it? How did he put this all back? How did Job, with all that he went through, with all the struggles, with all the tough times, how did he put this all back?

How was Job able to hang on in spite of the fact that he lost his health, his wealth, and his family? How was Job able to pass such a great test? And what lesson, ladies and gentlemen, what lesson husbands and wives, what lesson parents that we can learn from Job's ideal?" Well, the answer is in our text. There are three things I want to show you really quickly that enable Job to pass this test. Three things that Job understood that you and I must understand: my brothers and my sisters.

If we are ever going to go face the test and pass the test and call the light. Number one, you must always remember that God pre-approves every test. God pre-approves every test that a believer

faces. Look at the first part of verse 10 in Job 23. The Bible says, Job says, but he knows the way that I take. God pre-approves, ladies and gentlemen, God knows the way that I take.

Don't you remember back in Chapter 1 that Satan had to get God's permission before he even tested Job? Remember the conversation? The devil was walking to and fro, and God said, What's up, man? What are you doing? Remember, Satan said, "Well, I'm just walking to and fro seeking whom I may devour." And remember, Satan didn't ask for Job. God suggested Job. This says to me, my brothers and sisters, that God pre-approved the test. He would have never suggested Job if God knew that Job could suggest.

Now, I find it very interesting, Dr. Patterson, that there were some people whom God couldn't suggest. Isn't it amazing that God didn't say, Well, here you can send it to my servant Noah? Satan said, Oh, I'll take Noah. I'll take Noah. Yeah, give me Noah. I'll put a pack of Budweiser in front of Noah, and he would get drunk. I'll take Noah. Isn't it amazing that God can say, Hey, have you suggested my servant Adam? He said, Yeah, give me Adam. I just put another fruit in front of Adam, and he will fall. I got Adam. Isn't it amazing that God could not suggest David, a man after his own heart, a servant of God, a friend of God?" Because he said, yeah, give me David. But I just put a woman named Bathsheba in front of David. And David will fall. I'll take it. Isn't it amazing that God could even suggest David's own son, Solomon, the wisest man in the world? Because like his dad, Solomon liked not only women, but Solomon liked strange women.

He didn't care about the color, he didn't care about the shape, he didn't care about the size, he just liked it when they backed it up, shook it fast, popped it, locked it, and dropped it like it is hot. Solomon said, Yeah, that's the one I want, that's the one I want. Quincy, Quincy, Quincy. Isn't it amazing that God couldn't recommend Peter? Because Peter will pull a switchblade out and cuss. Yeah, I'll tell you later. Isn't it amazing that there are some people that God couldn't suggest? Can you see Dr. Patterson up here shaking it back? Some of y'all would like to see that, I know.

But I find it amazing that God couldn't suggest Adam, couldn't suggest David, couldn't suggest Solomon, couldn't suggest Peter. But God said, Have you considered my servant, Job? Well, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, it's the same thing with you and me. There is nothing that a believer does that catches God by surprise. God pre-approved everything that Job went through. Think about it. God was not surprised when Adam and Eve were tempted with the forbidden fruit. Abraham and Sarah were surprised, but not God. God was not surprised when Joseph was betrayed by his brothers.

God was not surprised when the children of Israel were under forty years in the wilderness. God was not surprised when that young David slew that giant by the name of Goliath. God was not surprised when King David committed adultery with that Sheba. God was extremely upset and disappointed with David, but he was not surprised. God was not surprised when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace. God was not surprised when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. God was not surprised when the virgin by the name of Mary gave birth to a Savior by the name of Jesus. God was not surprised when Judas betrayed Jesus, and

Peter denied Jesus. God was not surprised when his only begotten Son hung on the cross with nails in his hands and nails in his feet. God was not surprised when his only son died for the sins of mankind. No one caught God by surprise because God pre-approved every test. He pre-approved it all. And like man, my brothers and my sisters, before the devil can throw anything away, before the devil can throw in the trial of sickness, attack on your ministry, attack on your marriage, attack on your finances. You've got to understand, brothers. You've got to understand, pastors. You've got to understand, churches, that God pre-approved the test, which says to me that God knows that you can pass it. If God allows it to happen, God will give you the faith. He'll give you the confidence. He'll give you whatever you need to pass that test.

Just like in the city of New Orleans, God knew that Hurricane Katrina was going to destroy our city. God knew that the levees were going to break. God knew that the city would flood. God knew that the neighborhoods would flood. God knew we would lose our homes and our churches. Still, God was waiting to see how his children would respond to the flood, how believers would respond to the test called Katrina, how believers across America would respond to the most difficult disaster of something called Katrina. Remember, Job says in the text, "He knows the way that I take."

In other words, God knows who is going to pass and he knows who is going to fail. He knows who is having a good day, he knows who is having a bad day, he knows who is ready for a promotion, he knows who is ready to be kept back, he knows when our worship is sincere, he knows when our worship is a performance, he knows our strengths and he knows our weaknesses. He knows when I'm walking in the spirit, and he knows when I'm walking in the flesh, and because he knows us so well, that's why, ladies and gentlemen, he pre-approves every test.

But really quickly, the second thing in the text is that not only does God pre-approve every test, but he also prepares us for every test. Not only does he pre-approve teachers' every test, but he also prepares us for every test. Look at the second part of verse 10. "But he knows the way that I take it is, when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." Listen, brothers and sisters, from the moment you became a child of God, from the moment after you accepted Christ into your life, from the moment you became a born again believer, God has been preparing you for the test that life hands out. Right now, while you're a student at Southwestern Baptist University, God is preparing you right now for something you may face ten years down the line in the church, five years down the line in your family.

Right now, while you're a student here, God is preparing you for something that you can't handle right now, but something you're going to face down the line. Every time you read your Bible, He's preparing you. Every time you say a prayer, He's preparing you. Every time you go to Sunday school and Bible study, He's preparing you. Every time you come to chapel and hear a sermon, He's preparing you. Every time you go to revival, He's preparing you. Every time the enemy attacks your body, attacks your mind, attacks your family, God is preparing you.

My brothers, when a mess starts in your ministry, He's preparing you. When cliques start in the church, He's preparing you. When your career has become a chore, He's preparing you. When that loved one dies unexpectedly, He's preparing you. When that job downsizes, He's preparing you. When that teenage daughter got pregnant, He was preparing you. When that son joined the gang, He was preparing you. When the doctor said that there's going to be an unfavorable report on your exam, God is preparing us. And then on top of all that, my brothers and my sisters, we got to deal with the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, the loss of precious memories.

My brothers and my sisters, but hold on to God's unchanging hand, because God told me to tell you, if you're studying your Word, if you've been praying, if you've been fasting, if you've been worshiping, if you've been steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, that God said, you can pass this test because you shall come forth as pure gold. In other words, you will pass the test because this, too, shall pass. Romans 8:28 says, "For we know to him that all things work together for good. To them that love God, they are called according to His purpose." Have you ever looked back over your life and said, Lord, how did I get out of that? How did I get out of that situation? How did I get out of that circumstance? How did I get out of that deacons' meeting? Because God will prove every test.

God prepares us for every test, and then, finally, God preserves us through every test. Look at verses 11 and 12 as I come to a close. "My foot has held fast to his steps. I have kept his way. I have not turned the side. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips. I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." Ladies and gentlemen, whatever you're dealing with, whatever undue life is sending you away, always remember, God pre-approves every test you go through. God has been preparing you for every test you go through. And finally, God preserves you through the test.

My brothers and sisters, do it all. God will keep you. In spite of all that you go through in life, God will keep you. Like Job, our feet have held fast. He kept us. Like Job, we kept his ways. He kept us. Like Job, we didn't turn aside. He kept us. Like Job, we didn't depart from his commandments. He kept us. Like Job, we treasured his necessary words. Think about it, my, think of all the stuff we've gone through in life. All the stuff you're facing on a daily basis in the ministry, on your job, and then you're like, my brothers and my sisters, when you look back over your life, you're here today because you made it. You're in this chapel today because you made it. You're in the seat right now. You have the sight; you're sighted and able to walk and talk and move and sing and worship because God saw you through every test.

You could have lost your mind. You could have committed suicide. You could have done something crazy, but God preserved you through it all. And now here you are. I've come to let somebody know that you passed the test today. It's been another year since you made it. It's another month, you made it. It's another semester, you made it. It's another day, you made it. It's another beginning, you made it. High-five somebody next to you, say, "I made it. I made it." I made it because of what God has done in your life. I know it wasn't easy, but you passed the test. I know it wasn't; it was difficult, but you—I know you have to cry sometime—you pass the test.

And I've come today to tell everybody who is passing the test that just like Job, your latter days will be better than your former days. Your latter days will be better than your former days because the Bible says, at the end of the story, God gave Job twice as much as he had. In other words, he gave him double for his trouble. And if you're hanging there, if you don't do anything foolish, if you don't turn your back on God, he'll bless you in your future more than you've ever been blessed in your past. Get ready for new blessings. Get ready for the new ministry.

Get ready for new miracles. Get ready for new opportunities. All my brothers and sisters, I don't know about you, but I've seen the lightning flash. I've heard the thunder roar. I felt sin breakers dashing, trying to conquer my soul. But I heard the voice of Jesus telling me, still, fight on. Why? Because he promised. Why? Because he promised. Why? Because he promised never to leave us, never to leave us alone. No, never. He promised never to leave us, never to leave us alone. Because he promised, you can pass the test called life. God bless you. May God keep you. Thank you for your presence.²

² From SWBTS Chapel Audio: SWBTS Chapel – Fred Luter (2008), Sep 24, 2008
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Sermon 6

Title: "It May Be over Our Head, but It's under God's Feet"

Text: Habakkuk 3:17–19

Originally preached on April 8, 2007

One of the things I've discovered after becoming a Christian is the fact that we are not exempt from enduring the troubles, trials, and tribulations of life. One of the things I discovered after becoming a born-again believer is the fact that we are not exempt from enduring the heartaches, hurts, and humiliation that are part of ministry. And one of the most recent lessons I've learned on this Christian journey is that no matter how faithful you are, no matter how dedicated you are, no matter how gifted you are, no matter how educated you are, no matter how devoted you are, I've discovered that you are not exempt from enduring disasters, disappointments, and depression that touches all of our lives at one time or another.

In other words, sooner or later, it will happen to all of us. You can be a cute child, a tender teenager, and you're tempting 20s, you're tantalizing 30s, firm 40s, you're fabulous 50s, you're soaring 60s, you're serene 70s, you're aching 80s, or you're blessed 90s. It doesn't matter. You will endure changes in your life. No matter your profession, you can be a pastor, pastor's wife, pastor's kid, preacher, deacon, trustee, choir member, ministry leader, seminary professor, denominational worker, business owner, home maker, and for the younger folk in the house, a butcher, baker. And one of these days, you will endure changes in your life. It doesn't matter if you're a Southern Baptist, American Baptist, National Baptist, Independent Baptist, or bedside Baptist with your pastor, sealy, and your assistant pastor, pastor's pillow.

Sooner or later, you will endure changes in your life. Sooner or later, you will endure trouble, trials, tribulations, heartaches, hurts, humiliation, disaster, disappointments, and depression in your life and your ministry. These things, unfortunately, are a part of life. It started back in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and listened to Satan instead of the Savior. They listened to Lucifer instead of the Lord. They listened to the devil instead of the divine. Ever since then, enduring change has been a part of our lives, whether it's forest fires in California, whether it's flooding in Laplace or Broussard, whether it's war in Iraq, whether it's terrorists in Afghanistan, whether it's earthquakes and severe food shortages in Haiti, whether it's human rights violations in China, whether it's political unrest in Egypt, Libya; whether it's crime and violence in our inner cities, whether it's high taxes or gas prices.

My brothers and sisters, I'm not trying to alarm you. I'm just trying to inform you that death, disaster, disappointments, decadence, and deterioration are a part of life. And because enduring change is part of life, we cannot avoid these changes. However, if you don't prepare yourself, take heed to instruction, you can be so overwhelmed by the things in life. And if you're not careful, you can be overtaken by things in life. If you're not careful, you can be overtaken by the things in life. Amen. However, my brothers and my sisters, I've got some good news for you

today. I've got some good news for you today. In spite of the trouble, the trials, the tribulation, in spite of the heartaches, the hurts, the humiliation in life, in spite of the deaths in life, in spite of the disasters, in spite of the disappointments, in spite of the depression, in spite of the deterioration, the good news is the stuff we face in life may be over our heads, but it's under God's feet.

