

LET THE GOSPEL PREDOMINATE: EXERCISING EVANGELICAL PATIENCE IN THE GROWTH OF
NEW CHRISTIANS

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ABSTRACT

Jesus promises that the gospel will work to change hearts, and changed hearts eventually lead to fruits of faith, but the timeline and visible results involved in this spiritual transformation can vary greatly. As a result, we should be patient because it might take time for fruits to bloom. The pastor and congregation have an obligation to show gospel love, not only initially but also continually, for those pining to hear God's word. This thesis will explore how Jesus treated humans, what challenges people new to the Christian faith will experience, dangers that the congregation and pastor should avoid while dealing with new believers, and some practical applications to minister to new believers.

INTRODUCTION

The word for patience in the English language is derived from the Latin word “patientia” which means to suffer. To suffer, is really a good short definition that fits the art of exuding a patient attitude. Everyone can think of a time in their life that they had to show patience and being patient often does not come easy! When you look at your daily life you realize that practicing patience is something that we get a chance to do every day. Often times when people talk about practicing patience, they bring up the frustration of standing in line at a grocery store – or getting a phone call by a telemarketer. While these are examples of inconveniences that might try one’s patience, they don’t usually rise to the level of what most would consider suffering. If these situations can test our patience, what happens when we face situations that are more serious? Your six-year-old son has lied to you for the first time and you caught him red-handed. How do you react? Your reaction would likely be different with the six-year-old who has lied for the first time and the fifteen-year-old who has been told time and time again that lying is sinful. Allow me to give you one more situation. Your boss is putting pressure on you to get a project done. It is taking you longer than you expected, and the project isn’t going how you wanted. You’re having a hard time, but your boss simply won’t listen to you. What emotions do you feel?

Certain situations call for an abundance of patience in our lives, and the same is true when it comes to spiritual lives. What role does patience serve when it comes to leading people

to the foot of Jesus' cross? Patience plays a major role. Especially when dealing with people who are new to the faith. In the church, being patient is no easier than in everyday life. In fact, it is probably harder as we are dealing with matters of eternity. The pastor and the congregation play a huge role in the life of a new Christian. Our tendency as humans is to correct and use the law to show people how they should live, but you cannot encourage fruits of faith without encouraging faith. As we lead new Christians in their spiritual lives let us not be quick to show a judgmental attitude, but patiently allow the gospel to work in their hearts.

When the term new Christian is used in this paper, unless otherwise stated, it is referring to someone who did not grow up in the Christian faith. This could be someone who is in your Bible information class, who just finished your Bible information course, or someone who simply came and visited church for the first time.

PART I - JESUS LIFE: EXAMPLE OF GOSPEL PREDOMINATION AS JESUS SEEKS THE LOST

If the church ever wants to see examples on how to patiently lead people who come with different backgrounds, look to the perfect example of Jesus. Jesus used a balance of law and gospel as he proclaimed his word to people, but we will look specifically at examples of his gospel love.

Jesus many times shows that the gospel is needed by all people regardless of background and regardless of their life situation.

³⁵The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? ³⁶What did he mean when he said, ‘You will look for me, but you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am, you cannot come?’” ³⁷On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink” (John 7:35-37 NIV11).

The Jews were confused as to what Jesus was doing. He had told the Pharisees, who were trying to arrest him, that they would not be able to find him, and what did he go to do?

Proclaim the gospel to all people. Jesus wants all people to be saved, not just the chosen Jews.

That is applied to the church as the church strives to go outside of the bubble of the church walls to proclaim the gospel.

Jesus makes this point even more clear in the book of Mark. He is willing to put himself into difficult situations and proclaim the gospel to people who are not considered the most prominent in society, because he wants souls to be saved!

¹⁵While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹⁷On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is

not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:15-17).

Notice the reaction of the Pharisees. It is unimaginable to the Pharisees that Jesus would sit and eat with those perceived to be lowly sinners and tax collectors. But then Jesus goes on to say something that is very applicable to ministry. You don’t take someone to the doctor who is in perfect health. Instead, when someone is in need you take them to the doctor. Application to modern-day pastoral ministry is evident. A pastor would not say the members who are already being fed with the gospel are not in need of being fed spiritually. The life of a Christian is one of continuous growth throughout a person’s entire life. But a pastor would say that those who have not heard the gospel are in dire need of the truth of Jesus. Jesus gives his people the perfect example of being willing to go into an unfamiliar crowd – that may have no similarities at all with the Jesus, yet he was willing to spend time with them and through his actions show love. He opens the door for the spread of the gospel.

Reaching people in the world with the gospel involves knowing those in the world. This process of knowing must be a continual learning.¹ Getting to know the people in this world is done through relationships. As a person becomes more comfortable with the world around them, service to those people comes easier. Jesus showed this by example by not being afraid to put himself out there and eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners even if that meant he was going to be criticized by the religious leaders at that time.

1. Zachary A. Gebert, “Encountering Authenticity: The Gospel Fills the Needs of a Post-Postmodern Society” (WLS Essay File, 2012).

Jesus shows an example of just how he feels when a person is won over by the gospel.

After again being questioned by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Jesus tells a parable to explain why he is spending time with sinners.

⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. ⁸ “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:4-10).

Jesus spared no effort when it came to his desire to bring the gospel to sinners! He took the time to get to know them; he allowed them to come gather around him because they wanted to hear what he had to say! Rejoicing in heaven breaks forth when the one sheep is found. The lady who lost her coin throws a gathering with friends and neighbors when the coin was found after a long hard process of cleaning every crack in the house. Seeing a new believer come to know Jesus brings joy because God’s plan is being carried out!

