

Michael Harvat  
Sioux Falls Seminary  
Scholarship Essay  
November 30, 2013

I'm Michael Harvat, a Master of Divinity student in Sioux Falls Seminary's Omaha program. I serve as the Worship and Student Ministries Director at Community Covenant Church, an Evangelical Covenant Church in Southwest Omaha. I would like to be considered for the scholarship to study at Jerusalem University College next summer.

Having the opportunity to study in Jerusalem would benefit me immensely, both as a pastor and as a follower of Jesus. I am, in every sense of the word, a product of the traditional "youth group" approach to discipleship. I grew up in the church and became a fully committed disciple at an event in junior high. During these formative years, I committed to studying God's word and cultivating my understanding of Christian theology. I concerned myself with knowing Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior, and understanding what it means to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. Since then, a majority of my devotional habits, my personal study, and my teaching as a pastor has focused on the concepts, principles, and methods Christian living. In other words, my personal and professional understanding of Christianity focuses on the *how's* and the *why's* of faith.

Unfortunately, I recognize that as a result of this emphasis and preference, my grasp of the *when's* and especially the *where's* of Christianity remains largely uncultivated. My faith and my skills as a pastor alike suffer from a blind spot. When reading about specific events and places in the Bible, many of the names and places might as well be gibberish to me. Even my Religious Studies major in college did little to help me gain an understanding in these areas; there was discussion about events that occurred in the Holy Land and the traditions that arose from there, but I was never asked to fill out a map or tested on my knowledge of such places. For me, the geography of the Holy Land continues to exist as a blurry and convoluted enigma.

I believe that taking a class like *Geographical and Historical Settings of the Bible* will begin to remedy these shortcomings. Since I have little formal education in this area, the class will already be generally beneficial to me. But more than that, I believe being *in Jerusalem* as I study will augment the internalization and application of what I learn. The idea of this truly excites me – I get goosebumps thinking about how, for the rest of my life, there may be places that I can read about in the Bible and remember not just because I studied them during my time in seminary, but because I actually visited them!

The potential to apply what I learn seems obvious to me. As the Director of Student and Worship Ministries for my church, I am responsible for writing and teaching youth curriculum, planning and leading worship services, and preaching on occasion. When teaching my students, I will no longer have to gloss over the historical content and move straight into teaching conceptually. When planning our worship services, I will have a better context for many of our readings and biblical themes, especially when working from the lectionary. Likewise, a better understanding of the geography and historical settings of the Bible will enrich my preaching.

For me, taking this class will not just be about gaining knowledge, but about growing closer to Jesus and putting what I learn to good use. I am confident that, coming out of this experience, I will be able to implement a more well-rounded approach to teaching, preaching, and guiding my congregation into a fuller relationship with Christ. I understand that it will be a very rigorous and challenging course for someone like me, but I'm ready to put in the work required.

On a personal level, this scholarship is especially attractive to me because I recognize that it could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. While I am still relatively young and unhindered by responsibilities that might prevent me from participating, I want to take advantage of this experience. Furthermore, without this scholarship, I'm not sure if I would otherwise consider studying abroad because of the prohibitive costs involved. I assure you that this is not something I will take for granted. I am grateful to the seminary even for extending the invitation!

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me via any of the methods listed below.

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