The good news is, we're going to get through this. This stuff we face may be over our heads, but it's under God's feet. That's the point that the prophet Habakkuk tries to make in our text. The book of Habakkuk presents a picture of a man who has trusted God, yet he is perplexed. A picture of a man who trusts God, yet he is confused. A picture of a man who trusts God, yet he is bewildered. A picture of a man who trusts God, yet he is uncertain? A picture of a man who trusts God, yet he is troubled. Because Habakkuk cannot understand God. Because Habakkuk cannot understand why the people of God have to endure so much from the wicked Babylonians, and why the people of God have to endure such difficulty in life.

This was confusing to Habakkuk, perplexing to Habakkuk. It was troubling to Habakkuk. As a matter of fact, this was over his head. This was above Habakkuk. It was too much for Habakkuk to handle. But how many know that when it's over our heads, it's under God's feet? So, when Habakkuk didn't get through, what did Habakkuk do under this cloud? What did Habakkuk do to get out of his situation? How did Habakkuk endure the stuff that he was going through? That's a good question. Well, he had to realize several things. If Habakkuk was going to endure the life changes, first, Habakkuk had to realize that life is not going to be the same as it used to be. He had to realize that his life is full of fears.

Listen to his fears. Oh Lord, Habakkuk 1:2-3, "Oh Lord, how long shall I cry and you shall not hear?" Habakkuk was afraid that the Babylonians would attack God's people again. This fear had overtaken Habakkuk's life. He was afraid of what would happen to him. He was afraid of what would happen to his family and his loved ones. He was not sure. He was not sure he could endure another attack, that he could endure another threat. In like manner, my friends, if you're going to be overcomers, we must realize that this life is full of fears. I think about my fears from Hurricane Katrina. No job, no church, no house, no income, fear of what I would do next.

And listen, I don't know how long you've been saved, how long you've been born again. All of us have things that we're afraid of. Some of us are afraid of cats, dogs, rats, and snakes. Some of us are afraid of heights, thunder. Some of us are afraid of lightning, flying. Some of us are afraid of the dark. Little children are afraid of the bogeyman. Many of us are afraid of getting sick, getting cancer, afraid of dying. Adam and Eve were afraid of the voice of God. The children of Israel were afraid of the giants in the land. King Saul's soldiers were afraid of Goliath. Elijah was afraid of Jezebel. The disciples were afraid of the storm. The three little pigs were afraid of the big, bad wolf. Dorothy was afraid of the Wizard of Oz, and Harpo in *The Color Purple* was afraid of Oprah.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, all of us have fears. And some of those fears will affect our future. Some of those fears will affect our decisions in life. Have you ever said, “I want to plant a church, but. I want to start my own business, but. I want to get involved in ministry, but. Volunteer at school, but. Become a mentor, but. Volunteer to be a big brother, but. A big sister, but. Applying for that promotion, but.”

Because of fear, you have not fulfilled that dream. Oh, my brothers and sisters, if you continue to be fearful, those fears can become overwhelming. If you are not careful, those fears can overtake you, and you will not be able to endure.

But I’ve come today to let somebody know that your fears may be over your head, but they are under God’s feet. They may be over your heads, but they are under God’s feet. For the Bible says, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind. Listen, fear is the opposite of faith. And if the devil can keep you in fear, you are going under. But then there’s the second thing that Habakkuk revealed in his conversation with God. A second thing that brought about questions and confusion in Habakkuk’s mind was that it almost brought him down.

If Habakkuk was going to endure the changes in his life, if he was going to overcome the changes in his life, first, he had to realize that life is full of fears. But secondly, he had to realize that life is full of frustrations in Chapter 3:17, brothers and sisters, it does not make sense to Habakkuk. Habakkuk could not understand what was happening. What was happening to him? You talk about frustration. Habakkuk could not understand why this was happening to him. This was the right season. It was the right time. It was the right harvest. It was time to reap what he had sown. However, to his dismay, he went to the fig tree, nothing. He went to the fruit tree, nothing. He went to the cornfield, nothing.

He went to feed his cattle, nothing. You talk about frustration, failure, and defeat. You talk about discouragement and disaster. Frustrated. Frustrated because of no crop. Frustrated because of no cattle. Frustrated because of no commerce. No food. No fruit. No figs. In like manner, my brothers and sisters, if you’re going to be overcomers, we must realize that life is full of frustration. Folks in LaPlace are frustrated. I was frustrated after Katrina. My church flooded. Tulane flooded. NOBTS flooded. But Bourbon Street is high and dry. Lord, why don’t you do something? Once again, it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been saved. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been born again. All of us will face frustration in life. We get frustrated when our cars break down, when we get a flat. When we get a speeding ticket. With the traffic in Houston or Dallas. We get frustrated when the Saints lose. And they’ve been losing a lot lately. We get frustrated with the Hornets. And the Mavericks. We get frustrated with our favorite sports teams. We get frustrated with Alabama and Auburn. With our children when they’re disobedient.

We get frustrated with our spouse when they spend too much money. With our in-laws when they become outlaws. We get frustrated with so-called friends who betray us. We get frustrated when the paycheck is too short. We get frustrated when we have more money than we have in a

month. Or more months than money. When our money is funny and our change is strange. When we go to our checking account, there's nothing. Our savings account is nothing. The ATM and nothing. We get frustrated when the deacons get devilish. The trustees get tricky. The members get messy. The choirs get cranky. The ushers get ugly. The preachers get pushy. And somebody takes our seat in church. Ladies, you get frustrated when someone has on the same dress. Husbands, wives, parents, children. Children, parents, preachers, and members.

God got frustrated with the children of Israel. Cain got frustrated with Abel. Joshua and Caleb got frustrated with the other spies. Esau got frustrated with Jacob. Jesus got frustrated. And my brothers and my sisters, if you continue to get frustrated about the things in life, that frustration can get overwhelming. And if you're not careful, that frustration can overtake you. But once again, I come to you today to let someone who's frustrated know that this frustration may be over your head, but it's under God's feet.

It may be over your head, but it's under God's feet. For the Bible says, "Be not weary in doing good, for you shall reap if you faint not." For the Bible says, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that he reaps." For the Bible says, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." For the Bible says, "I may have been young, but wait." Listen, frustration will affect your commitment to God. And if the devil can keep you from God, you are under, you are going under. Oh, but don't go under. It's over your head, but it's under God's feet. You hang in there, pastor. You hold on, pastor. You hold on, senior soldier. You hold on, for this too shall pass.

But there's one point, one last point before we close. In Habakkuk's conversation with God, he realized that if he was going to, if he was going to endure, he had to realize that first, life is full of fears. Second, life is full of frustrations. And finally, for the believer, third, life is full of faith. Life is full of faith. Chapter 3:18-19. And chapter 2:46. Hind's feet are feet that are firm. Hind's feet are feet that are stable. Hind's feet are feet that stand firmly. Hind's feet are feet that can make progress on the dangerous heights of testing and trouble. Hind's feet are feet that are secure. Hind's feet are feet that are sure-footed. Hind's feet are feet that scale-steep, tall mountains without slipping. Hind's feet are feet that can endure. Habakkuk told the Lord, "Make my feet like the deer's feet, so that in spite of my fears and frustrations, I can still hold on to God and stand in the midst of my situation." In the midst of my change, Paul said in Ephesians 6 that we are to put on the whole armor of God so that we can stand and stand firm. Well, like my brothers and sisters, if you're going to be able to stand when the enemy is trying to overwhelm you, when the enemy is trying to overtake you, you must believe by faith that it may be over my head, but it's under God's feet. In other words, as long as I'm wrapped up, tied up, tangled up in what God, I can make it in spite of my circumstances.

I know it's hard, but you can make it by faith, because the just shall live by faith. I know it's been a long time, but you made it. It was a process. Everything is not like you want it, and the reason we made it is because the just shall live by faith, not by luck, by faith, not by chance, by faith, not by video poker, by faith, not by boomtown, but by faith, not by Treasure Island, but by

faith, not by lottery, but by faith, not by sugar daddy, but by faith, because of a political party, but by faith. I'm going to walk by faith, endure by faith, talk by faith, preach by faith, sing by faith, worship by faith, I'm going to shout by faith, I'm going to dance by faith, testify by faith, but most of all, I'm going to live by faith.

I come to encourage some husband, some wife, man, woman, parent, grandparent, some church leader, teenager, pastor, senior soldier, that whenever ministry or life is unfair, whenever life gets the best of you, whenever life is overwhelming, whenever life is about to take you over, that you're going to stand on God's feet and proclaim, "It may be over my head, but it's under." I'm going to stand on God's feet, hang in their pastor and overcome, hang in their pastor's wife and overcome, hang in their church staff and overcome, hang in their church member and overcome, hang in their senior soldier and overcome.

Oh, I can't speak for y'all, but I'm just going to look back over what I've gone through these past years, and my testimony is, I thank God for my mountains. If He brings you to it, He can bring you through it.

Sermon 7

Title: When God Says No"

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Date of Original Sermon Unknown

Well, good evening. How's everybody doing? Amen. Give an obedience to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Savior of my life, to my friend and brother beloved, your pastor, Steve Gaines, to all the other pastors of the gospel and ministers assembled here on tonight, to all the members of Bellevue Baptist Church and all the guests who are assembled here tonight, I'm indeed delighted and excited because I have been invited to be back here with you on this awesome August services. I have been looking forward to this ever since your pastor called me and gave me this invitation. I promise you that pastors and preachers across the city, state, and nation would love to have this privilege and opportunity to preach in the great Bellevue Baptist Church, and this is indeed a great honor for me to be here tonight. I want to thank you, Steve.

I'm also honored to be here tonight because there are a lot of folks here tonight from New Orleans, Louisiana, amen. There are a lot of folks here tonight from Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. Some moved here right after Hurricane Katrina. Some moved here recently, like Jordan, Jolie, and others who are here tonight. I want all the folks from New Orleans and Franklin Avenue, if y'all would just stand, and I want all the folks from New Orleans and Franklin Avenue all across the building, if y'all would just stand, stand. Good to see y'all, amen. Good to see y'all, amen, amen. I had the privilege of baptizing Jolie two months ago before she and her mom, Jordan, moved up here to Memphis. It is a joy and a privilege to see some New Orleans Saints fans.

Who that, who that, who that? Talking about beating them Saints, amen. Everybody in the league says, we that, we that, we that, amen. Amen. Amen. We're not playing that good this year, God, but it's good to be here, and I thank God for this very special privilege and opportunity that God has given me to be here tonight. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn with me to the book of 2 Corinthians chapter 12, as we share tonight in the Word of God. Second Corinthians chapter 12, as we share tonight in the Word of God. For the last three or four weeks, I've been really struggling in talking to some of the folks that are near and dear to me who are now living in Baton Rouge, Denham Springs, and Tangipahoa Parish.

Through talking to many of them, and the thing I heard for a minute, I said, Pastor, we prayed when we saw this coming. We're praying and praying and praying that we would not have to go through this again, but here we are in the same old situation. What do you do when you pray about things and it doesn't come to pass? What do you do as a believer? What do you do as a child of God? What do you do as a husband, as a wife? What do you do as a pastor? What do

you do? What do you do as sons and daughters of God when you pray to God for certain things, and those things just don't come to pass?

How do you handle that? How do we deal with that as believers? I want to talk about that tonight from a very familiar passage of Scripture, 2 Corinthians chapter 12. I want you to look at with me verses 7 through 10 of that chapter. Second Corinthians chapter 12, verses 7 through 10 of that chapter. If you have it, please say amen. Amen. You'll find these similar words. "Unless I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly I would rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Verse 10, "therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Thank you for all the Franklinites who are here tonight. God, what a joy it is to see them, God. And thank you for their presence here tonight. Now, God, do as I ask every time I stand to preach. That is, God, let me decrease as you increase. Father, let them not see Fred. But God, let them see Christ. So then, God, that you may be glorified. The saints of God may be edified. Satan may be horrified. And all sinners will come to repent. Therefore, God, stand in my body. Think with my mind. Speak with my voice. And I'll be so very careful to give you, in the name of all the praise, all of the glory, and all of the honor. In Jesus' name I pray and forsake. Again, the people of God say amen.

I want to look at verse 7. "And I should, lest I should be exalted above measure. By the abundance of the revelation, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me."