Pray that God fills the church with this same joy towards all people who come to hear the gospel in WELS churches. Petermann speaks to this type of attitude when he says, “the main purpose of the church is evangelism.”² If the main purpose of the church is to bring

2. Joel V. Petermann, “Assimilating New Members: Building Rolls or Saving Souls” (WLS Essay File, 1985), 2.

everyone to come and hear the message of Jesus hopefully the church too will rejoice with the angels in heaven when someone new comes. Hopefully the church is sweeping the corners of the house looking for one lost person even though there are other people securely in the church. Rejoice with God and the angels when a lost soul is brought to know Christ as their Savior.

Jesus shows a love unlike any other, and he shows that love to all people. As he showed love in his ministry, he reminds all people why he came to this earth.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus showed his love toward Zacchaeus, even though he was a wealthy tax collector. The people watching could not believe that Jesus would go and stay at the house of such a sinner. Jesus came to seek the lost, and so also the church. "What the attractional church gets right is the mission to seek and save the lost."³ Wilson says it well. The church can be attractive to those who need to hear the gospel. The church is present not only to confront sinners, but also to serve them. Because as Jesus said he came into the world, "to seek and save the lost." Jesus

3. Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019, 150.

shows that he came not only to love those who have already come to know him, but he came to love all those who are lost and looking for a Savior.

Practicing Patience: Biblical Advice

Patience is key when it comes to dealing with people who are new to Christianity, and this will be explored more in upcoming sections. As the church looks for reasons to do something the Bible is always consulted. The same is true when dealing with people who are new to the faith. So, this section of the paper will search scripture and see how the Bible talks about patience.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Gal 6:7-9)

Seeing the desired results from the work carried out is something that everyone wants! That is often society’s way of judging if something has been done well or not. If there are no results than something must have been done wrong! Paul’s words in Galatians show that just because results are not happening, believers should not stop doing good. Doing what is right is not always going to be easy, and sometimes it is going to take patience in our lives to see a harvest from doing good. A Christian’s life is continually going to be filled with patience as believers wait for God to fulfill his promises – to shower his people with blessings here on earth, and to bless his people with their heavenly home specifically made for each one of them. But this can also apply as the church deals with Christians who are new to faith. Sometimes it can be hard to be patient with God. Why? Because the church doesn’t always directly see results, and that can lead people to wonder if God’s will is being accomplished, or if there is something else that

needs to be done. "Sometimes it's simply unclear whether God wants his people to wait or take another course of action. Finally, and most difficult of all, there's no guarantee that God will, indeed, act to satisfy our desires."⁴ The church may not ever see results when dealing with someone, but when God's people act with patience God will continue to work in the way that he sees best. And finally, a harvest will be collected for those who continue to do good in the name of God. So, believers trust that in everything they do, God is going to bless them. Patiently the church continues to proclaim the gospel to the new to faith, and the results will be handled by an all-knowing, powerful God.

Gospel love shown through patience can be done in many ways. One of those ways is through service. As Christians, lives are a continuous act of service towards other people here on earth, but more importantly service to God. In the last section this paper looked at how Jesus dealt with people while he was on earth, and now Paul gives us advice on how believers should act.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed."
(Rom 15:5-8)

Paul gives people quite the task! Have the same attitude and mind as our perfect Savior. Now, there are going to be times that believers fail to do so, but Paul is urging the church to encourage others, to love others, and to be patient with people as they come to hear about

4. James S. Spiegel, "The Virtue of Patience." February 23, 2010.
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/virtue-of-patience.html?start=2>.

Christ. When people come to church, there is an amazing opportunity to share Christ with them – to serve! In a lot of situations, it takes an abundance of patience to see fruits of faith, but Jesus will take care of that. Finke explains what Jesus will do, and what role the church plays. “Our job is not to try and hurry people along in the ripening process. Jesus is in charge of ripening people. Our job is to watch for people who are ripe.”⁵ As the church searches out those who are ripe to hear the gospel of Christ, they may want to speed up the process – get them to a level of understanding that can lead them to serve others. But that will happen in God’s time. In the meantime, the church can continue to serve them with gospel love – allowing them to see the love of Christ through a continued preaching of the gospel about Christ. Greg Finke in his book *Joining Jesus on his Mission*, compares it to a timeline. Every person has a timeline for their life. They are born, they live, then they die. On that timeline there are some who are born, go to church, and believe in Jesus from the time they can remember. For others, hearing about Jesus and going to church comes much later in their timeline. Some are ready to jump in full force to hear the message of the gospel without rejection. For others, it takes time! You have to be patient with them and allow the gospel to work in their hearts.⁶ No matter what stage of life each person is in, Jesus’ goal is always the same. “Jesus is in the redemptive process of uniquely preparing each of them to receive what the Father would freely give them: forgiveness of sins and a new life with him forever.”⁷

5. Greg Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary*. Tenth Power Publishing, 2014, 33.

6. This is a paraphrase of the illustration given by Greg Finke. He is an evangelical pastor, so some of his illustrations include accepting Jesus into your heart. For the sake of this paper I found this illustration helpful but could use some modifications.

7. Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission*, 29.

Even if the church may not see the results, like the passage from Romans says, endurance and encouragement come from God. He is fulfilling his purpose through people's lives. For some it may be a fast transformation to coming to church and hearing about Jesus, but for most it is going to take time. And so, we serve with gospel love to not put any hurdles in the way of being able to preach the gospel to them.

The last passage for consideration is from Galatians when Paul is talking about fruits of faith. As believers in Jesus, it is a privilege to live lives of faith by showing fruits of faith. What should these fruits look like? Paul gives a list of them in his book to the Galatians. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal 5:22-24). The NIV translation uses "forbearance" for the Greek word. That word, however, can also be translated as patience. It is interesting to take a look at this list, because many of these virtues complement each other. In order to show patience, it takes love, gentleness, self-control, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. In order to see how these virtues are carried out in one's life, think about how Jesus deals with his disciples, who were sinful human beings. The disciples were often slow to believe who Jesus was, or simply did not understand who Jesus was. But Jesus patiently treated those who were his closest followers. He perfectly balanced the use of law and gospel in order to continue to encourage his disciples to grow in their knowledge. He didn't complain because the disciples were slow to understand his purpose, instead he continued to teach them and help them grow. "Finally, Jesus' refusal to complain about his disciples is generous. In spite of their vice and thick-headedness, he remained no less committed to them and served them

increasingly as their failures became more outstanding.”⁸ He could have gone and looked for other people to carry out his ministry. But that wasn’t what Jesus did. Instead, he patiently dealt with the disciples showing them his love over and over again. He showed by action that patience is a virtue that he wants his followers to carry out.

8. James S. Spiegel, “The Virtue of Patience.”

PART II - EXPECTATIONS OF THOSE NEW TO FAITH

As new people come into the church, whether as a first-time visitor or as a newly confirmed member, it is not unexpected for them to go through some struggles. Jesus tells believers that there will be crosses that they will have to bear for being followers of Christ, and that includes those who are new to Christianity. The Psalm writer states it clearly, “The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” (Ps 34:19). The devil is looking for ways into believers lives in order to pull them away from Christ, and when someone is new to the Christian faith the devil will work overtime in order to try to convince them that being a follower of Jesus is not something that they want to do. The Bible gives us examples of times when God allows his believers to struggle. And God allows these struggles to take place in a believer’s life in order to cause them to grow. Consider Paul’s words in Romans as he describes the value of being justified in Christ: “² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:2b-4).

One story that sticks out is the story of Job. Job was not someone who was new to Christianity, in fact he was someone who was a strong believer. The Lord even said that there was no one on earth like him. He was blameless, feared God, and hated evil.⁹ But even someone like Job, a strong Christian, was not exempt from being tempted by the devil. The Lord allowed the devil to ravage Job’s life, because the Lord knew that this would only bring Job

9. Job 1:8

closer to him. The fact that God allowed Job to face such difficulty in his life shows us a prime example how the life of a Christian is not always going to be as easy as people may want. And if the devil is interested in going after someone who has been a strong Christian for a while, he is also going to try to come after those who are young in the faith to pull them away from Christ. The devil will use different situations in a person's life to make them think that being a follower of Christ is not worth it. For Job it was attacks on his personal life. Messenger after messenger came to Job to tell him that all the cattle, sheep, and other animals that he owned had been struck down. And little did Job know, but that was just the beginning of the struggles that he was going to face in his life.

For people who are new to the church early struggles in their life of a Christian can be challenging. Those challenges may not come in waves as strong as the ones that Job faced, but they will happen in the life of a Christian. As pastors, and as a congregation, the more that the struggles that new Christians are going to face can be recognized, the better the church will be prepared to help them face these challenges straight on.

PART III - STRUGGLES FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

Bible Information Class

Having a new Bible information class start for a congregation is an exciting time. Many times, new faces are coming into the church, some for the very first time, others as a way to confirm what they believe. But Bible information class can also be a scary time for people who are entering a church for the first time in a long time or maybe even the first time ever. For those who have never been to a church, they will have some reservations. They may be thinking that it's going to be awkward for them because they don't know anyone coming, they might look bad if they don't know answers to questions that are asked, or can questions be asked that might cause disagreements. How can the church break through these hesitations and help people grow? What is the greatest tool that the church has to break down barriers that cause hesitations to get involved in a church? The gospel. "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim 4:1,2). God promises that the gospel works. It can knock down barriers and, in some instances, it will do exactly that.

The difficulties can grow exponentially if the new people coming into class have a young family. They may have questions as to what they are supposed to do with their kids. One WELS member, who did not grow up in the Christian church, was willing to answer interview questions. She said that her family's only reservation was they did not know what they would do with their children. "The only hurdle I felt we had to tackle when coming to church was the

fact that we had young children.”¹⁰ When talking about this, the member stated that part of the reason they came to the WELS church was because during the Bible information class they had a program in place that childcare would be provided for their young children. People who are new to the church can be worried about their children to the point that they don’t want to join class because they don’t think that they will be able to focus while worrying about their children, or they don’t want to inconvenience other people by making them watch their children.

One last difficulty that many people new to the church struggle with in regard to Bible information class has to do with the individualized attention that they get during class. Depending on the size of the class being conducted, many times a strong bond can be built between the pastor and those taking the class, and rightly so. Class time gives the pastor and the people attending a chance to get to know each other better and grow in God’s word together. But something that can be difficult is handling the switch from attention every class to no longer having class and being a part of the church. Many times, this can cause those who are new to the church to feel like they are being ignored or rejected by the pastor. Pastor Chuck Westra speaks to this challenge in an article he wrote for a pastoral conference.

“There are some that stay to talk about specific questions or concerns and some that just like to talk. In many cases that individual attention decreases dramatically once they are received into membership. Suddenly they are no longer the guests of honor. They are just another member of the congregation. They find it difficult to get a moment to speak to the pastor Sunday morning

10. Interview with WELS member. As a part of the question process I told the people I talked with that I would keep their names anonymous. All people talked to during the process are members of WELS churches who came from a non-Christian background, or who were part of a church when they were younger and then started coming to church again at a later age.

because he is preoccupied or has gone on to another round of guests and visitors.”¹¹

Usually this is no fault of the pastor, but it can be something that is crippling for new Christians. It can leave people feeling alone or wondering if they have done something wrong that caused the pastor to stop giving them the same attention that they previously were getting from him. This type of situation may not be easy to spot because people will not want to bring up their concerns, but if the church and pastor understand that this is a challenge, then it is a situation they can prepare for as a congregation.

Being a Christian Equals Earthly Success

With the account of Job being discussed earlier people understand why this might be a struggle. People who are new to Christianity can come into the church expecting that once they have joined a church and believe in Jesus as their Savior that their earthly success will take off. Is it possible that this happens? Absolutely, and when it does it is something to be celebrated. But is it possible that exactly the opposite happens? Yes. ²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it” (Luke 9:23,24). This statement comes directly after Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to die. He will take on the greatest suffering on the cross so that our suffering will only be temporal. But Christians still will go through difficult times. And this can come as a surprise to someone who is new to faith.