With that text in mind, with this Scripture in mind, with this occasion in mind, I want to preach tonight from the subject, When God Sayeth. When God Says No. When God Says No. Bellevue, one of the greatest decisions in the world, is when a person decides to become a Christian. The person decides to be born again. Anybody remember that time in your life when you surrendered and gave your life and gave your heart to the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ? It's a wonderful time. It's a marvelous time. It's a glorious time. It happened for Steve in 1976. It happened for me in 1977. I will never forget it as long as I live. When I gave my heart and gave my life to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

That time in your life when you became a new creature. That time in your life, Jill, when you were born again. That time, Nick, in your life when you received salvation. That time in your life when you asked Jesus Christ to come into your life. Jackie's songwriters have tried to describe this life. One songwriter said it like this, "A change, a change has come over me. He changed my life, and now I am free." Another songwriter said it this way, "I looked at my hands, and my

hands looked new. I looked at my feet, and they did too.” Another songwriter said, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found. I was blind, but now I see.” In Bellevue, each of these songs, in their own way, Donna tries to explain this Christian life, this new life, Pastor Gaines, where all things have passed away, and all things now become new. When people accept Jesus Christ into their lives as Lord and Savior, they become a part of the family of God. You become a member of the body of Christ. And how many know today that membership has its privileges? I say that all the time at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. I tell all our new members to make sure they get through all their new members’ classes. Don’t miss one. You need to get through all your members’ classes to become a member of the family of Christ.

You need to become an official member of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church because membership has its privileges. And Bellevue, one of the main or primary privileges that God grants every believer is the privilege of prayer. Prayer, Nick, for the believer, is how we communicate with God. Prayer for the believer is how we talk to God. I’m not talking to you. You’re not talking to me. Prayer is how we talk to God. Pastor Gaines, there’s a friend of mine who pastors in Atlanta, Georgia, who tells a very amusing story about the time he was teaching his little girl how to pray. And all of us as parents can remember these days when we are trying to train our children.

Jordan, I’m sure you went through it with Jolie, where you would go into the child’s room every night and you would teach them how to pray. So, you would get on your knees, they would get on their knees, you would get beside the bed, put their hand together, you put your handS together, and you would lead them into the Lord’s prayer. “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” And every night, you would go to your child’s room and lead them into the Lord’s prayer. Well, this pastor friend of mine did this for about three or four nights, went into his daughter’s room, got on his knees, she got on her knees, put his hand together, she put her hands together, and he would lead her into our Father’s prayer.

After the fourth night, he said, “Baby, listen, Daddy wants you to lead the prayer tonight. Say, you think you can do that?” Say, yeah, Dad, I can do it. Say, you sure? Say, yes, Dad, I can do it. Say, okay, let’s do it. So, he got on his knees, she got on her knees, he put his hands together, she put her hands together, and closed his eyes, and he waited about fifteen seconds. He looked over, and he didn’t hear anything. He waited about another fifteen seconds, looked over, and didn’t hear anything. He saw her mouth move, but didn’t hear anything. After about a minute, he couldn’t take it anymore. He said, Baby, are you okay? Say, yeah, Dad, I’m good. He said, You think you can do this? Say, yes, Dad, I think I can do this.

Say, you’re not nervous? Say, no, Dad, I’m not. He said, Okay, baby, what’s the problem? Daddy can’t hear you. And there’s a typical five-year-old who’s been here before. She put her hands on her hips, looked at Daddy, and said, I ain’t talking to you. Isn’t that funny? Isn’t that good? She was telling the truth. She wasn’t talking to that Daddy. She was talking to that Daddy.

And God doesn't care whether you say it out loud, or whether you say it on your knees, or in person. Prayer is how we communicate with God. Prayer is how we talk to God. It's a form of communication that every member of the body of Christ should take advantage of.

As a matter of fact, the Bible encourages, Brother Mark, this form of communication between God and His children. In Matthew chapter 6 and verse 9, it says, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it shall be given. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you." Matthew 21:22 says, "And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Matthew 26:41 says, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." Luke 18:1 says, "That men should always pray and not faint." First Thessalonians 5:7 says, "Pray without ceasing." Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, as if somebody said, God, is it important for believers to pray?

Is it important for children of God to pray? And God would say, "Duh, yes, it is." It's important for you and me to pray to God. God wants to hear His children call on Him in prayer. He encourages us to pray. He invites us to pray. He commands us to pray. But the question I've come all the way from New Orleans, Louisiana, that I want to ask tonight in this sanctuary, in this time, is, what happens, my brothers and sisters, when you pray and God says no? How should we as believers handle hearing no from God? You're a believer. You've accepted Christ into your life. You're part of the family of God. You're a member of the body of Christ.

You're told of the importance of prayer, yet when you make a request to God, your Heavenly Father, through prayer, God says no. What should we as believers do? How should we, Nick, as sons and daughters of God, handle hearing no from God when we pray? What should we do when God says no? Well, let's see what happens in our text tonight. Here in the Scripture, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, as always, there are several things I want you to see. First of all, I want you to notice, number one, the restraint. Notice Bellevue the restraint. Look at verse 7 of 2 Corinthians chapter 12. The apostle Paul says, "Unless I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." Look at the restraint in this text.

My brothers and my sisters, there was something in Paul's life. There was something in the apostle Paul's life that was preventing him from being all that he could be for God. And Paul describes this restraint as a thorn in the flesh. Whatever this thorn was, it confined Paul. It limited him. It restricted Paul from being all that he could be for God. As a matter of fact, this thorn in the flesh was so aggravating to Paul that Paul called it a messenger of Satan. Paul felt that the devil himself gave Paul this thorn in his flesh to prevent Paul from being all that God wants him to be. Paul felt that Satan personally sent this thorn to afflict Paul, just as Satan. And so, this is what the apostle Paul did to Job in the Old Testament.

You remember the story of Job in the Old Testament? Job had no clue that in chapter 1 of Job, there was a conversation between God and Job. I mean, God and Satan. Some of you know the story. The enemy, Satan, is going around, and God said, Man, what are you up to? You know,

what's going on? And remember what Satan said? "I'm walking to and fro, seeking whom I may devour." And God said, "Well, why don't you pick on somebody that will give you a good life?" You're in for a good fight. And God said, "Have you considered my servant Job?" The devil said, "Well, since you brought him up." And God said, "I'll tell you what, do whatever you have to do, just don't touch your soul." Satan said, "Deal."

The next thing Job knew was a knock on his door. Job, all your cattle were dead as he was leaving. Job, all your farmland is dead as he was leaving. Job, there's a fire, and all your children are dead. And one day, Job lost his health, wealth, and family. And Job had no idea, he had no clue that he had a bullseye on his chest from the enemy, and he was being picked out to be picked on. And Paul felt that just like Job, that just like the enemy attacked tactically. Job, Paul felt that this thorn in his flesh was a messenger of the enemy himself. Now, no one really knows, well, what this thorn in the flesh was.

Theologians and Bible scholars have studied this text for years and years, but no one can say with certainty what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. Talk to scholars, talk to academicians, talk to seminary professors, talk to Bible scholars. No one can say with certainty what this flesh was that the Apostle Paul was dealing with. Many have suggested it was some type of physical ailment. He had an earache. Some said he suffered from severe migraine headaches. Some say, "Lord, he had epilepsy, or that he had bad eyes and was nearly blind." But ladies and gentlemen, the fact of the matter, my brothers and my sisters, is that no one knows what this thorn was that was aggravating Paul. No one knows for certain what this thing was that was distracting him.

No one knows for certain what this thorn was that was draining Paul, that was confining Paul, that was restricting Paul from reaching his full potential in God, from reaching his full potential for God. And you know what, my brothers and sisters, I believe; I really believe with all my heart, soul, and spirit; and if I'm not, your pastor can correct me after the sermons. I believe that God intended it to be that way, that God purposely didn't say what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, so that every last one of us in here, from the pulpit to the door, from the balcony to the floor, so that every last one of us could relate to Paul's struggle. So that every last one of us could relate to Paul's situation.

In other words, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, Cynthia, all of us here have at least one thing. Every last one of us in here has at least one thing. Ladies and gentlemen, the question of the hour is, all of us, what's that one thing in your life? What's that thorn in the flesh that's preventing you from being all that you can be for God? Your spouse doesn't even know. Your children don't even know. Your parents don't even know. Church members that you worship with every Sunday and every Wednesday don't know that this thing in your life is restricting you, it's restraining you, it's limiting you, that it's confining you from being all you can, from being all you can be for God.

God wants you to reach a level, but look, like every time you try to get there, something holds you back, something keeps you back, and no one really knows but you. All of us have this one

thing. In other words, my brothers and my sisters, what's your issue? What's your situation? What's that one thing, guys, that's preventing us from being the men that God wants us to be? Guys, what's that one? What's that one thing that's preventing us from being the husbands and the dads that God wants us to be? Ladies, what is that one thing that's stopping you from being the woman of God, the mother of God? What's that one thing, ladies, that's stopping you from reaching your full potential in God?

Teenagers, college students, what is that one thing that you can just get rid of this one thing? You can really be all that God desires and wants you to be because all of us have at least one thing in our lives. What is it? Is it some physical ailment? Is it cancer? High blood pressure? Diabetes? Arthritis? What is that one thing that's stopping you, that's restraining you, that's preventing you? Is it some temptation, a stronghold in your life, pornography, premarital sex, or extramarital sex? What is that one thing in your life? Is it some type of addiction, or some type of habit, a gambling habit, a drug addiction, or alcohol addiction? What's that one thing that nobody knows? Your wife doesn't know, your husband doesn't know, your children don't know, your parents don't know.

What's that one thing that nobody knows? Your wife doesn't know, is it some type of lifestyle choice, homosexuality, profanity, or a bad attitude? Is it some type of persecution, opposition, jealousy, or envy? You can't control your anger? Just what is it, my brothers and sisters? What is it, ladies and gentlemen? What's that one thing that's stopping you, that's preventing you from being an effective witness for God? That if anybody ever knew and turned the light on that situation, you'd be so embarrassed because nobody knows this one thing that you're facing. In your life, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, just what is that one thing, brothers and sisters, what is that one thing that becomes a pain in your, I mean, a thorn in your flesh? Almost said it, Steve, almost said it.

Don't look at the person on your left. You've got one thing. Don't look at the person in front, behind you. Don't look, all of us here have at least one thing. Mine may not be yours, yours may not be mine, but every last one of us in here has one. The enemy has assigned something in our lives that we think is secret, that we think nobody would know, and it's preventing you from being all that you can be for God. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, I will tell you a story.

I'm going to tell you a story. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, all of us have at least one thing, but not only notice the restraint, but also notice the requests. Notice the requests. Do you look at what the Bible says in verse 8? Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. Not only notice, Pastor Steve, the restraint, look at the requests. Paul says, the Scripture says, the Word of God says, Paul said, I prayed not once, not twice, but Paul said, I prayed three times for God to remove this thorn, this painful, humiliating thorn that was given to the apostle Paul. Paul not only prayed, ladies and gentlemen, but the Bible said Paul pleaded with the Lord.

Sam, Paul pleaded with God. Oh God, please take it away. Oh God, I can't deal with this. God, please, God, if somebody finds out, God, if somebody knows, God, please take this thing away from my life. Three times, Paul prayed that God would take this thing away. Now, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, I need to be honest with you tonight. Nick, when I read this Scripture, I really began to think that God was not being fair to the apostle Paul. Why wouldn't God answer this? Can anyone come up with any legitimate reason? Why wouldn't God answer this request? I mean, after all, y'all, this was the Apostle Paul asking this. This was the apostle Paul making this request. You're not asking for this request.

I'm not. I can see God telling me no, because I still have some issues in my life. I can see God telling me, Oh, I don't study like I should. I don't pray like I should. I can see God telling me no. I don't witness like I should. I don't love like I should. I don't forgive like I should. I speed when I drive. I can see God telling me no. I can't just eat two Krispy Kreme donuts, particularly hot ones. I've got to have at least six of them. I can't just take a spoonful of homemade Blue Bell vanilla ice cream. I need at least half a pint. I'm addicted to Popeye's spicy fried chicken, y'all. Come on, y'all. I'm from New Orleans, y'all. I can see God telling me no.

Because I've got some issues. I've got some stronghold. But I wasn't answering this. You weren't answering this request. The apostle Paul was making this request. Paul was no novice. Paul was no beginner. Paul was no neophyte. Paul was not someone who played hooky from Sunday school or Bible study. Ladies and gentlemen, this was the apostle Paul making this request. Paul, no doubt, was the greatest missionary that ever lived. Paul suffered for his faith. Paul bled for his faith. Paul was beaten. Paul was whipped. Paul constantly faced persecution because of his stand as a pastor for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul was arrested and put in jail several times.

Paul wrote half of the letters of the New Testament. No doubt you've read some of Paul's famous sermons or famous scriptures like Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. Which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The apostle Paul wrote that. Romans 8:28, "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. They were called according to his purpose." The apostle Paul wrote that. Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate me from the love of God? Shall tribulation? No, shall distress? No, shall height? No, shall death? I'll let nothing or nobody separate me from the love of God." The apostle Paul wrote that.