11. Westra, “Building the Body of Christ: A Study of Assimilation of Members into the Christian Congregation” (WLS Essay File, 1998), 6.

Professor Emeritus Daniel Deutschlander talks extensively on this topic in his book *Theology of the Cross*, but he also summarizes this thought very well in an article that he wrote for the North Atlantic District Convention in 2010. The cross of Christ is the pinnacle of Christianity. Deutschlander wrote,

“His cross is everything to us. By all that he did, by all that he suffered and endured on Good Friday in both his body and his soul, he redeemed us. He suffered the torments of the damned that we deserved. He endured the horror that should have been ours for all eternity, the horror of being abandoned by his Father. He bowed his head to the death that we deserved from the moment of our conception and every moment since down to the second when we breathe our last breath. And he did it all willingly, even eagerly.”¹²

Suffering was the very reason that Jesus came to earth. And notice how Professor Deutschlander states it. Jesus came and suffered “willingly, even eagerly.” Jesus wasn’t kicking and screaming to win salvation for his people, instead he wanted to serve. The Apostle Paul many times urges believers to be like Christ in the way that they act. Now this does not mean that believers are going to suffer the same punishment on the cross, because Jesus suffered that punishment for them, but this does mean that believers should have the same attitude of looking out for others needs like Christ did. That might include some suffering on their part – always putting the interest and better of others above their own.

“Jesus says that we should take up our cross and follow him, and that the essence of the cross is selfdenial. Luther discussed that essence most famously in his treatise on *The Freedom of the Christian*. In the second part of that famous treatise he reminds us that we are slaves to all. That's the cross. I see myself as

12. Daniel M. Deutschlander, “DON’T BE AFRAID! Cheer Up! It’s the Cross! Part 1” (WLS Essay File, 2010),

giving up the exercise of all my rights and privileges just like Jesus did, so that I can serve the best interests of those around me.”¹³

The life of a Christian is one of constant service just as Christ always served the best interest of others. Self-denial is something that is so against human nature that it almost seems crazy for people to do, but that is exactly what Christ did for people even though he was perfect. Now, he asks people to join him – to look out for others not so that they can benefit from them, but so that more can hear about the gospel.

As also seen in the Job account, suffering could also mean that temporal things could be taken away from believers. Life is not easy, and it is definitely not always fair. Christians can fight against struggles daily, some that others will know about and some that people will never know about. “Deep down inside the Christian suffers. The suffering may be a direct consequence of his sins or the sins of others. The suffering may be traceable to no obvious cause. He gets sick. There is an accident. A child or a spouse dies way before the time that one would have expected.”¹⁴ Being a follower of Jesus means taking up crosses and following him, and the cross of Christ can be heavy and can lead a person to ask all kinds of questions. Maybe you have heard people ask the question, “how could God allow this to happen to me?” Sometimes, that question can’t be answered, but God allows things to come into believers’ lives as a way to strengthen their relationship with him. Maybe you have run into people who feel like they are being betrayed, and it is God’s fault. But the truth of the matter is, God

13. Deutschlander, “DON’T BE AFRAID! Cheer Up! It’s the Cross! Part 1,” 5.

14. Deutschlander, “DON’T BE AFRAID! Cheer Up! It’s the Cross! Part 1,” 7.

doesn't promise Christians an easy life. "Although God often protects us from harm and delivers us when we are in danger, he does not promise us a trouble-free life. In fact, we can expect problems, disappointments, and mistreatment."¹⁵

For someone who is new to the Christian faith, that will not be an easy concept to grasp. But it is one that Jesus does not shy away from talking about in Scripture. ³³ "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

New Christians Will have Hesitations

It is natural for people to have some hesitations when it comes to starting new things. Think of when you first went to school, or you changed schools. You probably wondered whether or not the people at the new school would like you – if you would get along with the dynamics of that school. The same is true when people come to a church. Someone who is starting a new adventure of coming to church will probably have many hesitations. In one of my interviews that I conducted a WELS member stated that they felt some hesitations when it came to the worship service.

"I felt uncomfortable and I was afraid I wouldn't know what to do during the services and that people would see me as an "outsider". This feeling consumed me during the entire service, and I remember feeling relieved when it was finished, and we could leave. I don't remember hearing or learning much during the service, most likely because I was so worried and nervous."¹⁶

15. Doug Britton, "Don't Be Surprised by Problems." 2020.
<https://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/onlinebiblestudies-godchristianityandchurch/expect-problems-t20-1/>.

16. Interview with a WELS member

This hesitation of feeling like an outsider is one that is common among people who are starting to go to church for the first time. Whether that be because they are nervous of how the worship service is going to be conducted, or because they don't feel like they fit in with the people, it takes courage to step into a new place – especially in a place of worship where they are the new people.

The feeling of being an outsider can be crippling to the faith of a new believer. It may cause them not to come back into the door of a church, and as mentioned in the quote above it can cause distractions as they are growing in their lives of faith. The nerves of stepping foot in a new building can lead to a mind that is not concerned about what is actually going on inside of the church. This feeling of nerves and being looked at as an outsider can be escalated if it is someone who has had a past that they feel like they can't shake. The person who walks into church with a difficult past may feel like they have eyes on them the entire service, and it can make them uncomfortable. But the person who struggles, the person who has a difficult past is exactly who the church wants to hear the gospel. They need to hear about their Savior just as much as those who are already sitting in the pews.

Pew Research Center¹⁷ did a study on the top reason that people go to church and on the flip side the top reasons why people don't go to church. Three out of the top nine reasons that people do not go to church would be considered hesitations, and one of the others could be seen as a hesitation. One, they are worried that they won't like the sermons; two, they

17. The Pew Research Center conducts surveys in order to find answers to many questions that people have about “U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends.”

won't feel welcome; and three, they think that they won't have time to give up for a long service. When these hesitations were researched, I expected that more people would say that they didn't go to church because they did not feel welcome, but that was only number six on the list of nine. But I was not surprised to see so many hesitations on the list that related to something other than not believing or not being interested in faith.