First Corinthians chapter 10:13, young people, "There had no temptation taken you such as common to man, but God is faithful. We're not allowed you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape so that you and that you, that you might be able to bear it." The apostle Paul wrote that. Galatians 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit and you should not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The apostle Paul wrote that. Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your

requests be made known unto God and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.” The apostle Paul wrote that.

Philippians 4:13, “Do all things through Christ that strengthens me.” The apostle Paul wrote that. Galatians 2:20, Steve, “I’m crucified with Christ, brother. Nevertheless, I live; yet that I have a Christ that lives in me, and the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who not only loved me, but he gave himself for me.” The apostle Paul wrote that. Ephesians 3:20, “Now unto him, now unto him, now unto him who can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ever ask or think according to the power that works in us. To him be glory, majesty, dominion, and power both now and forever.” The apostle Paul wrote that.

Yes, Donnie, this is the apostle Paul. Pastor Steve, this was the apostle Paul. Bellevue. This was the apostle Paul. If God had granted any requests, if God had answered any prayer, certainly it would have been for the apostle Paul. And to be honest with you, Pastor, to be honest with you, Bellevue, I started having issues with God. I have such a relationship with God that I can talk to him about things that just don’t happen. I can talk to him about things that just don’t make sense to me. He and I developed this relationship, Cynthia, after Hurricane Katrina, because I couldn’t understand how 80 percent of our city would be flooded. My home was flooded. Many of you are from New Orleans, and your home was flooded. The New Orleans Seminary I attended was flooded. Our church had nine feet of water. My home had five feet of water. The schools I went to, the churches and the city were flooded. But Bourbon Street was high and dry. As a matter of fact, it was the first time in the history of Bourbon Street that the city was flooded, but Bourbon Street was high and dry. It was dry.

I couldn’t understand that. So, I’ve been having long conversations with God about that. And so, I was looking at the text even. I said, “God, this is not right. God, this is not fair. God, how could you not answer this prayer?” He wasn’t asking to win the lottery like some of us do. If you can’t say amen, say ouch. He wasn’t asking for a golden chariot with spinning wheels on the side. He wasn’t asking for anything. He was just asking God to take away this painful thorn, this aggravating thing, this messenger of Satan. When I was talking to God, like I’m sure happens to many of y’all, the devil checked into my line and started talking while I was talking to God. The devil came on the line.

It was now a three-way conversation. He said, “Yeah, Fred, remember when you prayed about this and it didn’t happen? Remember the time you went on a fast and you had your journal and had things you were fasting for, and this didn’t happen? Remember the time you really needed God to do something, and it didn’t happen?” And I said, “Yeah, God, what about that?” And God said, “Fred. I said, No.” God, he makes a good point. God said, “Son, stop before you get in trouble.” I said, “No, God.” It felt like God hung up on me. The devil down there laughed at me and said, “Ha, ha, ha, I got you now.”

But ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, don’t act like I’m the only one who’s ever questioned God. Don’t make me feel like I’m the only one who’s ever questioned God. Don’t

make me feel like you've never questioned God in your life. Don't look at me like you've never entertained the devil's lies in your life. Oh, no, I know I'm not the only one who's ever questioned God.

When trouble came your way, you questioned God. When your loved one died unexpectedly, you questioned God. When sickness attacked your body, you questioned God. All of us have questioned God at one time or another. When your marriage fell apart, you questioned God. When your teenage daughter became pregnant, you questioned God. When your teenage son got hooked on drugs, you questioned God.

When you lost your job unexpectedly, you questioned God. When the enemy attacked your body, when the enemy attacked your ministry, when the enemy attacked your finances, when the doctor told you had cancer, you questioned God. When your dreams turned into nightmares, when your world fell apart right in front of your eyes, you questioned God. Oh, yes, don't tell me that I'm the only one who questions God.

Whether you want to admit it or not, every last one of us at one time or another has questioned God. When things didn't happen the way we thought they should happen. Oh, my brothers and my sisters, but still, what do you do when God says no? You've prayed, you've fasted, you've cried, but still, God says no. What do you do?

How do we as believers, as sons and daughters of God, Nick, Joe, how should we handle hearing no from God? The restraint, the request. Thirdly, look at the response. Look at the response in verse 9. Look at the response. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly I would rather boast in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Look at the response. You see, my friend, Pastor Steve, Sister Donna, Bellevue, what the devil didn't tell me when he was on my three-week conversation with God was that this was not the first time in the Scripture that God said no to one of his children. It's not the first time in the Bible.

But God said, "No." He said no to a believer. The Holy Spirit reminded me that God has said no to His believers before. In Exodus 3:33, God told Moses no. In Second Samuel 12, God told David no. In Job chapter 3, God told Job no. In 1 Kings 19, God told Elijah no. And just simply this next one's going to mess me up. This next one's just really going to mess you up. This next one blew me away. In Matthew chapter 26, God told His only Son, Jesus, no. Now, Fred, where do you get that from? Well, remember in Genesis chapter—Matthew 26, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, and He went to pray, and He knew in His divine side, because He was God's Son, He came to die for the sins of mankind.

But once He got here, His human side, Mary's baby side, said, "Why should I die for people who care nothing for me or nothing for my Father?" He knew He came to die. But once He got here and saw the hardness of the people's hearts, he said, "Dad, these people don't love you. They don't love your Word. They're disobedient. They're hard hearted." And so, Jesus went to the

garden of Gethsemane and asked the question, “Dad, I know why you sent me here. I know the reason you sent me to die, but God, is it possible to let this cup pass for me?” In other words, Sam, Jesus, in essence, asked His Father, “Daddy, do you have a plan B?” And God told Jesus, “No, Son. You got to die. You got to go to the cross. You got to shed your blood for the sins of mankind.”

However, my brothers and my sisters, the reason you and I can rejoice, the reason you and I should be encouraged, the reason you and I should never give up on God and throw away the towel when God says no is simply because it’s not ‘no’ with a period behind it. It’s not a ‘no’ door closed. It’s not ‘no’ curtain down. It’s not ‘no’, never to be brought up again. It’s not ‘no’ end of discussion. Don’t ask me again. Don’t talk to me about it again. It’s not no end of discussion. God says no to His children. It’s always ‘no’ with a comma behind it.

Oh, y’all don’t hear me. It’s always ‘no’ with a comma behind it. I say it’s always ‘no’ with a comma behind it, meaning there’s something else to follow. Comma, meaning there’s a break. Comma, meaning there’s a pause. Comma, meaning there’s not the end. But, meaning there’s a break. There’s a pause. A comma, but it’s not the end. In other words, a comma means it’s a delay, but it’s not a denial. Let me say that again. It’s a delay, but it’s not a denial. Paul, I won’t remove the thorn, but son, this is what I will do. My grace, my grace, my grace is sufficient for you.

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, when God says no, don’t get angry. When God says no, don’t get upset. When God says no, don’t get mad. God says no, don’t lose it. No, it’s not the end. No, it’s not final. It’s just a comma where some grace can be inserted. Grace is the love of God towards man. Grace is the favor of God towards man. Grace, God’s unmerited favor towards mankind. Oh, my friend, God’s grace is sufficient. God’s grace is adequate. God’s grace is enough. God’s grace is suitable. Oh, Paul, I won’t remove the thorn, but son, this is what I will do. I will give you grace to endure, grace to hang in there.

Oh, it’s no wonder the songwriter said it’s awesome. It’s no wonder the songwriter said it’s wonderful. It’s no wonder the songwriter said it’s phenomenal. It’s no wonder the songwriter said it’s extraordinary. It’s God’s grace. As a matter of fact, amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m saved. I was once blind, but now I see. As a matter of fact, if you’re not saved tonight, if you don’t have a relationship with Jesus Christ, if you’re not a part of the family of God, God’s grace is available for you at the end of this sermon. You can walk down these aisles. Give the preacher your hand. Give the Lord your heart. I don’t care what you’ve done.

God’s grace, God’s grace is available for you. It’s amazing grace. And then finally, thank you again, pastor, for this wonderful and exciting privilege. Notice the restraint. Notice the request. Notice the response. And then finally, notice the reason. Jordan look at verse 10 of 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 10. Paul says, “Therefore,” because of all the things that he mentioned before, “therefore,” because of the restraint, because of the request, because of the response, “therefore, I

take pleasure in infirmities,” pleasure in reproaches, pleasure in needs, pleasure in persecutions, pleasure in distress, for Christ’s sake, here it is, for when? I am weak. Jolie, for when? I am weak. Nick, for when? Jackie, for when? I am weak. Then I am strong.

My friend, the reason God says no sometimes is so that we can learn to depend on Him. The reason God says no to His sons and daughters sometimes is so we can learn to depend on Him. Think about it. You wouldn’t need God if you could handle everything by yourself. You wouldn’t need God if every time you were in a jam, every time you were in a predicament, every time you were in a situation that you could handle it and get out of it by yourself. Ladies and gentlemen, you wouldn’t need God if you could, if you can handle life alone. You wouldn’t need God if you could work it out alone. You wouldn’t need God if you could figure it out for yourself.

That’s why Paul said what he said in verse 7, “unless I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.” Look at the last part of verse 7, “lest I should be exalted above measure.” Think about it, my brothers and sisters. God had allowed the Apostle Paul to see things that no other disciple had seen. God had allowed the Apostle Paul to view stuff that John, Peter, and Andrew had not. God gave revelations to Paul that none of the other disciples had. God allowed Paul to see the third heaven. Paul was gifted. Paul was anointed.

There was no other believer who had a testimony like the Apostle Paul. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, it would have been really easy for Paul to be filled with pride. Real easy for Paul to be filled with pride. It would be easy for Paul to think he was the man. He said, Look at the revelation. Look at all that God showed me. Look at the abundance of revelation. God did something for me, guys. He didn’t do for y’all. Did anybody else see the third heaven? Did anybody else see this? It was easy for Paul to get a big head. It was easy for Paul to think that he was the man. It was easy for Paul to think that he was better than everybody else.

It was easy for Paul to be filled with pride. And God remembered the last time a believer was filled with pride; he was kicked out of heaven. God said, “No, I don’t want that to happen to Paul. So, I will allow this flesh, this stone in the flesh, to attack Paul. So, every now and then, when Paul thinks that he is all that,”

God allowed this Paul in the flesh, the stone in the flesh, as a reminder to Paul, never forget that God is still in control. Never forget, Paul, where your help comes from. Never forget, Paul, where your strength comes from. Never forget that you are what you are, Paul, because of me. So, every now and then, God, oh, oh, okay, God, I got it. He will bring Paul back to level. Ladies and gentlemen, so when we are weak, when we are faint, when we want to give up, when we want to throw in the towel, that’s when God steps in, picks us up, comforts us, and gives us grace to make it through. That’s why he closes this thing out in verse 10, when he says, “therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

The reason, ladies and gentlemen, he can take pleasure in the stuff that he was going through is because he knows and knew that God's grace would take up the slack. Grace in infirmities, grace in reproaches, grace in needs, grace in persecution, grace in distress, grace in hardship, for when I am weak, then I am strong, because grace got me back, because grace will give me the strength. In other words, Paul is saying, I don't know how I will get through this thing. I don't know how I'm going to get through this storm. I don't know how I'm going to get through this pain. But I do know who's going to get me through. I know how I'm going to get through this mess. I don't know how I'm going to get through this situation.

I don't know how I'm going to get through this attack. But I do know who. I don't know how I'm going to make it through my infirmities, through my reproaches, through my necessities, through my persecutions, through my distresses, through my hardships. I don't know how through setbacks, through trials, through tribulations, through hearts, through hurts and disappearances, through adversities, through hurricanes, through floods. I don't know how I'm to make it, but I do know who will get me out of each and every situation. And because I know who, I also know that God's grace, God's grace, God's grace is sufficient for me. So, hang in there, brothers. God's grace is sufficient. Hang in there, sisters. God's grace is sufficient. Dads, husbands, hang in there, men. God's grace is sufficient.

Moms, I know it's difficult, but you've got to hang in there. God's grace is sufficient. Young people, I know it's difficult in this crazy time that we live in to try to live for God, try to live holy, try to be obedient to your parents and be obedient to God, but hang in there, young people. God's grace is sufficient. It's sufficient, no matter the thorn, no matter the setback, no matter the enemy, no matter what he brings into your life. Keep on preaching, Steve. Donna, keep on praying. Bellevue, keep on telling the story. Keep on soaring the seas. Keep on singing in the choir. Keep on playing in the orchestra. Keep on teaching, Sunday school teachers. Keep on doing what God has called you to do. Why? Because God's grace is sufficient.

That's why I thank God for my mountains. I thank God for my valleys. I thank God for the storms that have brought me through another Andraé Crouch song, because I've never had a problem. I wouldn't know that God could solve them. I wouldn't know what faith in His Word could do, but through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to trust in God through it all. I've learned to depend upon His Word and His Word, so no matter what the enemy brings my way. Even when I don't understand it, God's grace is sufficient. Now you know what to do when God says no.

Sermon 8

Title: "Don't Let Sin Discredit You"

Text: 1 Peter 5:8-11

Originally preached on September 6, 2007

Good to see you, man. Keith, I thank you. Let's give him another hand. Isn't that blessed this morning? Amen. Pastor Landon, good to see you, man. I don't think I've seen you in a long time. Good to see you. Sounded good. Well, good morning. That's a taste of what y'all are getting at Franklin Avenue if y'all come and worship with us, all right? Amen. I give thanks to God, my Father, Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Savior of my life. To my friend and my brother-in-Christ, Dr. Kelly, thank you, sir, for this tremendous opportunity that you've given this street preacher from the Lower Ninth Ward. Amen.

I am blessed to come here and share once again in this chapel with his beautiful wife, Dr. Rhonda Kelly, to all the professors, the staff, the members, and the students here. At the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I am indeed delighted and excited because I have been invited to be back here with you one more time. I look forward to this each and every opportunity that Dr. Kelly gives me to share in this chapel service. I've preached at five of the six Southern Baptist seminaries. The only one I've never preached at is Golden Gate. And I tell you, this is my personal favorite when I'm able to come home and share personally in the seminary that I love and the people that I love. I appreciate you so very much.

And I thank God for what God is doing in the life of this campus. My wife and I put up on campus. She said, "Look how beautiful it is." And I said, "Yes, God is really doing a great work in this campus." And we hope to return to our campus by the end of December. So be in prayer with us and be in prayer for us. There are two people I'd like to let you get to meet this morning. One, I didn't know you were going to be here. One of our staff pastors. Amen. He's with us today. Pastor Gary Mack is our family pastor. Please stand, Pastor Mack. Good to see you here this morning. I did not know he was going to be here. Amen.

He has been my right-hand throughout this whole past two years as we're trying to recover from Katrina. He's done a great job in doing that. And then the lady who's my angel all along from heaven. Amen. She's the most committed believer that I know. I don't know what I would be or where I would be without her. She is the love of my life, the apple of my eye, my primary, my good thing. My wife, Elizabeth, will you stand, baby? That's my wife. Amen. I tell people all over America, there ain't no woman like the one I got. Amen. Tony, you can use that, all right? But I let you use that, all right? Kimberly, let him use that on you, I tell you.

But it's a joy to be here, and we thank God for you. Tony, if I were with you this morning, to the New Testament, the book of 1 Timothy, I mean the book of 1 Peter, chapter 5, as we share today in the Word of God. The book of 1 Peter, chapter 5, as we share today in the Word of God. How

does it affect you when somebody you know has fallen? How do you deal with someone near and dear to you who has fallen into sin or fallen into a trap of the enemy? How does it affect you when somebody that you may not know, but you admire, comes into your life? There may be one of your mentors from afar, someone that you've always looked up to, someone that you've always admired.

How does it affect you when someone you know, who is a or walking with God, but one day you find out that they've fallen, that they've slipped, they've been ambushed by the enemy? In the past month or so, it has happened to me with someone near and dear to me, messed up in a very serious way. It affected me unlike anything that has affected me as far as someone who's messed up because I knew this person so well, and I could have put my hand on the Bible and said that would never happen to this person. And not only has it happened to that person I know, but it has happened recently in some other high-profile cases in America. And how do we as believers with the situations in life when people that we know are messed up, when people that we know fall, even still, when we mess up, when we fall? I want to talk about that this morning from 1 Peter chapter 5. I want you to look at verses 8 through 11 of that chapter with me. First Peter chapter 5, verses 8 through 11.

Now, God, as always, let me decrease as you increase. Father, let them not see prayer, but God, let them see Christ. To the end, God, that you may be glorified, the saints of God may be edified. Satan may be horrified, and lost sinners will come to repentance. And, Master, when it's all said and done, so very carefully give you in them all the praise, all of the glory, and all of the honor. In Jesus' name we pray, and for our sake, let the people of God say amen.

"Be sober, be vigilant. Why? Because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour." I want to preach this morning on the subject, the enemy.

Two words, "the enemy." In light of some recent, local, and national events, have you ever asked yourself as a believer, have you ever asked yourself as a child of God, what could they have possibly been thinking? Have you ever said to somebody else in conversation, have you heard about someone that you've known, and someone that you admire? Have you ever tried to mess up and fall? Have you ever asked yourself, what could they possibly have been thinking? What could have led him to make such a decision? What could have led her to make such a choice? He could not have been thinking right. She could not have been in her right mind. What in the world was he thinking? Reflect with me, my brothers and my sisters, if you will.

How could a popular senator from Louisiana, who ran and stood for family values, who ran and stood for family values, who ran based on family and faith in God, how could that popular Louisiana senator get involved in prostitution? What could he have possibly been thinking? What was on his mind? How could one of the most popular politicians in the history of our city take a bribe? Here was someone who was admired by blacks and whites. Someone who could relate to the rich as well as to the poor. Someone who was considered, Dr. Kelly, a shoo-in as the

next mayor of the city of New Orleans. What could he have possibly been thinking? I've known him since seventh grade. What was on his mind?

How could one of the most popular athletes in professional football, someone whose jersey is sold more than any other player in the league, someone who just a few years ago signed a contract, Dr. Price, that just as soon as he signed the contract, worth over \$100 million? How could he risk it all, Dr. Nix, by fighting pit bulls? What could he have possibly been thinking? What could have been on his mind? What could have led a popular pastor preacher, a bishop in the Atlanta area, to physically attack and beat his wife outside in a carport in an Atlanta airport? This man was popular. His wife was popular. Had one of the largest churches in Atlanta. A couple, who, just a few years ago, had one of the most talked-about weddings in America.

A couple who had a growing ministry in the greater Atlanta area. What could have driven him to physically abuse his wife so much so that now he's facing charges for that attack? What could have possibly happened? What could have been on his mind? What could have led to the divorce of the co-pastors of the 23,000-member church in Tampa, Florida? A couple who spoke to other couples about marriage. A couple who spoke to other couples about ministry. A marriage whose wife was one of the most sought-after speakers in America. Have you ever asked yourself what could have happened that now they're on the verge of a divorce? What could have happened to them? What could have happened to their marriage?

My brothers and my sisters, have you ever asked yourself what could have happened? Have you ever thought about what could have possibly happened to those individuals? How could this happen to Senator David Vitter? How could this happen to Councilman Oliver Thomas? How could this happen to Michael Vick, one of the most popular quarterbacks of the Atlanta Falcons? How could it happen to Bishop Weeks and Evangelist Juanita Bynum? How could it happen to Pastors Randy and Paula White? Now my brothers and my sisters, lest you think this only happens to politicians, lest you think this only happens to public officials, lest you think this only happens to celebrities, lest you think this only happens to professional athletes, I assure you that you and I have made some bad decisions in life.

I assure you that bad decisions happen to all of us. I assure you that bad choices happen to all of us. I assure you that in this chapel service right now, it's full of individuals, it's full of men, it's full of women, it's full of students who at one time or another have made some bad choices and bad decisions in life. Why? It happened to me two weeks ago. I was on our couple's retreat. We have a couples retreat every year. I was in Sandestin, Florida, at the Hilton Resort. And the year before, the week before Katrina, we had, how many were there, 200? 325 couples at this retreat in Sandestin, Florida. Two weeks ago, we had 150 couples there at the Sandestin Resort.

And many people in my congregation know, I've been trying to lose weight for about two years, Doc. It's been hard. I've been trying to cut off the pounds. And I'm sitting there. We're having our picnic right on the beach. And I purposely, Keith, I purposely chose smaller portions on my plate. I purposely got just a leg and just a wing. I would have gotten a leg, a wing, a thigh, a

breast. I would have gotten it all. But I purposely chose, Pastor Landry, the smaller portions. I purposely do, because I'm trying to lose weight. I'm trying to do the right thing. I purposely passed up the dessert tray, the dessert table. And I'm sitting there on the couple's picnic by my wife, minding my own business, when two good friends of mine, knowing my weaknesses and knowing the things of life, came to my table and put a dozen hot Krispy Kreme donuts on my table.

And before anybody could say, "Don't forget your diet," I had eaten four of them. I ate them in less than sixty seconds. And I enjoyed every last one of them. So why does it happen, Tony? How does it happen? Why and how? Is it because of greed? Is it because of jealousy? Is it because of envy? Is it because of the love of money, the love of pride? Is it some type of addiction? Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, why do we do it? Why would they do it? Why would you do it? Why would you jeopardize your name? Why would you jeopardize your reputation? Why would you jeopardize your integrity? Why would you jeopardize your marriage? Why would you jeopardize your ministry? Why would you jeopardize your family? Why would you jeopardize your future? Why would you jeopardize your diet? Why would you do that?

Well, my brothers and sisters, I can name that tune in two words. The enemy. The enemy. Believers need to understand that we have an enemy. My brothers and my sisters, just because you're on a seminary campus, that does not mean that the enemy will leave you alone. Just because you're trying to go into preaching ministry or music ministry or trying to go into mission ministry, that does not mean that the enemy will leave you alone. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, professors and students, the fact of the matter is, we have an adversary. We have an opponent who's trying his best to take us out. Lucifer, Satan, the devil, the enemy, is behind it all.

The devil is a slanderer. He's a malicious enemy who corrupts believers. He's always looking for opportunities to overtake the child of God. He's always looking for opportunities to overthrow a believer. John chapter 10 and verse 10 says it like this. "The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy." Think about it, ladies and gentlemen. He wants to steal our joy. He wants to kill our witness. He wants to destroy our testimony. He's the enemy of God. Therefore, that makes him the enemy of God's people. He studies us. He watches us. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our struggles. He knows our issues. He knows our addictions. He knows what turns us on, and the enemy knows what turns us on. And ladies and gentlemen, he knows what button to push. He knows when to push a button, and he knows how to push the button. And because he studies you, he will set you up and make you think you're getting something. But in reality, it's something else. For instance, those of you who are brothers who have a weakness for women, he'll send Jessica Biel your way. But after you get to know her, she'll take off that mask, and it's Rosie O'Donnell.

Now, ladies, don't laugh. It happens to you, too. He'll send Matthew McConaughey your way. I mean, a good-looking guy, hugging. But after it's all said and done, he'll take the mask off. It's

Kevin Federline. I know we have a mixed crowd of brothers. Some of my African American brothers. He'll send Halle Berry your way. But after it's all said and done, she'll take off the mask. I want to rock your world. I want to rock your world. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, the enemy knows our weaknesses, guys. He knows our struggles. He watches you. He studies you. He watches the things you like, the things that appeal to you. Think about it, my brothers and my sisters. Why would a rising star in the Senate get involved with prostitutes?

He was set up by the enemy. Why would the most popular politician in New Orleans, except for Blythe, he was set up by the enemy? Why would a popular football player like Michael Vick, with millions of dollars in his bank account, get involved in dogfighting? He was set up by the enemy. Why would a popular preacher, pastor, and bishop beat up his wife? He was set up by the enemy. Why would a well-known pastor and his wife get divorced in front of a 23,000-congregation church? The obvious answer is they were set up by the enemy. Why would a preacher who's trying to lose weight eat four Krispy Kreme donuts in less than a minute? In less than sixty seconds, I was set up by the enemy.

Why do born-again, saved, sanctified believers do things we should not do? Why do we lie? Why do we steal? Why do we cheat? Why do we drink? Why do we commit adultery? Why do we commit fornication? Why do we get involved in homosexuality? Why do we gamble? Why do we look at horoscopes? Why don't husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church? Why don't wives respect their husbands? As unto the Lord. Why don't children and teachers obey their parents and the Lord? For this is right. Why do we envy one another? Why are we jealous of one another? Why do we have pride with racism in the body of Christ? Why do we use profanity? Why do we play church? Why do we have religion and no relationship?