I found that in my interviews people talked about hesitations that they had when they came to church, but when I looked for outside evidence to support the findings of my survey, I was unable to find much of substance. My sources never spoke opposing to the thought that there are many hesitations that keep people away from the church, but other than the PEW research I was not able to find a lot of evidence.

PART IV - NEEDS/WANTS OF THOSE NEW TO FAITH

This section of the paper will switch the focus from the reasons why someone who is new to the faith may not come to church, to what someone who has not come to church before is looking for in a church. An article by Philip Attebery¹⁸ was particularly interesting speaking on this topic. There were not a lot of quotes from this article to add in this paper, but it gave an interesting perspective of people coming to church for the first time, described in their own words. It also gave a perspective from the view of Baptist members instead of just the results I got from the WELS members.

Sense of Community

People looking for a church want to feel loved. One way that people feel loved is by being involved with a group of people – working together with others who share a common goal and feeling like they play an important role. This makes people feel wanted, needed, and loved. So, a common denominator for most people looking for a church was that they want to feel a sense of community within the church. People crave the feeling that their church is connected in such a way that it feels like they have a second family.

“Pertaining to the value of a family-like fellowship, one convert said, ‘Just knowing that I was part of a Christian family is what I really looked forward to.’ Another affirmed that ‘it’s just the love that everybody has. Everybody just takes care of everybody... They’re there and it’s just like you’re all a family. I’ve got

18. Philip Attebery served as Dean and Professor of Church Ministries as Baptist Missionary Association Theological Seminary

three families.’ Still another convert ‘thought that made it final. If they accepted me, I was truly part of the family.’”¹⁹

It shouldn’t come as a surprise to the church that people are looking for a family-like setting when deciding if they want to come to a church. Having love like that of a family is natural for humans to want. There are many quotes that talk about humans craving family. “Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.”²⁰ Whether it be a feeling of togetherness of a family, a sports team, a crew at work, or a church, people love the feeling of working together toward a common goal and want to feel like they are a part of something. When people feel like they aren’t a part of a community or a family they often feel like something is missing. “Without a family, man, alone in the world, trembles with the cold.”²¹ Being a part of a family or community is built into our human nature and is something that people are looking for in a church.

WELS members that were interviewed also said that they were looking for a church that had a community feel to it. When asked the question: what are some things you were hoping to find in a church, the answers supported what I was expecting to hear. One member said, “Stability and friendship... A church that was welcoming and friendly so I could put those at ease while I tried to build a more stable relationship with God, one that would last more than a few years... along with hearing the Word of God, fellowship with other people was important to

19. Philip Attebery, “In Their Own Words: Describing the Assimilation Experiences of New Converts.” (Christian Education Journal) Pg. 58

20. Jane Howard, “Thoughts on Business Life” Forbes.com.

21. Andre Maurois, Brainyquote.com.

me”²² Another person that I talked to answered the same question by saying, “A sense of community. Welcoming people who would include my family.”²³ Both answers were similar and based on the concept of enjoying the comfort of feeling like they were a part of a community or a family. The church should, for the most part, expect those who are looking to come to a new church, to be craving to be a part of something – to want to feel like they are a part of a close-knit family.

Authenticity

Authenticity is something that is harder and harder to come by in the twenty-first century. People today are so used to being promised one thing but being given another. They are used to seeing leaders at their workplaces who know how to put on a show when the boss is around, but when the boss is gone, they really don’t care one bit. People want to know that their church is being authentic with them. As I was doing my research on this point, I actually found a church that’s name is Authenticity Church. As far as I can tell it is an online community of believers that meet virtually for bible studies, fellowship, and prayers.²⁴

Authenticity is especially important for the youth. Just think about the age that the millennials and generation Z²⁵ have grown up in. Television commercials done by Billy Mays

22. Interview with WELS member

23. Interview with WELS member

24. I don’t advise naming your church this, but if you think it’s too crazy this could be the name of a church, this is the link. <https://authenticity.church/>

25. Anyone born after 1996 is generally considered a part of generation Z, but it is a subjective matter.

trying to sell you anything and everything, the product looks like something that you just can't live without, but often times falls short of the description. We have seen politicians fight back and forth on television bickering about what the other one has done – often times stretching the truth to the point that no one knows what to believe anymore. The presence of social media has allowed celebrities and superstars to be at the touch of people's fingers, which causes them to see that these people are not always the most authentic. They may say one thing, but then their actions show a completely different approach. When people believe one thing to be true and then find out that they were being lied to the whole time they feel cheated – like they've been played. And they have. With all these experiences, when looking for a church, people want to know for sure what they are hearing is authentic. They want to be sure that the church they attend practices what it preaches.

The word authentic did not specifically come up in the interviews that I conducted. What was mentioned, however, was finding a church that focused on the teachings of the Bible, and then carried out those teachings through their actions by being, “welcoming and friendly” and by having people who you could, “have a heart to heart with.”²⁶

Gospel Preaching and Teaching

Maybe not the most talked about, but the most important want and need of people who are new to a church is a focus on gospel teaching and preaching. For many churches today the gospel is a side thought. Evangelicalism, a group of non-denomination Christians who often

26. Interview with WELS member

focus on prosperity gospel, is growing immensely by putting on a good show for worship and sometimes preaching the gospel. But what people need and want to hear is the gospel properly proclaimed and taught. Wilson wrote in his book *The Gospel-Driven Church*, “What believers need from their churches, above everything else and in every element experienced, is nourishment from the Word of God.”²⁷ It probably goes without saying, but people who are new to the church need above anything else to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed. And often times, that is exactly what a new believer also wants. One member was pleased by the beauty of the teaching of the great exchange by their pastor when they came to a WELS church for the first time.