Why do we say things we shouldn't say? Why do we go places we shouldn't go? Why do we do things we shouldn't do? Well, my brothers and my sisters, my answer to all of those why questions is that we're not God. We have an enemy, and he'll do all he can to trip us and fall. We have an enemy, and he'll do all he can to trip us up. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask all those questions because we've been played. We've been tricked. We've been tempted. We've been deceived. We've been bamboozled. We've been set up. And for the MTV crowd, we've been punked by the enemy. However, my brothers and sisters, the only problem is that our situation is no game.

When you fall, when the enemy gets you to fall, Ashton Kutcher doesn't show up and say, "It was just a game." It was just a play. It was just all in fun. No, when you and I fall, no actor comes up and says, "Yeah, it was just fun. It was just all a game." The only problem is that our situation is no TV show. Our situation doesn't break for a TV commercial. Therefore, when we fall, the pain is real. When a believer falls, the pain hurts. When a believer falls, the embarrassment is real. When a child of God falls, the consequences are real. Your name is affected. Your reputation is affected. Your marriage is affected. Your family is affected. Your children are affected. Your ministry is affected. Your future is affected.

And it's all because we were set up by the enemy. So, is there an answer for the child of God? Is there an answer for the believer? Is there any hope for those of us in here who've been set up, who've been tricked, who've been ambushed by the enemy? Is there a way to break this sin cycle? Is there a way to stop this embarrassment? Is there a word of encouragement for the believer? Is there a way out for the child of God? Can we become a victor instead of a victim? Is there a way that we can be winners instead of losers? Well, praise the Lord, my brothers and my sisters. Our text gives us our answer here in 1 Peter 5.

There are three things we must do to win this spiritual warfare. There are three things, Lance, that you and I must do to win this spiritual battle. There are three things, brothers. There are three things, sisters. Ladies and gentlemen, there are three things that you and I must practice in our lives if we're going to be able to stand against the attacks of the enemy. First of all, number one, you must recognize the enemy. Number one, you must recognize the enemy. Look at 1 Peter chapter 5:8. The Bible says, "Be sober. Be vigilant." What? "Because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Ladies and gentlemen, Satan is no cartoon. You must recognize the enemy.

Satan is not a TV show. He's not some actor walking around in a red suit, with horns and a pitchfork, like the BET show, Hell Day. That ain't the devil. He doesn't come like that. He's not a figment of our imagination. The devil is real. Sometimes he comes in the form of a husband that you've always wanted. Sometimes he comes in the form of a wife you've always wanted. Sometimes he comes in the form of a preacher. Sometimes he comes in the form of something you want in your life. But it's a deception. It's a trick of the enemy. Ladies and gentlemen, you've got to know the enemy, and recognize the enemy. Satan is real, and he's on his job 24/7. He's out to steal, kill, and destroy the children of God.

Therefore, we better recognize him as he is. But the problem is, he disguises himself in various ways. Whatever area of your weakness is, that's how he'll come. He's not just going to show up in a red suit. He's going to come up in an area of your weakness. If your weakness is gambling, he'll tempt you to play the lottery. If your weakness is alcohol, he'll tempt you to get involved in liquor. If your weakness is food, he'll put a dozen Krispy Kreme donuts right before you. If your weakness is lust, he'll tempt you to get involved in pornography. If your weakness is greed, money, sex, lying, stealing, whatever your weakness is, that's how the enemy will come. And before you know it, you're trapped. Before you know it, you've been sent up.

Before you know it, you've been bamboozled. Before you know it, young people, you've been punked by the enemy. That's why the text says you've got to recognize your enemy. Because, depending, ladies and gentlemen, on your weakness is how he'll show up. That's why Peter said, Be sober. Be not drunk. Be in your right mind. If I had more time, I would go into this a lot more, but I don't have time. Be sober. Spiritual sober-mindedness includes the ideas of being steadfast, of being in self-control, and of clarity of mind. You've got to be thinking right. I have no doubt that none of those people that I mentioned earlier were thinking right. Oliver wasn't thinking right. Vitter wasn't thinking right. Vic wasn't thinking right.

There was no way they were thinking right, or they never would have gotten to what they had gotten to. Sober. Be vigilant. Why? Because your adversary, the devil, is a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he may devour. The sober Christian is in charge of his priorities and not intoxicated with the various temptations and with the various allurements of the world. Then the text says, “Be vigilant.” In other words, be on guard. Stay alert. Be watchful. Always look around because you never know what area the enemy will attack from. You may think he’s going to come in one way, but he’ll come in another way. Ladies and gentlemen, you’ve got to be watchful. Be watchful of the dangers. Be watchful of the trouble. Think about the consequences.

What if I get caught? What if my wife finds out? What if my husband finds out? What if my pastor finds out? What if my children find out? What if my church finds out? Be sober. Be vigilant. Why? Because your adversary, the devil, your enemy, walks about. Like a roaring lion. Seeking whom he may devour. And right now, even though you’re on a seminary campus and you’re learning about Jesus Christ. You’re learning about God. You’re learning about how to witness. You’re learning about how to make better families and better men and better women. Right now, the enemy is walking up and down these pews seeking whom he may devour. Be sober. Be vigilant. Why? You must recognize your enemy. But then there’s a second thing in the text.

Not only recognize the enemy, but secondly, the Bible says you must resist the enemy. Resist means to stand up against. Resist him. Don’t allow yourself to get in a situation where you can easily fall. Stand up against. In other words, Dr. Kelly, if I know I’m about to be attacked by someone. If I know somebody’s about to run up on me and try to knock me over. Then I’m going to get, pastor, in a position of resistance. I will get in a position where I can fend that person off. Tony, I’m going to get in a position where I can fight against. Where can I stand against the enemy? Pastor Landrum, I’m not going to let the enemy.

I see him coming. No. I will get in a position where I can withstand the enemy. In other words, I will stand firm as a child of God. And what’s the best way, my brothers and sisters, for a believer to stand firm? Well, I’m kind of glad you asked. That kind of freed me up. There are some good questions at this seminar. The way you stand firm, you just got to fight the devil with the Scriptures. You’ve got to fight the devil with the word of God. That’s what Jesus did in Luke chapter 4 when Jesus was tempted by the devil. You remember when the devil called upon Jesus after he had been fasting forty days and forty nights?

The devil came to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and said, “Why don’t you turn those stones into bread? You know you’re hungry. You know you want some nourishment.” But Jesus, recognizing the enemy, resisted the enemy by saying, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word. That proceeded out of the mouth of God.” Oh, my brothers and sisters, if you’re going to resist the enemy, you’ve got to do it with the Word of God. He doesn’t care who your pastor is. He doesn’t care what your denomination is. He doesn’t care about your title. He doesn’t care how much you’ve been in school. He doesn’t care about that. You have to resist the devil with the Word of God. No weapon formed against me shall prosper.

If God is for us, who can be against us? For we know that all things work together for good. To them that love the Lord. To them that call upon him. To those who serve a purpose. You have to resist the enemy. Great is He that's in me than He that's in the world. We're more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, who loved us. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them out of them all. You have to resist the enemy. Come unto me. All you who labor and are heavily laden I will give you rest. What shall separate me from the love of God? Shall tribulation? No. Shall trials? No. Shall persecution? No. Shall pestilence? No. Shall sword? No. I'll let nothing separate me from the love of God. You gotta resist the enemy with the Word of God. I'm crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live, yet not I but the Christ that lives in me. In the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God. Who not only loved me, but he gave himself for me. Resist the enemy with the word of God. I can do all things through Christ, who gives me the strength. Resist the enemy with the word of God.

And then once you resist him, Peter encourages us, America, to testify about your victory. Tell somebody else about your victory. He says at the end of verse 9, "Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings." You're not the only one being tempted. You're not the only preacher who's tempted. You're not the only seminary professor who's tempted. You're not the only staff member who's tempted. You're not the only trustee who's tempted. Resist him in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brothers and sisters here in the world. You tell a man, "if God did it for me, he can do it for you." If God kept me, God can keep you. If God made a way for me, he can make a way for you.

How do we resist him? How do we stand against him? We've got to recognize the enemy. We must resist the enemy. And finally, because my time is running out, we must remind the enemy. Recognize the enemy, resist the enemy, and then remind the enemy. Look at verse 10. But may the God of all grace, who called us to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and shelter you. Dr. Nix, we've got to remind the enemy. Let the devil know that you're a work in progress. Let the enemy know that God is not through with you yet. Remind the devil that this is a twelve-round bout. I know you got me in the first round. You got me in the second round.

But it ain't over until God says it's over. It's a twelve-round bout. Yes, I fell in round one. Yes, I gave in to round two. But God was just using that to teach me about His grace and mercy. And his grace taught me that I fall sometimes. I mess up sometimes. But because it's a twelve-round fight, because it's a twelve-round bout, God's going to use it for my glory and his praise. I'm going to get back up again. Oh, yes, we fall down, but we get back up again. That's what 1 John chapter 1 and verse 9 says. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

All my brothers and sisters, when the devil tells you it's over for you, when the devil tells you you can never be used again, remind the enemy that God is using every trial in your life. Remind

the enemy that God is using every temptation in your life. Remind the devil that God is using every setback, every mess up in your life to do four things in your life. He's using it to protect you. He's using it to establish you. He's using it to strengthen you. And he's using it to settle you, to perfect you in spiritual warfare, to establish you in his Word. To strengthen you so you can stand firm against the enemy, and finally to settle you. That God always has the last word. That God always has the last word.

Remind the devil, devil, you don't have the last word. God has the last word. And if you go to the back of the Bible, go to the back of the Scripture, guess what, y'all? We win. We win. We win. Remind the devil. Remind Lucifer about Calvary. Remember Calvary, y'all? Satan thought it was over. Remember Calvary? Lucifer thought it was over. They killed Jesus. It's over. No more religion. No more worshipping Jesus Christ. No more getting born again. And they killed Jesus Christ. They died on Calvary. And he died for your sins and my sins. And they put him in jail. They put a stone in front of another stone. And Roman soldiers, dead in hell, in the grave, were celebrating. They thought it was over. We got this, Jesus now.

But as the old Baptist preacher said, early Sunday morning, Jesus got up with all power in his hand. Death, where is our strength? Grave, where is our victory? And ladies and gentlemen, because Jesus got up from the grave, we can get up from every attack of the enemy. Don't lie there. Don't lie there. Don't stay in that pit. Don't wallow in that sin. Don't stay in that mud. You can get up again. Somebody go to Washington, D.C., and tell David Vitter you can get up again. Somebody go to Atlanta and tell Michael Vick that you can get up again. Somebody go to Atlanta and tell Juanita Bynum, you can get up again. Somebody go and tell Pastor Randy and Paula White that you can get up again.

And somebody here in New Orleans, find Oliver Thomas and tell him, Oliver, you can get back up again. But then the neighbor next to you, that person to your left, tell him, you can get back up again. That neighbor to your right, tell him, you can get back up again. See, if I were at my church, they would really be doing that by now. Y'all don't help me out at all. These brothers are doing their best. I appreciate it, guys. But I ain't getting no help out there. But I want to get back up again. That person on your left, you don't know what they've been through. You don't know what type of weakness they're in. You need to let them know that you can get back up again.

That person on your right is struggling. They have issues in there. But tell them, you can get back up again. I know it's been tougher. I know it hurts. I know it wasn't easy. But because Jesus rose from the grave, you can get back up again. Yes. Yes. Yes. However, you must recognize the enemy. You must resist the enemy. You must remind the enemy that God has the final word. And then Peter, Dr. Kelly, signs off, Dr. Nix, verse 11, in 1 Peter chapter 5, by saying, "To him." To who? To him. To who? To him. To the one who saved you. To him. To the one who redeemed you. To him. To the one who rescued you. To him. To the one who ended the world. We win. We win.

Father, we thank You and praise You for the privilege and opportunity to share this word. God, this flesh makes us do some things we shouldn't do. Makes us say some things we shouldn't say. Makes us think some things we shouldn't think. God, the Bible says all of us like sheep have gone astray. God, as I look over this congregation, as I look over this crowd, God, these are brothers and sisters that are being trained for the kingdom of God. And don't let the devil tell them, if they make a mistake, that they can never be used again. God, Moses fell, but you used him. David fell, and you used him. Solomon fell; you used him. Peter cursed out a woman, cut a soldier's ear off, but you used him to preach on the day of Pentecost, and three thousand people came down the aisle. But somebody in this sanctuary, somebody in this chapel, needs to know that they can get back up again. If they resist the enemy, they recognize the enemy. If they remind the enemy that Jesus is Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you. May God keep you.

Sermon 9

Title: "The Church that Christ Builds"

Text: Matthew 16:13–20

Originally preached on March 30, 2008

I want to preach this morning about "The Church That Christ Builds."