“Pastor explained to me many fundamental things, such as the great exchange, how we are saved by Jesus through faith in Him (and not by our works), and many other things I had heard before in past churches and synods, but never really fully clicked until I started going to this church. I remember feeling fully at peace with God for the first time in a very long time.”²⁸

The gospel was what this person needed to hear. That is exactly what the pastor proclaimed to him, and it had amazing effects on this young man who has been active in the church ever since that first time he showed up. He needed to hear the gospel and did. This example shows that C.F.W Walther knew what he was saying when he wrote, “But it is the gospel alone that satisfies men, makes them cheerful, revives them, and comforts their consciences.”²⁹ People are craving the free gift of God’s grace that the church has to offer. Another member that I

27. Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 95.

28. Interview with WELS member

29. C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1897, 24.

talked to didn't point as specifically to the gospel being the reason that they kept coming to church, but they did point to God's word as being a big part of the reason. They came back to church because they wanted "true understanding and teaching of the Word."³⁰ One of the top things that people are looking for in a church is exactly what the WELS, as Lutherans, have to offer. They want to hear about the love of a Savior who died to forgive all of their sins. They want to hear about the peace that they now have with Christ as their Savior.

30. Interview with WELS member

PART V - DANGERS TO AVOID

Now that the struggles, wants, and needs of those new to the faith have been identified, this paper will move on to some dangers that pastors and congregations can avoid while encouraging a new Christians in the faith. By stating these dangers, this paper is not saying that they are prevalent among WELS churches, instead it is acknowledging the sinful nature inside of all people that can lead to mishandlings of situations.

Legalism

Legalism, as defined by dictionary.com, is, “strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence, to law or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.”³¹ In the church, legalism occurs when the pastor or the congregation is too worried about the outward actions of a person to the point that they believe that their actions are the cause for their salvation. The focus shifts too far toward the law and what people must do in order to earn God’s favor. This can be such a temptation to humans because humans all have the “opinio legis” – that tells them that they can do something, by their works, to add to their salvation. Because, by nature are attracted to the law and not the gospel, it is important that the church continually points people back to the gospel of Christ.

There are a couple different ways that legalism can show itself in the church. It can show itself in the church when Christianity becomes a series of “do’s and don’ts.” Often these leads to setting moral principles that is only concerned with keeping God’s law.³² While believers do

31. HarperCollins, “Legalism” S.V.

32. R.C. Sproul, “3 Types of Legalism.” July 17, 2019. <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/3-types-legalism/>. - This ministry started in the 1970’s by R.C. Sproul. Some members came up to Dr. Sproul and asked him to start a study center where laypeople could receive the benefits of seminary training. Today they produce many podcasts,

want to keep the law of God, it is important to remember that much of God's law was given for specific people at a specific time.

Another type of legalism is shown by the Pharisees when they condemn Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were so concerned about the letter of the law, that they did not care that Jesus was working in order to heal. This type of legalism is only being concerned with the outside keeping of the law, and not actually being concerned about what the law is about.³³

The last nuance of legalism for consideration is probably the most dangerous, and most common form. This happens when people demand that something be done, or not done, as if it were commanded by God - turning an adiaphoron into law. The Pharisees fell into this trap time and time again and God condemns them for it, "these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁷They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules" (Mark 7:6b,7). This isn't to say that churches aren't allowed to set their own policies. If it is a church's policy that you must be a church member in order to be in the choir then people should abide by that. But how the church acts when someone disagrees with that decision can go a long way.

Koehler explains the danger of legalism very nicely in his writing *Legalism Among Us*. He says, "Legalism sets aside the proper source of the Christian life, namely the gospel, and

broadcast Christian radio, and they have teaching studies on YouTube. I would not recommend reading them for all of their theology, but the article written on Legalism I found rather helpful.

33. R.C. Sproul, "3 Types of Legalism" <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/3-types-legalism/>.

devotes itself to the law, which is not at all intended by God as a source of life.”³⁴ When legalism takes over, our source of life in the gospel is set aside.

Giving Leadership Roles Too Quickly

This is a concept that can be very different depending on the person. Some may be excited about joining in on the work of the church, like one of the members that was interviewed. This member was looking for a place where their gifts could be used to serve. When talking about things that attracted them to their WELS church they said, “Being asked to serve was a huge draw... A place where I could help serve others with my gifts and talents.”³⁵ As you can see serving was a “huge draw” in this situation. But asking people to serve should come at the right time. Asking to serve too soon can cause some people to think that they are being used by the church. John Huebner says it well when he gives a list of things to do to help integrate someone new to the church. He says,

“As I see it, there are three things we can do to help integrate new members into the congregation: 1) Provide and atmosphere of acceptance in the Gospel – a warm, loving, non-threatening, caring, and understanding fellowship. 2) Give them a reason for belonging – something of substance. 3) Give them something meaningful to do.”³⁶

Huebner does have an aspect of service in his list of integrating new members, but he does not try to rush people into that service. Before he begins to get a new believer into service for the

34. J.P. Koehler, August Pieper, John Schaller, *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 2. “Legalism Among Us,” Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997, 235.

35. Interview with WELS member

36. John Huebner, “Integrating the New Member” (WLS Essay File, 1979) 11.

church, he allows gospel care and love to take over the heart of a believer, and then when the time is right, allow them to serve.

Losing Patience When a Believer Stumbles

As stated earlier, new believers are going to have struggles, and part of those struggles is going to be a battle against the devil. Petermann states this in his paper saying, “Lastly, we need to realize that converts do not instantly forget the rest of their life. ‘People who join the church are pursued by old habits and associations and states of mind. Unless the church people can surround them with loving and protective care, many will be lost.’”³⁷ The first sentence that Petermann writes is extremely important. Many times, people are coming to church looking for a way out of their “old lifestyle.” But old habits die hard. People who have been a part of the Christian church their entire life are going to stumble, and in the same way those who are new to the Christian faith will struggle with sin. A patient attitude toward that young Christian who struggles could be the difference between them coming back to your church, and not stepping foot in a church again.

There is a time to crush with the law, and there is a time to heal with the gospel. The law should be used, because when it is used, God willing, “The result is that man can find no rest trusting in his good works. He would be glad to have a good conscience. He yearns for a good, cheerful, peaceful conscience and for real comfort. He thirsts for contentment. That is the thirst of which Jesus speaks.”³⁸ But when a new Christian comes to church they are often

37. Petermann, “Assimilating New Members: Building Rolls or Saving Souls”, 3.

38. C.F.W Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, 23.

yearning for that peace, joy, and comfort. The only way that they are going to feel those feelings is through the gospel of Christ. Let them struggle with their faith, but be patient, and be there to pick them right back up with the gospel.

Allowing New Believers to Fall Through the Cracks

One of the easiest ways to allow new believers to fall through the cracks and decide to leave church is by failing to show joy when they attend church.

“Imagine that you have been invited to a birthday party by some friends. When you arrive at your friends’ house, they invite you in, but after that no one there concerns himself with you at all. No one introduces you to strangers; no one says hello; no one even acknowledges that you exist. Obviously you wouldn’t enjoy yourself very much. In fact, if you were invited to that same house for a birthday party the next year, chances are you wouldn’t go.”³⁹

This scenario can be applied to the church. Someone has been invited to church, but when they show up, no one greets them, no one says hi, no one seems excited at all that they are there. Almost everyone would feel hurt in some way if this happened to them. And most likely that person would not come back! Just like that an opportunity to reach someone new has slipped through the grasp of the church.

Petermann quotes Charles S. Mueller saying, “Members disappear from church rolls when no one cares enough to do something about it.”⁴⁰ While he is speaking of members in this quote, the church can apply it to someone who is new to the church. If no one cares enough to show joy and excitement when they walk in the doors, then likely they will disappear from the church. This

39. Petermann, “Assimilating New Members: Building Rolls or Saving Souls”, 1.

40. Petermann, “Assimilating New Members: Building Rolls or Saving Souls”, 2.

ties back to the idea that new believers like to feel welcomed as part of the church family or community.

PART VI - PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS TO “EMBRACE THIS MESS”

There is so much information out there regarding new believers. What they are looking for in a church, how they react to different scenarios once they are in the church, what dangers the church can avoid when dealing with new believers. With all that information at the church’s fingertips, they look for ways that it can be applied both by the church body and by the pastor. The heading, embrace the mess, is not to say that churches are a complete mess, but it is acknowledging that some situations are going to cause tough decisions and difficult challenges.

As a Church

The church can often feel uncomfortable in certain situations dealing with new believers. Maybe a member feels like they aren’t good at striking up conversations with new people, or maybe they feel like they will be asked questions that they are not prepared to answer. Often dealing with new people in the church can be uncomfortable, but when gospel motivation is at the center of everything the pressure is taken off of the individual. “The first time I realized that Jesus was inviting me to come *with* him and not go *for* him was a great relief. If I go *for* Jesus, I am doing the work and seeing the results of what I can accomplish. When I go *with* Jesus, he is doing the work and I am seeing the results of what Jesus can accomplish.”⁴¹ Finke takes this idea from the great commission when Jesus tells people that he is always with them in whatever they do. Having this mindset while doing work within the church can lead to people feel a sense of relief as they talk to new believers.

41. Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to be an Everyday Missionary*, 30.

At the very beginning of this paper Luke 15 was discussed. There is rejoicing in Heaven each time a new believer hears the gospel. The pastor has the opportunity to teach this to the congregation. Allow them to see how their God feels about new people in the church and encourage them to imitate that feeling. “What lights up Heaven is that one more image-bearer has been rescued from the clutches of darkness. One more prodigal has come home. If we are truly living for Heaven, we should rejoice at what makes glad the heart of God.”⁴² The congregation can rejoice with the angels in heaven at the opportunity to patiently guide new believers along by showing them the gospel of Jesus through their actions. While it may feel out of the comfort zone of members, seeing how Jesus feels about it may be just the motivation that they need.

For the church to become more accustomed to creating a culture that is welcoming, the members of a congregation have to want to work.

“The gospel has the power to change this. It is perfectly equipped to nurture and empower its own implication, including stoking the desire in Christians for gospel-centered community. The message of grace in the gospel develops a culture of grace when a church is centered on the gospel. But the gospel doesn’t create this desire for community unless believers take it seriously and apply the implications of the gospel to their lives.”⁴³

The believers of each congregation will have to apply the gospel in their lives in order to create this community. To be able to share gospel love with other people, people have to apply the gospel to their own lives first. “And the intentional practice of applying the gospel to all of life

42. Daniel Darling, “6 Mistakes the Church Often Makes with New Believers” November 6, 2019. <https://factsandtrends.net/2019/11/06/6-mistakes-the-church-often-makes-with-new-believers/>

43. Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 127,128.

will naturally, over time, make the impulse or habit of applying the gospel more reflexive.”⁴⁴

When the gospel is applied in one’s own life, it becomes natural to allow the gospel to become reflexive.

In *Fusion* Searcy talks about the importance of having a plan in place for when new Christians come into the church. He talks about an experience he had at the Ritz-Carlton. The workers at the Ritz-Carlton were, “trained on the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere for each and every person who chooses to walk through the door.”⁴⁵ Searcy said that he could tell that they were prepared for visitors to come to their hotel. Now, this is a hotel who is used to seeing guests every single day, but some of these ideas can be applied to the church. Especially how they are taught to deal with guests. “They are taught to greet you, know your name by the second time they see you and not let you leave without a sincere thank-you and goodbye. With a strong system in place to clear the path toward effectiveness, the Ritz-Carlton is able to consistently treat their guests well.”⁴⁶ The church can be hospitable. And a lot of times this will take patience. The new Christian may not understand where they should sit. They may accidentally take the seat that the eighty-year-old lady has been sitting in her whole life. Invite them to sit by you. Introduce yourself and reflect Christ’s love by showing you care about them.