When I was a little boy, I grew up in the lower Ninth Ward, and one of my favorite pastimes was watching, listening to, and reading children's stories. One of my favorite children's stories was the story of the big, bad wolf and the three little pigs. I was always intrigued by why this big, bad wolf was always picking on these three little pigs. I couldn't understand it. They never did anything to him, but the big bad wolf always picked on these three little pigs.

You know the story. The three little pigs built the straw house, and right after they built the straw house, here comes the knock on the door, "Little pigs, let me in, let me in, or I'm gonna huff and I'm gonna puff, and I'll blow your house down." You remember what the three little pigs said? "No, we're not going to let you in, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

He huffed, and he puffed, and he blew the straw house down. The pigs panicked. They got upset and said, "What are we gonna do?" So they decided to build a wooden house. They thought that it was a stronger house, and the big bad wolf could not possibly blow this wooden house down. But sure enough, right after they built the wooden house, "I'm back! Little pigs, let me in, let me in, let me in. If you don't let me in, I'm gonna huff, and I'm gonna puff, and I'm gonna blow your house down!" And once again the three little pigs said, "No, we're not gonna let you in, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

The wolf huffed and puffed, and he blew the wooden house down. The pigs panicked. They said, "What do we do now? He's blown down the straw house; he's blown down the wood house. We've got to do something." This time, they decided to build a brick house. They put the foundation down. They put pillars down. They knew this would be a stronger house, but right after they built that brick house, guess what? Here came the big, bad wolf again. I mean, why not come back? He thought, I've blown down the wooden house. I've blown down the straw house. He feels like he's eaten his Wheaties, like he's the shot caller; he's all that and a bag of chips and some change. He says, "Little pigs, I've blown down the straw house; I've blown down the wood house. If you don't let me in, I'm gonna huff and I'm gonna puff, and I'm gonna blow your house down." And one more time, the three little pigs said, "No, we're not gonna let you in, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

And he huffed, and he puffed, and he blew, and nothing happened. The pigs' house could stand when they built the right kind of house.

The Adversary

There's a big, bad wolf named Satan that's doing his best to blow down God's houses, to blow down God's churches. He's trying to blow down God's congregation. He doesn't care how large or how small the church is. He doesn't care if the church is in the inner city or the suburbs. The devil doesn't care if the pastor is full-time or bi-vocational. Satan doesn't care if the choir sings hymns or praise songs. He doesn't care if the church is made up of seniors, soldiers, adults, couples, teenagers, yuppies, or buppies. He doesn't care. He's trying to destroy the church.

Satan is trying to blow down our churches. He's trying to blow down their leaders. He's trying to blow down their ministers. He's trying to blow down their testimonies. He's trying to blow down their reputation. He's trying to blow down their character. He's trying to blow down their witness. He's getting ready for his attack. He's planning his mode of operation. He's setting up his game plan. He's huffing, and he's puffing, and he's blowing. However, in the midst of the enemy's attack, God is sitting up in heaven looking down at His church, and as a coach that's trying to encourage His team, God shouts down from heaven, "God's church, stand. Church, hold your position. Church, be strong. Church, hang in there. Church, don't give up. Church, don't give in. Church be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for your labor is not in vain."

That's what I've come to tell you today: Your labor is not in vain. The devil doesn't like First Baptist opening up their doors to a predominantly black congregation. He doesn't like First Baptist Church doing what you've done for us. The devil doesn't like that, so he's going to do all that he can to try to destroy what God is doing in this church and among this congregation. Therefore, the question of the hour, my brothers and sisters, is how can a church stand against the attacks of the devil? How can a church stand when Satan is trying his best to blow down their church, to blow down that ministry?

It must be a church that Christ builds.

Christ the Foundation

If the church is going to stand, if the church is going to be what God has called us to be and do, Jesus must be the foundation. In verse 13 of this text, the Bible says Jesus comes into the town of Caesarea Philippi. And Jesus looks around this area and says, "My, they thought a lot about Caesar in this town. Look at Caesar's Coliseum, Caesar's Courts, Caesar's Condominiums, Caesar's Custom Chariots. They thought a lot about Caesar in this town." He said, "They thought a lot about Phillip in this town. Look at Phillip's plaza. There's Phillips' Pizza Pub, Phillips Petroleum. They thought a lot about Phillip in this town." And he looked at His disciples, and He said, "I see, guys, what they think about Caesar. I see what they think about Phillip."

Jesus asked the disciples a question in verse 13: “But you’ve been among the people in the community. Who do men say I, the Son of Man, am?” In verse 14, He gets His answer: “Some say you’re John the Baptist. Some say you’re Elijah.” Wrong answers. And then the Master gets personal with His disciples in verse 15, “Guys, I can see the multitude getting it wrong. I can see the crowd getting it wrong. But Peter, James, John, and Andrew, who do you say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

In verse 16, Peter says, “Oh, oh, I know that one!” John looks at him and says, “Man, put your hand down. You know you got rebuked yesterday.” Peter says, “But I know this one. I know it.” Andrew says, “Come on, Peter, you’re going to mess this thing up.”

Upon this Rock

But Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In verse 17, Jesus said, “Boy, give me a high five, you finally got one right.” And then Jesus looked at Peter and said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in heaven. You are Peter, and upon this rock, upon this saying, upon this declaration, upon this statement of faith, I will build my church.” Don’t miss that declaration. Jesus says, “I will build my church.”

If Jesus is not the foundation, watch out, you’re heading for a fall. I love David Crosby. I love him like a brother. I appreciate all that he has meant to me these last two years. But frankly, First Baptist Church better not be built on David Crosby. Franklin Avenue Baptist Church is the only church I’ve ever pastored. I went from the street corner to the pulpit. When I got to Franklin Avenue, they couldn’t even pronounce my name. They gave me a chance with fifty members back in 1986, and God has grown that church. But I promise you, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church better not be built on Fred Luter. It’s the wrong foundation. My friend, if the church is being built on anything other than Jesus, it’s the wrong foundation. It’s not about the pastor; it’s about the Master. It’s not about the leaders; it’s about the Lamb of God. It’s not about the ministers. It’s about the Messiah. It’s not about the singing; it’s about the Savior. It’s not about the creature; it’s about the Creator. Jesus says, “If I be lifted up, I’ll draw all men to me.” Jesus must be the foundation of the church.

If Jesus is not the foundation, watch out. One day, when you least expect, old good-for-nothing Satan is going to come around a church where Jesus is not the foundation, and he’s gonna huff, he’s gonna puff, he’s gonna blow the church down. That’s why the song says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. God, I dare not trust the sweetest frame but

lean on Jesus. On Christ the solid Rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. “If the church is going to stand, Jesus must be the foundation.”³

³ Fred Luter, through the Storm,” *Lifeway*, January 1, 2014, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/ministry-church-fred-luter-shelter-through-the-storm>.

Sermon 10

Title: "Disaster to Dancing

Text: Habakkuk 1:2–4; 3:17–19

Originally preached on April 6, 2008

History has yet to record the impact that a woman named Katrina had on the citizens, city, community, and churches of New Orleans. Sure, you've read the articles in the *Times-Picayune*, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, and even the *Wall Street Journal*. Yes, we've been featured on BET, ABC, NWC, CBS, Fox, and CNN, as well as numerous other cable channels on television. Present and former presidents of our nation have been to our city. Present and former presidential candidates have been to our city. Governors of other states, mayors of other cities, world-famous celebrities, and athletes have all been to our city. Yet I submit to you, brothers and sisters, that history has yet to record the impact that a woman named Katrina had on the citizens, city, community, and churches of New Orleans.

Well, what will be written? What can be said about that? The worst natural disaster in the history of our nation and how that disaster has affected so many lives. Because of the fact of the matter, my brothers and sisters, is that many of us have been afflicted and affected. How many of you are now living in another state because of a woman named Katrina? Oh, yes, we have been affected. How many of you are living in another city because of a woman named Katrina? How many of you are still waiting for your LA Road Home money? How many? How many of you are still living or know someone still living in a FEMA trailer? Oh, yes, you have been affected.

How many of you are no longer working at the same job, teaching at the same school, living in the same house, riding in the same car, and married to the same spouse? Oh, yes, we've been affected. And to add to that, what about the number of loved ones, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, and friends who have died from the medical professionals or from what medical professionals are now calling the Katrina Stress Syndrome? Oh, yes, we've been affected. And finally, who even thought it would take us two and a half years to worship in our own beautiful sanctuary? Oh, yes, we've been affected. Two and a half years of worshipping at First Baptist in Houston, where Pastor Sam Young is now pastoring. Oh, yes, we've been affected.

Two and a half years of worshipping at Istrouma and Florida Boulevard Baptist Churches in Baton Rouge, where Pastor White is now. Oh, yes, we've been affected. For two and a half years, we have been worshipping at our sister church, First Baptist Church of New Orleans. Oh, yes, we've been affected. Oh, what a disaster for two and a half years. Oh, what damage, dysfunction, disappointment, disbelief, disgust, disconnect, disorder, and displacement. Oh, but now, somebody says "But now." Somebody says, "But now." Now that we are back in our sanctuary. Now that we're back. Now that we're back in our worship center. Choir, now that you're back in your own choir stand. Preacher, now that you're back in your own pulpit. Musicians, now that you're back in your music pit. Deacons, now that you're back in your own

seats. Deaconess, now that you're back in your own section. Usher, now that you're back at your own post. And Franklinites, now that you're back in your own pews.

Those two and a half years now seem like two and a half months. Two and a half months, two and a half weeks. Two and a half weeks seem like two and a half days. Because today in this service, today in this hour, today in this place, our disaster has turned into dancing. In spite of all the disappointment, the damage, the dysfunction, the disorder, the displacement, Franklinites, we can thank God today that we've gone from disaster to dancing. Woo-hoo! And that's what I see happening to the prophet Habakkuk in our text. In our text, Habakkuk is going through a very difficult time in his life.

Habakkuk is going through a very trying time in his life. Habakkuk is a man of faith, a man who loves God. The name "Habakkuk" means one who embraces or claims. Habakkuk is a man of great character, a watchman over God's people. However, in our text, Habakkuk is concerned about some things that are happening in society. More specifically, Habakkuk is concerned about some things that were happening in his life. What was happening to the nation of Judah? So here, in these three chapters, Habakkuk addresses the Lord about the things that were happening in society. Therefore, the question at this hour is, how does Habakkuk go from being a disaster to dancing? With all of his questions, with all of his concerns, with all that he's going through, how does one go from disaster to dancing?

Well, to get from disaster to dancing, you must realize several things that, first, life is full of foes, Chapter 1, verses 1–4. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, you don't have to have a bull's eye on your chest to realize that life will bring you foes and you will have enemies. That was Habakkuk's dilemma. That was Habakkuk's disaster. The Babylonians were foes of the children of Israel. Babylonians were the enemies of the children of Judah. The Babylonians were always attacking the children of Judah. Therefore, Habakkuk complained to Jehovah. Jehovah God listened to his complaint in verses 1–4.

A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, according to Shuganath. O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it. In the midst of the years, make it known. In wrath, remember mercy. God comes from Teman, the holy one from Mount Paran. His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light rays flashed from his hand, and there he veiled his power. In other words, Habakkuk could not understand why the children of God were always being attacked. Oh, my brothers and sisters, that sounds like the same old song. And I have been singing for two and a half years. That seems like the same complaint you and I have been telling God for two and a half years.

Oh, Lord, how long shall we cry because of our foes and enemies? How long must we deal with the crooked contractors? How long shall we deal with no road home from the roadhouse? The thieves and the robbers who are breaking in and stealing from our trailers and our homes. How long must we deal with the crazy co-workers, the noisy neighbors, the critical church members,

the fake friends, and the feuding family members? Oh, my brothers and sisters, I know life has not been easy for you. I know you had to cry sometimes, but because of the fact that we're in this sanctuary today, it lets me know that the battle is not ours, it's the Lord's. The fact that we're in this sanctuary today lets me know that God is for us, not against us.

The fact that we're in this sanctuary today tells me that the giants cannot defeat us. As a matter of fact, the bigger they are, the harder they fall. My friend can bring and go from disaster to dancing when we realize that life is full of foes. But then there's a second thing in our text. If we are to go from disaster to dancing, not only must we realize that first, life is full of foes, but secondly, we must realize that life is full of failure. Habakkuk chapter 3:17, "Though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fails and the yields fields yield no food, the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herbs in the stalls." And you thought your day was going bad, listen to the day that Habakkuk is having; let me read it again. "Though the fig tree shall not blossom, fruit be on the vine, the produce of the olive fails and the field yield no fruit, the flock be cut off from the fold and there'll be no herds in the stalls."