The goal of all of this is to help apply gospel love to the needs of a new believer. To make them no longer feel like an outsider, but rather to help them feel comfortable in the

44. Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 128.

45. Nelson Searcy, *Fusion*. Ventura, California: Regal, 41,42.

46. Searcy, *Fusion*, 42.

church, so that they can focus on hearing the message of the gospel. Huebner speaks about this saying, “We do not aspire a unity of being. We are not and never can be the same. I am sure there will be sinless personality differences even in heaven. Yet we do desire a sense of unity...the kind that Jesus prayed for...a sense of coming together and being together.”⁴⁷ That sense of coming together and being together comes only through the gospel. Believers share that gospel love with people who are new to the church so that eventually they can share the unity of faith. “And today we are celebrating the fact that God has brought us together through faith in his Son Jesus Christ into His family called the Church.”⁴⁸ The church works to create a family culture in order to not put any barriers in the way to sharing the gospel.

As a Pastor

Creating a culture that is focused on sharing gospel love with everyone starts with the leader of the church. As pastor, people are going to watch and follow your example. A pastor has the opportunity to lead a change in culture. “Confidence in organized religion has hit an all-time low.”⁴⁹ People find confidence in the gospel as Jesus works in their hearts, and that starts by showing that love through actions. Because culture has less confidence in church, showing that love is more important than ever. So, the church adjusts. Finke says, “In the same way, our solution as the church is not to try and make the U.S. culture move back to where it was, but to

47. Huebner, “Integrating the New Member” 5.

48. Huebner “Integrating the New Member” 5.

49. Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to be an Everyday Missionary*, 40.

focus our prayer and planning on building the next span of bridge over where the culture is now.”⁵⁰ That shift begins with the leaders of each congregation.

Just like there may be times that members of the congregation will be uncomfortable, the pastor will have situations where he may have to go outside of his comfort zone. Especially as new believers come into the church with different backgrounds. So, how can showing gospel love become a priority? Make a plan. Each week a pastor prepares for the service, writes a sermon, gets the music for the musician, etc. Preparation can also be done to be prepared for when people who are new to Christianity come to church. “In working with churches of all shapes and sizes, I have noticed an interesting phenomenon: The more prepared a church is to receive guests, the more guests it receives.”⁵¹ This may not always be the case, but word will spread. People will talk about the church as a welcoming place that shows God’s love through action. Searcy, in *Fusion*, suggests putting in place short term goals for each time a new believer comes to your church. He suggests having a plan to help get them from a first-time guest all the way to membership at church. This will take patience. The plan may not play out exactly as intended. The plan may even have to be changed. But when it does, continue to show that Christian love through your actions and reactions.

Planning can be very helpful when dealing with a new Christian who has just finished Bible Information Class. As stated earlier, they are accustomed to having a lot of close attention. This may be harder to plan for but is still doable. One church has a mentor program set up that links a member up with someone who just finished class. This person is supposed to

50. Finke, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to be an Everyday Missionary*, 41.

51. Searcy, *Fusion*, 47.

offer to sit with them at church and take them under their wing if they have any questions. This program gives responsibility to a member and allows the new member to have close contact with someone inside the church other than the pastor.

Another thing that can be planned to show love toward new members is to make a big deal out of the day that they become members.

“Make a day of confirmation a day of rejoicing. God has added to the church! Make the reception of the new members a high point of the service. Take a picture of the group and post it in the narthex. With their names on it and perhaps a brief introduction to each family.”⁵²

Show love to the new believers by making it a big deal! God is rejoicing so let us rejoice as well!

Another thing that a WELS church does is have a new member welcome dinner. The new members are invited and the mentors who have been assigned to them. The pastor and his family go and also other leadership in the church. This means a lot for new believers to see how much the church cares for them.

One of the most important ways that pastors can show patience with new believers is by understanding where people are coming from. “As a leader, you must be objective enough to step back and remove yourself from personal opinions and begin to see the situation at hand through the other person’s lens.”⁵³ This quote is talking about business leaders, but it is also true for leaders of the church. As pastors deal with new believers, or any believer, it is

52. Huebner, “Integrating the New Member” 14.

53. Glenn Llopis, “5 Powerful Ways Leaders Practice Patience” June 3, 2013.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2013/06/03/5-powerful-ways-leaders-practice-patience/?sh=6a350f76421a>

important to understand their situation. Then handle the situation in the best way to help lead that person to the gospel.

Finally, as a pastor it is important to continually teach how to be patient with new believers and allow the gospel to shine forth. Wilson quotes Luther talking about the gospel and gospel ministry and says, “Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.”⁵⁴ The pastor will continually have to remind members show gospel love to those who are new to the church. The gospel is so counterintuitive to human nature, so people need to be reminded of it over and over again. The pastor could take advantage of Bible Study time to talk about how the church can make Sunday worship a time that visitors want to come. The pastor also can be on the front-line showing people how to welcome new believers and how to patiently show love to them by warmly greeting people, answering questions, and showing them the important areas in the church like where the sanctuary, bathrooms, and nursery are located. All of this can go a long way to the growth of a new believer, and the trust that will be built between the pastor and the believer.

54. Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 171.

CONCLUSION

Care for new believers is something that can be researched for years to come. Methodology and success are always changing as culture changes. This paper looked at some of the wants and needs of new Christians as well as some of their expectations as they come to the church. Much more research could be done on those two portions of the paper. It is very interesting to see what people are looking for in a church. And it was only lightly touched on in this paper. The amount of writing that is out there about showing gospel love and patience to new believers is immense.

People always come into the church with presuppositions. Many times, they come into the church worried and afraid – feeling out of place. Sometimes people can come into the church with false expectations. No matter what it may be, the church's job is to bring people to Christ. One way that the church can begin to do that is by showing the love of Christ through actions and being patient with new believers as they grow in their life of faith.

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