Habakkuk is facing one failure after another, but once again, my brothers and sisters, this sounds like us; after the last two and a half years, if anybody knows about failures, those of us from New Orleans know about failure.

FEMA failed us, the federal government failed us, the state failed us, the city government failed us, and the Corps of Engineers failed us. And it's all because the levees failed us. Lost our homes because the levy failed us. We lost our businesses because the levy failed us. We lost our schools, churches, and neighborhoods because the levees failed us. But here we are today as a living testimony that if we wait on God, trust in God, believe in God, and have faith in God, you can turn disaster from dancing.

Listen, Habakkuk's faith in God was not based on what he expected God to give him. Even if God was suffering and loss, Habakkuk still declared that he would rejoice in the God of his salvation. Wow, what faith!

In like manner, my brothers and sisters, every now and then, our faith will be tested because life is full of failure. Family will fail you. Friends will fail you. Co-workers will fail you. Classmates, church members, cars and trucks, and politicians will fail you. Preachers will fail you. But in the midst of failure, you must put on your trust, confidence, and faith in God. Our faith is tested when things are not going well. Oh, anybody can walk, talk about faith, preach about faith, sing about faith, write about faith. But Habakkuk tells us in chapter 2, verse 4, that if you want to turn from disaster to dancing, you must realize that the just live by faith. Don't just talk about it. Live it. Don't just preach it. Live it. Sing it. Live it.

Don't just write it. Live it. Don't just rap it. Live it. Oh, Brother Louis Dandridge was here. He would tell you to live by faith every day. On Monday, walk by faith. On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, walk by faith. On Friday, walk by faith. And on Saturday, walk by faith.

If Byron Johnson were here in the last song that he recorded before he went to direct heaven's Choir, Byron would tell you that in spite of how things look, in spite of how things appear, and what some folk will say, Byron would join in a duet with Habakkuk and say, "Yes, well, I trust Him." In spite of what the doctor says, "I will trust Him."

In spite of what society says, the reporter says, the so-called friends say, the media report, or how I feel, oh, yes, I will rejoice in the Lord of my salvation. What leads to my third and final point, oh, Franklinites, I know it's not been easy these last two and a half years, however, if you and I are to turn our disaster to dancing, we must realize that, first, life is full of foes, second, life is full of failures, and finally, for the child of God, third, life is full of favor. Verses 18 and 19, brothers and sisters, I am convinced that many of us don't know how to enjoy the favor of God in our lives. Favor means the blessings of God, the special privileges of God. Favor means the promotion.

Favor means the promotion of God. If I had tickets to the Hornets game Friday night, and picked up the tickets at will call, then I looked in the envelope to notice two tickets in section 308, top section, \$10 a ticket, nosebleed section. You talk about depression, you talk about disappointment, you talk about disaster. But before I gave the ticket taker my ticket, I noticed a letter in the envelope and took it out. Because of your relationship with the American Factory Direct, you have been granted a favor, of being moved to the best seat in the house in section 114. Section 114 is on the first level and gives you access to the club level. And because the owner of this area was a furniture owner who had plush leather seats, you start dancing and yell "Woo-hoo."

All of a sudden, because of the favor of our owner, my disaster was turned into dancing. If the screens had been working, I would have shown you some footage of the deer climbing high, steep hills, and then shown you the beautiful strides in motion as they run over a grassy plain. To see a deer run is a picture of beauty, a picture of beauty in motion. They're not timid, they're not afraid, they're not tiptoeing, they're not guessing. It's beauty in motion. It's as if they're dancing in the midst of disaster. They're not timid. Well, brothers and sisters, it's been two and a half years. Ladies and gentlemen, it's been two and a half years. Franklinites, it's been two and a half years since we have been in our sanctuary.

Two and a half years of the blessings of God, the special privileges of God, the promotion of God, the favor of God, displaced in Houston, but God gave us favor. Dallas, Birmingham, Atlanta, Memphis, Arkansas, but God gave us favor. And now that we're in here, you can sit down if you want to, but it's been two and a half years. So I've asked God, even if it's just for a day, to make my feet like hind's feet, so I can stand, climb, run, rejoice, and dance, and dance, so that I can turn this disaster of two and a half years into a celebration of dancing, so stand on your

feet and dance, clap your hands and dance, lift up your voice and dance, give thanks to God and dance, because when I think of the goodness of Jesus and all that he's done for me, I can dance all day.

APPENDIX H

HUGHES, BEATTY, AND DINWOODIE INSTRUMENT

(Adapted from Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*)

Strategic Thinking Competency

I. Scanning

Did the leader examine the organization's problems? How did the leader analyze the problem?

1. As a potential strength?
2. As a potential weakness?
3. As a potential opportunity?
4. As a potential threat?

II. Vision

Did the leader have the ability to view what the organization can and should become? How did the leader demonstrate vision?

5. Expressed Ideals and Values?
6. Affirmed Human Dimension?
7. Put Story Meaningful Context to Connect Members?
8. Clarified Expectations about desired growth?
9. Described drivers of change?

III. Reframing

Did the leader have the ability to see things differently or change way of thinking? How did the leader reframe their perspective?

10. Adjust Core Beliefs?
11. Transcend Cultural Barriers?
12. Alter Lifestyle?

IV. Making Common Sense

Did the leader help others in the organization make sense of the world, circumstances, and challenges facing them? How did the leader help make common sense?

- 13. Framing?
- 14. Advocating?
- 15. Illustrating?
- 16. Inquiring?

V. **Systems Thinking**

Did the leader discern the interrelationships among variables in complex situations? How did the leader demonstrate systemic thinking?

- 17. Looked for patterns over time?
- 18. Looked at the big picture?
- 19. Looked for complex interactions?
- 20. Hypothesized key relationships?
- 21. Validated understanding of what causes what?¹

Strategic Acting Competency

I. **Decision-Making**

Did the leader act decisively in the face of uncertainty? How did the leader make the impactful decision?

- 1. Consulted the advice of other experts?
- 2. Accounted for variable change?
- 3. Decisions are strategically consistent with each other?
- 4. Acted quickly to limit damage and establish order?

II. **Fostering Agility**

Did the leader sense and respond to turbulence in the competitive environment surrounding the organization? How did the leader foster agility?

- 5. Recognized changes in the environment?
- 6. Fast and Effective Action?
- 7. Dealt and removed barriers hindering progression?
- 8. Recognized a particular situation as an opportunity for learning?

¹ Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie, *Becoming a Strategic Leader*, 71–103.

III. **Creating Alignment**

Did the leader set clear strategic priorities to create alignment? How did the leader create goal alignment?

9. Utilized Strategic Thinking?
10. Ensured a common understanding of Goals?
11. Presented Vision of Future?
12. Offered Strategic Drivers?
13. Leadership Ethos?
14. Offered openness?²

Strategic Influencing Competency

I. **Building Trust**

Did the leader build trust in relationships? How did the leader build trust?

Contractual Trust

1. Discussed expectations?
2. Set reasonable boundaries?

Competence Trust

3. Respected Others Skills?
4. Sought Input?
5. Involved Others?
6. Allowed Others to make decisions?
7. Supported Others Progression?

Communication Trust

8. Admitted Mistakes?
9. Told the Truth?
10. Kept Confidences?
11. Gave and Received Constructive Feedback?

² Ibid., 105–44.

II. **Managing the Political Landscape**

Did the leader maintain credibility while navigating the organizational politics? How did the leader maintain credibility?

- 12. Examined personal motives?
- 13. Communicated personal agenda?
- 14. Shifted Expectations?
- 15. Maintained end goal?
- 16. Demonstrated missional success?
- 17. Modeled appropriate behavior?

III. **Boundary Spanning**

Did the leader have the ability to expand the boundaries of the organization? How did the leader expand organizational boundaries?

- 18. Buffering?
- 19. Reflecting?
- 20. Connecting?
- 21. Mobilizing?
- 22. Weaving?
- 23. Transforming?

IV. **Involving Others**

Did the leader involve others to foster commitment? How did the leader involve others?

- 24. Created a common understanding of the entire picture?
- 25. Developed consensus around the direction chosen?
- 26. Ensured the input and perspectives of others are valued?

V. **Connecting Emotionally**

Did the leader engage the hearts of others to generate commitment? How did the leader engage emotionally?

- 27. Putting yourself in stakeholders' shoes?
- 28. Connected to organizational aspirations?
- 29. Enlivened language through the power of stories, metaphors, and images?

VI. Building and Sustaining Momentum

Did the leader implement building and sustaining momentum? How did the leader build and sustain momentum?

- 30. Set appropriate expectations along the way?
- 31. Search out and celebrate successes?
- 32. Send consistent messages?
- 33. Organizational Adaptability?
- 34. Slow Down or Prevent Distractions?³

³ Ibid., 145–95.

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- Dobson, Barbara Angela. "Transformational and Strategic Leadership: Its Impact on the Capacity for Organizational Effectiveness." PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
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- Mellon, Judith J. "Becoming an Expert Strategic Thinker: The Learning Journey of Christian Ministers." PhD diss., University of Idaho, 2013. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

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VITA

Christopher Brandon Phillips

EDUCATIONAL

AA, Northwest Mississippi Community College, 2009

BGS, Southern Arkansas University, 2012

Major: Psychology

Minor: Sociology

MDiv, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018

Major: Pastoral Ministry

Minor: Evangelism

ThM New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021

Major: Christian Leadership

Minor: Biblical Exposition

PhD, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2025

Major: Christian Leadership

Minor: Biblical Exposition and Christian Education

AWARDS AND HONORS

LifeWay Pastoral Leadership Award (NOBTS), 2019

Senior Chapel Speaker (*NOBTS*), 2019

Caskey Center for Church Excellence Scholarship (*NOBTS*), 2015–18

Cecil Hubbard Ministerial Scholarship, Lincoln Baptist Association, Brookhaven, MS
2015–24

PROFESSIONAL

Adjunct Instructor, CEAM:6320 Christian Leadership and Administration, New Orleans
Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, Spring Break, 2022

Adjunct Instructor, PATH 6334: Stress and Conflict Management, New Orleans Baptist
Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, Summer 2021

Adjunct Instructor, PATH 6635: Pastoral Leadership, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, Spring 2021

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Reggie Ogea, Church Ministries Division, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, January 2021–24

Field Mentor for undergraduate students at Leavell College, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2023–present

MINISTERIAL

License: January 2008, New Sight Baptist Church, Brookhaven, Mississippi

Ordination: January 2010, New Sight Baptist Church, Brookhaven, Mississippi

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Vernon, Alabama, 2019–present

Pastor, Evans Creek Baptist Church, Pearl River, Louisiana, 2016–19

Transitional Pastor, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Bogue Chitto, Mississippi, 2015–16

Lead Pastor, Flag Lake Baptist Church, Sarah, Mississippi, 2014–15

Pastor, New London Baptist Church, Strong, Arkansas, 2010–14

Youth Pastor, Arkabutla Baptist Church, Arkabutla, Mississippi, 2008–10

COMMUNITY

Assistant Football Coach, Lamar County High School, Vernon, Alabama, 2025–present

Moderator, Lamar Baptist Association, Vernon, Alabama, 2020–22

Chaplain, Vernon Police Department, Vernon, Alabama, 2019–23

Church Health Consultant, Extended Mission Network, Hernando, Mississippi, 2014–16

Assistant Football Coach, Strong High School, Strong, Arkansas, 2010–14

FCA Director, Strong High School, Strong, Arkansas, 2010–14

Assistant Football and Powerlifting Coach, Strayhorn High School, Strayhorn, Mississippi, 2009–10

CONFERENCES

Men's Conference, Meadowview Baptist Church, Starkville, Mississippi, 2023

Character Carved in Stone with Pat Williams, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2019

'No Restraints' Caskey Center for Church Excellence Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2015–18

Leadership Conference, Mississippi College, Jackson, Mississippi, 2008–09

CERTIFICATIONS

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

- Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, August 2025
- Emergency Action Planning, August 2025
- Protecting Students from Abuse, August 2025
- Sportsmanship, August 2025
- Officiating Football, August 2025
- Heat Illness Prevention, August 2025
- Coaching Mental Wellness, June 2025
- Concussion in Sports, June 2025
- Sudden Cardiac Arrest, June 2025
- Fundamentals of Coaching, September 2008

Red Cross: Basic Water Rescue Certificate, July 2020

Red Cross: CPR/First Aid Certificate, July 2020–present

MinistrySafe: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training Certificate, February 2019

FEMA: Emergency Management Preparedness Fundamentals Certificate, April 2007